The Use of Internet Communication Forms and Their Quality in the Educational Process in Higher Education

Jana Simonidesová

The Department of Finance and Accounting
Faculty of Business Economics in Kosice, University of Economics in Bratislava
Tajovského No. 13, 041 30 Košice, Slovak Republic
jana.simonidesova@euke.sk

Barbara Hlavňová

Institute of Geoturism
F BERG, Technical university of Košice
Letná No. 9, 042 00 Košice, Slovak Republic
barbara.hlavnova@tuke.sk

Abstract— Internet communication between educators and students represents a part of the educational process at higher education institutions. The aim of this paper is to highlight the relatively complex problems of the use of online and offline Internet communication in higher education on two basic levels – a university lecturer and a student. On the basis of a survey carried out at the Faculty of Business Economics in Kosice, Economic Faculty, focused on the use of existing forms of Internet communication and their quality in the educational process, it defines the positives and negatives of this form of communication.

Keywords- Forms of Internet Communication, Questioning, the Teacher - Student relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication, which is an information transfer instrument, represents an essential part of the teaching process. By implementation of Internet-based forms of communication in the teaching process the communication between educators and students acquired a new meaning. For the current generation of students the Internet is a natural communication tool for communication not only among them, but also with their educators. The Internet-based form of communication is currently affected by multiple negative aspects, such as possible identity confusion, absent knowledge of netiquette, lack of time, etc., reduce its overall quality and often complicate the teaching process as such.

From the above mentioned reasons, the article deals with the basic forms of Internet communication - online and offline, between educators and students in higher education, their positives and negatives that determine the overall level of educational process at higher education institutions.

II. INTERNET COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Each educational process includes an integral part, communication between educators and students, in which various Internet communication tools are currently being more intensively applied as they facilitate the so-called informal communication. Internet communication between educators and students can be carried out using the following methods [1]:

Offline communication – without the possibility of immediate response, i.e. with a certain delay, for example e-mail,

Online communication – with the possibility of immediate responses, for example Facebook, Skype etc.

The use of individual forms of Internet communication, its quality and intensity in the sphere of educational process was and still is dependent on acceptance and a positive attitude taken by educators, as well as acceptance of this forms of communication by higher education students.

The following survey is focused on the issues regarding the use of the above mentioned forms of Internet communication by educators in the educational process at a selected higher education institution and their acceptance and use by students of the given higher education institution. The survey concentrated mainly on offline and online communication existence, quality, satisfaction, and forms.

A similar survey was carried out during the summer term of the academic year 2010/2011 and the winter term of the academic year 2011/2012 at the Faculty of Mining, Ecology, Process Control and Geotechnology at the Technical University in Košice. The survey was carried out using a questionnaire developed by them and supplemented with four additional questions [1,2]

III. SURVEY METHOD AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The group of respondents inquired in the survey consisted of 175 full-time students at the Faculty of National Economy of the University of Economics in Bratislava with the office in Košice; the group included 76 bachelor study students and 99 master study students. The second group of survey respondents consisted of 26 educators and 7 internal doctoral candidates of the above mentioned faculty.

The survey was carried out in the period of April – May 2013. The questioning was performed in two stages; the first one was carried out as online questioning in April. This stage involved 101 students and 29 educators. The second stage was personally performed in May during the educational process, using a printed version of the questionnaire. This stage involved 74 students and 4 educators.

Survey objectives:

- determination of the extent to which the Information and Communication Technologies are used in the educational process,
- determination of the quality level and satisfaction with the existing forms of communication between educators and students,
- definition of advantages and disadvantages of Internet communication between educators and students,
- development of suggestions how to improve Internet communication in the educational process.

In order to verify the above defined objectives, the respondents were given a 12-item questionnaire containing 11 closed questions and 1 open question.

A. The use of Internet Communication in the Educational Process

Out of all the existing forms of Internet communication, 100% of educators at the above mentioned faculty communicate with students using offline e-mail communication; only 24% of educators use the Moodle in the educational process. Communication via the Facebook social network is carried out by as little as 6% of the inquired respondents of the Economic Faculty and the Faculty of Mining, Ecology, Process Control and Geotechnology; as for other forms of communication, they use online communication via Skype or Facebook (almost 50% of the inquired respondents) [1].

97% of students of the above mentioned faculty communicate with their educators via e-mails. 4% of respondents communicate with their educators via Facebook. 38% communicate with their educators using the Moodle service, 6% use other forms. Out of 25 educators, who are currently not using the Moodle service in the educational process, 68% of educators are willing to include this service in the educational process. Only 18% of educators participating in the survey refuse to use the Moodle service.

Working time segments devoted to Internet communication by individual educators are varied. 12% of educators engage in Internet communication with students for more than two hours per day; 36% of educators reported they spend 1.5 to 2 hours a day communicating with students. 48.5% of educators participating in the survey reported they spend one hour of their working time engaged in Internet communication.

At the above mentioned faculty, no online communication with students is currently formally running. Within the innovation effort, the educators were asked whether they would accept communication in form of a chat, or via social networks. 69.7% of educators refuse such form of communication. They do not regard this type of communication to be a professional form of communication. Their current work load does not facilitate incorporating the online communication among standard forms of communication with students. The argument against it is also the fact that an educator can never be certain about the communicating student's identity (identity confusion); moreover, personal data of the participating parties can be misused. This form of communication requires strictly determined rules applicable to both involved parties. Educators have also concerns regarding misuse of the provided data which might be concealed by students in future for their own benefit.

B. Quality Measure

Regarding communication between an educator and a student, the quality of communication is an important issue. The survey results show that if students formulate their messages in the Internet communication in an objective, clear, brief and comprehensible manner, educators are not burdened with long formulations of a response provision. Therefore, they are able to respond promptly to questions asked by students. The quality measure is influenced by, among other factors, compatibility of files which represent the main data transfer media in offline communication. Feedback rate is also regarded as an important factor of quality assessment.

In the above mentioned survey, 63.6% of educators reported that students formulate their messages in Internet communication briefly and clearly. According to educators' opinions, 60.6% of students respect the Internet etiquette despite the fact that as much as 57.6% of educators do not inform students about specific requirements of formal e-mail communication. Students confirmed in the survey that they were not advised by educators on any specific requirements for their mutual Internet communication. This fact was reported by 72% of inquired students. As much as 100% of students believe they formulate their messages clearly and objectively; almost 80.6% report they have the knowledge on formal internet communication.
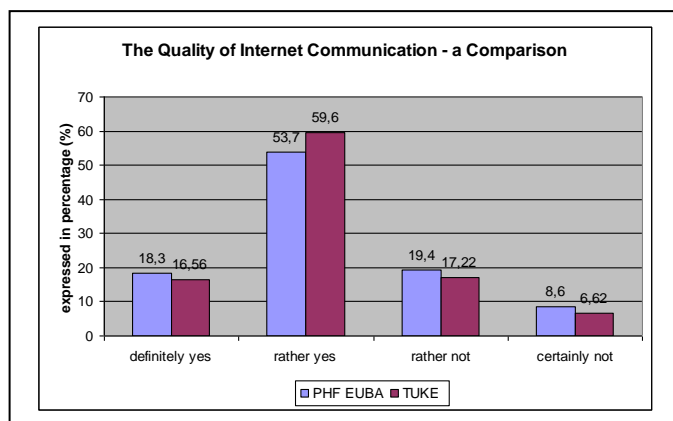
Problems with compatibility of files in data transfer within the Internet communication were reported by as little as 26.8% of inquired students and 42.4% of educators.

From a student's point of view, the most important issue is the speed of an educator's response to their inquiries. 28.6% of students reported they received an educator's response to their e-mail within 24 hours. 39.4% of educators respond to inquiries by students within 48 hours, and 18.3% within 72 hours. 13.3% of students reported they waited for the response for more than 72 hours, or have not received any response at all.

In their answers to the survey question regarding the changes in the Internet communication 62.3% of students requested improvement in the educators' feedback rate. 33.1% of students would accept the possibility to communicate online with their educators. The use of the Moodle service by educators would be positively accepted by 8.6%. 5.1% of students pointed out substandard communication by foreign educators, as it hinders proper understanding of the replies written within such communication.

The survey shows that 63.7% of educators and 72% of students are satisfied with the overall quality of Internet communication.

Figure 1 (custom processing) shows a graph of comparison of the survey results obtained at the Faculty of National economy at the University of Economics in Košice (PHF EUBA) on one side, and the Faculty of Mining,

The Quality of Internet Communication - a Comparison

Figure 1.   The Quality of Internet Communication – a Comparison

Ecology, Process Control and Geotechnology at the Technical University in Košice (F BERG TUKE) on the other side. [1]

IV.   DISADVANTAGES OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Admission of the Internet in common people's lives, as well as in the educational process, has brought multiple advantages, including online and offline communication between educators and students, transfer of data of various formats, transfer rate, accessibility, low costs (access to the Internet is free of charge for higher education students within the academic territory), possibility to share and use for their study all the documents available in web and social networks. In the educational process and communication at higher education institutions the Internet communication comprises also certain disadvantages. Probably the most important disadvantage is possible *student identity confusion.* More disadvantages include:

- loss of personal contact in the educator – student relationship,
- impersonal, more formal communication,
- possible misuse of personal data,
- possible loss of data,
- threats coming from shared/attached data and subsequent damage to hardware and software of the participants to the communication,
- and others.

V.   SUMMARY

The constantly modernizing world should be respected and new forms of communication should be accepted. Internet communication in the educational process represents only certain ancillary form of communication. Considering the survey results, it is possible to state that at present the educators should pay more attention to their feedback speed and feedback existence as such in the offline communication with students of the above mentioned faculty. Besides the consultation hours determined at the workplace, it is necessary to specify also consultation hours and Internet communication forms which can be used by students to

inquire and expect responses in the Internet environment. Current enormous work load of educators does not enable them to communicate with students in the online environment. Should such form of communication be accounted for within the educators working time in future, it will be necessary to secure the accessible forms of online and offline communication against the data misuse and cover these forms of communication in the internal directive of the faculty (ISO) which would contain strict rules binding for both, educators and students.

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