

Chapter 67

Examining Social Presence Influence on Students' Satisfaction with Online Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

Online education has become an essential element of higher education and continues to grow with a potential to facilitate learning. Evidence indicates that many students become frustrated after their initial online experience and fail to pursue additional online courses. Little is known about the reasons why this phenomenon exists. The purpose of this chapter is to examine students' satisfaction with online learning environments guided by the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) conceptual framework and to determine students' perceptions of social presence in the online environment. The selection of the student population from this program are due to the need to improve on the U-rate. The U-rate is the unsatisfactory rate of a course due to few factors. Such factors are low Course Level Assessment (CLA), course difficulty, content presented in the course is not clear, or students struggling with course outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many individuals started pursuing higher education to increase their marketability (Lee & Oyserman, 2007). The growth in the online market was significant and due to full-time workers, the fastest growing segment of the student population. In addition, online education became an essential element of higher education (Rovai & Jordan, 2004) and continues to grow with a potential to facilitate learning (Ayala, 2009). Online education has reached new levels in development and positive statistics prove this notion. Online education increases options for students to continue their education through available technologies, and reduces study costs and travel time (Romiszowski, 2005). An increased number of students, educators such as instructors, administrators and their institutions are interested in the positive developments that online education can afford.

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BACKGROUND

Many studies were found that focused on online education and students' experience in the online classroom. Two respective areas were reviewed for this chapter. One group of literature focused on the overall satisfaction of students with their e-learning environments which include the environment that is created by the course and the instructor. In addition, these sources addressed students' previous education, employment status, and their proficiency in related technologies. The second group of sources addressed students' interaction in the classroom and their overall satisfaction with online learning. This included their interaction with their peers, their instructor, and the content presented in their online classrooms. All of the studies discussed in this chapter focused on academic achievement, retention, and satisfaction with online education. Findings in the literature about online students' satisfaction were divided into significant or non-significant results.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

In this section, issues, controversies, and problems with online learning addressed by these technologies: Learning management system, podcasting online discussion board, and social networking services. Each of the above technology is addressed next.

Learning Management System

With the increase of desired students to learn remotely, a web-based technology medium called LMS was created. Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are web-based software application systems that are designed for administration, instructors, and students to share documents, track students' records, allow students to submit their work for grading, offer discussion board for students and their instructor to communicate and discuss topics covered in the classroom. Instructors share documents and course materials with their students (Lonn & Teasley, 2009). LMSs used to be called integrated learning systems (ILSs) (Watson & Watson, 2007). Carmean and Haefner (2002) developed five learning principles for effective learning when using an LMS: learning, active, social, contextual, engaging, and student-own. Learning is considered social when the interaction between students and their faculty is encouraged. This can be applied through virtual chat, discussion boards and posting announcements. Learning is considered active when students practice learned concept and the application of the real world scenarios.

Learning is considered contextual when new knowledge is demonstrated in front of the student. This can take place when multimedia, video, selected external hyperlinks where students can learn more about specific topic. Learning is considered engaging when it embraces universal talents and provide safe and high challenging environment. This can happen by using supplemental educational tools. Learning is student-own where students control the way they learn and taking charge of their learning by reading course material before coming to class and becoming independent when searching for answers (Carmean & Haefner, 2002).

Lonn and Teasley (2009) conducted a study to explore the uses and perceived benefits of using an LMS in a traditional classroom teaching. The sample students' population of this study was chosen from a large American Midwestern university. The researchers examined surveys that were collected over two years focusing on communication, interactive teaching and learning practices in the learning manage-

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