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THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND THE INTERNET FOR THE PROCESS OF LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

With the development of techniques and technologies, the use of the Internet as an important segment of information and communication technologies is a means of learning and teaching in all universities. With the aim of obtaining data on how much the Internet is used by students in foreign language learning, we conducted research through surveys among students from elementary schools in our city. In accordance with the objectives of the research, a descriptive method was used. The analysis of the results leads to the conclusion that the Internet and one of the most famous websites on the Internet, YouTube, are used to a large extent by students, although not always and not most often for language learning. Students are very dependent on this technology, although they still do not fully rely on someone who lives in the choir to master the school material. However, the research shows that most of them believe that it would be of great benefit for the teaching and learning process, but also that their teachers rarely use the Internet as a teaching tool.

Keywords: IT and communication technologies, Internet, learning a foreign language

INTRODUCTION

The importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) for the learning and education process has recently been increasingly emphasized. As early as 2008, a report by the European Commission (Commission of the European Communities, 2008) highlighted the importance of ICT for the educational process, which could be modernized and "refreshed" with the introduction of these technologies. In our country, initiatives are also being launched at the national level for the development and implementation of educational technologies and efforts are being made to implement them as quickly and completely as possible for the purpose of integration into the educational process. The following goals are particularly highlighted: the introduction of the modern concept of e-learning and distance learning, as well as the development of digital educational content, which together would lead to the establishment of a modern educational system that is tailored to needs. Harmer (2007) believes that the computer is exceptionally suitable for performing language exercises and claims that language exercises performed on a computer promote the development of team spirit and cooperation among students. The computer, in general, is suitable for "quickly and easily finding useful and appropriate digital materials", according to Tomlisson, which undoubtedly facilitates the work of the teacher. It should be emphasized that such materials can be used for teaching various subjects, as well as during independent learning and can mostly be found on the Internet. These and many other authors

believe that digital materials using the Internet have a positive effect on students' motivation to work, by introducing technology as part of their everyday life in the learning process.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Independent Learning

Independent learning - better known in the literature as self-regulated learning - which is increasingly insisted on in the context of modern education, represents "an active, constructive process in which the goals are set by the student who monitors and controls his/her motivation, behavior, cognition and the learning process in general". So, the main goal of such learning is, above all, independent research and expansion of students' knowledge, in addition to an increased dose of freedom and integrity when it comes to shaping the learning process itself. Here it is important to emphasize research as opposed to memorizing facts, which is insisted on within the formal educational process. Independent learning increases the level of motivation of students, makes them independent and allows them to work in accordance with their capabilities and desires, time planning, organization of the work environment and learning strategy. This learning is often associated with information and communication technologies because the use of computers, especially the Internet, allows the realization of the self-regulated learning tasks mentioned above. First of all, computers allow to determine the pace, duration and difficulty of the learning process, then they allow more frequent practice and confirmation of what has been learned, they provide a constant insight into the progress of students and, finally, they offer the possibility of assessing students that can take place "at a distance", without the necessary presence of the teacher. In addition, they also positively affect the motivation of students who choose what to learn in accordance with their interests, needs and affinities.

Independent learning can be fully implemented through computers and the Internet, extremely useful ICT media. Finally, we would suggest that such self-regulated learning, together with the use of the aforementioned modern technologies, can help to overcome the fundamental shortcomings of the classical (traditional) approach to teaching, which is still widespread.

The inadequacy of the traditional approach in relation to the needs of modern society and, on the contrary, the adequacy of the use of computers, the Internet and self-regulated learning are seen if comparisons are made in their domain, where traditional learning lags behind in modernized teaching, enriched with ICT. While the former offers the opportunity to acquire facts, teaching in which digital technologies are integrated offers students the opportunity to learn how to solve problems. ICT also promotes teamwork, which is another requirement of modern education, while traditional teaching values individual work and encourages a competitive spirit (groups are formed that compete with each other, work is done independently or in pairs, and the department rarely cooperates as a group). Also, in the case of self-regulated learning, since students usually do not have teachers as guides, they learn the material themselves, and it is understood that in this process they also “learn how to learn”. The last point regarding the needs of modern education needs no explanation; ICT not only fits into the modern teaching process, but is also an indispensable part of it.

The Internet in learning and teaching German

Today, the Internet is a world-famous phenomenon whose spectrum of applications is increasing day by day. It is "A communication technology used by almost two billion people around the world and without which life as we know it today would be impossible". Millions of people communicate every day thanks to the Internet; ideas, information, documents are exchanged. The entire planet is at your fingertips. The Internet, in essence, is a large knowledge base. The possibilities for its application are countless - through the Internet, people get information, learn, communicate, buy, apply for jobs, schools, universities, in general, it can be said that every aspect of life can be arranged and directed with the help of the Internet. The wide spread of the Internet further increases its popularity because it can be accessed almost anytime and anywhere. This property of the Internet stands out as one of the most important advantages of its use - thanks to the Internet, "practitioners share their experiences and learn from each other". From the point of view of education, the great educational potential of the Internet as a knowledge base that can be easily and quickly accessed to find the necessary information. Since we have already indicated that the development of ICT conditions changes and innovations in education, methods and forms of teaching work and that there is more and more talk about the necessity

of introducing ICT in teaching, both general and professional and in subjects, as well as in teaching foreign languages such as German.

In order to master any foreign language, it is necessary to master four skills. The four language skills that need to be practiced when learning a foreign language are: speaking and writing, which are active language skills, and listening and reading, which are passive language skills. These skills are also called productive and receptive skills in the literature. To practice the aforementioned, numerous authors suggest the Internet as a convenient, rich and easily accessible source of language learning material, along with YouTube, which is extremely popular and frequently used. Considering them as extremely suitable learning media, the authors propose various ways in which, using these two media, all four language skills could be practiced and which students could use in school and outside of school, at their own discretion and in accordance with their affinities.

Until now, the skill of speaking was mainly practiced "by the professor giving a certain topic, and the students would maintain some form of communication." However, this type of communication was far from spontaneous, natural communication, and students often had difficulties when talking about an unknown or uninteresting topic. Some authors suggest exercises such as singing, reciting or acting in a foreign language for the development of this skill. Appropriate practice materials could be easily (and free of charge) found on the Internet, namely on YouTube. Students can be shown an appropriate music video on YouTube, and then they can be “motivated to sing along with their favorite artist.” In addition to YouTube, other websites and types of ICT can be used to practice the skill of speaking a foreign language.

Skype can also be used for this purpose, through which students can communicate with peers from the country whose language they are learning (in our case, German) or even receive lessons in that language.

We would also add that by using the Internet, not only can we practice all four language skills, but we can also master language systems by following the content of the foreign language we want to learn, using video lessons and attending online language courses. Being informed about the culture and events in the community of speakers of foreign languages further contributes to this process because it allows close contact with the language that these elements shape.

Problems and shortcomings of information and communication technologies (ICT)

Despite all the aforementioned benefits, the Internet and ICT are still little used in teaching. Where they are used, they are used more for lesson preparation than in the teaching itself, and the use of this and similar technologies in teaching is negligible. The opinion of many authors is that the low representation of ICT in teaching can be partly explained by the underdevelopment of teachers' digital competencies. Due to the insufficient understanding of the potential and importance of technology, there is resistance among teachers towards them, and consequently, very few teachers today follow innovations in the field of educational technology, and a certain number of them do not use the Internet at all in education. By the aforementioned term, digital competence, we mean "safe and critical use of information and communication technologies". In order to develop this competence, inclusion and engagement in networks gathered around cultural, social and professional goals, while maintaining a critical attitude towards the information that is available, is essential. Therefore, the teacher must responsibly and carefully approach this information and must try to separate the useful from the useless, the appropriate from the inappropriate, which in the era of the "information explosion" is not an easy task at all.

In our opinion, although digital competencies are increasingly becoming competencies of key importance that cover all spheres of life, their implementation in the daily practice of teachers, in study programs, curricula, work plans and programs in schools is still not at a satisfactory level.

Although each of us understands the necessity of acquiring IT knowledge, we must not neglect the existence of the fact that thousands of educators completed their education before the emergence of modern information and communication technologies and that now, unlike them, their "students who were born in a digital environment and who very easily navigate through it", which further deepens the gap between generations. The term “digital divide” clarifies that teachers’ IT competencies are weak, not aligned with the requirements of students and modern schools, leading to the fact that students are bored in class, do not accept the teacher as an authority and simply do not want to learn. However, in order to avoid generalization, we must not claim that all teachers are resistant to these technologies.

There are also those who try to keep up with the times, and train themselves independently, from professional literature or with the help of more experienced colleagues and friends. However, we feel the need to emphasize that it points to the fact that the introduction of new pedagogical processes in technology implies investing special efforts in adapting to new ways of working; it requires additional qualification, retraining and "continuous professional development of teachers". Unfortunately, teachers are not always ready to accept this kind of responsibility - which should not be blamed - because the role of teachers today is more complex than ever before. We will agree with the following statement that a modern teacher today is expected to be a "researcher, programmer, organizer of work, advisor, pedagogical diagnostician, therapist, educator of the generation". This can be achieved "only through continuous professional training and methodological and statistical education".

Regardless of the teacher's competence, other problems also arise in practice as possible reasons for reluctance to use ICT (especially the use of the Internet). Although they offer many opportunities for learning foreign languages such as German, the aforementioned media also contain potential dangers. These shortcomings interact more with security issues, around the problem of student motivation, etc. The issue of the safety of students and even students on the Internet raises particularly sensitive topics, because the availability of Internet content not only opens the door to information and knowledge for students, but also makes them vulnerable to themselves, as they become easy targets for unwanted content.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subject of the research is to what extent the Internet is used in the study of the German language. The research includes certain analyses and presentation of the data obtained from them. Special emphasis is placed on students in higher grades in primary schools in our city.

As a problem of this research, I single out the denial by some of the professors who adhere to the traditional way in teaching foreign languages. All educational environments in the country face this problem.

The purpose of the research is that the use of the Internet can greatly facilitate the study of a foreign language, such as German.

Based on the subject of research, the methodology used during the research has been determined, and the methods will be combined depending on the content, i.e. the element being researched.

By nature, the research is developmental, in order to determine whether students use the Internet in the independent study of foreign languages.

According to the content, this research is social, because it treats a phenomenon that occurs at the same time in elementary schools in our city.

According to the time duration of monitoring the research phenomenon, this research is transferal, because it will be realized in a short period of time, in different conditions.

Primary and secondary research are used to prepare the paper. Secondary sources refer to professional literature, scientific papers in the field of foreign language curricula, in theory and practice.

The general scientific methods used in data processing are:

Analytical-synthetic method - analysis of certain phenomena, breakdown to the final basic parts, their grouping according to common characteristics and based on that, drawing and presenting new specific conclusions.

Inductive-deductive method - determination of general conclusions, through individual specific attitudes and observations, and vice versa, reaching new specific conclusions through general attitudes.

Description method - as a procedure for describing or presenting the subject of scientific research with scientific interpretation and explanation. A large number of scientific and professional literature and specific research by prominent experts from the country and abroad were used in the description.

Statistical method - the collected data were statistically processed, they were interpreted and then analyzed on the basis of which appropriate conclusions will be drawn about the researched phenomenon. The statistical method and its application will enable sorting and organizing the previously collected data according to various criteria, all of which will be supported by statistical tables and graphic displays in order to more easily and clearly determine the relations of conditionality of this phenomenon.

For the purposes of this paper, analysis was used as a procedure, which, with the help of a survey questionnaire, made it possible to collect data for the research of students in elementary schools in our city.

The obtained data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

• Methods of scientific knowledge

The interpretation of the obtained data is based on several methods of scientific inference, namely:

a. basic procedures of scientific inference

- analysis;

b. auxiliary procedures of scientific inference:

- comparative analysis;
- synthesis.

Staffing plan: Students were surveyed randomly.

Timeline: The research was conducted from September to November 2024 according to the following schedule:

1. Technical preparation of the survey questionnaires;
2. The survey questionnaires were delivered and answered by randomly selected respondents.
3. Collection and classification of the survey questionnaires.

The results of the research will be beneficial for teachers who teach foreign languages, but also for the entire social community.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The research included 150 randomly selected respondents. The students from the higher grades in the primary schools of our city were represented here. Survey questionnaires were sent to them electronically. The first part contains demographic data about the respondents. The second part of the survey questionnaire contains survey findings with offered answers, to which the respondents had to decide according to their opinion. In the appendix I will show only a part of the graphs.

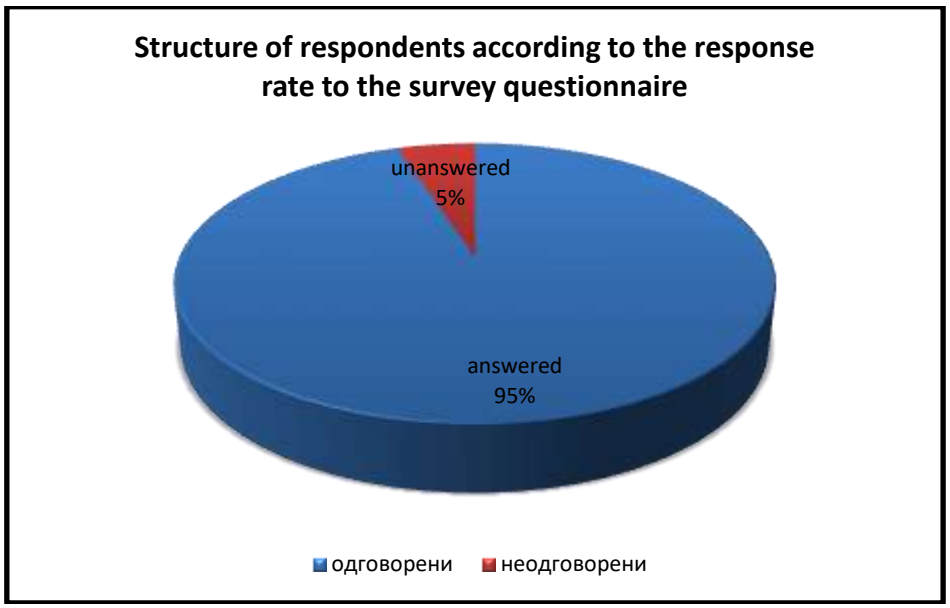


Chart No. 1. Structure of respondents according to the response rate to the survey questionnaire

The first graph represents the response rate and is presented on the previous page. Of the survey questionnaires sent to the respondents, I received a response rate of 95%, which in my opinion is a satisfactory percentage and I believe that the topic has aroused interest among them.

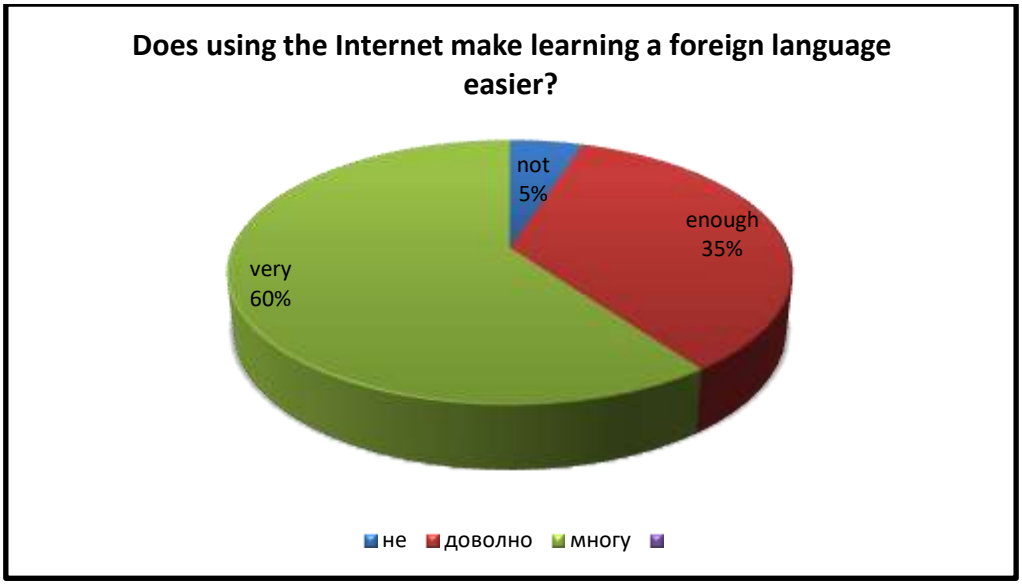


Chart No. 2. Does using the Internet make learning a foreign language easier?

The graph above shows how the respondents responded to the question: Does the use of the Internet facilitate learning a foreign language? As we can see, the smallest part stated that the Internet does not facilitate learning, namely 5%, the largest part or 35% stated that it is sufficient, and the largest part of the total number of respondents stated that the influence of the Internet in learning a foreign language is great. We can conclude that the students who were the subject of the research believe that the Internet greatly facilitates learning a foreign language.

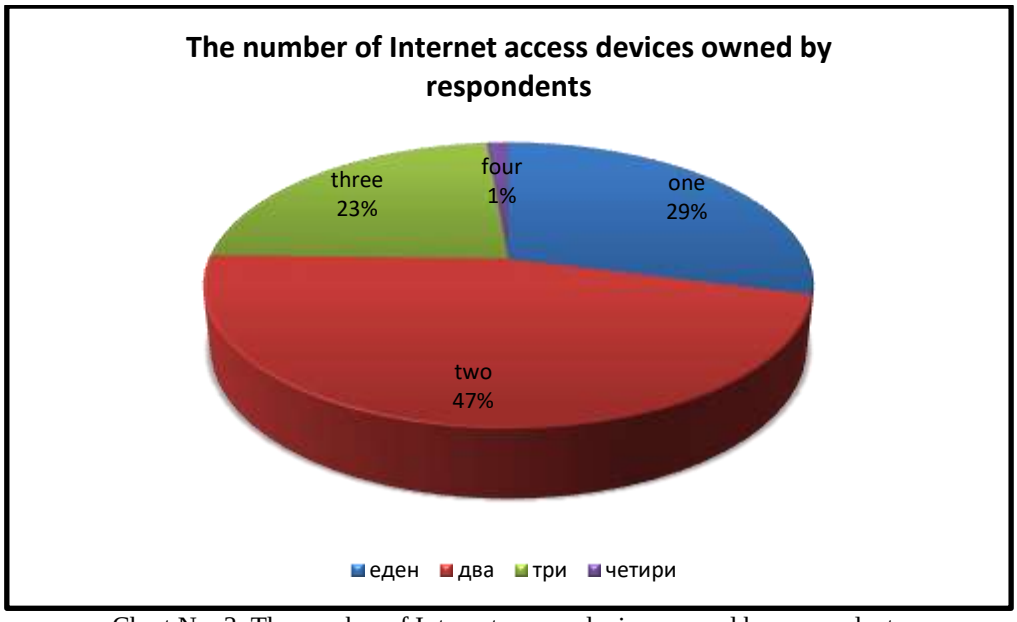


Chart No. 3. The number of Internet access devices owned by respondents

The graph contains the structure of the respondents according to the number of Internet access devices that the respondents own. The largest percentage of the total number of respondents, 42%, own two devices. A smaller part, i.e. 29%, own one, 23%, three, and the smallest part, i.e. 1%, own four devices. We can conclude that the respondents mostly own two Internet access devices.

What type of device do respondents most often use to access the Internet was the next question, and how the respondents responded is presented in graph no. 4. which is presented on the next page. It can be noted that the majority of the total number of respondents, 55%, stated that they use a smartphone,

20% stated that they use a tablet, 15% use a laptop, while the smallest part or 10% use a desktop computer. We can conclude that students mostly access the Internet by using smartphones.

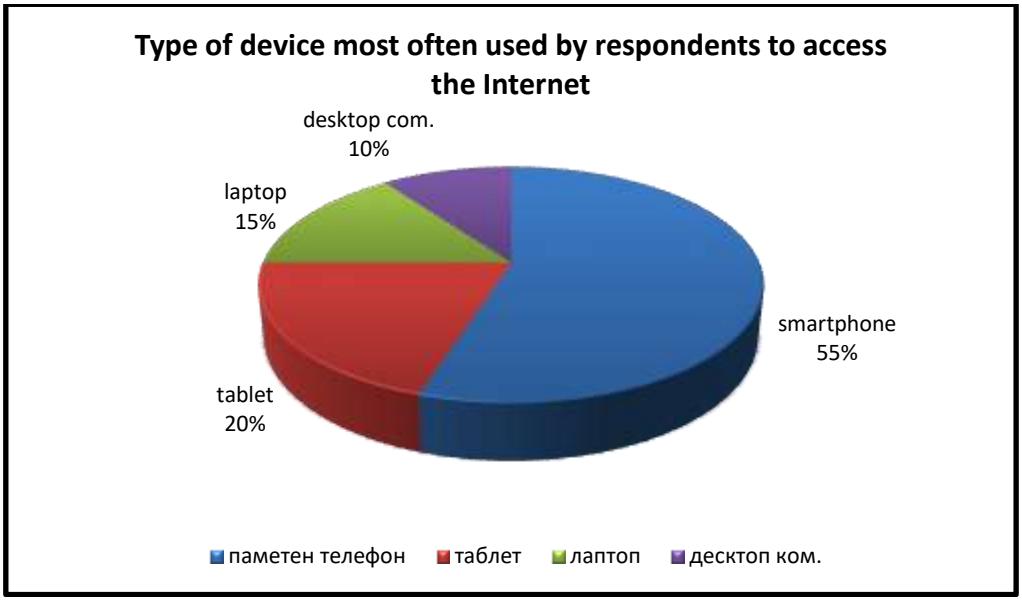


Chart No. 4. Type of device most often used by respondents to access the Internet

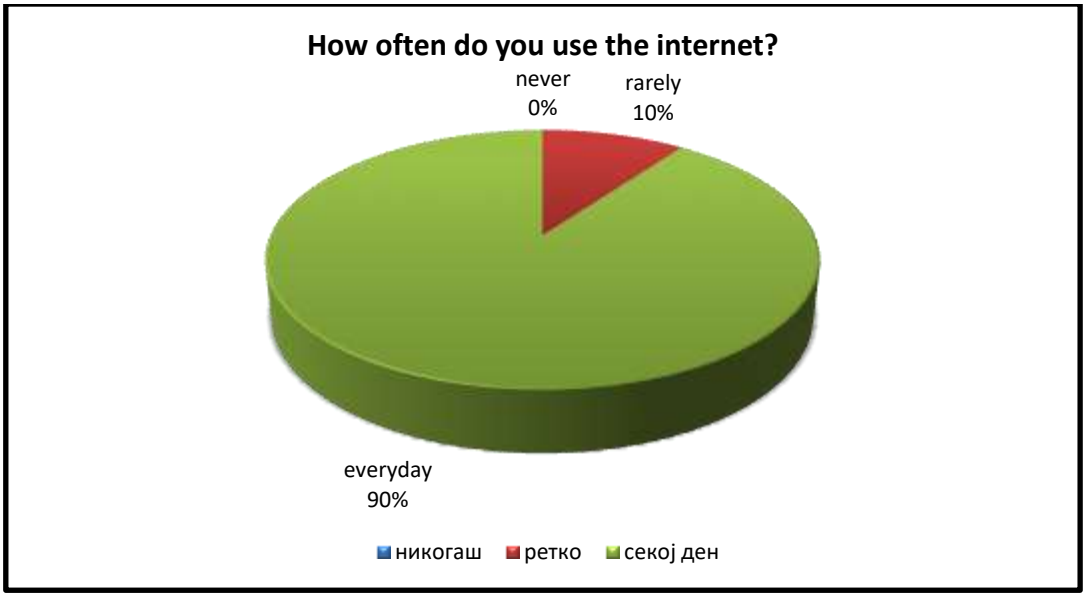


Chart No. 5. How often do you use the Internet?

The survey question regarding the frequency of Internet use, as stated by our respondents, is presented in Chart No. 5. There was no response that they never use the Internet, 10% responded that they rarely use it, and the majority or 90% responded that they use the Internet daily. We can conclude that students use the Internet daily.

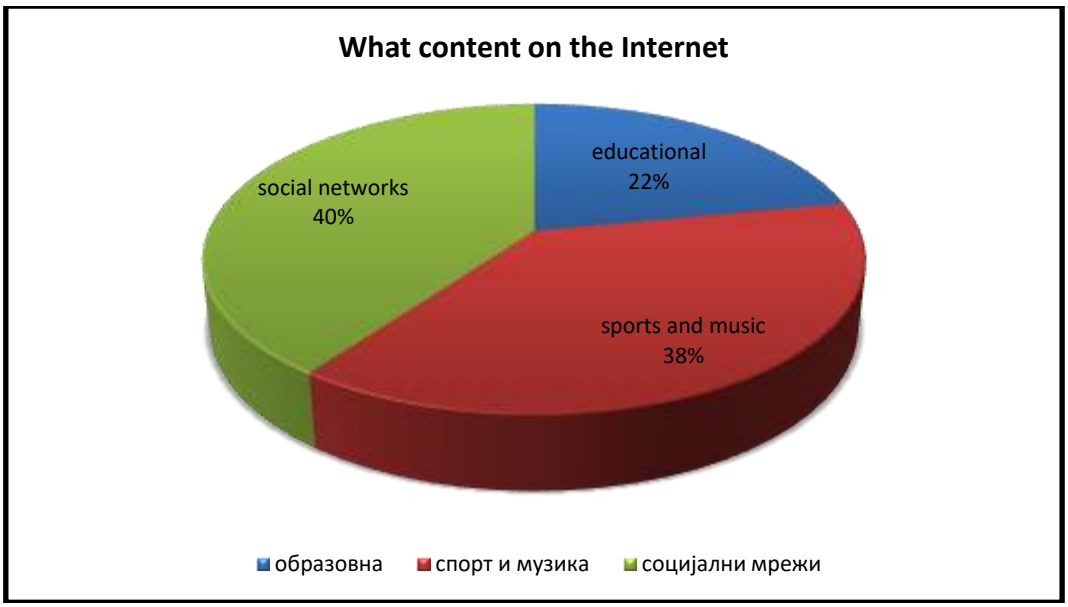


Chart No. 6. What kind of content on the Internet?

The survey question asked about the content that respondents most often search for on the Internet, the results of their statements are presented in Chart No. 6. As we can see, the smallest part or 22% of respondents devote to educational programs, 38% to sports and music and 40% to social networks. We can conclude that our respondents spend most of their time on the Internet searching for sports and music or social networks.

CONCLUSION

Based on all that has been mentioned so far, we conclude that the potential of the Internet as a segment of information and communication technologies is exceptional. This potential has already been recognized in the world, and our country is gradually taking steps towards integrating these technologies into the education system.

The research showed that at the level of primary schools, the Internet is still not used enough in classes, although the students themselves use it daily. Unfortunately, it turned out that they use the Internet mainly for entertainment and information, and significantly less for learning and updating school material. Although the respondents rarely choose the Internet as a means of mastering knowledge, they still rely on this medium to a significant extent when it comes to learning a foreign language, although in this case they choose less formal ways of learning. While video lessons, educational and informative content on the Internet and YouTube video materials for mastering vocabulary and grammar are watched very rarely, they prefer and more often watch and search for entertainment and sports content, as a way to more easily acquire the language. Most often, access to the Internet is through two devices, the most common of which is the smartphone.

My recommendation is that every teacher who teaches a foreign language should encourage their students what content on the Internet they will follow and how they will use it correctly in the process of learning a foreign language.

It is necessary to choose content that will be both entertaining and interesting for them, in order to facilitate this process.

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