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Research Article

**THE EFFECTS OF THE USE OF BLOGS ON THE LEARNING PROCESS
OF SEA SPORTS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

There is ever-greater interest in the use of web technologies such as blogs in higher education. This study was designed to identify the perceptions held by students regarding the process of learning and interacting with their co-students through using blogs as part of their higher education experience. Twenty, 5th-year students, 12 male and 8 female, studying for the Sciences of Physical Activity and Sport degree took part in the study. Each subject was interviewed by two interviewers and recorded on audio using a conventional tape-recorder. A descriptive analysis was carried beforehand, the statistics used for this consisted of frequency analysis distribution. After grouping by categories, the answers were analysed and classified by factors. Eighty-five percent of the subjects stated that the creation of the blogs had helped them in their learning process. Seventy percent believed that e-learning facilitates learning. Ninety percent stated that the blog helped them to acquire more knowledge, and 100% agreed that their relationships with their co-students had increased considerably. These results could underline the positive value of using blogs within teaching processes for university students studying sports sciences.

Key words: blogs, learning, sea sports, higher education

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INTRODUCTION

There is ever-greater interest in the use of *web* technologies such as *blogs* in higher education (Blázquez & Calvo, 2003). This is due to the fact that one of the most important values of *e-learning* is the possibility of permitting interaction between students (Roznawski & Wiemeyer, 2008). Sports sciences learning normally has a high practical content, with a significant need to create new spaces for reflection. In these cases, the application of new spaces for learning is a solution of considerable importance, and one that offers many possibilities for this particular educational system.

New technologies are frequently linked with the development of sports sciences and have very diverse fields of application, such as, for notational analysis in sports performance (Hughes & Hughes, 2005) or the use of sailing simulators (Bünger et al., 2007). There are other studies related to sea sports and the use of new technologies, such as, mathematical simulation of *body surfing* (de Mestre, 2004).

The *blog* is an online publishing format characterised by the inverse chronological presentation of the entries, a kind of diary that contains links, news and opinions normally written by one person in an informative and subjective style (Gewerc, 2005). *Blogs* have three advantages over conventional websites that make them easy to use in education and sport:

- a) Using tools to create and publish *blogs* is simpler, thus demanding a shorter learning process as regards creating *websites* using *HTML* editors and publishing them on *web servers*.
- b) Designing and creating *blogs* with preset templates makes the graphic design easier and allows students to focus on the contents and process of communication.
- c) *Blogs* offer a number of functions such as comments, automatic detection of references, a file system, internal search engines and permanent personalised links to the stories published – all providing the online content produced with added value.

The University of Alicante (Spain) has created a virtual learning environment that allows different kinds of online learning to be offered to over 30,000 students and teaching staff. Amongst other options, it allows *blogs* to be used for this purpose. This learning environment was used to develop a *blog* in the framework of the subject entitled Sea Sports, part of the Sciences of Physical Activity and Sport degree at the University of Alicante during the 2008/09 academic year. The *blogs* were developed on the basis of the experiences of other writers such as Marzal and Butera (2007), who encourage the use of *blogs* in higher education.

This study was designed to identify the perceptions held by students regarding the process of learning and interacting with their co-students through the implementation of *blogs* as part of their higher education experience.

METHODS

Subjects

Twenty, 5th-year students, 12 male and 8 female, studying for the Sciences of Physical Activity and Sport degree took part in the study. The criteria for participation included having already studied the subject entitled Information and Communication Technology for Sports sciences, so that they possessed the basic knowledge required to develop a *blog*. Creating the *blog* was part of the final assessment of the students.

Methodology

The Sea Sports course took place in the second term of the academic year. The course started on January 8th 2009 and finished on May 25th 2009. There were 35 hours of practical classes at sea and 10 hours of theoretical seminars. From January to March, the students created the *blog*. During April and May, there was a process of interaction between the various *blogs* created in order to further develop and improve them. The subjects of the study were interviewed in late May.

Data gathering

All the information housed in the *blogs* was compiled using a specific matrix. Prior to this, all the subjects signed an informed consent waiver that allowed us to access, read, analyse and use their work for this study. All subjects were interviewed by two researchers using a standard tape recorder. The following questions were asked:

1. Do you think that the *blogs* have helped you to learn sea sports?
2. Do you think that *e-learning* interaction has helped your learning process?
3. Have the *blogs* allowed you to learn more/reinforce what you already knew?
4. Has using the *blogs* allowed you to create a new way to interact with your classmates?

Data analysis

The SPSS 16.0 programme was used to carry out a prior descriptive analysis, with the statistics used for said purpose consisting of frequency analysis distribution. After grouping by categories, the answers were analysed and classified by factors.

RESULTS

The perception of the students as to whether implementing the *blogs* helped in their learning process related to Sea Sports, [Figure 1](#) shows that most answers were positive.

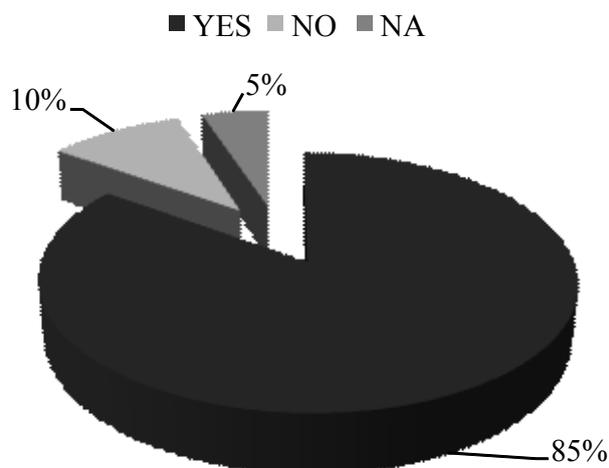


Figure 1. Percentage results of the perception of the students regarding how helpful blogs have been to their learning. NA=no answer.

Regarding whether *e-learning* contributed to facilitate learning, most of subjects also answered yes (Figure 2).

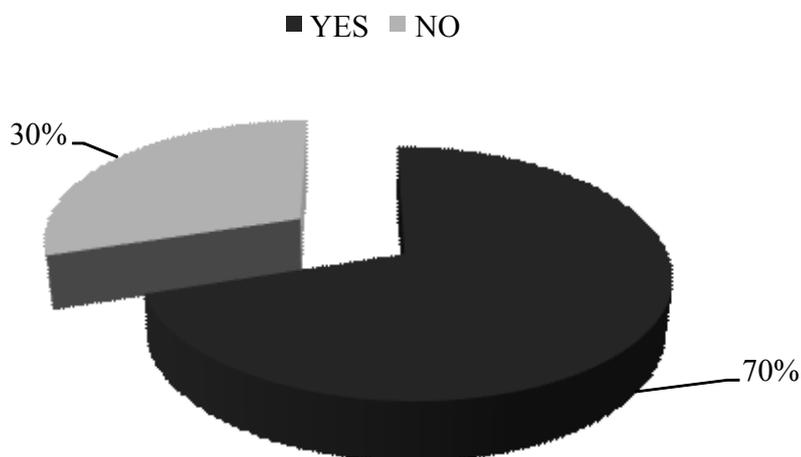


Figure 2. Percentage rating of the interaction of a virtual space in learning.

Figure 3 shows that most subjects indicated that the implementation of *blogs* as a training method had helped them to learn more about/reinforce what they already knew about the subject.

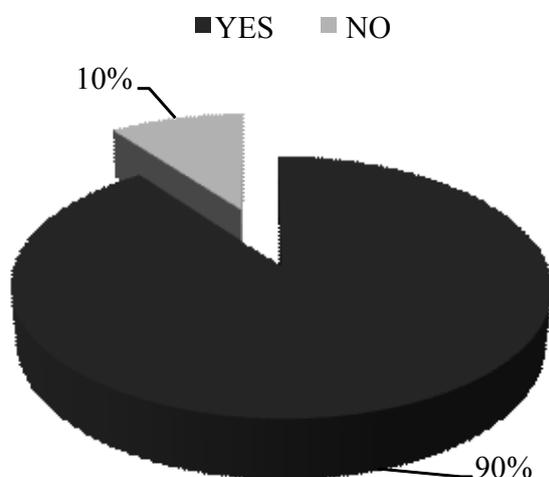


Figure 3. Percentage rating of the use of blogs to learn more about/reinforce what students already knew.

One hundred percent of the subjects saw *blogs* as tools that help to promote and maintain interaction between students.

We will now give some examples of the comments made by subjects on the initial questions:

Regarding the first question:

"structuring the assignment using the blogs really helped me when learning about Sea Sports"participant N°3

Regarding the second question:

"as well as helping with Sea Sports, it is also necessary for the society we live in"participant N°15

Regarding the third question:

"as I searched for information I became more aware of the need to continue learning more" participant N°7

Regarding the fourth question:

"the blogs allow me to meet more people, as well as getting to know my classmates better"participant N°19

Finally, analysis of the data matrix on the basis of the answers provided by the subjects showed four common points of inflection with regard to the perception of the use of *blogs*:

- Perception of practising physical activities on the sea.
- Presentation of the contents of the *blog*.
- The possibility of learning more about new subjects.
- Promotion of interpersonal relationships

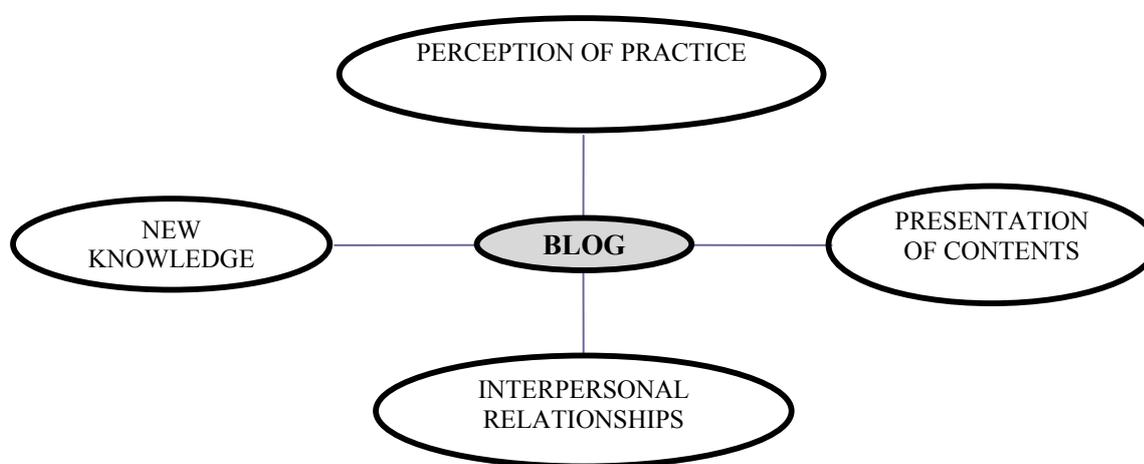


Figure 4. Factors resulting from implementation of the blogs

DISCUSSION

The results obtained regarding the use of *blogs* by students studying the subject entitled *Sea Sports*, part of the sciences of Physical Activity and Sport degree at the University of Alicante, underline the positive value of using *blogs* as part of the teaching processes for university students. Other similar studies (Gewerc, 2005; Marzal & Butera, 2007) show that the results of this study were in line with current research trends (Kerawalla et al., 2009). The results encourage us to adopt a more up-to-date way of understanding university teaching that is appropriate to advanced societies, where new technologies are an inevitable reality inherent to the lives of students. In addition, healthy questioning of the curriculum is based on the constant search for updated tools that contribute towards the progress and transmission of knowledge. Interactive spaces for virtual learning are an essential component in this context (Gasser et al., 2006; Bünger et al., 2007). More specifically, studies such as that of Chaín-Navarro et al. (2008) show that there is a high level of satisfaction (84%) with the use of these tools, which also makes them significant motivating agents.

Equally important are the effects obtained at a personal interaction level. The results of this study show that 100% of the subjects perceived the *blogs* as allowing them to considerably increase their interpersonal relationships with their co-students. Said relationships are the necessary foundation for correct integration into both society and current business frameworks.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, we can state that using *blogs* to teach sea sports has had positive results, which seems to indicate that they offer a contributory tool for the learning process in general (Rożnawski et al., 2008), particularly for subjects related to sports sciences.

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