Business Report Writing Students’ Perceptions of Their Ability to Succeed in an Online Environment vs. Students’ Performance in an Online Course

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ABSTRACT

The trend for online courses and programs continues to expand as today’s learners request an anytime, anywhere learning environment. To design effective online learning, data must be collected to review students’ perceptions of their ability to succeed in an online environment and their performance in online courses. This manuscript describes an experimental research study conducted with business report writing students in a College of Business. The control group was taught in a traditional classroom setting and the experimental group was taught in a blended learning environment. Students had a high level of perception of their technology abilities and ability to be successful in an online environment; however, there was significance different in performance between the two groups on assignment and post-test scores.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Online Learning, Student Perception, Student Performance

INTRODUCTION

The United States General Accounting Office (2002) reported 1.5 million of the 19 million postsecondary students in the U.S. took at least one online course during the 1999-2000 school year. Allen & Seaman (2006) also noted college students in the U.S. took at least one online course during the fall 2006 semester and there appears to be no leveling of the growth rate in online learning. The literature notes online courses are as effective as traditional courses in a classroom setting.

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However, as the trend continues for higher learning institutions to offer more online courses and programs, e-students’ perceptions of their technology skills and ability to succeed in an online environment must be investigated. Students must analyze their online experiences and identify factors to help them be successful e-students. This analysis should result in e-instructors incorporating these factors to enhance learning. A conscious effort must be made, based on content, student analysis, and need, as to whether a course or program should be offered in a traditional, blended, or online environment. Data must also be collected to review student performance in online courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As e-students request courses and programs in an anywhere, anytime environment, synchronous and asynchronous formats must be utilized to develop online learning. The definition of online learning is based on definitions of distance education. In 1972, the International Council for Correspondence Education coined the term distance education (Moore, 1990). Numerous definitions of distance education or distance learning have continued to evolve over the years.

Definitions in the area of distance education must be reviewed to establish a comprehensive definition of online learning. Distance education has been defined as “the process of extending learning or delivering instructional resource sharing opportunities, to locations away from a classroom, building or site by using video, audio, computer, multimedia communications, or some combination of these with their traditional delivery meetings” (Instructional Telecommunications Council, 2001). Traditional classroom education has been defined as providing “assistance to learners that enable them to achieve levels of development (and efficiency) that they would not be able to achieve by themselves” (Tiffin & Rajasingham, 1995, p. 240). Dewey (1963) incorporated another component of the definition of education by noting key to any type of effective educational experience is continuity and interaction. Whether pure or blended, online education is defined for the purpose of this study as “the use of technology (software and hardware) to provide assistance to learners to enable them to achieve the set level of learning through continuity and interaction” (Crews, Wilkinson, Wiedmaier, Hemby, and McCannon, 2006).

With these definitions in mind, Allen and Seaman (2006) delve into defining online learning as ‘those in which at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online’ (p. 4). Allen and Seaman further delineate the type of course as follows: (1) Traditional: Zero percent of content delivered online, (2) Web Facilitated: 1-29 percent of content delivered learning online, (3) Blended: 30-79 percent of course content delivered online, and 4) Online: 80 percent or more of content delivered online with typically no face-to-face (F2F) class meetings.

As continuity and interaction are key components of online education, Williams and Peters (1997) noted e-instructors “must shift from the role of content provider to content facilitator, gain comfort and proficiency in using the Web as the primary teacher–student link, and learn to teach effectively without the visual control provided by direct eye contact” (as cited in Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2001, p. 19). However, as the e-instructor is learning how to accomplish this shift and learning how to use the technology, they are also concerned with the online comfort level of the e-students. Huebner and Weiner (2001) noted instructors may have a lower comfort level with electronic learning tools than e-students. Therefore, many e-students learn to use appropriate technology to become self-directed learners. Therefore, e-students are requiring a shift in how e-instructors teach.

It is necessary for e-instructors to reposition their teaching from a passive environment to one encouraging e-students to be engaged and self-directed in their learning. This allows for the building of relationships between the e-students themselves and between e-students and the instructor. However, McQuillen (2003) noted the
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