

# SPANISH ONLINE COURSE FOR EJA (THE EDUCATION OF YOUTHS AND ADULTS)

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study reports the experience of creating a learning net and the revision of Spanish language basic contents for Youths and Adults Education (EJA) students, of the Industry Social Service (SESI) school, SESI Eraldo Giacobbe High School, from Porto Alegre/RS. To perform this study, 40 students were invited for an online course, 20h long, offered with the aim of trying to reinforce these students learning. The results revealed the complexity of implementing this study with the students who do not see the computer as a studying tool and to improve their knowledge, but revealed that the necessity of performing experiences likes this one due to the benefits provided to the students.*

**Key-words: Distance education; EJA; heterogeneity; Spanish.**

## **1- Introduction**

This article<sup>1</sup> brings a report of the experience performed during a course conclusion work of Instrumental Computing Post Graduation, in UFRGS/UAB and consists on a relevant investigation for presenting an alternative for the youths and adults education, for, nowadays in Brazil, many students are already studying through the computer in online courses at a distance (EaD) and the technological tools can help mainly the students with learning difficulties by using dynamic and interactive resources.

The study performed came from the necessity of creating an online complementary Spanish study to the students of SESI Eraldo Giacobbe High School, Porto Alegre pole, with the aim of contributing to the students who were interested in the course, so they could improve their knowledge of the language. The research was focused on the education-learning process of heterogeneous groups of EJA by internet, by performing an online course recovery of Spanish language.

## **2- EJA student profile**

In EJA groups, the heterogeneity can be noticed in relation to the age, the necessities which give the students motivation to look for study complementing and the individual difficulties of each student, usually related to cognitive, family and/or professional issues.

Initially the EJA was offered only in-person, which required settled time availability of the student and logistics to assure the student would attend the classes with certain regularity. However, if on one hand this system made possible to many students to conclude their studies, on the other hand it deprived students of look for their formation, because not all of students have conditions to follow the pace of in-person classes.

Nowadays EJA is offered in private and public schools in the modalities: in-person, semi in-person or at a distance, and the students who are interested in it can choose the modality which fits better to their reality.

This way, the education at a distance is due to the necessities of these workers, for they provide more autonomy in relation to time, geographical

location and space management, favoring more and more people to proceed their own learning construction<sup>[5]</sup>, which would be impracticable in a in-person situation

### **3- EJA IN SESI**

EJA in Brazil is directly connected to Sesi, because in the 1940's the educator Paulo Freire started a movement to make youths and adults literate in Pernambuco. This action extended to Rio Grande do Sul (RS) in 1947, when the first literacy groups were implemented in the state, followed by many educational actions done by SESI in the last few years, from the supplementary education up to Telecurso 2000, and in 2006, the possibility of offering EJA at a distance in the Institution was authorized<sup>[1]</sup>.

Nowadays, the SESI Eraldo Giacobbe School offers EJA to the students in two educational modalities: in-person and at a distance, this one started in 2009. In addition to this, the school has many poles in the state, and among them is Porto Alegre, the place where the investigation was performed.

Spanish is part of the school syllabus from EJA EaD (at a distance) in this pole of education, but this subject is not always welcomed by students, because many of them have difficulties related to understanding the subjects and have progress on learning, for many of them perceive the language as something away from their reality, although another language helps them with literacy and self steam, as the main aspects of PCN-LE reveal<sup>[4]</sup>.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the heterogeneity of the EJA groups constitutes a challenge related to language learning, for the difference of age and interests, as well as the difficulties of taking in the contents require the creation of strategies capable of reaching the whole group.

Moreover, for many students, studying at a distance is a new challenge to be overcome, because the difficult of understanding and adapting to a new type of education and learning, so different from the conventional one, might impede the students to believe in the possibility of learning away from the in-person classroom and demands autonomy and organization towards to studies from the student.

In the year the research was performed, the students from this pole who studied in EJA at a distance received borrowed books of each one of the subjects to study at home and counted on tutor teacher's support in attention meetings, so that they could solve doubts, this system remains in the first semester of 2012 and will be replaced by a new model of EJA at a distance with SESIEduca Platform implementation, which is expected to be offered in this Pole by the 2nd semester of the same year.

During the research was observed that many students did not come to the attention meetings and many of these students were not prepared to education at a distance.

Thus, necessity of creating one more educational channel, a recovery study group of the language, using a free and for free learning environment by internet as a tool which would provide the experience, contributing to the study and learning arrangement.

The proposal consisted on the task of offering to the students of this Pole a new education channel, which would work as a help to the learning process.

#### **4 – ARRANGING THE EXPERIENCE**

To arrange a Spanish Language recovery studies subjects by internet, in addition to the choice of an environment where the contents will be provided, it is necessary to establish the suitable methodology to perform the activities.

To make learning something meaningful, it is necessary to know not only the students and the knowledge they have, but also provide knowledge improvement through interaction, providing the students an educational proposal that stimulates them to move on and keep on studying instead of leading him to quit school <sup>[2]</sup>.

Thus, the point of view chosen to support this investigation is justified, for it is believed that social-interacionist point of view is suitable for EJA, because it makes possible to exchange knowledge and construct learning <sup>[4]</sup>.

This way, the learner broadens his cultural horizons and reinforces the mother tongue learning, which in EJA is fundamental to the literacy construction and reinforcement, and to the exercise of citizenship, because to know how to

write and read is not enough, it is necessary to use these processes and participate actively of society.

#### **4.1 – Selecting a tool**

There are many alternatives to be selected when the issue is use the educational technologies to arrange a learning support subject.

A virtual learning environment (in Portuguese, ambiente virtual de aprendizagem - AVA) is a scenery which permits the learner interaction and makes possible to use many asynchronous and synchronous communication tools<sup>[3]</sup>, but for a student to use an AVA, it is necessary to go through a kind of training which demands time, a complex process that might make the students go away.

Thus, the most suitable idea was to adopt an online learning net, which offered an intuitive navigation, similar to the relationship websites known, with the aim of making the learning easier and stimulate the student in the knowledge search <sup>[3]</sup>.

When looking for learning nets, we knew Portal de Relacionamento Educacional Professor-Aluno (PRAL) <sup>[6]</sup>, a for free net which provides educational tools to improve knowledge, and exchange and interaction between the participants, in a collaborative way of knowledge construction.

It is important to mention that the PRAL net does not have tools that make possible to control the students' accesses, but is similar to a profile in a relationship website, making it easier to navigate and attract the student. It consists on an environment in where people involved can communicate, and also provide additional exercises, providing communication and interaction.

## **5 – METHOD**

The research presented is of quantitative and qualitative nature and consisted on the creation of recovery subject of Spanish language in the Teacher-Student Relationship Portal (PRAL). The activities were performed from November to December of 2010 and involved research and construction of contents in a collaborative way, in addition to the performance of exercises about basic contents related to vocabulary and grammar points, such as

numbers, verbs, pronouns and adjectives, among others. Picture number 1 illustrates the home page of the course developed:

The screenshot shows the PRAL Portal interface for the course 'Turma Alunos do Reforço'. The page is organized into several sections:

- Navigation:** 'Página Inicial', 'Buscar no PRAL', 'Enviar Convite', 'Agenda de Compromissos'.
- Turma (Class):**
  - Turma: Alunos do Reforço
  - Disciplina: Espanhol
  - Escola: Escola de Ensino Médio Sesi Eraldo Giacobe
  - Ano: 2010
  - Professor: Jozelina Silva da Silva
- Datas Importantes (Important Dates):** [Vazio]
- Mural de recados - ALUNOS DO REFORÇO (Noticeboard):**
  - Assunto: Pessoal!
  - Conteúdo: Falta pouco tempo pro término das atividades. Sexta-feira vou postar as últimas. Não deixem para a última hora. Acessem os materiais e realizem as atividades!!! Bons estudos.
  - Data: 15/12/2010 06:38
  - Ações: Excluir, Visualizar Recados
- Meus Conteúdos / Trabalhos / Gabaritos (My Contents / Assignments / Answers):**
  - B. El español en el mundo (Conteúdos)
  - L. Terceira semana - aula 2 (corrigido) (Segunda aula da terceira semana)
  - O - Última aula do curso de reforço (Última aula)
  - M. Mural de recados (Segunda aula da segunda semana)
- Alunos (Students):**
  - Patricia Mendes de Borba
  - Carlos Morais
  - Alex Sandro Barbosa Santos
  - Karina Becker Deken
- Left Sidebar:**
  - Meu Perfil
  - Minhas Turmas
  - Meus Colegas
  - Minhas Ferramentas
  - Meus Favoritos
  - Caixa de Mensagens
  - Configurações
  - Conheça nossos planos avançados:
    - TURMAS
    - ESPAÇO
    - A partir de R\$ 7,90

Picture 1: Home page of the course

By the end of the activity, online questionnaires were applied, in order to verify the results reached with the experience. There was also a report and online experiences share, in an asynchronous way.

### 5.1 – Research, population and sample deliniation

With this experience, it was intended to develop a proficiency of the Spanish language, enabling the student to use the internet as a mean of study, to use the virtual net. Contextualized didactic material was prepared and complementary material about professions, cooking, welfare and general entertainment were indicated, in order to reach the students' interests, respecting the heterogeneity of the group. After the invitation, 40 students filled in the form to show they were interested in the course, 35 from elementary school and 5 from high school.

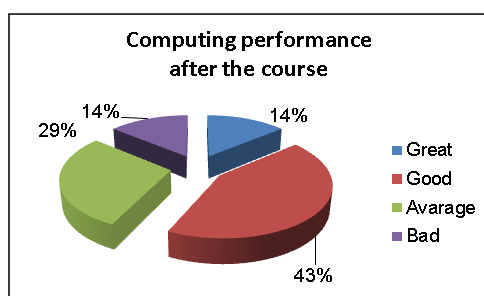
### 5.2 – Data collection and analysis

The first contact was done through e-mail to give the instructions. After that, a questionnaire was sent through Google Docs and a tutorial with the step-by-step about how to use the tool, in order to identify the participants' profiles. Then, an invitation to access the PRAL Portal and to create a profile was sent, starting the course. From the 40 students who were interested in, only 11 participated of the course.

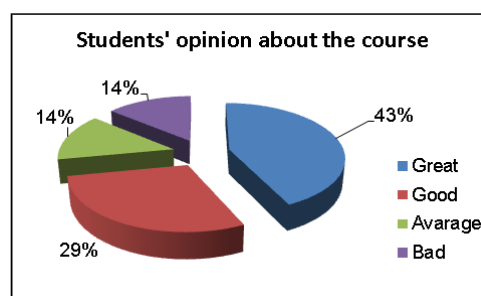
## 6– RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results, it was found that the majority of the students were between 31 and 40 years old, they were married or lived with a partner and did not have children. Only one of them had taken a course by internet up to 5 hours long, but 86% had computers with internet access and 55% used the equipment daily.

It was also found that 70% used the computer to access relationship or online real time communication nets, although only 20% used it for doing research. After the course, they were asked to answer a final questionnaire. The picture 2 reveals that the majority considered positive their computing performance after attending the course. Picture 3, it is possible to see that the students enjoyed attending the course by the internet:

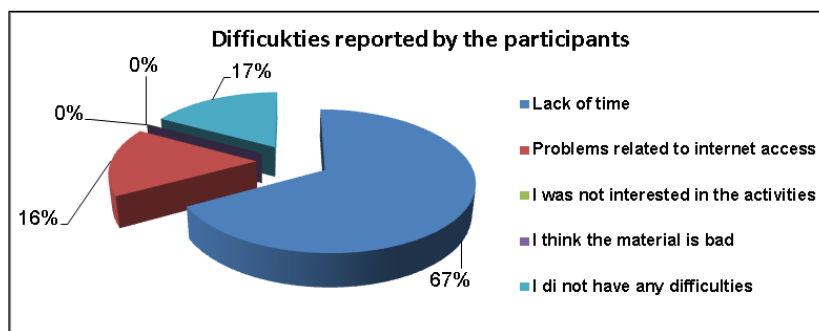


**Picture 2:** Computing performance after the course



**Picture 3:** Opinion about the course

The lack of time was the main issue reported by the students, 67%, as being one of the greatest difficulties faced during the course, and because of these time problems, according to the picture 4, some of the students could conclude the course only in the second week of January in the other year.



**Picture 4:** Greatest difficulties pointed out by the students

86% of the students approved the course and took the opportunity to use the computer to study. About the experience of studying by the internet, the students answered that it was good in a general view, only two students reported that they did not like studying this way. On the following lines, the testimonies that called our attention the most:

*"I have never taken a course by the internet, I liked the course a lot and I learned plenty of things about Spanish that I did not know and now I understand it better".*

*"This way is difficult because it is necessary to have willingness to learn at home, to be responsible for your own studies".*

*"The course was good, but there should be a test and a certificate".*

Another aim of the research was to stimulate the interactivity between the students. Initially, they were incentivized to exchange e-mails, in order to interact between each other, but as the access time was little and due to the resistance of the students that had never taken part of an experience likes this one, we decided not to insist on it in order not to make them quit the course.

Thus, the interactivity did not happened between the students, but to surprising the researcher, it happened between parents and children, for many of children helped their parents to understand and do the tasks.

In relation to this, it was observed that 86% reported that they had asked their relatives who studied Spanish at regular school's help to do the tasks and only 14 % did the tasks alone.

Going further on the analysis, the students classified their Spanish knowledge before the course as being bad, and only one classified as average.



When asked about in which aspects the course could be better, one of the students reported that it would be interesting if there were more exercises and tests.

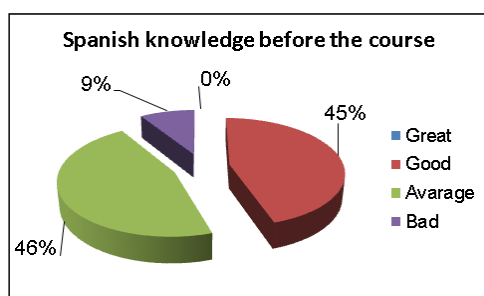
About the activities they liked the most, the following testimonies are important:

*“I liked learning about the numbers and time, because they are the easiest to learn”.*

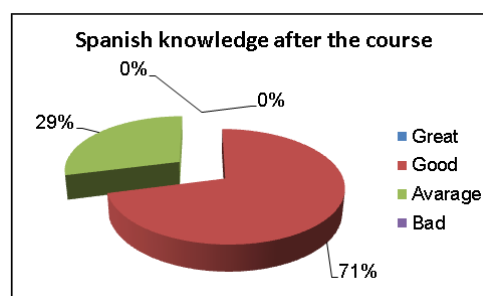
*“Learning about culture made me like Spanish more”.*

In relation to the suggestion for future courses, the students asked Spanish music and Literature classes, because according to them, these subjects are a way of broadening their knowledge, and they also asked for a longer course.

Eventually, 71% of the students classified their Spanish knowledge after the course as being “good”, mentioning the fact that only 14% of the students thought their knowledge was good, according to the pictures 5 and 6:



**Picture 5:** Spanish Knowledge before



**Picture 6:** Spanish Knowledge after

## 7- CONCLUSION

Having the opportunity of showing the EJA students a new way of studying at home through the internet is for sure one of the many rewarding experiences of this rewarding activity which is teaching.

The variety of the students' behavior called our attention, because some of them were very committed to the tasks, and on the other hand, some of them seemed to be very insecure, demanding a greater help.

Although some students had some difficulties related to attending the course, it is believed that it worked as a contribution to broaden the involved

students' way of learning, showing them that the education is evolving and nowadays there are other ways of learning asynchronously, getting over time boundaries life brings.

Based on the results obtained, it is noticed the complexity of teaching students who study at a distance using books to broaden their knowledge through a course by internet. Using the computer as a study tool in EJA consists on a slow and continuous process, but it has to be stimulated and encouraged by all the teachers, no matter what is the subject, in order to show the student the how useful are the computer and the internet for research and study.

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<sup>1</sup> The production of this article counted on the revision of Michele Marchesan, from SESI Porto Alegre, and of the orientator professor Master Carlos Tadeu Queiróz de Moraes, from UFRGS.

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