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Evaluation of Blended Learning

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Abstract

Blended learning is developing rapidly in academic as in firm area. It is one of contemporary trends of education. Foreign language teaching by means of eLearning is often following through more slowly than eLearning used in technical or science subjects. In foreign language teaching, therefore a new method was applying gradually. The method seemed to be more suitable. It was blended learning, that is a combination of the contact teaching with a teacher and of a self-contained preparation using on-line education. We mustn't forget that the teacher's role is very significant throughout the study of a foreign language and so is the role of conversation. Success of Blended learning depends not only on the quality of the course and the virtual environment but also on the grade to which the students are prepared to work in their virtual study environment. It also depends on their ability to make themselves organized in a given background and use all the tools offered by the LMS. Of course, an effective use of the ICT in eLearning is influenced to a large extend by a responsible students' attitude to the work on a given task.

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1. Introduction

In connection with an actual introducing of e-learning into didactical practice the conviction had been strengthening that the most useful way of using e-learning does not draw on its self-contained forms, but on a combination with a classic form of contact teaching. The English speaking countries had come to those findings

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earlier than our country and in the western education environment had been that combined medium termed. It had been called blended learning.

Blended learning is developing rapidly in academic as in firm area. It is one of contemporary trends of education. Foreign language teaching by means of eLearning is often following through more slowly than eLearning used in technical or science subjects. In foreign language teaching, therefore a new method was applying gradually. The method seemed to be more suitable. It was blended learning, that is a combination of the contact teaching with a teacher and of a self-contained preparation using on-line education. We mustn't forget that the teacher's role is very significant throughout the study of a foreign language and so is the role of conversation. The arrangements of a foreign-language on-line course place great demands on a foreign-language teacher, who – in most cases – is not an informatics alongside.

2. Virtual learning environment

Success of Blended learning depends not only on the quality of the course and the virtual environment but also on the grade to which the students are prepared to work in their virtual study environment. It also depends on their ability to make themselves organized in a given background and use all the tools offered by the LMS. Of course, an effective use of the ICT in eLearning is influenced to a large extend by a responsible students' attitude to the work on a given task.

Czech schools often use the open-course teaching system MOODLE. We can find it across the spectrum of high schools as of secondary schools. The name of this system has originated as an acronym of the expression Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment.

For many years, our faculty had been using the virtual learning environment (VLE) WebCT. The current courses are made in the Blackboard environment. The Blackboard TM Learn 9.1 system is not very complicated for students. Some skills for work with a computer at least at the ECDL. Start level are necessary for mastering of handling it in that environment. That represents the handling of sets, internet browser and of a text editor.

3. Our experience with blended learning use and its students' evaluation

It would of course be ideal to assemble a team of authors who would make a course. The team should represent designers, programmers, subject-matter specialists, and educators. Practically, however, the whole team is often displaced by authors-educators. The author is responsible for learning content, for material of the course. He is an author of texts as multimedia study supports. He plays the role of an examiner. A disadvantage may be seen in the fact that an author often has no satisfactory experience with the eLearning courses development. A tutor is an important factor in the area of virtual education. He explains to students the study system, sets important tasks, is a companion throughout their study, he checks their work. The tutor is commonly represented by an educator in our case. Some advantages use to be mentioned in connection with blended learning. An individual space of study is given as a main advantage. Each student elects his own pace, place and time mostly suitable for study. An important role is played by an immediate feedback. Blended learning provides a checking of student's effort a survey of achieved results. It often makes possible an anonymous comparison with other students. This fact is highly appreciated by them.

Speaking about advantages we have to mention some disadvantages connected with blended learning: an inappropriate use of it by some kinds of students; an inappropriate use of it in some areas of education; dependence of it on other technological equipment, a demanding arrangement of its content concerning teachers.

The design of our online language courses is very simple. All lessons are organized in an identical way. Therefore they are well understandable, the work with them is easy and purposeful. The courses are directed to practicing grammatical issues, to working with original foreign-language texts, to listening to these texts. The courses are used first of all as blended learning within the full-time studies. Next to it, we have a nine-term long practice with the use of language courses within the scope of inter-university studies.

We usually conduct a questionnaire research among the students to the end of a term to find out how happy they are with the blended learning-form of teaching. We try to find out their satisfaction with the course format. We ask them for possibilities of an improvement of the process.

And so we have tried and found the level of students' satisfaction with teaching furnished by blended learning. We compared the first-term (GERM 1) and third-term (GERM 3) students in the subject professional German. We graph the survey of students responses as follows.

The feedback questionnaires should find out how the students rank the separate parts of the course and the complex operating them. The respondents were 120 students. The questionnaires were filled in and submitted by 98 students.

All students appreciate the freedom of choosing place and time for study provided by on-line courses. They are not bound up with a fix lesson, they have a permanent possibility of consulting and communicating with the teacher in the teaching process at the same time.

I consider the used virtual study environment as:

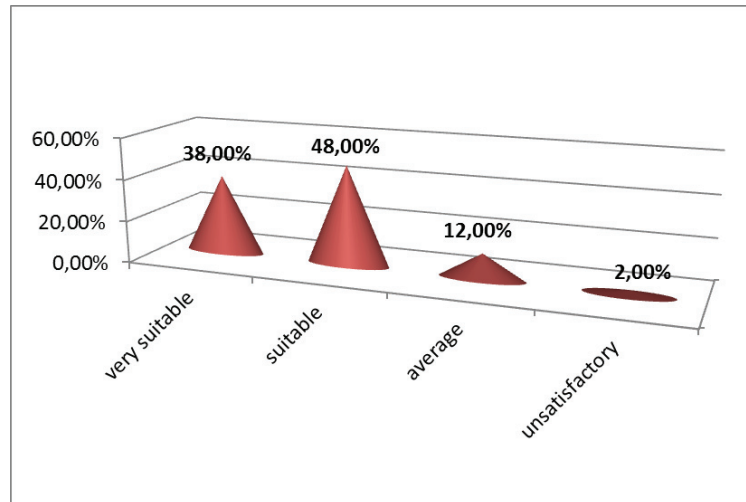


Fig. 1. Graph 1 Germ 1

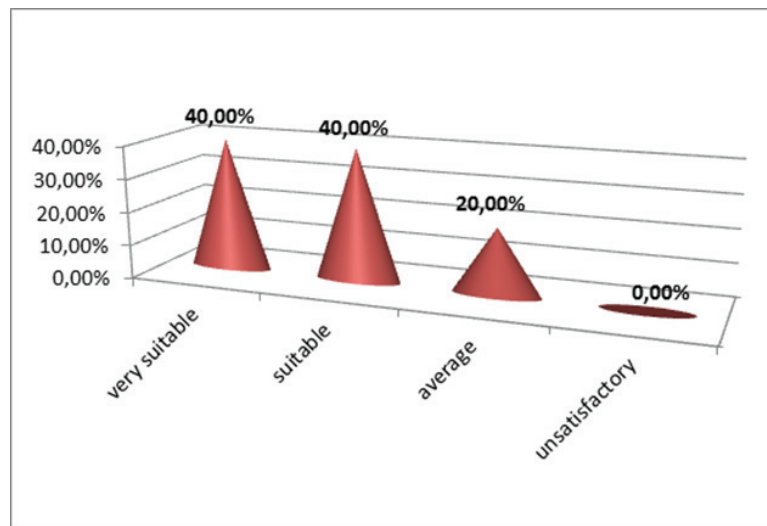


Fig. 2. Graph 2 Germ 3

Is the course user friendly?

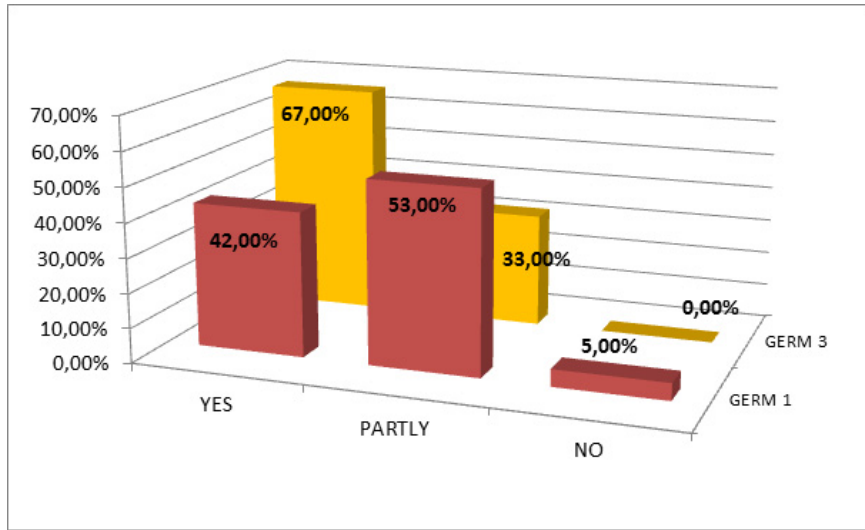


Fig. 3. Graph 3

Did you understand the tasks?

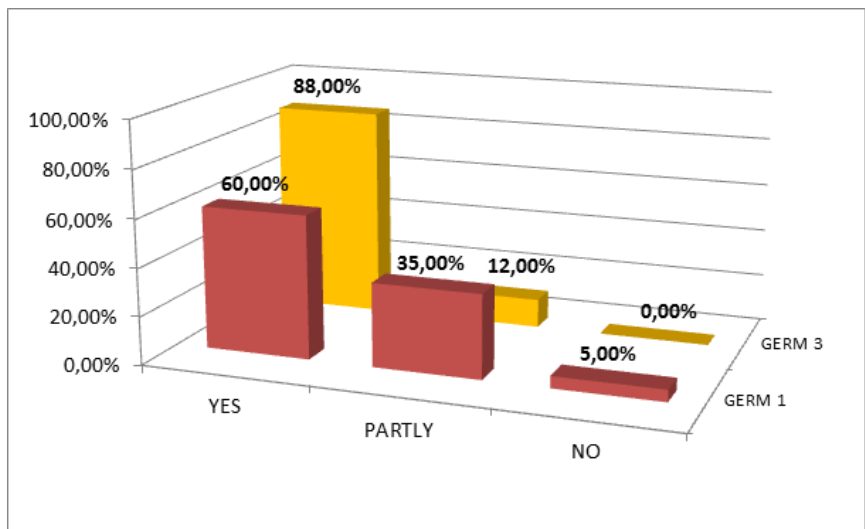


Fig. 4. Graph 4

Was the course as a whole, beneficial for you?

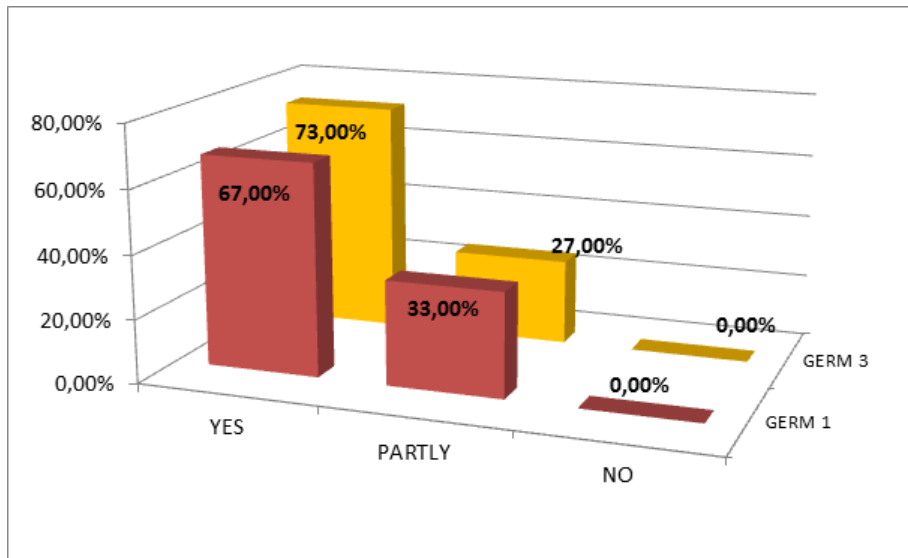


Fig. 5. Graph 5

Do you find the controlling of the course convenient?

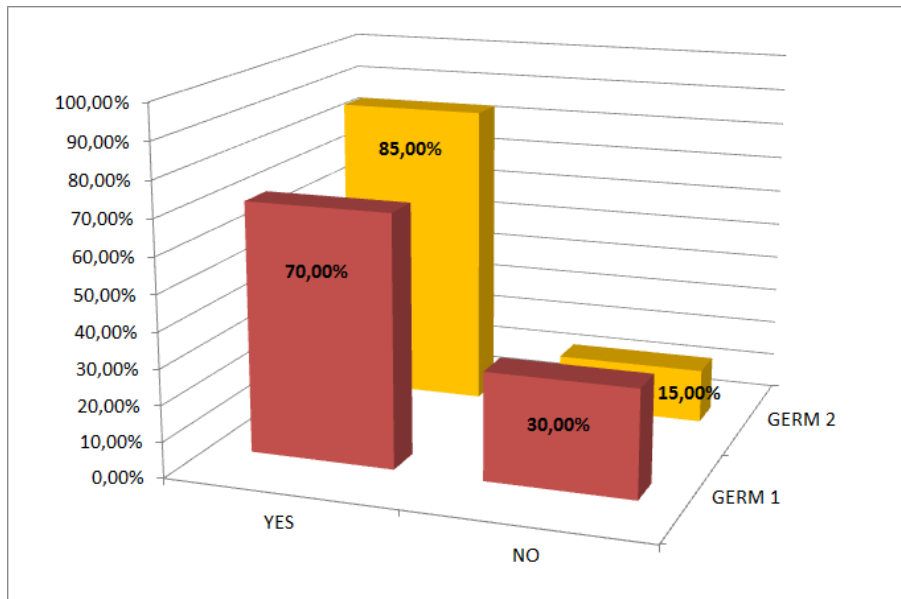


Fig. 6. Graph 6

Given the fact that there were almost no differences to some question in separate terms, only the common graph has been published.

Did you find the communication with the tutor convenient?

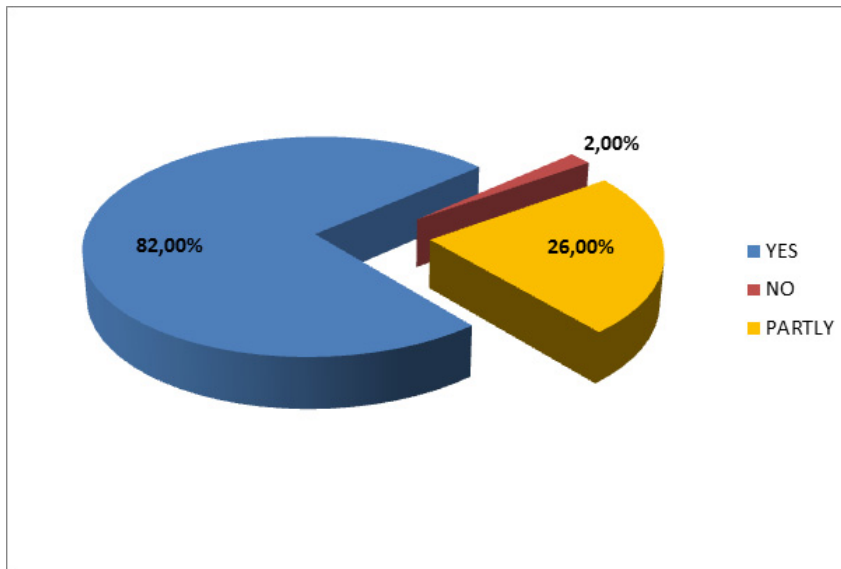


Fig. 7. Graph 7

Do you find communication tools convenient?

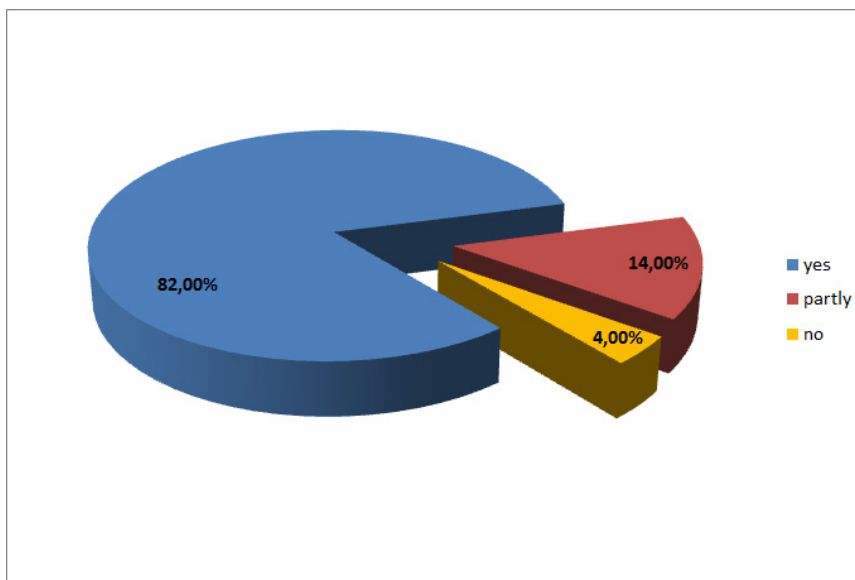


Fig. 8. Graph 8

We can easily come to some conclusion based on separate graphs: On-line courses as study supplement suit the most students. Some examples may show that higher-term students have their better relation to blended learning. They are used to autonomous work, to the course construction and its control. They have learnt to work better with separate tools of the course, their orientation in the tasks set is better. They understand better what is required from them and that is why they find the course more user friendly.

4. Conclusion

The research conducted shows that blended learning is not only acceptable but very favored by students. The students of today accept new technology rapidly and learn easily to handle it. Blended learning as a combination of contact teaching using some constructivist principles and electronic format of teaching is a suitable and required way even for foreign language teaching.

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