Chapter 7
Adult Learner Engagement, Empowerment, Faculty–Student Interaction, and Technology Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide strategies for adult learners to engage in online learning and to empower themselves to succeed in online learning. In addition, this cannot be fully accomplished without some degree of faculty-student interaction. There are some strategies that work regardless of if a course is offered synchronously or asynchronously, such as time management and presence. Technology and the use of digital tools are essential in online learning and provide high motivation and participation to adult learning in an online course. In addition, technology is extremely important in our ever-advancing global market. Some strategies previously thought to be for in-person use only can be adapted to online learning. Cross-curriculum learning provides more motivation and participation when aligned with the concepts of a course.

INTRODUCTION

Adult learners in higher education may experience several obstacles when starting or restarting their education, especially in an online environment. The mission of this chapter is to provide strategies for adult learners to engage in online learning and to empower themselves to succeed in online learning. Concerns for the quality of online education have been an ongoing debate since the launch of the internet and the first online courses and schools (Barrot, 2021; Boelens et al., 2017; Kebritchi et al., 2017; Rasheed et al., 2020). However, since the 1980s and 1990s, hundreds of universities and colleges used the evolving

internet to provide undergraduate and graduate courses and programs, and currently over 3,900 higher education schools participate in online learning (American Center for the Study of Distance Education, 2019; Florida National University (FNU), 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Some challenges to virtual schools are access to quality broadband internet, availability of practice with teachers for English Language Learners (ELLs), and access to student services (Cullinan et al., 2021; Kursav et al., 2022; Silva de Castro et al., 2019). In addition, the population of students of higher education courses also includes adult learners, which adds another dynamic in itself (Education Advisory Board (EAB), 2019). Some of the concerns for the use of technology in the classroom is that there is misinformation and bullying occurring in the virtual world and abuse of technology during instructional time (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018; New EdTech Classroom & Kary, 2019). In addition, some faculty do not feel that technology is important for their course or that they have the confidence to teach effectively with technology (Martin et al., 2020). Furthermore, some educators have difficulties adapting activities to fit an online environment (Retallick, 2022). Additionally, adult learners who have not been in formal schooling may not be familiar with the current and evolving technology.

Providing strategies for adult learners to engage in online learning and to empower themselves to succeed in online learning cannot be fully accomplished without some degree of faculty-student interaction. There are some strategies that work regardless of if a course is offered synchronously or asynchronously. Time management, presence (both student and instructor), and diversity are relevant to any environment. Technology and the use of digital tools are essential in online learning and provide high motivation and participation to adult learning in an online course, in addition technology is extremely important in our ever-advancing global market (Al-Zahrani, 2015; Shopova, 2014). In most colleges or universities there are also introductory courses for Microsoft Word or Office and tutoring services for use of technology (Wilfong & Miller, 2022). Some strategies previously thought to be for in person use only can be adapted to online learning. This approach makes learning appealing to even adult learners who may be more familiar with these strategies. Cross curriculum learning provides more motivation and participation when aligned with the concepts of a course.

STRATEGIES, TOOLS, AND BEST PRACTICES FOR BOTH SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

Online education cannot be successful without good, reliable broadband internet (Cullinan et al., 2021). Students can tap into resources already available at many universities and colleges, such as the college library, increased Wi-Fi output, and mobile hotspots in and around the campuses (Hirsch & Varn, 2021). Adult learners may have a family that they have to support and therefore have limited funds for internet service. Some families have already taken advantage of the government's low-income programs to provide low-cost fiber connections in the home for students in K-12 schools (Hirsch & Varn, 2021). This program also benefits older siblings, and even adults, attending university or college. Other universities and colleges loan laptops to students as long as they are enrolled in their courses at least part time (Jaggars et al., 2021).

One study demonstrated how even in a completely virtual program, students still need practice with live teachers (Silva de Castro et al., 2019). Students that are ELLs can benefit from tapping into practice of native English with an instructor. English Language Arts concepts, such as Speaking, Listening, Read-

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