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**DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY . A
COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE**

PhD thesis abstract

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Cuvinte cheie: cognitive load, adaptive instruction, learner-controlled instruction, learning efficiency, eye tracking, thinking aloud protocols, cued retrospective reporting

INTRODUCTION

With the development of personal computers (PCs) in the early '70s and with the advent of the Internet (in 1989), there has been an unprecedented technological explosion, with major implications for all areas of human activity.

The fast technological development has put pressure on education from the perspective of at least two essential requirements. First, it is necessary, more than ever, that the educational system equips students with the abilities and knowledge necessary to deal with the rapid changes that have taken (and still take) place in all areas of human activity. Second, information sources must be easy to access, create, change and be available *anytime* and *anywhere* the students desire, so that they may accomplish their goals and fulfill their personal learning needs.

In an attempt to respond to these requirements, instructional design research has put forward two approaches: (a) using real-life learning tasks, with a high complexity that will help students acquire transferable abilities (Corbalan, Kester, & Van Merriënboer, 2006), and (b) increasing the flexibility of instructional programs (especially the computer-based ones), so that they correspond to demands such as *just-in-time learning* and *education-on-demand*.

In a flexible educational program, not all learners benefit from the same instructional interventions (the same program for all); instead, each follows their own learning path, dynamically adapted to their personal needs, progress and preferences (education-on-demand). Additionally, learners must be offered the possibility to benefit from instruction precisely when and where they need it (just-in-time learning). This approach implies in fact the *personalization of instruction*, which can be accomplished either by the *computer program* (e.g., the e-learning application assesses subjects' progress and selects adequate learning tasks of adequate difficulty and amount of support), or by the *learners* (students monitor their own progress and select the appropriate learning tasks). In the latter case we are talking about *learner-controlled instruction*.

Both approaches can be found in this dissertation, as the learning tasks used in the computer program designed by us are characterized not only by realism – having a practical applicability – but also by complexity. Additionally, the sequence of learning tasks (in the adaptive program control) was conceived as a dynamic entity, in the sense that the tasks were permanently adapted to the learners' level of expertise.

The aim of the studies presented in this dissertation was to investigate the degree to which personalized instruction, accomplished either by a computer program, or by the learners, optimizes the learning process, increases test performance and stimulates subjects' motivation, taking as a reference point fixed instruction, controlled by the program (a non-adaptive program control).

The analysis we conducted has sought to mainly answer two questions: (1) *which type of instructional control (program control – adaptive vs. nonadaptive - or learner control) is more beneficial in terms of performance, time on task, learning efficiency (performance combined with invested mental effort and time on task) and motivation?* and (2) *to what extent does learners' prior knowledge mediate these effects or influence the task selection process?*

The theoretical perspective that has guided our approach was *cognitive load theory* (Sweller, 1988), subsumed to the general *cognitivist* paradigm. The necessity to adapt instruction to the constraints of the learners' cognitive system represents the main concern of this theory, Sweller (1988) suggesting that, since a defining aspect of the human cognitive architecture is represented by the limited capacity of working memory, all instructional designs must be analyzed from the perspective of cognitive load theory.

The first three chapters in this dissertation are dedicated to the theoretical framework, the next five chapters present the empirical studies conducted, while the last chapter presents the final conclusions of the dissertation.

In the first chapter, alongside the conceptual clarifications undertaken, we review the main learning paradigms that have had (and still have) an impact upon instructional technologies: *behaviorism*, *cognitivism* and *constructivism*. A relevant aspect in this sense is represented by the fact that in the field of instructional design there have been major changes both at the level of instructional technologies, as well as the level of learning paradigms that underlie them. Additionally, the first chapter also focuses on *cognitive load theory* (Sweller, 1988), emphasizing theoretical and practical contributions of this approach for instructional design, but also the limits it has.

Chapter 2 presents a theoretical framework of adaptive instructional technologies, with an emphasis on approaches and models of *adaptation at the macrolevel*, *the microlevel* and of *aptitude-treatment interactions*. From the point of view of the empirical approach developed in this dissertation, the most valid model of adaptation at the microlevel is the *two-level model of adaptive instruction* (Tennyson & Christensen, 1988), which allows for the moment-to-moment adjustment of instruction to the learners' (ever-changing) performance.

In chapter 3 we review operationalizations of learner-controlled instruction (internal control), the theoretical and research paradigms used in this field, and factors that influence (mediate) the effectiveness of this type of control. Extant research does not appear to support the hypothesis that learner-controlled instruction has a higher efficacy under all circumstances, compared to program-controlled instruction.

Chapter 4 introduces a hybrid model of adapting instruction (put forward by us), which integrates the assumptions of the two-level model of adaptive instruction and of the four-component instructional design model (4C/ID; Van Merriënboer, 1997), as well as of the assumptions of cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988). This personalized model allows for the dynamic selection of the learning tasks based on the learner's performance scores and invested mental effort. A computer-assisted instructional program for the learning of genetics has been developed to put the model into practice. Additionally, in this chapter we present the results of formative evaluation, whose purpose was to test the functionality, usability, but also the efficiency of the developed computerized learning environment in reaching the learning objectives set.

Chapter 5 presents two closely related empirical studies investigating the effects that different types of instructional control have on the effectiveness and learning efficiency in learning genetics using students of different prior knowledge levels: students with low prior knowledge (i.e., high school students) vs. students with a higher prior knowledge (i.e., college students). More specifically, the first study compares – in terms of performance and learning efficiency – the following four types of instructional control: a non-adaptive program control, a full learner control, a limited learner control, and an adaptive program control. The second study represents a replication of the previous study with the purpose of verifying predictions regarding the influence of the type of instructional control on performance and learning efficiency in the context of increased level of learner expertise (inclusion of PhD students in the study).

In chapter 6, the focus was on the task selection process and the features processed by the learners in this case (relevant vs. irrelevant task information). More specifically, the study aimed to investigate the differences between learners with a high prior knowledge level and those with a low prior knowledge level in the field of genetics, with respect to the manner of processing relevant information (structural features) versus irrelevant task information (surface features) in the selection process. To this end, several process-tracing techniques were combined, such as eye tracking, thinking aloud protocol, and cued retrospective reporting.

Chapter 7 presents two closely related studies whose purpose was to examine the influence of the type of instructional control upon the motivation of learners with different levels of expertise, as well as the relationship between their motivation and performance, invested mental effort, and time on task, respectively.

In an attempt to capture mechanisms that explain the occurrence of significant individual differences in terms of performance obtained with the computer-based program developed, a quantitative analysis (semistructured interview) was conducted in chapter 8. The purpose of this analysis was to identify difficulties that learners have encountered in their interaction with the computer-based learning environment, and the manner in which these difficulties were reflected at the level of cognitive and metacognitive strategies used during the learning process (i.e., patterns of self-regulated learning).

Chapter 9, dedicated to final conclusions, presents an overview of the results of the empirical studies included in the present dissertation, and their implications are discussed from the perspective of instructional design and educational applications.

Chapter 1

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Conceptual conceptions

Although for the people with no expertise in the educational field, the term *instructional technology* might only have a technical meaning (e.g., hardware components, etc), the instructional technology means more than those materials or equipment used in the instruction. They represent only the products of instruction, while the instructional technology is an applied field and, thus, involves a process often called instructional design (Lockee, Larson, Burton, & Moore, 2008).

The terms *educational technology*, *instructional design* and *instructional technology* are used interchangeable in literature (Lockee et al., 2008) and so we do in the present dissertation. Some authors (e.g., Kim, Lee, Merrill, Spector, & Van Merriënboer, 2008) claim that although these terms are interchangeable used, they have a slightly different meaning. While the term *educational technology* has a more general meaning, including all technologies that support any type of learning in any environment, the term *instructional technology* has a narrower meaning and involves only the technologies developed for attaining some specific, planned learning outcomes. One of the most representative definitions of instructional technology is the one given by the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT - 1994), according to which the instructional technology is „the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation of the processes and resources for learning.” (Seels & Richey, 1994).

Instructional design is the discipline which studies these technologies, and their development and use in order to support instruction and learning. Reigeluth (1983) defined instructional design as a „linking science” between the learning theory and the educational practice, with the main purpose of prescribing some instructional actions necessary to optimize the desired learning outcomes.

Kim et al. (2008) claimed that the study of the instructional design is represented by three distinct activities: (1). the development of tools and artifacts with the purpose to support learning; (2). the evaluation of the utility and efficacy of those tools in designing computer-based learning environments, and (3) the evaluation of the impact these tools have upon learning.

1.2 History of instructional technologies

Contrary to the general belief that the research, development and evaluation of the instructional technology began once the PCs started being used in the 1970s, it really took place long before that. Even from the early decades of the 20th century, instructional technology was constituted as a distinct field of research. The first research question was linked to the idea of enhancing learning with visual, and afterwards with audio-visual resources (for example the use of radio in instruction). As radio broadcasting grew in the 30s and the television in the 50s, these mass media were easily accepted as methods of providing instruction both in schools and outside them.

In the 60s, the interest towards teaching machines that incorporate programmed instruction (based on behaviorist perspective), invaded the field. Thus, the research field of the instructional technology extended from the audio-visual technologies to all the other types of instructional technologies, including the psychological ones (for example, programmed instruction). In the 80s, the interest had changed again, this time moving towards the design of some instructional systems which presume the clever application of the instructional methods, a change brought to life by the new insights from the constructivist and cognitive perspectives.

As a result of the fact that in the 90s computers became pervasive, they have become the favourite way of supplying information/instruction. After the rapid global spread of the Internet after 1995, the computer networking started to have a function of communicating the information beside the one of storage and processing it. In the 21st century, the instructional technology focussed especially on the distance education, with the sole mission of helping people learn faster and more effective, in a less expensive manner.

1.3 Paradigmatic perspectives to instructional technologies

Learning and instructional theories are based on philosophical assumptions about *knowing* and *learning*, and these are implicit in the instructional design (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). Over the years, instructional design has been characterized by radical changes both at the level of technology and the level of paradigms which underlie it. The paradigms which provide theoretical framework for designing instructional technologies are *behaviorism*, *cognitivism* and *constructivism*.

1.3.1. Behaviorism

Behaviorism emerged in the first half of the 20th century and is based on an associationist approach. From an ontological perspective, this paradigm is based on an objectivist philosophy: the world is real and exists outside of the individual (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). According to the behaviorism, in order to know something, individuals must accomplish specific behaviours in the presence of specific stimuli (Schuh & Barab, 2008).

Programmed instruction represents an example of instructional design which facilitates learning by using reinforcement and feedback. In the case of programmed instruction, the instructional content is preplanned (based on the objective ontology), presenting the learners a plan of what needs to be learned. Teaching machines and the computer-assisted instruction, the descendants of programmed instruction, represent instructional technologies based on the reinforcement of the relationships between stimuli and responses. The essential aspect of these instructional technologies is represented by the content organisation so that the students might offer correct answers and benefit the reinforcement when they offer the correct answers (Saettler, 1995).

1.3.2. Cognitivism

Cognitivism emerged with the cognitive revolution in the 50s, emphasizing on the necessity to focus on the human mind. Cognitivism focus on mind, seeing it as an information processing system (the metaphor „mind-as-computer”), with the purpose of understanding the way knowledge is organised, encoded and retrieval.

Although the acquiring of knowledge structures underlie the cognitive perspective, as in behaviorism, the rationalist epistemology (it considers that reason is the main source of knowledge) is the one that makes the distinction between behaviorism and cognitivism (Schuh & Barab, 2008). The unit of analysis of the cognitivism remains the individual, as in behaviorism, only it is not the behaviour that is analyzed, but the mental structures and the developed representations.

Gagné's (1985) theory of instruction provides an exemplar within the cognitive perspective. This theory considers that during learning process, learners involve several capabilities, hierarchically organized, from simple to complex, and from particular to general. Gagné (1985) described five types of learning capabilities by which the learning can be facilitated: (1) intellectual skills; (2) verbal information; (3) cognitive strategies; (4) motor skills and (5) attitudes.

1.3.3. Constructivism

Constructivism emerged in 1990 as a alternative framework to the cognitive perspective. This paradigm states the existence of a real world that we experience (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992), so the ontological basis might as well be objectivist, but, because it is also states that this world cannot be directly know, the realism can also be the ontological base. In other words, like objectivism, constructivism considers that there is a real world which we experience, but the meaning of the world is imposed by us, it does not exist outside us (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Schuh & Barab, 2008). The individual remains unit of analysis of the constructivism, as in the case of cognitivism, but the focus is on the conceptual reorganization of the knowledge base, not on the extant structure of knowledge.

În ciuda criticilor primite (vezi Driscoll, 2005), constructivismul a avut un „ecou” puternic în domeniul *designului instrucional*. Din perspectiva acestei paradigme, strategiile instrucionale trebuie să respecte următoarele principii generale (Driscoll, 2005): (1) procesul de învățare să aibă loc în cadrul unor medii complexe și realiste (de ex., microlumi); (2) să fie promovate mediile de învățare colaborative (de ex., forumuri de discuții); (3) sprijinirea perspectivelor multiple asupra problemelor; (4) încurajarea perfecționării prin învățare; (5) susținerea procesului de construire a cunoștințelor.

Despite the critics (Driscoll, 2005), constructivism had a strong echo in the domain of instructional design. From this perspective, the instructional strategies must follow certain general principles (Driscoll, 2005): (1) the learning process must take place within complex and real environments (e.g., microworlds), (2) collaborative learning environments must be promoted, (3) multiple perspectives upon different problems must be supported, (4) mastering through learning should be encouraged, (5) the process of knowledge construction should be promoted.

Without a solid theoretical framework and a systematic application of the paradigms in the design and development of the computer-based learning environments, it is very likely they will not improve performance (Spector, 2008).

1.4 Cognitive load theory

The necessity to adapt instruction to the constraints of the learner's cognitive system represented the main concern of the cognitive load theory, elaborated by Sweller et al. (Sweller, 1988; Sweller, Van Merriënboer, & Paas, 1998). The development of cognitive load

theory started in the late 1970s, now being one of the most influential theories in the field of instructional design. Numerous studies found empirical support for the assumption that without taking into account the limitations of the human cognitive system, the effectiveness of instructional design is absolutely accidental (Sweller et al., 1998). In other words, the design of the instructional materials must be aligned with the limited cognitive processing resources of the learners, in order to prevent the cognitive load and improve learning (Paas & Van Merriënboer, 1994).

1.4.1. Basic assumptions of cognitive load theory

The fundamental assumptions of cognitive load theory can be divided in two categories: (a) general assumptions and (b) specific assumptions (Gerjets, Scheiter, & Cierniak, 2009).

(a) *At the general level*, cognitive load theory is based on the commonly accepted assumptions about human cognitive architecture, including the distinction between a limited working memory and a virtually unlimited long-term memory (see memory models elaborated by Atkinson and Shiffrin 1968; Baddeley 1999). From this perspective, the basic assumption is that the processing of instructional materials imposes a cognitive load which exceeds learners' working memory capacity, and as a result, interfere with learning.

(b) *At the specific level*, unique assumptions of cognitive load theory concern the differences between three types of cognitive load, namely, intrinsic, extraneous, and germane load (see Sweller et al. 1998). Cognitive load represents the mental resources which are allocated by the students to learn a particular material (Sweller & Chandler, 1994) or to perform a particular task (Sweller et al. 1998).

1. Extraneous cognitive load

One of the earliest versions of cognitive load theory focused on extraneous cognitive load only (Chandler & Sweller, 1991). This type of load is caused by the format of the instruction (Sweller 2005, Sweller et al. 1998), or by an inappropriate instructional design (Kalguya et al. 1998). A poor instructional design imposes a cognitive load because requires processes to overcome barriers imposed by this design. These processes are seen as irrelevant for learning because they are not directed to schema acquisition and schema automation (Sweller and Chandler 1994; Sweller 2005). From the cognitive load theory perspective, extraneous load interferes with learning and, thus, should be reduced as far as possible by eliminating irrelevant cognitive processes (Sweller et al, 1998).

2. Intrinsic cognitive load

Around 1993, another type of load was acknowledged, namely intrinsic cognitive load, which is imposed by the basic characteristics of the information, that is, the complexity of the information that must be processed (Sweller 1993). Complex materials are characterized by a high level of element interactivity, in this case, learners must to not only maintain information about these elements but also their interconnections simultaneously in working memory (Ayres, 2006; Gerjets et al., 2009). Both the element interactivity of the content and learners' prior knowledge determine the complexity of the information, and such as the intrinsic load (Sweller et al., 1998; Sweller, 2005).

3. Germane cognitive load

In 1998, Sweller et al.(1998) further augmented the cognitive load theory by introducing germane cognitive load. This type of load results from higher-level elaborative processes that go beyond the mere activation and memorization of information, being relevant to schema construction and schema automation. Germane load is caused by an adequate instructional design and is helpful for effective learning, as a result, it should be increased as far as possible.

Cognitive load theory assumes that intrinsic load, extraneous load and germane load are additive (Sweller et al., 1998).

Cognitive load theory assumes that principal mechanisms of learning are schema acquisition and schema automation (Sweller & Chandler, 1991; Sweller et al., 1998). In order to promote learning, the main purpose of the instructional strategies should be to reduce extraneous load, optimize intrinsic load, and increase germane load (Gejerts & Scheiter, 2003; Van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005).

1.4.2 Measuring cognitive load

Mai multe studii au indicat că efortul mental investit de utilizatori constituie „esența” încărcării cognitive și, prin urmare, efortul mental este adesea considerat un indicator fidel al încărcării cognitive (Paas, 1992; Paas et al., 2003).

There are three major methods of cognitive load measurement (Paas et al., 2003; Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007): physiological measures (pupillary dilation or heart rate variability), subjective ratings (experienced difficulty and mental effort can be measured with subjective rating scales), and performance-based measures (dual task methodology; Brünken, Plaas, & Leutner, 2003).

1.4.3 Limitations of cognitive load theory

Principalele critici aduse în acest sens se referă la modul de măsurare a conceptelor fundamentale ale teoriei încărcării cognitive și la testarea asumpțiilor specifice (Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007).

Cognitive load theory has many conceptual, methodological and practical limitations, which need to be surmounted before the research can adequately test the predictions (Bannert 2002; Brünken et al. 2009; Horz and Schnotz 2009; Moreno 2006; Schnotz and Kürschner 2007). The main conceptual and methodological issues surrounds the lack of clarity of cognitive load concept itself and lack of standard, reliable, and valid measures for the constructs of the theory.

Chapter 4

PERSONALIZATION OF THE LEARNING TASKS TO THE LEARNERS' EXPERTISE LEVEL

4.1 Study 1: A methodological contribution

Adapting instruction to the individual student's progress seems a good way to reduce learners' cognitive load and improve learning results (Kalyuga & Sweller, 2005; Salden, Paas, & van Merriënboer, 2006). More specifically, in order to prevent a possible cognitive overload, the task difficulty and amount of support of each newly selected learning task should be adapted to the learners' expertise level and perceived mental effort (Corbalan, Kester, & van Merriënboer, 2006). According to adaptive models, the use of a computer program allows personalization of instruction by dynamically changing the instruction (i.e., task difficulty) as a response to input from the learners (i.e., performance scores and invested mental effort of each learning task).

Research using such adaptive program instruction has shown to lead to a more efficient training and higher transfer test performance compared to a non-adaptive program control (Camp, Paas, Rikers, & van Merriënboer, 2001; Corbalan et al., 2006; Kalyuga & Sweller, 2005; Salden, Paas, Broers, & van Merriënboer, 2004).

In the domain of Air Traffic Control, Camp et al. (2001) and Salden et al. (2004) compared a fixed, predetermined sequence of learning tasks with dynamic task selection which reflected a personalization of difficulty level of the tasks based on performance and mental effort scores (i.e., a measure of expertise level). They found that dynamic task selection yields more efficient transfer test performance compared to the fixed, predetermined sequence of learning tasks. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Salden et al. (2004) that compared two personalized methods (i.e., personalized efficiency and learner control) to yoked conditions revealed that personalized efficiency condition showed more effective training compared to the learner control condition, whereas the latter one proved to be more efficient than the personalized efficiency condition. Additionally, in Kalyuga and Sweller's study (2005) both the difficulty level and the support level for the next learning task were adapted to learner expertise. Results of their study showed that learners who received personalized support and difficulty obtained higher pre-to-post-test gains and higher cognitive efficiency than learners in a yoked control group.

These findings are consistent with the results obtained in the genetics domain by Corbalan, Kester, and van Merriënboer (2008) which showed that adaptive instruction including limited learner control (i.e., shared control) for both difficulty and support level based on the learners' growing level of competence and associated mental effort yields more effective and efficient learning. Additionally, the adaptive instruction including shared control increased learners' motivation (i.e., their task involvement) since the program ensured avoidance of overloading students' cognitive capacities and the limited given learner control was beneficial to their learning process.

4.1.1 Towards a personalized task selection model

Componentele modelelor instruirii personalizată cu ajutorul computerului (și a celui propus de noi) sunt esențiale pentru adaptarea nivelului de dificultate și suport al sarcinilor la expertiza utilizatorilor și vizează: (a) caracteristicile sarcinilor de învățare; (b) caracteristicile sau profilul utilizatorilor, și (c) componenta personalizării sau adaptării.

The personalized task selection model presented in this chapter aims at providing each individual learner the best next learning task based on her/his expertise level, thus yielding a personalized sequence of tasks in a complex environment. The proposed model includes three

components: (a) learning tasks characteristics, (b) learner characteristics, and (c) personalization.

Learning tasks characteristics include the level of complexity (i.e., from simple to complex, or from easy to difficult), embedded support (i.e., from full support to no support), and other task features (e.g., the surface features). According to 4C/ID model (Van Merriënboer, 1997), (1) learning tasks should be organized in easy-to-difficult categories or task classes, (2) learners should receive full support for the first learning task in each task class after which support is gradually reduced to none for the last learning tasks, and (3) learning tasks provide a high variability of practice.

In the proposed model, each of the five difficulty levels contained three support levels, differing with regard to the amount of embedded support and diminishing in a scaffolding process according to the completion strategy (van Merriënboer, 1997). The three levels of embedded support, ordered from high to no support are: (1) completion problems with high support which provided many, but not all solution steps (i.e., four out of five solution steps are worked out, learners have to complete the final step); (2) completion problems with low support that provided a few solution steps (i.e., three out of five solution steps), and (3) conventional problems that did not provide any support, learners had to solve all the sub-steps in the problem on their own.

The learner portfolio contains the information about the learners in terms of obtained performance and invested mental effort. The 4C/ID model indicates that in addition to performance, the amount of effort that a learner invests to reach this level of performance may be important. Since subjective rating scales have been repeatedly proven to be a reliable measure of cognitive load (for an overview see Paas, Tuovinen, Tabbers, & van Gerven, 2003), the current model utilized a subjective rating scale to measure mental effort. The perceived mental effort was measured after each learning task and after each pre- and post-test as well as after each far transfer test task on a 5-point rating scale, with values ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) (Paas, 1992).

The personalization component of the proposed model aims to prevent cognitive overload of the learners by dynamically adapting the level of task difficulty and embedded support to the expertise level. According to the 4C/ID assumptions, performance measures alone are not a sufficient basis for dynamic task selection, and may be improved by taking into account the effort that students invest in reaching this performance. Therefore, the dynamic process of task selection (in the proposed model) is based on the continuous assessment of the level of expertise of individual learners (after each learning task the learner portfolio is updated).

4.1.2 The learning environment developed on the basis of the personalized model

The aim of this study was to develop a personalized learning environment according to our model. The learning environment developed for the current study was a Web application written in PHP scripting language. A MySQL database connected to the learning environment contained all learning material and registered all the student interactions with the system: participants' competence and invested mental effort scores, their task selection choices, and time spent (in minutes) on each activity. Furthermore, this database contained a basic introduction to genetics, a pre- and post-test, a far transfer test, three motivational questionnaires, algorithm selection tables, and a glossary with the main genetics concepts used in the learning environment.

The basic components of the personalized learning environment are presented in Figure 1.

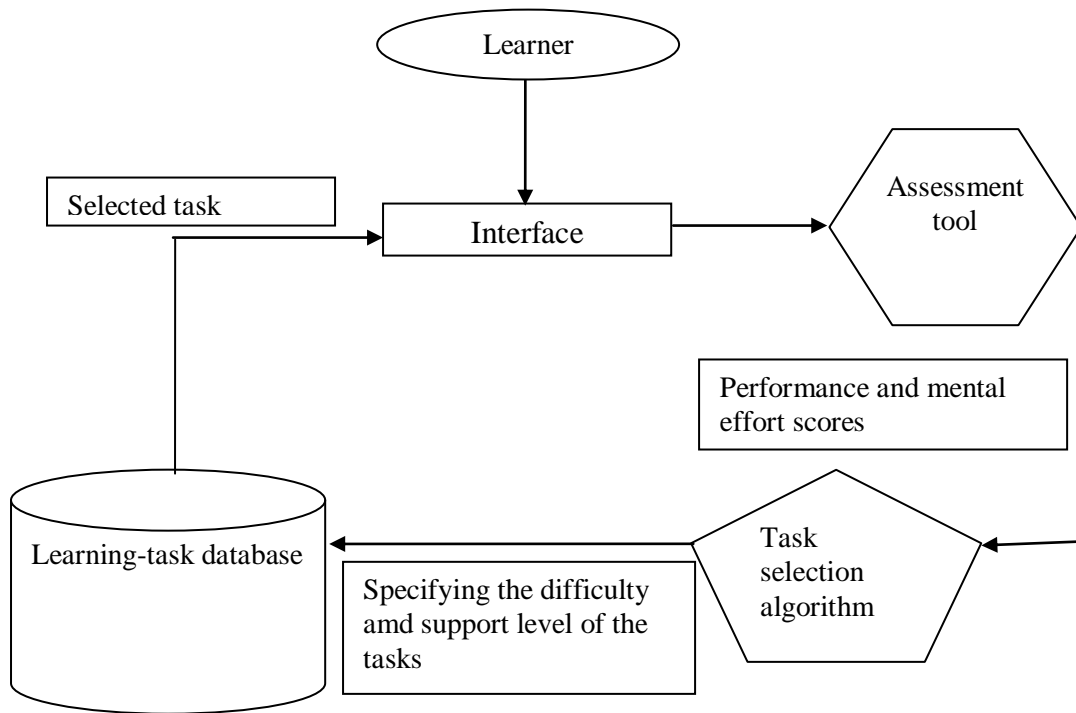


Fig. 1. The basic components of the personalized learning environment

Figure 2 presents the tasks that are represented in the learning-task database as a combination between five difficulty levels (i.e., from low to high), three levels of support (high, low and no support) and three tasks per support level with different surface features (this was also the task-selection screen in learner control instruction).

Mediu educațional computerizat pentru învățarea geneticii														
Glosar Vezi informatii generale														to to Logout
Probleme de genetica														
Nivel dificultate 1			Nivel dificultate 2			Nivel dificultate 3			Nivel dificultate 4			Nivel dificultate 5		
- două generații - raționament deductiv (de la părinți la copii)			- trei generații - raționament deductiv (de la părinți la copii)			- două generații - raționament inductiv (de la copii la părinți)			- trei generații - raționament deductiv (de la părinți la copii) - raționament inductiv (de la copii la părinți)			- trei generații - două raționamente inductive (de la copii la părinți)		
culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr	culoare păr
forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului	forma capului
gropișă mentonieră (din bărbie)	lobul urechi	hexadactilie	lobul urechi	gropișă mentonieră (din bărbie)	hexadactilie	albinismul	fenilcetonurie	gropișă mentonieră (din bărbie)	fenilcetonurie	lobul urechi	albinismul	hexadactilie	fenilcetonurie	albinismul
<p>Prin culoarea galbenă – sunt reprezentate problemele în care aveți de completat un singur pas pentru aflarea soluției, restul pașilor fiind completați de program.</p> <p>Prin culoarea albastră – sunt reprezentate problemele în care aveți de completat doi sau trei pași pentru a afla soluția, restul pașilor fiind completați de program.</p> <p>Prin culoarea roșie – sunt reprezentate problemele în care trebuie să completați singuri toți pașii pentru aflarea soluției.</p> <p>Prin culoarea gri - sunt reprezentate acele probleme pe care le-ați rezolvat.</p> <p>Dacă doriți să renunțați la rezolvarea problemelor și să răspundeți la chestionarele ce urmează, dați click pe acest buton.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><input type="button" value="Terminarea problemelor"/></p>														

Figure 2. Overview of database structure; this was also the task-selection screen.

For the personalization of the instruction, the performance and invested mental effort scores were used as a variable for dynamic task selection, an approach used in other studies too (Camp et al., 2001; Corbalan et al, 2006; Salden et al., 2004). Based on these scores a task selection algorithm determined the appropriate difficulty and support level of the next learning task for each individual learner. The task selection algorithm for determining the

difficulty and support level of the first learning task in the training phase using pre-test performance and associated mental effort is presented in Table 1, and task selection procedure for the remainder of the training phase using the performance and mental effort scores of the preceding solved learning task is presented in Table 2 (for completion problems with high support) and Table 3 (for completion problems with low support and conventional problems).

More specifically, the difficulty level of the first training problem would always be level 1 and the pre-test performance and associated mental effort scores determined the support level. Overall, most pre-test scores would lead to completion problems with high support (+1), some led to completion problems with low support (+2) and only a few led to conventional problems (+3).

Once working in the training phase, the selection algorithm determined the difficulty and support level of the next problem considering the support level the participants previously worked in. For instance, if a participant has successfully solved a completion problem with high support in difficulty level 1 by obtaining a performance score of 3 and a mental effort score of 1, s/he must jump 2 steps ahead, meaning that the amount of support increases two levels. Therefore, the learner will move to a conventional problem at the current difficulty level. For completion problems with high support, the mental effort scores determine changes in the support level within a certain difficulty level, since the performance score is preset to a fixed value (3).

Table 1 shows the selection decisions for completion problems with low support and conventional problems. The students receive a similar problem when their performance and corresponding mental effort scores are the same (+0) and they can jump to a higher or lower support level (+/-1 and +/-2) when these scores are different. If a learner solved a completion problem with low support obtaining a mean performance score of 5 and a mental effort score of 1, s/he must jump 3 steps ahead. But since there are less than three support levels available at the current difficulty level, the learner has to advance to a low support level of the next difficulty level. Therefore, only by obtaining the highest performance while investing the lowest mental effort can students jump between difficulty levels (+3). Similarly, participants can also drop to the previous difficulty level when obtaining the lowest performance (1) and the highest mental effort (5).

Tabelul 1. *Selection table indicating step size between pre-test and first learning task*

Mental effort	Performance				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	1	2	2	3	3
2	1	1	2	2	3
3	1	1	1	2	2
4	1	1	1	1	2
5	1	1	1	1	1

Tabelul 2. *Selection table indicating step size for completion problems with high support*

Mental effort	Performance				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	1	1	2	2	3
2	0	1	1	2	2
3	-1	0	0	1	1
4	-1	-1	0	0	1
5	-2	-1	-1	0	0

Tabelul 3. *Selection table indicating step size for completion problems with low support and conventional problems*

Mental effort	Performance				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	0	0	1	2	3
2	-1	0	0	1	2
3	-1	-1	0	0	1
4	-2	-1	-1	0	0
5	-3	-2	-1	-1	0

The selection tables 2 and 3 apply some additional rules to make the instruction encouraging for the learners: (1) if the learner completed all three available problems of a certain support level in a current difficulty level s/he will move to the next support level at the current difficulty level; (2) if the learner completed two successive problems of the same support level at a certain difficulty level, s/he can progress to the next support level at the current difficulty level; (3) the learner will finish the training after s/he successfully completed either one conventional problem at the highest difficulty level or after having worked through all conventional problems available in the highest difficulty level (i.e., difficulty level 5).

4.1.3 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter discussed a personalized task selection model which integrates the assumptions of the two-level model of adaptive instruction and of the four-component instructional design model (4C/ID; Van Merriënboer, 1997). The proposed model combines the strong points of both approaches and was therefore expected to make learning more effective (i.e., higher transfer test performance) and more efficient (i.e., a more favorable ratio between performance and time on task or mental effort). This personalized model allows for the dynamic selection of the learning tasks based on the learner's performance scores and invested mental effort, that is the expertise level of the learners.

There are two main differences between the proposed personalized model (and the learning environment developed according to this model) and the previous developed personalized models. First, the present model applies different measurement scales and another selection algorithm. The scales used in the proposed model are sensitive to the

differences between the support level within the same complexity level of the tasks. As a result, the selection algorithm that is used for selecting a new learning task of a certain complexity and support level, is different for problems with high support and for problems with low support. Furthermore, the maximum jump size between complexity levels was decreased from four (Camp et al., 2001; Corbalan et al., 2006) to three in the implemented selection algorithm forcing a smoother increase or decrease in task complexity (see Salden et al., 2004). Secondly, unlike the previous personalized models in which the selection of the first training task is arbitrary, the support level of the first training problem would be adapted to the learners' expertise level (combination of performance and mental effort scores).

4.2 Formative evaluation of the computer-based learning environment developed on the basis of the model

The learning environment was pilot tested with 28 high school for functionality and usability assessment (formative evaluation). The results indicated that the program promotes learning and the provided content is suitable for target population.

Chapter 5

THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERNAL INSTRUCTIONAL CONTROL VS. EXTERNAL INSTRUCTIONAL CONTROL (ADAPTIVE AND NONADAPTIVE) ON EFFECTIVENESS AND LEARNING EFFICIENCY OF LEARNERS WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERTISE

5.1 Study 1

Aims and hypotheses

The purpose of the current study was to assess the effectiveness (i.e., training and test performance) and learning efficiency (i.e., test performance, its associated test mental effort and training time) of a non-adaptive program control, a full learner control, a limited learner control and an adaptive program control in learning genetics using students of different prior knowledge levels. The main research question entails what effects do these four types of instructional control, students' prior knowledge (i.e., high school, first year and second year college students), and the interaction between both factors have on learning outcomes and learning efficiency. It was hypothesized that the adaptive program control would yield higher performance and be more efficient than the other three conditions. Whereas the non-adaptive program instruction was expected to be insensitive to individual students' learning needs, the learner-controlled instruction might overload the students.

With regard to students' prior knowledge it was hypothesized that higher prior knowledge students (i.e., college students) would achieve higher performance and be more efficient than students with a low prior knowledge (i.e., high school students). Furthermore, it was expected that higher prior knowledge level students perceive their current learning state and instructional needs more accurately, and thus would be better able to manage their own instruction. Additionally, it was expected that the high prior knowledge students would spend more time-on-task due to engaging in deeper cognitive engagement and self-reflecting (see Chi, 2006) than the low prior knowledge students.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and sixty nine students (99 high school students, 117 first year college students, and 53 second year college students; 44 males and 225 females; $M = 18.63$ years, $SD = 3.95$) participated in this study. The high school students were novices and the college

students were intermediate students with regard to the genetics domain used in this experiment. All participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions: a non-adaptive program condition ($n = 65$, 25 high school students and 40 college students), a full learner control condition ($n = 70$, 25 high school students and 45 college students), a limited learner control condition ($n = 68$, 25 high school students and 43 college students), and an adaptive program control condition ($n = 66$, 24 high school students and 42 college students).

Materials

Electronic learning environment. The learning environment developed for this study was a Web application written in PHP scripting language. A MySQL database connected to the learning environment contained the learning material and registered student actions: performance and mental effort scores, problem selection choices, and time-on-task. Furthermore, this database contained a basic introduction to genetics, a pre-test and post-test, a far-transfer test, and a glossary with the main genetics concepts. The content of the instructional program was part of the regular biology curriculum for high school students and Neuropsychology curriculum for first year college students from Psychology.

The introduction included the main genetics concepts required for solving problems such as dominant and recessive genes, genotype, phenotype, homozygous and heterozygous gene pairs.

The pre-test and post-test consisted of the same ten multiple-choice questions on the subject of heredity (i.e., Mendel's Laws). The maximum score was 10 points, one point for each correct answer.

The participants received genetics problems represented in a database (see Figure 1) as a combination between five difficulty levels (i.e., from low to high), three levels of support (i.e., high, low, and no support) and three problems per support level with different surface features (i.e., aspects of the tasks that are not related to goal attainment such as eye color, hair shape). The selection of problems from the database of the 45 genetics problems (Figure 1) differed between the experimental conditions.

In the *non-adaptive program control* condition, participants received 15 problems with three randomly chosen problems of each support level within each of the five difficulty levels. These problems were presented in a predetermined simple to complex sequence, designed according to the 4C/ID model (Van Merriënboer, 1997).

In the *full learner control* condition, participants received an overview of all 45 problems with an indication of their difficulty and support level, and they could choose any problem to solve next. *The limited learner control* condition differed from the first in having to solve a conventional problem in each difficulty level before being allowed to start solving tasks from a higher difficulty level.

For the *adaptive program control* condition the performance and invested mental effort scores were used as a variable for dynamic problem selection (see chapter 5).

Far-transfer test. The far-transfer test consisted of five problems which differed structurally from the training problems and measured students' ability to apply the learned procedures to new learning situations. Specifically, participants had to solve problems on dihybrid crossings, problems involving sex-linkage and co-dominant genes (i.e., blood types). The transfer problems had distinctive solution steps, resulting in a maximum total score of 16. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the pre-test, post-test, and far-transfer test was: .52, .69, and .75 respectively.

Mental effort. The perceived mental effort was measured after each problem during each phase of the study (i.e., pre-test, post-test, training, far-transfer test) on a 5-point rating scale adapted from Paas (1992), with values ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).

Learning efficiency. Learning efficiency was determined using the following formula derived from the original formula proposed by Paas and Van Merriënboer (1993; see also Tuovinen & Paas, 2004):

$$E = \frac{P + TT - ME}{\sqrt{3}}$$

In this formula, E = learning efficiency, P = test performance, TT = total training time, and ME = mental effort during test. To calculate learning efficiency, all variables were standardized before being entered into the formula.

Procedure

All participants were given a pre-test and a basic introduction before the training phase started. Participants were free to consult this basic introduction during the entire training session. Immediately after the training, participants received the post-test and far-transfer test, and mental effort was measured after each solved problem. Overall, the experiment lasted about two hours.

Results

All the analyses were done using ANOVAs with between-subjects factors (1) type of instructional control and (2) prior knowledge, and a significance level of .05 was used. Dependent variables were performance, mental effort, time on pre-test, time on training, time on post-test, and time on far-transfer test, total solved problems, total solved problems per difficulty and support level, and learning efficiency.

Table 4 provides an overview of the results during training and test phase for factor (1) and Table 5 provides an overview of the results for factor (2).

(1) Type of instructional control

An ANOVA showed significant differences for training performance, $F(3, 265) = 2.94$, $MSE = 3075.45$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ and time during training, $F(3, 265) = 13.57$, $MSE = 218.93$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Planned comparisons revealed that participants in the adaptive program condition attained higher performance scores ($t(265) = 2.59$, $p < .05$) than the participants in the non-adaptive condition and both learner control conditions. Furthermore, participants in the adaptive program condition spent more time on training ($t(265) = 5.06$, $p < .0001$) than the mean training time of participants in the non-adaptive condition and both learner control conditions. No effect on the invested mental effort during the training was found for type of instruction, $F(3, 265) = 1.37$, $MSE = 1.10$, *ns*.

With regard to the number of learning tasks that was completed during training, an ANOVA revealed a main effect for type of instruction, $F(3, 265) = 4.41$, $MSE = 19.16$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants in the adaptive program condition solved more problems during training ($t(265) = 3.53$, $p < .0001$) than the participants in the non-adaptive condition and both learner control conditions.

With regard to total solved problems for each difficulty level, ANOVAs revealed significant differences for type of instruction on total solved problems for difficulty level 1, $F(3, 260) = 16.39$, $MSE = 6.16$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$; difficulty level 2, $F(3, 265) = 11.60$, $MSE = 5.46$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$; difficulty level 4, $F(3, 188) = 19.46$, $MSE = 1.69$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$, difficulty level 5, $F(3, 167) = 3.29$, $MSE = 1.36$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Overall, participants in both learner control conditions solved more problems from lower difficulty levels (i.e., difficulty level 1) and fewer problems from higher difficulty levels (i.e., difficulty level 4) than participants in the adaptive program condition and the non-adaptive condition.

An ANOVA of total solved problems for each support level revealed a main effect for type of instruction on total solved completion problems with high support $F(3, 258) = 4.64$, $MSE = 7.05$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, and total solved completion problems with low support $F(3, 254) = 6.18$, $MSE = 3.61$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Overall, participants in both learner control conditions solved less completion problems with low support and conventional problems compared to participants in the adaptive program condition and the non-adaptive condition.

No significant differences in post-test and far transfer test performance, invested mental effort during the post-test and the far transfer test, time during the far transfer test (all $F_s < 1$), and time during the post-test ($F(3, 265) = 1.42$, $MSE = 28.39$, ns) were found.

(2) *Prior knowledge*

An ANOVA revealed significant differences on pre-test performance, $F(2, 266) = 18.28$, $MSE = 3.8$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$; invested mental effort, $F(2, 266) = 28.34$, $MSE = .59$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$; and pre-test time, $F(2, 266) = 13.67$, $MSE = 20.75$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. High school students achieved lower pre-test performance scores ($t(266) = 5.29$, $p < .0001$) than first year college students and second year college students. Furthermore, second year college students achieved higher pre-test performance ($t(266) = 3.12$, $p < .0001$) compared to the mean of performance of high school students and first year college students. With regard to invested mental effort, planned comparisons showed that high school students experienced higher mental effort ($t(266) = -7.49$, $p < .0001$) than first year college students. Additionally, high school students spent less time on the pre-test ($t(266) = 2.30$, $p < .05$) than first year college students and second year college students. Furthermore, second year college students spend more time on the pre-test ($t(266) = 4.78$, $p < .0001$) than first year college students.

ANCOVAs revealed main effects of prior knowledge factor on training performance, $F(2, 265) = 15.13$, $MSE = 2551.96$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$; invested mental effort on the training, $F(2, 265) = 14.31$, $MSE = .70$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$; and training time, $F(2, 265) = 31.87$, $MSE = 151.29$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$. First year college students achieved higher training performance scores ($t(265) = 4.41$, $p < .0001$) than high school students, whereas second year college students achieved higher training performance scores ($t(265) = 3.69$, $p < .0001$) than the high school students and first year college students ($M = 116.26$, $SD = 48.26$). Furthermore, first year college students experienced a lower mental effort on training ($t(265) = -3.54$, $p < .0001$) than high school students, whereas second year college students experienced lower mental effort ($t(265) = 4.58$, $p < .0001$) than the high school students and first year college students.

ANOVAs showed significant main effects for prior knowledge on total solved problems for difficulty level 1, $F(2, 261) = 5.09$, $MSE = 7.02$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$; and difficulty level 2, $F(2, 261) = 8.10$, $MSE = 5.61$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Overall, high school students solved more problems for lower difficulty levels (i.e., difficulty level 1) and fewer problems for higher difficulty levels (i.e., difficulty level 5).

With regard to the solved problems for each support level, an ANOVA revealed a main effect for prior knowledge level only for total completion problems with high support, $F(2, 259) = 12.40$, $MSE = 7.76$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. First year college students solved less completion problems with high support ($t(259) = -3.65$, $p < .0001$) than the high school students, whereas second year college students solved less completion problems with high support ($t(259) = -3.55$, $p < .0001$) than the solved completion problems with high support of high school students and first year college students.

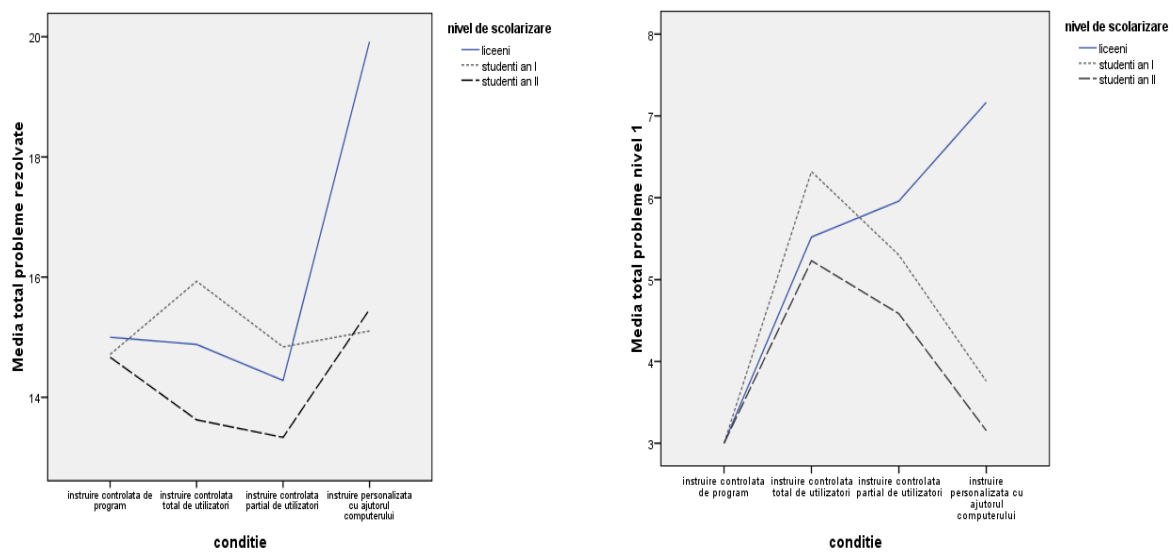
ANCOVA revealed a main effect on post-test performance, $F(2, 265) = 8.05$, $MSE = 4.23$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, invested mental effort, $F(2, 265) = 17.46$, $MSE = .51$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$ and time spent on post-test, $F(2, 265) = 72.97$, $MSE = 13.05$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$. First year college students achieved higher post-test performance ($t(265) = 3.04$, $p < .01$) than high school students, whereas second year college students achieved higher post-test performance

($t(265) = 2.89, p < .01$) than the mean score of high school students and first year college students. Furthermore, first year college students experienced lower mental effort during the post-test ($t(265) = -3.34, p < .01$) than high school students, whereas second year college students experienced lower mental effort during the post-test ($t(265) = -4.93, p < .0001$) than the mean score of high school students and first year college students. Finally, first year college students spent more time on the post-test ($t(265) = 10.10, p < .0001$) than high school students, whereas second year college students spent more time during the post-test ($t(265) = 7.36, p < .0001$) than the mean score of high school students and first year college students.

Furthermore, an ANCOVA revealed a significant effect for prior knowledge on far transfer test performance, $F(2, 259) = 84.27, MSE = 5.23, p < .0001, \eta_p^2 = .39$, and time spent on the far transfer test $F(2, 265) = 146.67, MSE = 27.54, p < .0001, \eta_p^2 = .53$. First year college students achieved higher far transfer test performance ($t(258) = 10.78, p < .0001$) than high school students whereas second year college students achieved higher far transfer test performance ($t(258) = 4.21, p < .0001$) than the mean score of high school students and first year college students. Additionally, first year college students spent more time during the far transfer test ($t(265) = 15.56, p < .0001$) than high school students, whereas second year college students spent more time during the far transfer test ($t(265) = 8.30, p < .0001$) than the mean score of high school students and first year college students.

Using paired t-tests a significant gain from pre-to-post-test in performance ($t(268) = -7.51, p < .0001$) as well as a significant drop in mental effort ($t(268) = 8.52, p < .0001$) were found, indicating that learning did take place across all groups.

No significant interaction effects were found on performance, invested mental effort and time spent for the pre-test phase, training phase and the test phase (all $F_s < 1$). Regarding the training phase, significant main effects were found on total solved problems, $F(6, 257) = 2.80, MSE = 18.14, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .06$; completion problems with high support, $F(6, 250) = 2.64, MSE = 6.17, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .06$; conventional problems, $F(6, 248) = 2.58, MSE = 2.98, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .06$; on total solved problems for difficulty level 1, $F(6, 252) = 4.80, MSE = 5.44, p < .0001, \eta_p^2 = .10$; difficulty level 2, $F(6, 252) = 6.55, MSE = 4.38, p < .0001, \eta_p^2 = .14$, and difficulty level 3, $F(6, 238) = 2.86, MSE = 1.49, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .07$. (see Figure 3).



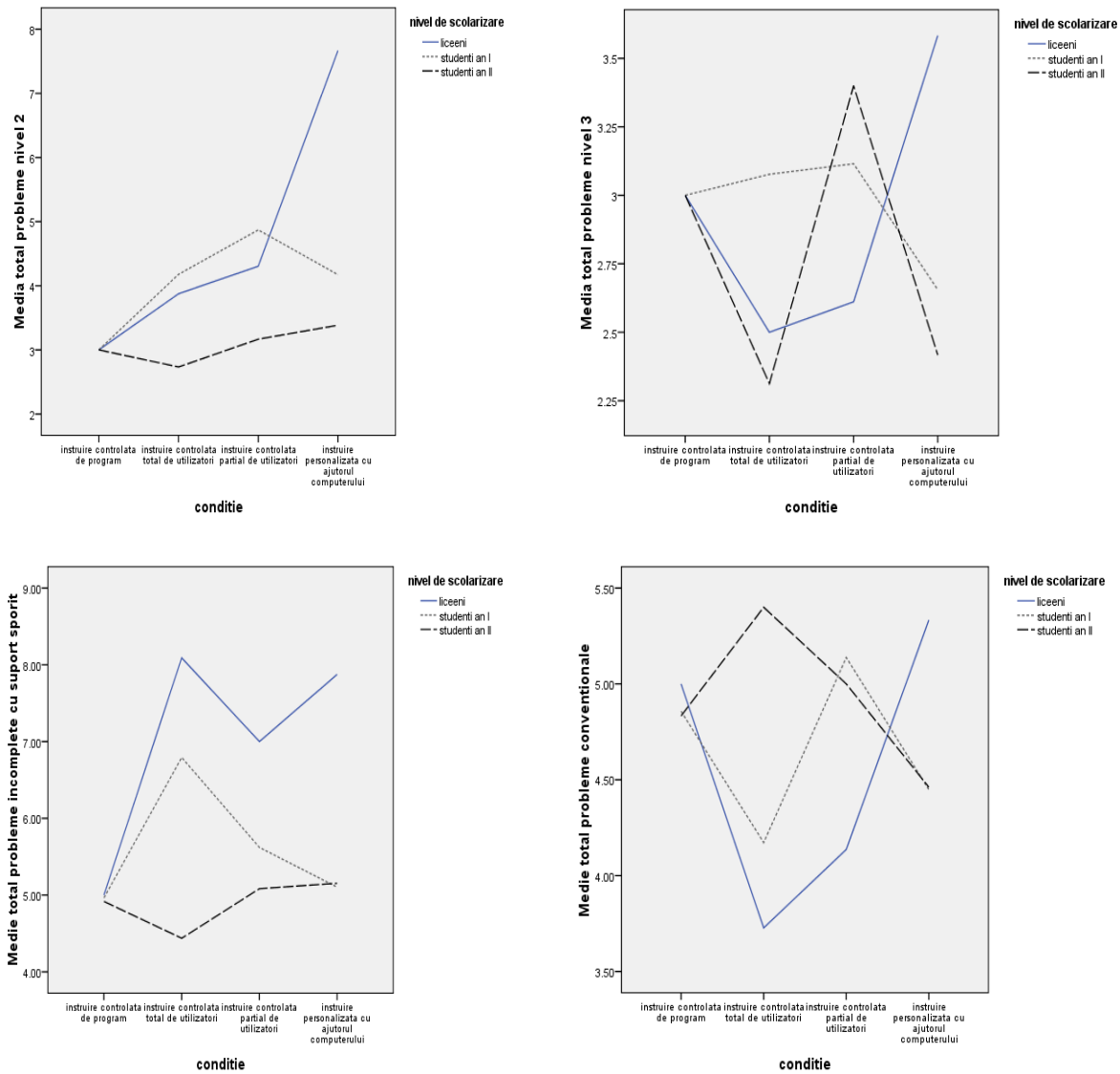


Figura 3. Graphical representation of the interaction between type of instruction and prior knowledge level on total solved problems, completion problems with high support, conventional problems, total solved problems for difficulty level 1, difficulty level 2, and difficulty level 3.

Using an ANOVA, a significant effect was found for learning efficiency related to the post-test scores, $F(3, 265) = 2.72$, $MSE = 1.70$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, and for learning efficiency related to the far transfer test scores, $F(3, 258) = 3.92$, $MSE = 1.57$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. for posttest performance, adaptive program condition was more efficient ($t(265) = 2.23$, $p < .05$) than the non-adaptive condition and both learner control conditions, and for far transfer test performance, adaptive program condition is more efficient ($t(258) = 2.96$, $p < .01$) than the non-adaptive condition and both learner control conditions.

An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of prior knowledge on learning efficiency for post-test scores, $F(2, 266) = 67.64$, $MSE = 1.16$, $p < .0001$, and for far transfer test scores $F(2, 259) = 88.84$, $MSE = .97$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .41$. For post-test performance, first year college students are more efficient ($t(266) = 10.16$, $p < .0001$) than high school students, whereas second year college students are more efficient ($t(266) = 6.04$, $p < .0001$) than the high school students and first year college students. Furthermore, for far transfer performance, first year college students are more efficient ($t(259) = 12.34$, $p < .0001$) than

high school students , whereas second year college students are more efficient ($t(259) = 5.66$, $p < .0001$) than the high school students and first year college students.

Tabelul 4. Overview of results from the pre-test and the training phase for factor type of instruction

Dependent variables	Type of instruction							
	Non-adaptive program control		Full learner control		Limited learner control		Adaptive program control	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Pretest</i>								
Time (min)	11.49	3.97	11.95	4.92	10.66	4.91	13.23	4.90
Mental effort	3.10	.86	3.08	.83	3.21	.84	3.04	.85
Performance	4.15	2.21	4.19	1.86	4.19	2.03	3.89	2.22
<i>Training</i>								
Total <i>N</i> of learning tasks	14.82	.83	15.03	5.33	14.37	5.46	16.92	4.06
Total solved steps	42.32	2.92	39.07	15.72	39.32	14.22	46.41	10.23
Time (min)	39.38	13.95	32.53	15.76	29.82	14.79	44.51	14.57
Mental effort	2.96	1.05	2.63	1.21	2.84	1.06	2.92	.83
Performance	127.20	37.70	117.26	71.16	114.04	61.54	139.85	43.13
<i>Posttest</i>								
Time (min)	6.20	4.42	7.83	5.38	7.71	5.38	7.72	6.00
Mental effort	2.73	.97	2.67	1.04	2.74	1.04	2.69	1.11
Performance	5.18	2.45	5.14	2.58	5.00	2.60	5.17	2.48
Learning efficiency	.01	1.27	-.21	1.36	-.39	1.28	.22	1.31
<i>Far transfer</i>								
Time (min)	11.13	7.42	12.67	8.05	12.50	8.08	13.37	8.24
Mental effort	4.01	.92	3.87	.97	3.96	.98	3.76	.98
Performance	3.95	3.02	3.93	2.87	3.60	2.81	4.04	3.06
Learning efficiency	-.05	1.22	-.22	1.34	-.42	1.19	.30	1.24

Tabelul 5. Overview of results from the test phase for factor prior knowledge

Dependent variables	Prior knowledge					
	High school students		First year college students		Second year college students	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Pretest</i>						
Time (min)	9.92	4.39	12.90	4.78	13.02	4.34
Mental effort	3.52	.80	2.73	.76	3.18	.72
Performance	3.17	1.39	4.58	2.19	4.81	2.27
<i>Training</i>						
Total <i>N</i> of tasks	15.98	4.41	15.15	4.56	14.25	4.16
Total solved steps	42.00	12.59	41.79	12.87	2.47	.86
Time (min)	28.31	1.28	40.32	1.15	43.04	1.70
Mental effort	3.17	.09	2.73	.08	2.43	.12
Performance	101.60	5.29	133.60	4.73	146.70	7.03
<i>Posttest</i>						
Time (min)	3.80	.38	8.99	.34	10.52	.50
Mental effort	3.01	.08	2.65	.07	2.29	.10
Performance	4.46	.22	5.36	.19	5.84	.29
Learning efficiency	-1.09	.98	.40	1.07	.65	1.25
<i>Far transfer</i>						
Time (min)	4.81	.54	16.43	.49	17.37	.73
Mental effort	3.98	.09	3.92	.08	3.72	.11
Performance	1.66	.24	5.17	.21	4.88	.31
Learning efficiency	-1.20	.80	.49	1.07	.50	1.07

Discussion

As predicted, the results show that the adaptive program control condition achieved higher training performance scores compared to the non-adaptive program control and learner control conditions. Therefore, adapting the difficulty and support of problems to the students' expertise level makes learning more effective (only for training) and efficient. Additionally, the adaptive program condition needed more time to complete the training than the other two experimental conditions. This difference in time could be attributed not only to the fact that the adaptive program condition solved significantly more problems, but possibly participants also noticed the relationship between their accuracy in solving the problems and the difficulty plus embedded support of the subsequent problems and consequently spent more time analyzing and self-reflecting (Corbalan et al., 2008).

Although the non-adaptive program control condition attained the same training performance as the learner control conditions, the former needed significantly more time to complete the training phase. A possible explanation could be that participants in the two learner control conditions solved more problems from lower difficulty levels, less problems from higher difficulty levels, and more completion problems with a high support than the non-adaptive program control condition. Not only did the learner control condition solve mostly easier problems, they also received more support in their problem solving than the non-adaptive program control condition.

Unfortunately, the higher training effectiveness of the adaptive program condition is not reflected in superior post-test or far-transfer performance. A possible explanation for the lack of higher test performance could be related to the difficulty levels the participants mostly worked in. The participants in the adaptive program control condition mostly worked in lower difficulty levels compared to the non-adaptive program control condition yet did not attain inferior post-test or far-transfer performance. More precisely, despite the fact that roughly 66% of the participants in the adaptive program control did not reach difficulty level 5 they did not do worse in terms of post-training performance. Another possible explanation could be related to the so-called 'perverse effects of help/ support' (Mircea Miclea, personal communication) or the acquisition of 'limited' schemas which interfere with the generation of new solutions for similar problems (Smith. et al., 1993).

Regarding learning efficiency, the results confirm that the adaptive program condition is more efficient than the other three experimental conditions. The inclusion of the training time in the 3D efficiency formula allows taking into account other differences besides those related to performance and invested mental effort. We chose to add the total training time instead of subtracting it as in Salden et al. study (2004) due to the fact that spending more time during training is considered to be beneficial in this study. This is in agreement with Chi (2006) who stated that experts spend a relatively great deal of time on solving learning tasks and self-reflection in comparison to novices.

Regarding the students' prior knowledge level, the prediction that the college students would outperform the high school students, spend more time-on-task and experience less mental effort was confirmed. While the same pattern was found for the second year college students over both first year college students and high school students, the differences between first and second year college students were relatively small.

The interaction effects found in this study show that the students' prior knowledge strongly affects the students learning path in the learner control and the adaptive program control conditions.

Chapter 6

EXPERTISE- RELATED DIFFERENCES IN TASK SELECTION: COMBINING EYE MOVEMENT, CONCURRENT AND CUED RETROSPECTIVE REPORTING

A series of studies indicated that low levels of prior knowledge may negatively affect learners potential to be aware of the task features that are relevant for the learning process (Quilici & Mayer, 2002). Corbalan et al. (2008) showed that low prior knowledge students typically focus on the more salient surface task features (e.g., cover stories that are irrelevant to understand how problems can be solved) rather than on the less salient structural task features (e.g., underlying problem-solving procedures that are relevant to understand how problems can be solved). Learners who do not possess or use appropriate schemas (i.e., one chunk of information, which increases the amount of information that can be held and processed in working memory), will not be able to recognize problem similarities on the basis of structural features (Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981; Quilici & Mayer, 1996, 2002). However, as learners' levels of knowledge in a particular domain increase, more useful schemas are constructed, which improve their ability to recognize structural task features (Quilici & Mayer, 2002) and consequently learning (Sweller, Chandler, Tierney, & Cooper, 1990).

Eye movement studies investigating how novices and experts perceive relevant versus irrelevant information have indicated that learners' attention allocation is indeed influenced by expertise. More specifically, it has been shown that with increasing domain knowledge, learners tend to focus more on task-relevant information (e.g., Van Gog & Scheiter, 2010). The tendency of experts to focus more on task-relevant features and less on salient, but irrelevant features can be seen as an example of the information-reduction hypothesis (Canham & Hegarty, 2010; Haider & Frensch, 1999; Jarodzka, Scheiter, Gerjets, & Van Gog, 2010). According to information-reduction hypothesis, improvements in task performance reveal that learners possess the necessary level of knowledge to discern between task features that need to be processed and those that do not.

Useful as eye movement data may be, they do not explain *why* learners focus their attention on certain areas for a certain amount of time and in a certain order (Kaakinen & Hyönä, 2005). In other words, eye tracking does not reveal any information about the success or failure of learners' ability to understand task-relevant information. In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the learning performance processes, eye movement data can be complemented with concurrent, retrospective or cued retrospective verbal protocols (cf. Van Gog et al., 2005).

The so-called cued retrospective reporting technique (Kaakinen & Hyönä, 2005; Van Gog et al., 2005; Van Gog et al., 2009) has been recognized as a valuable alternative for concurrent or retrospective reporting. Whereas "standard" retrospective reporting relies exclusively on memory processes, cued retrospective reports are less prone to omissions and constructions of actions. With this technique, records of eye movements and mouse/keyboard actions are used to stimulate retrospective verbal reports of a task performance process. Though this unburdens the learner from reporting what they are thinking during task performance, it does require stimulated memory-based recall.

Aims and hypotheses

The aim of the current study was to examine the differences in attention paid to relevant and irrelevant task-features during task selection processes between low and high prior knowledge learners by combining eye tracking measures, think-aloud and cued retrospective protocols (see e.g., Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Van Gog et al., 2005). Note that

the cue consisted of a record of participants' eye movements as well as their actions on the computer screen (i.e., mouse/keyboard actions).

A prediction was that high prior knowledge students would focus on structural features during task selection as compared to low prior knowledge students, who would be more likely to focus on surface task features. The high prior knowledge students, by having at their disposal higher level schemas, were expected to be better able to discern which information is relevant to the task performance than low prior knowledge students. Furthermore, it was predicted that participants who were exposed to multiple examples of learning tasks (i.e., three task selections) would be more likely to select subsequently presented tasks based on their structural features than on their surface features. It was expected that in the later stages of processing irrelevant task information would become 'less salient'. Consequently, participants' eye fixations were expected to reveal a trade-off between surface features and structural features, indicating that more fixations would be made on structural features.

Also, it was expected that high prior knowledge students would verbalize more information, and implicitly would spend more time for verbalizing during both think-aloud and cued retrospective protocols than low prior knowledge students, and that their verbalizations would contain more relevant task information (i.e., structural features).

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 30 students in first ($n = 9$), second ($n = 10$), third ($n = 3$) or fourth ($n = 8$) year of higher professional education. Four participants had to be excluded from the final analyses of the data due to technical difficulties. The remaining sample contained 26 students (12 females and 14 males) with a mean age of 21.15 years ($SD = 2.34$). All participants had normal or corrected-to-normal vision and all had at least some basic knowledge of Mendel's Laws, the topic of the study. The students received €10 for their participation.

Apparatus and Materials

Electronic learning environment. The learning environment consisted of a Web application written in PHP scripting language, and a MySQL database connected to it (based on Corbalan, Kester, & Van Merriënboer, 2011). The database contained 54 genetics completion tasks addressing Mendel's laws (i.e., inheritance tasks), which varied in terms of surface features (e.g., species type, traits), and structural features (to-be-completed solution steps). Completion tasks present a given state, a goal state, and a partial solution that must be completed by learners (Paas, 1992). In our study, completion tasks contained three to-be-completed solution steps and four steps that were already completed by the program. Table 6 shows all possible surface features and structural features of the genetics completion tasks (based on Corbalan et al., 2011).

Table 6. Composition of the Database with Learning Tasks (*based on Corbalan et al., 2011*)

Surface Task Feature		Structural Task Features
Species (species type)	Traits (part traits)	To-be-Completed Solution Steps
Humans (European/African/Asian)	Color (hair/eyes)	(1) Determine the genotype of one parents based on information of the individual given
	Shape (hair/nose)	(2) Determine the genotype of one parents based on the given percentage in her/his generation
	Length (nose/lips)	(3) Determine the genotype of one of the offspring of the first generation
Animals (dog/cat/guinea pig)	Color (fur/eyes)	(4) Determine the genotype based on the information of the prior partner and related offspring
	Shape (ear/fur)	(5) Draw a Punnett's square by combining the genotype of the parents
	Length (tail/fur)	(6) Determine the genotype (and percentage) of the offspring
Plants (pea/corn/bean)	Color (flower/leaf)	(7) Determine the phenotype (and percentage) of the offspring
	Shape (fruit/pod)	
	Length (axis/fruit)	

The selection screen always presented a set of four learning tasks, which contained a description of both surface features and to-be-completed steps (see Figure 4). Each set of learning tasks (i.e., three sets of learning tasks) represented a combination of low and high dissimilarity levels (i.e., in terms of surface and structural features), from which the learner selected and solved one task.

Kies een taak

<p>Welke soort en welke eigenschap zou je in de volgende taak willen hebben? In deze taak richt je je op boonkleur bij bonenplanten</p> 	<p>Welke soort en welke eigenschap zou je in de volgende taak willen hebben? In deze taak richt je je op bloemkleur bij maisplanten</p> 
<p>Welke stappen wil je zelf oplossen?</p> <p>3 en 8: Gebruik de kruistabel om de nakomelingen in te vullen</p> <p>4 en 9: Het genotype van de nakomelingen vinden</p> <p>7: Het genotype van de partner van de nakomeling vinden</p>	<p>Welke stappen wil je zelf oplossen?</p> <p>4 en 9: Het genotype van de nakomelingen vinden</p> <p>6: Het genotype van één nakomeling van de eerste kruising vinden</p> <p>7: Het genotype van de partner van de nakomeling vinden</p>
<p>Welke soort en welke eigenschap zou je in de volgende taak willen hebben? In deze taak richt je je op kolfvorm bij maisplanten</p> 	<p>Welke soort en welke eigenschap zou je in de volgende taak willen hebben? In deze taak richt je je op vacht vorm bij cavia's</p> 
<p>Welke stappen wil je zelf oplossen?</p> <p>1: Het genotype van de eerste vader vinden</p> <p>6: Het genotype van één nakomeling van de eerste kruising vinden</p> <p>7: Het genotype van de partner van de nakomeling vinden</p>	<p>Welke stappen wil je zelf oplossen?</p> <p>1: Het genotype van de eerste vader vinden</p> <p>2: Het genotype van de eerste moeder vinden</p> <p>6: Het genotype van één nakomeling van de eerste kruising vinden</p>

Figure 4. Example of a task-selection screen.

Eye tracking equipment. Participants' eye movements were recorded with a 50Hz Tobii 1750 eye tracking system, which is integrated into the stimulus PC monitor. Screen resolution of the stimulus PC was set at 1024 x 768 pixels, with a spatial accuracy better than 0.5 degrees. ClearView 2.7.1 software was used to record participants' eye movements and their keyboard and mouse actions, and to replay these recordings at half speed as a cue. This so-called "gaze replay" showed fixations, which represent gaze-points that fell within a radius of 50 pixels, and together had a minimal duration of 200 ms. The fixations were represented as a single red dot, which became larger with increasing fixation duration and smaller with decreasing fixation duration, and had a gaze trail of 1,000 ms (for an example screenshot of the gaze replay see Figure 5).

Audio recordings. The verbal data were recorded with Audacity 1.2.6 software using a standard microphone attached to the stimulus PC.

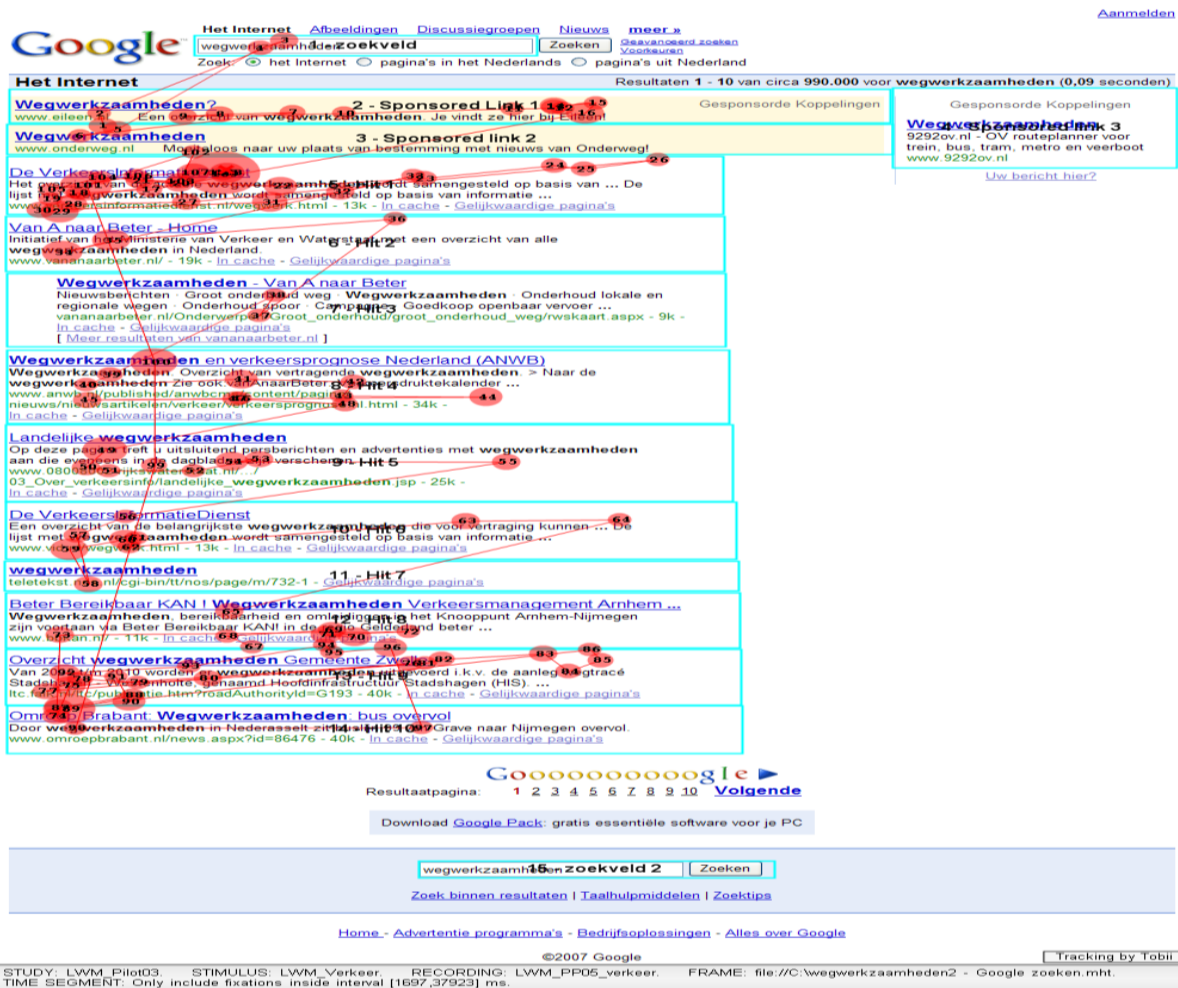


Figura 5. Exemple of gaze reply during first warming-up task

Verbal instructions. The instructions were formulated in line with the recommendations by Ericsson and Simon (1993; see also Van Gog et al., 2005).

Basic introduction. The basic introduction included the main genetics concepts required for solving completion tasks, and a worked-out example containing all the solution steps.

Pre-and post-test. The pre-test and post-test consisted of the same ten multiple-choice questions on the subject of heredity. The maximum score was 10 points, one point for each correct answer.

Warming-up tasks. Because learners vary in their ability to verbalize their own thoughts (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), two warming-up tasks were used to familiarize participants with the thinking aloud and cued retrospective reporting procedures. Although, those tasks were not related to the domain used (i.e., genetics), they required the participants to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant choices.

Procedure

The experiment was run in individual sessions of approximately 60 minutes. First, participants were given general instructions explaining the procedure and introducing the topic. They were asked to sign an agreement. The participants then started with the pre-test, for which they were given a total of eight minutes.

The pre-test was administered to all participants in order to assign participants in two groups: low and high prior knowledge students. Out of a possible ten points, participants'

average pre-test score was 6.12 ($SD = 2.53$) with a median score of 6.50. Based on the median split we created two groups of equal size: low prior knowledge students ($n = 13$, age $M = 20.69$ years, $SD = 1.97$, 6 female, 7 male) and high prior knowledge students ($n = 13$, age $M = 21.62$ years, $SD = 2.66$, 6 female, 7 male). The high prior knowledge participants achieved an average score of 8.23 ($SD = 1.01$) on the pre-test, while the low prior knowledge students achieved an average score of 4.00 ($SD = 1.63$). The resulting independent samples t test was significant, $t(24) = 7.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.12$.

After completing the pre-test, participants were seated in front of the stimulus PC and the eye tracking system was calibrated. To familiarize participants with thinking aloud and cued retrospective procedures, they were given two warming-up tasks. When participants had finished the warming-up tasks, they received the basic introduction to read for ten minutes, and then started with the completion learning tasks. Before solving the learning tasks (i.e., three tasks), participants had to select one task from each set of tasks (i.e., a set contained four learning tasks), which represented a combination of low and high dissimilarity levels.

During the task selection process, participants were asked to think aloud, while during the task performance they had to complete the task in silence. Subsequently, all participants were exposed to the gaze replay and they were asked to provide the cued retrospective reports. The gaze replay was at half speed in order to allow participants to utter enough information about their thought processes.

Data analysis

Eye tracking data. To analyze participants' eye movements, eight areas of interest (AOIs) on the tasks features that were either relevant (i.e., structural features) or irrelevant to goal attainment (i.e., surface features) for each task selection were defined. AOIs were defined to determine whether and for which amount of time participants were looking at a specified area during the task selection process.

The dependent variables were the *fixation count*, the *gaze time*, and the *average fixation duration* (total fixation time divided by the number of fixations per AOI).

Verbal data. The concurrent reports obtained during the task selection process, and the cued retrospective reports obtained during the gaze replay were transcribed and analyzed with a coding scheme. The verbal protocols were analyzed to determine whether participants referred to either relevant (structural features) or irrelevant features (surface features) during task selection process. Therefore, the coding scheme was developed based on the participants' 'actions' during the task selection process ('reading', 'decision making', 'comparing the tasks', 'description of the tasks') and the task features types (surface features and structural features). Next to these, categories like 'reference to prior knowledge', 'picture', and 'rest' (i.e., other aspects) were included. The total number of words used during the thinking aloud and retrospection was counted.

Two raters familiarized with the experimental tasks coded 70 percent of the transcribed protocols with an inter-rater reliability of .72 (Cohen's kappa). Since the inter-rater reliability was sufficiently high (i.e., higher than .70; Van Someren, Barnard, & Sandberg, 1994), one rater scored the remaining protocols.

Results

Learning outcomes

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores, training scores, post-test scores, pre-to-post-test gain, and time spent in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 7. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for learning outcomes as a function of expertise

Dependent variables	High prior knowledge students		Low prior knowledge students	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Pre-test	8.23	1.01	4.00	1.63
Training performance	8.00	1.38	7.35	1.77
Post-test	8.92	.95	6.46	1.45
Pre-to-post-test gain	.69	1.11	2.46	2.11
Time on pretest (min)	7.00	1.15	6.15	1.52
Time on post-test (min)	5.31	1.70	5.62	1.39

Participants in the two conditions (i.e., high prior knowledge students and low prior knowledge students) did not differ significantly in terms of training performance, $t(24) = 1.05$, *ns*. A *t*-test on post-test scores showed that the high prior knowledge students attained higher post-test performance than the low prior knowledge students, $t(24) = 5.11$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.01$. No significant differences were found on time spent for the pre-test, $t(24) = 1.60$, *ns*, and post-test, $t(24) = -.51$, *ns*.

The high prior knowledge students gained less knowledge than the low prior knowledge students, $t(24) = -2.68$, $p < .05$, $d = .36$. However, using paired *t*-tests a significant gain from pre-to-post-test in performance, $t(25) = -4.28$, $p < .0001$, $d = .72$, as well as a significant drop in time from pre-to-post-test, $t(25) = 3.59$, $p < .001$, $d = .77$, were found, indicating that learning did take place across both groups.

Eye tracking data

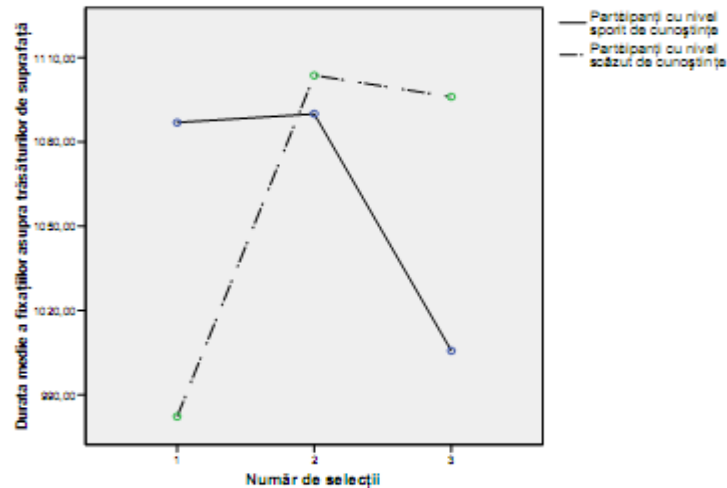
Regarding the number of fixations over surface features, a repeated measures ANOVA with expertise (i.e., high and low prior knowledge students) as the between subjects factor and number of task selections (i.e., first, second and third task selection) as within subjects factor was performed. Results showed a marginally effect of the number of task selections on fixation number over surface features, $F(2, 46) = 3.10$, $p = .055$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, but no effect of expertise or interaction between expertise and number of task selections, $F_s < 1$. For factor number of task selections, planned contrasts revealed that the number of fixations over surface features was significantly lower for the third task selection compared to the first task selection, $F(1, 23) = 5.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$, but was only marginally lower for the third task selection compared to the second task selection, $F(1, 23) = 3.96$, $p = .059$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$.

With respect to the number of fixations over structural features, ANOVA showed no significant main effect either for expertise or for number of task selections, and no interaction between expertise and number of task selections, $F_s < 1$.

An ANOVA on the duration of fixations over surface features revealed a significant main effect of number of task selections, $F(2, 46) = 3.48$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, but no effect of expertise or interaction between expertise and number of task selections, $F_s < 1$. The duration of fixations on surface features was significantly shorter in the third task selection than in the first task selection, $F(1, 23) = 5.01$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$, and significantly shorter in the third task selection compared to the second task selection, $F(1, 23) = 4.40$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$.

For the fixation duration over structural features, ANOVA revealed no significant main effect either for expertise or for number of task selections, $F_s < 1$, and no interaction between expertise and number of task selections, $F < 1$.

ANOVA revealed that there was a no significant effect of expertise, $F < 1$, and of number of task selections, $F(2, 36) = 1.31$, ns , on average fixation duration over surface features. A marginally significant interaction was found between expertise and number of task selections, $F(2, 36) = 3.04$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$ (see figure 6). This marginal interaction showed that the average fixation duration over surface features was higher for the high prior knowledge students than for the low prior knowledge students in the first task selection, but lower for the high prior knowledge students than for the low prior knowledge students in the third task selection.



Finally, for the average fixation duration over structural features, the ANOVA showed no significant main effect of expertise or of number of task selections, $F_s < 1$. The interaction between expertise and number of task selections was also not significant, $F < 1$. Means and standard deviations for the eye movement parameters are displayed in Table 8.

Tabelul 8. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for the eye tracking data as a function of expertise

	High prior knowledge students				Low prior knowledge students			
	1 st selection	2 nd selection	3 rd selection	Overall	1 st selection	2 nd selection	3 rd selection	Overall
Eye tracking data	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
<i>Fixation number</i>								
Surface features	72.69 (37.86)	62.85 (31.27)	57.77 (35.16)	64.44 (25.31)	67.67 (30.89)	66.42 (33.24)	45.50 (31.12)	59.86 (24.87)
Structural features	66.00 (63.99)	52.50 (49.25)	48.83 (49.99)	55.78 (42.50)	41.92 (46.18)	51.77 (62.72)	39.08 (45.99)	44.26 (46.01)
<i>Fixation duration</i>								
Surface features	19959.15 (12565.13)	16512.39 (9714.19)	14564.39 (11020.80)	17011.97 (8507.53)	19613.08 (14207.78)	20000.17 (13610.12)	12594.83 (10117.94)	17402.69 (10649.75)
Structural features	15488.33 (16192.85)	12719.42 (13160.60)	11955.58 (12665.70)	13387.78 (10861.32)	10686.08 (10775.31)	13498.31 (18070.30)	9582.77 (10809.41)	11255.72 (10938.00)
<i>Average fixation duration</i>								
Surface features	1086.88 (157.90)	1089.97 (142.52)	1005.63 (197.03)	1060.83 (131.64)	982.26 (238.03)	1103.63 (301.66)	1096.02 (350.80)	1060.64 (282.86)
Structural features	783.48 (214.60)	828.05 (246.98)	808.98 (205.09)	806.83 (216.28)	835.63 (99.71)	945.93 (285.76)	993.37 (304.21)	924.98 (216.92)

Verbal protocols

Because the numbers of the utterances in the response categories were unequal, nonparametric tests were used to analyze the verbal data. To test the effects of expertise (i.e., level of prior knowledge) on the categories produced in the thinking aloud and cued retrospective protocols, Mann-Whitney U tests were used. One-tailed significance is reported when a directional prediction is stated; otherwise two-tailed results are reported. Means and standard deviations of the main categories and subcategories are reported in Table 9.

On the main (sub)categories of both concurrent and cued retrospective protocols, Mann-Whitney U test was significant (two-tailed) only for a few (sub)categories. More specifically, the high prior knowledge students showed significantly less verbal utterances during concurrent reporting with respect to the category ‘comparing the tasks’ based on surface features (i.e., subcategory ‘within one selection moment’) compared to the low prior knowledge students, $U = 28.00, p < .01$. There was also a significant main effect of expertise on the category ‘comparing the tasks’ based on structural features (i.e., subcategory ‘within one selection moment’) from concurrent protocols, $U = 3.50, p < .05$. The high prior knowledge showed more verbal utterances during concurrent reporting with regard to the category ‘comparing the tasks’ based on structural features than the low prior knowledge students.

For the cued retrospective reporting, Mann-Whitney U test results were marginally significant only for two categories, ‘comparing the tasks’ based on surface features and ‘description of the tasks’ based on structural features (i.e., subcategory ‘like/dislike’). For high prior knowledge students, we found a marginally decrease in the use of category ‘comparing the tasks’ based on surface features, $U = 50.50, p = .08$ (see Table 9), but a marginally increase in the use of the category ‘description of the tasks’ based on structural features (i.e., subcategory ‘like/dislike’), $U = .0, p = .076$, compared to the low prior knowledge students.

With regard to the category ‘comparing the tasks’ based on surface features, during both concurrent and cued retrospective reporting, a strong trend was found, $U = 46.50, p = .05$ favouring the low prior knowledge students (see Table 9).

As shown in Table 10, most eye tracking parameters, especially the number and duration of fixations were positively correlated with the aggregated categories referring to surface and structural features of the verbal protocols. Notably, there were significant positive correlations for the number and duration of fixations over surface features with the variable indicating total surface features for both concurrent and cued retrospective protocols, as well as across verbal protocols.

Table 9. Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) of the main (sub)categories as a function of expertise in the two verbal protocols

Main sub(categories)	High prior knowledge students			Low prior knowledge students		
	TA ^a	CR ^b	Overall ^c	TA ^a	CR ^b	Overall ^c
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
<i>Reading</i>						
Surface features	13.85 (6.47)	15.77 (7.87)	29.54 (12.41)	9.77 (5.28)	18.23 (8.97)	28.00 (13.50)
Structural features	6.08 (3.85)	11.23 (10.38)	16.85 (13.51)	.33 (4.80)	10.91 (6.38)	16.91 (10.56)
<i>Decision making</i>						
Surface features	4.08 (3.15)	6.62 (3.88)	10.38 (6.80)	4.00 (2.35)	7.54 (3.62)	11.54 (4.98)
Structural features	2.43 (1.62)	2.91 (2.02)	4.08 (3.48)	1.80 (.84)	2.50 (1.52)	3.43 (2.51)
<i>Comparing the tasks</i>						
Surface features	2.67 (2.27)	7.00 (4.04)	9.46 (5.88)	3.69 (2.02)	10.54 (4.93)	14.23 (6.22)
Structural features	3.83 (3.71)	6.75 (6.18)	8.00 (8.90)	3.33 (3.27)	6.73 (7.09)	7.83 (9.54)
<i>Description of the tasks</i>						
Surface features	3.50 (2.59)	6.82 (5.51)	8.00 (7.52)	3.63 (3.74)	4.64 (6.31)	6.67 (9.01)
Structural features	3.33 (1.75)	3.71 (3.64)	5.75 (4.62)	2.17 (1.47)	2.40 (1.14)	3.57 (2.30)

^a TA – thinking aloud protocol (i.e., concurrent reporting);

^b CR – cued retrospective protocol;

^c cumulated verbal protocols: TA and CR.

Table 10. Correlations between the eye tracking parameters and the aggregated categories referring to surface and structural features of the verbal protocols

Eye tracking parameters	Aggregated categories of verbal protocols					
	TA surface	CR surface	Total surface	TA surface	CR surface	Total surface
<i>Fixation number</i>						
Surface features	.44*	.47*	.49*	-.02	.17	.09
Structural features	.15	.34	.29	.69**	.72**	.74**
<i>Fixation duration</i>						
Surface features	.41*	.45*	.46*	-.13	.05	-.02
Structural features	.16	.32	.28	.65**	.66**	.69**
<i>Average fixation duration</i>						
Surface features	.25	.19	.23	-.64**	-.32	-.42
Structural features	-.74	-.38	-.55	-.35	-.31	-.32

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Discussion

The results show that high prior knowledge students achieved higher post-test performance scores compared to low prior knowledge students. In terms of performance on training, no significant differences between high prior knowledge and low prior knowledge students were found.

No differences were found between high prior knowledge and low prior knowledge students with regard to the eye tracking data. More specifically, expertise (i.e., level of prior knowledge) did neither affect the number or duration of fixations nor the average fixation duration on both surface and structural features. The lack of differences between high and low prior knowledge students regarding the frequency and duration of fixations might be due to the fact that these eye tracking parameters indicate different things depending on the expertise level. For example, for high prior knowledge students, longer fixation durations might indicate productive involvement during learning, whereas for low prior knowledge students it could suggest unproductive processing (Schwonke, Berthold, & Renkel, 2009).

Although we found no differences in viewing behavior between groups over the three task selections, we did find a remarkable difference in participants' viewing behavior between those selections. The number and duration of fixations over surface features was significantly lower for the third task selection compared to the first task selection, and even compared to the second task selection (only marginally lower). This pattern of results was not found for the number or duration of fixations over structural features. These findings indicate that the participants' allocation of visual attention was less affected by surface features of the tasks when viewing tasks with the same format of presentation a second or third time.

However, high prior knowledge students differed in their verbal utterances made during concurrent reporting from low prior knowledge students in that they showed more verbal utterances with regard to the category 'comparing the tasks' based on structural features, but less utterances related to the category 'comparing the tasks' based on surface features. As indicated by the marginally significant effect of prior knowledge, during retrospection the verbal utterances related to the category 'description of the tasks' based on structural features (i.e., subcategory 'like/dislike') grow with increasing prior knowledge, whereas utterances referring to the category 'comparing the tasks' based on surface features decrease. Furthermore, the results from both concurrent and cued retrospective reporting revealed that high prior knowledge students showed less verbal utterances with respect to the category 'comparing the tasks' based on surface features than low prior knowledge students.

Finally, there is evidence of a correlation between increases in the perceptual processing of irrelevant or relevant task-features and increases in the number of statements referring to surface features, and structural features, respectively.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSIONS. APPLICATIONS. FUTURE RESEARCH

The review of the literature, presented in the theoretical part of the dissertation, has outlined the fact that one of the major problems of the complex instructional designs is the control of the overload imposed on the learners' cognitive system (Paas, Renkl, & Sweller, 2003, 2004). From cognitive load theory perspective, in order to promote learning, the instructional designs have to decrease extraneous cognitive load and increase germane load (Kirschner, 2002).

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to control the cognitive load which impede learning, and this goal is reached in two ways: (a) using cognitive load (invested mental effort as input - together with the obtained performance- for the dynamic selection of the level of difficulty and support of the tasks which are about to be solved (in the case of personalized task selection model) and (b) assigning learners an active role in their own learning process (learner-controlled instruction; Paas, 2003).

A review of the main results and conclusions of this dissertation is given, following the suggestions of Van Gog et al. (2005) related to the implications for instructional design research as indicated by the relations between cognitive load theory assumptions and the framework of expert performance research.

1. Personalization of instruction

Chapter 4 introduces a personalized task selection model which integrates the assumptions of the two-level model of adaptive instruction and the assumptions of the four-component instructional design model (4C/ID; Van Merriënboer, 1997) This personalized model combines the strong points of the above mentioned models and allows for dynamic selection of the appropriate learning tasks based on the learners' level of expertise (represented by the combination of the performance and invested mental effort).

The main purpose of this dynamic selection of the tasks is to prevent learners' cognitive load through a continuous adaptation of the level of difficulty and support of the tasks to the learners' expertise. The utilization of invested mental effort as input for the process of the dynamic selection of the tasks is only at the beginning. Only few studies have explored the benefits of integrating the assumptions of cognitive load theory into the microadaptive models of instructional technologies upon learning. The model form the basis of the most of empirical studies described in this dissertation. In order to put this model into practice, we designed a computer-based learning environment for learning genetics and preliminary results were discussed. Chapter 4 also reports the results of a formative evaluation carried out with a twofold purpose: (a) to test the functionality and usability of the personalized learning environment and (b) to do the necessary changes in the interface as a result of the "field testing".

Unlike the previous developed learning environments, this learning environment applies different measurement scales and includes another selection algorithm for adapting the level of difficulty and support of the tasks to the learners' expertise. In this case the maximum jump size between complexity levels is decreased forcing a smoother increase or decrease in task complexity.

The results of the formative evaluation provides some preliminary evidence that the personalized learning environment is a promising approach to improve learning and efficiency in reaching the pre-established objectives.

2. Improving learning and performance

The experiments presented in chapter 5 tested the effects of prior knowledge (expertise level) and type of instructional control on performance and learning efficiency. The results of the first study in this chapter confirm the hypothesis that the adaptive program instruction has positive effects on the training effectiveness and learning efficiency, but this is not reflected in a superior post-test performance, a higher pre-to-post learning gain or higher transfer test performance. A possible explanation could be that the participants in the adaptive instruction have acquired ‘restricted’ cognitive schemes (as a result of “the perverse effect of the help”) which only allow for a ‘routine’ completion of the steps (Van Merriënboer, 1997).

Although the participants in the non-adaptive condition attained the same training performance as the students in both learner control conditions, the non-adaptive condition needed significantly more time to complete the training phase. A possible explanation could be related to the fact that participants in the two learner control conditions chose to solve easier learning tasks (i.e., difficulty level 1 and 2), and more tasks with a high support (i.e., completion problems with high support). These results suggest the fact that learners who control their instruction have the tendency to minimize the effort involved in problem solving process rather than try to maximize this effort.

Regarding the students’ prior knowledge level, the prediction that learners with a relatively higher prior knowledge (i.e., college students) would outperform lower prior knowledge students (i.e., high school students) on performance measures and efficiency was confirmed. In addition, college students spent more time on the training compared to high school students and their longer training time is assumed to be related to a deeper cognitive engagement and self-reflecting (see Chi, 2006).

Consistent with the literature on age differences in cognitive capacity which has found that adolescents demonstrate adult-like levels of maturity by the time they reach 15 or 16 (see Steinberg, Cauffman, Woolard, Graham, & Banich, 2009), it is unlikely that age differences between high school students and college students might affect the results regarding prior knowledge since after these ages cognitive performance does not change

Finally, the interaction effects found in this study show that the students’ prior knowledge strongly affects the students learning path in the learner control and the adaptive program control conditions.

The second study described in chapter 5 is a replication of the previous study with the purpose of verifying predictions regarding the influence of the type of instructional control on test performance and learning efficiency in the context of increased level of learner expertise (inclusion of PhD students in the study). Contrary to the results of the first study (see also Mihalca et al., 2011), adapting the difficulty and support of the learning tasks for learners with a higher level of expertise would not make learning more effective (neither the training effectiveness) and efficient. These results support Lee and Lee’s findings that differences between the different types of instructional control decrease whereas the learners’ previously acquired knowledge increases.

3. Cognitive structures

The aim of the experiment presented in chapter 6 was to examine the differences between low and high prior knowledge learners in attention paid to relevant and irrelevant task-features during task selection processes by combining eye tracking measures, thinking-aloud and cued retrospective protocols. Contrary to our expectations, no differences were found between high prior knowledge and low prior knowledge students with regard to the eye tracking data. More

specifically, learners' expertise level did neither affect the number or duration of fixations nor the average fixation duration on both surface and structural features. However, the findings indicate that the participants' allocation of visual attention was less affected by surface features of the tasks when viewing tasks with the same format of presentation a second or third time. In contrast, the number and duration of fixations over structural features in the first task selection were very similar to those in the last task selection, in other words the pattern of fixations on structural features was relative stable over the multiple viewings (i.e., the three tasks selections).

As indicated by the marginally significant effect of prior knowledge, during retrospection the verbal utterances related to the category 'description of the tasks' based on structural features (i.e., subcategory 'like/dislike') grow with increasing prior knowledge, whereas utterances referring to the category 'comparing the tasks' based on surface features decrease. Furthermore, the results from both concurrent and cued retrospective reporting revealed that high prior knowledge students showed less verbal utterances with respect to the category 'comparing the tasks' based on surface features than low prior knowledge students.

Furthermore, there is evidence of a correlation between increases in the perceptual processing of irrelevant or relevant task-features and increases in the number of statements referring to surface features, and structural features, respectively. The finding that the type of processing indicated by the participants' verbal responses was related to the amount of processing time (indicated by eye tracking data) was in line with results of Kaakinen and Hyönä (2005).

In sum, the results of the present study suggests that combining different process measures, such as eye tracking, concurrent and cued retrospective reporting can provide a better understanding of the processes that underlying the selection decisions. As is suggested by this study, in addition to investigating the perceptual processing that occurs during task selection decisions, it is imperative to consider decision making from a cognitive perspective (i.e., verbal explanations of the task selections), because the results can differ.

To conclude, the results of this dissertation partially supported the idea that adapting instruction to the individual needs of the students makes training more effective and efficient yet had no effects on improving test performance. It seems necessary to conduct further studies in order to address the benefits and shortcomings of the types of instructional control used in this study, as well as explore the effects of feedback and advisory models to assist learners with their decisions.

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