

Gender differences in students' preferences using communication technologies to support learning: the case of Portuguese Higher Education

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Abstract

The main goal of the research project presented in this paper is to contribute towards a wider understanding about the use of Communication Technologies in Portuguese Public Higher Education Institutions, with a special focus on gender related issues regarding the students' perception and evaluation of the use of these technologies in supporting learning activities. Within this project this paper focuses on the results obtained about gender related differences in the activities that students prefer to carry out in learning contexts.

The project already mentioned is an descriptive and exploratory study and the data was collected using an online questionnaire made available to students of all Portuguese Public Higher Education Institutions. A validated sample of 2207 students (865 boys and 1342 girls) from 36 Higher Education Institutions participated in this study.

The findings indicate gender differences in student preferences using Communication Technologies in learning contexts. Female students seem to prefer learning using text-based conversation over e-mail more than male students do, and boys prefer to use programs they can control, such as video games. Significant differences between males and females are found in activities such as: contributing to websites, blogs or wikis and in learning through the creation or listening podcasts. In both cases, we noticed, through collected data analysis, that male students seem to prefer these activities more than female students. On the other hand, no gender differences were found in students preferences concerning the use of social networking applications and in the use of instant messaging in learning contexts.

The results of this study are expected to be helpful for Portuguese Higher Education Institutions for they may allow a better understanding of the students' perceptions about the use of Communication Technologies in supporting learning processes.