Communication, "Edu" e- mail and the student

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Summary
E- mail as a means of communication is widely used and has become the most common electronic tool to obtain an almost immediate communication, although asynchronic in nature. Its use has been expanded globally and the countless amount of new technology developed around it in the past ten years has benefitted users everywhere. The dependency we have created around this means of communication demands that both users, the sender and the receiver, participate in equal terms and comply with certain tacit rules. In the present time, where on line and virtual communication is a constant in our lives, particularly, for university students, it is surprising that a constant and common complaint by teachers and tutors is that students do not answer e -mails. The question here is not whether the student has the official e-mail , "correo edu" but whether they use it, how often and how to solve the problem of lack of reciprocity in answering e mails. In this article, we present a study carried out with students of the program of translation and language teaching of the Language School at UABC.

Introduction
E-mail as a means of communication is widely used and has become the most common media utilized in order to obtain an almost immediate response, regardless of its asynchronous quality. Furthermore, its use has been influenced positively by the countless number of other media tools developed in the past ten years.

Due to the astounding development of the information and communication technology, higher education institutions face themselves with the need to make this technology accessible to their students. At the University of Baja California all the students are required to log on and obtain an "edu" e –mail, which will be used to register, check out books, use the computer center and go through any university paper work. Furthermore, the teachers use " edu e mail" in order to contact students, send course information and additional material. Equally important, is the contact that academic tutors have or intend to have with the tutees through e- mail.

The great dependency created on this means of communication demands that both parts , the sender and the receiver, participate in equal terms and that both comply with tacit rules.

At a time, where communication on line and virtual is a constant in the students' lives, specifically university students, a frequent teacher complaint is that students do not answer e – mails. It is not a question whether students have an "edu e-mail", but how frequently they check it; how often they answer their e mail ; which other means of communication they use and how we can solve the problem of communication reciprocity.

Introduction

Since the first e mail was sent in 1971 by the engineer Ray Tomlison, or later when the first connection between The United States, Norway and England in 1972 (Badia, 2002) took place, e-mail has become one of the most used communication tools. It is a reality that e mail communication takes place in all and every area of our lives: social, business, academic and entertainment.

On line teacher- student communication has become a necessity. The time where the teacher spoke and the student listened passively, is past gone. University teaching, either face to face, mixed modes or at a distance require for the teacher and students to use the new technologies and this includes the correct use of e-mail service, specifically the university e- mail.

Furthermore, the teaching and learning process demands a fluent communication teacher- student and student- teacher, particularly when the process is on line.

It is known that university students' desertion percentage in face to face courses can be up to 46% (Chain, 1999) by the end of their BA studies. It can be inferred that the percentage could increase in the mixed mode courses and at a distance since they require

for the student to be autonomous and that is a quality that most likely has not been put into practice throughout their prior academic history.

The electronic mail

Some of the advantages in the use of electronic e- mail have been expressed in an empiric study by Albarran,I, Heredero,C. & Montero, A. (1999) form the "Universidad Completense" in Madrid.

These are:

Fastness and reliability in sending and receiving.

- Increase of personal contact.
- Facilitation of filing, resending and integration.
- Low cost.
- Increment in motivation.
- It facilitates comprehension, in some caes.

The dependency that has been created in this means of communication demands an answer of the sender, as well as the receiver. Equally important is that certain rules are known and followed by both. The rules listed here do not exclude others that could be proposed.

- Read and answer as soon as possible. Not doing this, results in being ill mannered.
- Read your messages at least twice a day.
- Identify yourself as the sender.
- Be careful with your writing. Syntax and spelling errors give a poor image of the sender.
- Avoid the use of capital letters. They give the impression of screaming.
- If the message is long, use paragraphs in order to facilitate its reading.
- Be concise and precise.
- Avoid sending massive messages as some people may not be interested.
- Use part of the text you received in the answer.
- Do not demand answers, ask politely for them.
  Adapted from Valverde, (2002) and Cabero, (2004)

An item that can be added to this list is not using the same heading for numerous e-mails when the e – mail subject has changed. This impedes clarity and makes it difficult to locate e – mails when needed.

The notion that there are rules to be followed by both parts, the sender and the receiver, implies that both parts know them and follow them. That is not the case for some teachers and many of the students.

In this article we will only refer to the students' use and answer of e – mail, specifically, "edu e-mail".

¿What is the reality in terms of the correct use of "edu e-mail" by the university students, in the Ensenada campus, specifically, the Language School, Campus Ensenada?

In a study by Del Castillo (2010) 150 BA students (2nd to 8th semester) were asked to answer questions regarding the use of "edu e_mail". In the question ¿how often do you check your "edu e- mail"? of the total of 150 students, 27 checked their e – mail daily; 32, 2 to 3 times a week; 26, once a week; 23, twice a month; 4, once a month; 19, almost never ;9, never. Ten students did not answer, so it can be assumed that they do not use their "edu e- mail".

These results have repercussions in the communication process teacher – student and tutor- tutee since they show that less than 30% of the students check their e- mail daily and of course checking it twice a day, as one of the rules specifies, is out of the question.

In terms of the frequency in which they answer e- mails received by their tutor, only 38 of 150 students indicated to always answer the tutor's e –mails ; 52 almost always; 38 , almost never; 18, never and 3 did not answer. Not answering e- mails ,again, contributes to the interruption in communication and it shows an ill manner attitude towards a tutor or teacher. Exactly the same rules apply to the teacher if they happen not to answer e – mails, which as mentioned by students , it does occur.

When students were asked to give suggestions about ideal means of communication other than "edu e- mail" , they suggested a Facebook page or another e- mail. Since it is evident that students use the Internet tools available to them, the question would be, what can be done so that the student comprehends the importance of the reciprocity element in e – mail communication; accepts to check his e – mail daily ; always sends a brief answer and compromises himself to promote its use.

The accessibility to Internet from any of the campus is covered by the university, but as students state, access is many times slow due to high number of users. Regardless of this, an informal inquest done every semester with first semester students regarding Internet access at home , shows that the number of students having access at home has increased yearly, where in 2012-1 almost 90% of the students had it.

Conclusions and recommendations

In order to obtain a more efficient on line communication it is necessary that first semester university students are introduced to the "edu e- mail" as the official means of communication and as the way in which to contact teachers and classmates; to be informed about academic and cultural and administrative activities; to follow through with the dates and place of registration and not less important, to maintain in contact with their academic tutor besides using the SIT "Sistema Institucional de Tutorías" (Institutional Tutoring System).

Although students are avid users of cellular telephones (chat and text messages) and other on line tools used to communicate with their peers , the rules for the correct e –mail use are not followed . It is for this reason, that rules need to be promoted by all the teachers , and specially by the area Information and Communication. The strategies to do this will have to be stated by each teacher.

We propose that courses are taught to teachers and students in the correct use of e – mail and its numerous applications. Furthermore, we recommend that the rules for the use of e – mail are printed and placed in each classroom. The measure proposed here could aid in part to fill the void in the communication process student- teacher, tutor- tutee.

The use of other means of communication proposed by some students such as Facebook or another e – mail besides "edu e- mail", cannot cover all the administrative, academic and tutorial needs.

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