Chapter 11
Evaluating Learning Experience Through Educational Social Network Support in Blended Learning

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ABSTRACT

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) model has been used for exploring various aspects of blended learning courses using technology such as Course Management Systems (CMSs). However, there is a lack of research literature evaluating CoI in environments where students use an educational social network in addition to a CMS and face to face teaching and learning. This study investigates a learning experience in blended learning that combines the usage of a CMS, Edmodo, which is an educational Social Network Site (SNS) and face to face teaching and learning. The results have shown a significant relationship and prediction of overall learning experience in relation to teaching, cognitive and social presence in blended learning. Moreover, social presence is the most significant factor to predict the overall learning experience of students.

INTRODUCTION

Many higher education institutions are hoping to enhance student participation. Enhancement of student participation in e-learning is associated with improved learning (Roblyer & Ekhaml, 2000). The technology used to support a blended course may affect the manner and frequency in which faculty and students interact with each other, interact with course materials, and receive and provide feedback (Rubin, Fernandes, & Avgerinou, 2013). Effective blended learning can provide opportunities for students to learn better and faster. Blended course designs support learners and instructors working together in

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5472-1.ch011

mixed delivery modes, typically technology mediated and face-to-face, to achieve learning outcomes that are pedagogically supported through activities, assignments, and assessments (McGee and Reis, 2012). Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robbins, & Shoemaker (2000) suggested that students who fail to interact with other participants in a group feel more isolated compared to participants who interact effectively. Understanding how students participate in blended learning can help us to distinguish how to best engage students.

Although Course Management Systems (CMSs) offer several tools that support social learning, the functionality and scope of these tools can inhibit just-in-time interactions and social connections (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2010). Jafari et al. (2006) stated that students were interested in CMSs that emulate the kinds of systems they use to interact with socially. A secure social network system in teaching and learning can improve students' social presence, perceived learning, and satisfaction with the instructor (Mirabolghasemi & Iahd. 2013). Özmen & Atıcı (2014) explored the effects of a CMS supported by a SNS on learners' academic achievements in distance education using a survey method. The results indicated that a CMS used in distance education should be supported by a SNS to enhance the academic achievement of learners, and that combining these two platforms could provide more personal interaction, communication, student engagement, social experience and peer-to-peer feedback. Pilli (2014) stated that a CMS and a SNS need to be used together to make sure that individuals can capture the potential benefits of informal learning and collaboration while still providing the formal documentation necessary to meet management and compliance requirements. Since research on usage of social network applications for learning with a CMS in a blended learning environment is still limited, the main objective of this paper is to study how the combination of both technologies influences the overall learning experience.

Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2000) proposed factors supporting the development of learning experience, namely teaching, cognitive and social presence. The CoI model is a well-cited learning model in education (Daspit and D'Souza, 2012). A critical community of learners is composed of lecturers and students interacting with the specific objectives of constructing, understanding, facilitating, and developing capabilities that inspire further learning (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Shea et al., 2014). Effective online learning requires the development of a community that provides deep learning. Therefore, it is essential and valuable to create a learning platform where interaction and reflection are sustained, where opinions can be explored and critiqued, and where the process of critical thinking can be modeled. The need to turn from descriptive to predictive quantitative studies using the CoI model that consider the interaction effects of presence and cross disciplinary studies has been identified (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes& Fung, 2010). There are only few previous studies on SNS application in higher education, mostly based on case studies (Jucevičienė& Valinevičienė, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this research study consists mainly of brief descriptions of blended learning, CMSs, SNSs for learning, and the CoI model.

Blended Learning

Blended learning refers to linking e-learning activities to traditional classroom training. E-learning can provide access to both synchronous and asynchronous information and communication (Al-Hunaiyyan