Chapter 32
Saving Face in Online Learning: New Directions in Teaching and E-Learning

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in technology and innovations in education allow universities to entertain new ways of teaching and learning. This chapter presents quasi-experimental data of how various online tools and teaching strategies impact student learning outcomes, satisfaction, and engagement. Specific variables impacting social presence, affect, cognition, etc., were tested to determine their impact on different student outcomes such as grades, feelings of isolation, student engagement, and perceived authenticity of course materials in a second-year Introductory Psychology course. Findings suggest that, despite the literature, only some factors had a significant impact on student outcomes and that while some course activities transferred well online, others did not; peer activities and participation in some course components particularly were hindered online. Considered here are students' experiences with online learning, including hybrid and inverted courses, and teaching strategies that help meet challenges in different higher-education learning contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Advancements in technology and innovations in education allow universities around the world to think up new ways of teaching and learning that can sometimes help instructors avoid barriers encountered in traditional educational contexts. Technology drives and enables a lot of the new and different methods of online teaching and innovation that we hear so much about in the media, amongst our colleagues, and across institutions. Some views of what higher education should look like today include that it be easily accessed by anyone who wants to be educated, that it cost less than it currently does, and that there be

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a significant increase in student engagement, student experience, and the quality of education. Whether for online, hybrid or blended courses, or some other learning context, instructors are often wary of using too much technology since it can be distracting. They worry that some educational technologies can take something away from their teaching or negatively impact students' learning experience. There is an argument to be made that one can use technology in ways that brings groups of learners together. For example, utilize technologies and devices in the classroom that students are using anyways (in their daily interactions), and embrace those technologies in ways that create meaningful course interactions rather than distractions, or use them in ways that empower both instructors and students, and engages them online (outside of the classroom) or even inside of the classroom.

It seems obvious that online learning technologies can help instructors to innovate, but what is the evidence that online learning, or the available tools and the teaching strategies supported by those tools, facilitate learning? Presented here are findings from a three part quasi-experiment research series that considers teaching strategies and educational technologies that push learning beyond boundaries often found in different teaching contexts. Boundaries considered here include social presence, affect, perceived authenticity of a course, student interactions, behaviour and cognition. *Study-One* of this research series (conducted in the summer of 2012), was published elsewhere (Berry & Paulo Kushnir, 2013). Data from *Study-One* compared face-to-face and online teaching and learning; in this chapter, *Study-Two* (conducted in the summer of 2013) and *Study-Three* (conducted in the summer of 2014) add new data on teaching approaches, strategies, course and curriculum design that focus only on online teaching and learning. This chapter extends our work published elsewhere (Paulo Kushnir & Berry, 2014), updating details, elaborating the content, and enhancing the results with newly obtained results (*i.e.,* data from *Study-Three*). Specific variables impacting social presence, affect, student interactions, behaviour, cognition, *etc.,* where tested to determine their impact on different student outcomes (*e.g.,* quiz, test, and exam scores, final course grades, feelings of isolation, student engagement and satisfaction, feeling like the course, instructor and course materials were authentic, *etc.*) in a second-year Introduction to Psychology course. Results show that, despite the literature, only some factors had a significant impact on student outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Enrollments in online education continue to grow at a quicker pace than enrollments overall in higher education. As many universities and colleges struggle with issues of space, scheduling conflicts and budget cuts, some believe that online education offers cost effective alternatives to traditional classroom teaching (Allen & Seaman, 2010, 2013; Carey & Trick, 2013). In 2010 the Sloan Consortium reported that online enrollments were up 17%, compared to 12% the previous year (Parry, 2010). In 2011, at least 33% of college students had participated in at least one online course and the majority of these students (over 82%) were undergraduates (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Parry, 2010; Salcedo, 2010).

Online courses are convenient in higher education, alleviating constraints of time and space of traditional face-to-face courses, allowing institutions to offer more courses, and effectively meet the growing and changing needs of students (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Carey & Trick, 2013; Gould, 2003; Gupta & Lei, 2010; Macon, 2011). The literature is positive for the most part; some argue that it might be more cost effective for institutions to offer online courses since they often require less overhead than face-to-face courses with the necessity for physical classrooms. Others argue that online courses expand the reach of