Abstract

Many studies report information overload (IO) as one of the main problems that students encounter in online learning via computer-mediated communication (CMC). This study aimed to explore the sources of online students’ IO and accordingly offer suggestions for increasing students’ cognitive resources for learning. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used in data collection and analysis processes. The findings suggest that varied learner characteristics made some students more susceptible than others to IO. Difficulties associated with students’ perceptions of IO are addressed and implications for course design are offered.

Key words: information overload; computer-mediated communication; cognitive load theory; online discussion.

Introduction

With the increase in Internet communication technologies, online learning has grown rapidly through the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC uses telecommunication technologies such as email, real-time chat, computer conferencing/online discussion systems, and online databases to support human communication between spatially separated learners (Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag, 1995). Although CMC can support teaching and learning by making information and communication easily accessible via computer networks, one of the main problems caused by the medium is information overload (IO)