Integrating Cooperative Learning into the Combined Blended Learning Design Model: Implications for Students’ Intrinsic Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Extensive research has been done on the implementation of cooperative learning (CL) in a face-to-face classroom. However, only a few studies could be found on the implementation of CL in a blended learning environment. The implementation of CL in such an environment is a challenging goal for facilitators. It requires a commitment to change and the willingness to take risks, it takes time and requires planning. This article reports on research done to develop a holistic blended learning (BL) design model. The development of the model was based on a synthesis of a number of pedagogical models, which focus specifically on the integration of technology. The model was then used as a tool to design a module with the integration of CL in a BL environment. It was evident from the findings of the qualitative data that the students’ intrinsic motivation (IM) improved after implementing the CL–BL module design.

KEYWORDS

Blended Learning, Blended Learning Design Model, Cooperative Learning, Intrinsic Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning (CL) is an approach that involves a small group of students working together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal (Wessner & Pfister, 2000). According to a literature review done by Korkmaz (2012), CL contributes to students’ academic successes, cognitive skills, self-confidence, social skills, metacognition levels, problem solving skills, ability to work in groups, positive attitudes towards learning and courses, and intrinsic motivation. Facilitators should design curriculums and instruction in which students are motivated to participate in learning tasks (Liao, 2005). When students are intrinsically motivated, they will engage in a task because it is enjoyable and they find it inherently interesting (Hung, Durcikova, Lai & Lin, 2011). A number of studies on online learning environments found that ‘social presence’ or involvement, where students felt part of a community, have contributed positively to learning outcomes and student satisfaction with online courses (Kazmer, 2000). Song and Hill (2007) contended that online learning allows students to have better control of the instruction. This, together with the number of online collaboration tools available on the Internet opens up a number of possibilities for the implementation of CL in a blended learning environment. This paper presents findings from a larger PhD study (Bosch, 2016).

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

The concept of blended learning (BL) is rooted in the idea that learning is a continuous process and not just a one-time event (Niemi, 2009). A single delivery mode inevitably limits the reach of a learning program or critical knowledge transfer in some form (Geçer, 2013). While BL is appealing to many because it enables one to take advantage of the ‘best of both worlds’ (Gliner, Morgan, & Harmon, 2002), BL environments could also mix the least effective elements of both face-to-face and technology-mediated worlds if not designed well (Lindsay, 2004). One cannot simply transfer activities from traditional learning environments into a technology-mediated environment without taking the effect of technology on the course content into consideration (Ross, 2012). The BL mode should be designed based on insights regarding the understanding of the character and the nature of the students, and the preparation of content. Instructional design should furthermore take the experience and the prior knowledge of its self-directed students into consideration (Luppicini, 2007). BL could increase access and flexibility for learners, increase the level of active learning, and achieve improved student experiences and outcomes (Saliba, Rankine, & Cortez, 2013).

In BL environments, face-to-face and online learning should be integrated optimally in such a way that the strengths of each are blended into one (Graham, 2009). If the traditional mode of delivery has always been face-to-face, when moving towards BL, lecturers should start to integrate technology in their classrooms. However, BL is not merely the integration of technology in the classroom or identifying the right blend of technologies to increase student access to learning opportunities. It rather requires the facilitator to create a transformative environment where critical and complex learning skills could be developed (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Thus, in a BL environment, the use of technology transitions from being a great teaching tool to being the actual learning space where the collaboration and sharing occur (Cooke, 2013). The component of collaboration and the shift from teacher-centred to student-centred interaction are central to BL (McDonald, 2012). The collaborative component of BL was attended to in a cooperative learning environment, and the principles of CL were taken in consideration throughout the study.

In view of the above, the research question addressed in the research on which this article is based, was formulated as follows: What are the implications for students’ intrinsic motivation (IM) when they are being taught in a teaching model that integrates CL in a combined BL design model?

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Intrinsically motivated students take responsibility for their own learning (Borich, 2007; Loyens et al., 2008; Francom, 2009; Song & Hill, 2007), through an approach of self-directed learning (SDL). SDL allows students to determine their learning goals, select resources to achieve the goals, decide upon their preferred learning strategies and assess the outcomes of the learning process (Knowles, 1975; Ellis, 2007). According to Unrau and Schlackman (2006), IM arises when an individual is interested in a topic or activity and is satisfied through pursuit of that topic or activity. IM in learning expresses a student’s desire for mastery and a spontaneous curiosity (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Engaging in enjoyable, self-determined and competence-enhancing behavior fosters this type of motivation (Kong, Kwok & Fang, 2012). An intrinsically motivated person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed, rather than due to external prods, pressures or rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsically motivated persons will maximize effort and persistence in challenging activities optimally and experiencing interest and enjoyment that increase or sustain participation (Ferrer-Caja & Weiss, 2000).

IM not only exists within individuals but also in the relationship between individuals and activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). People might be intrinsically motivated for some activities, but not for others, and not everyone is equally intrinsically motivated for all particular tasks (Yancy, 2012). When students are allowed to choose components that are of interest to them while working in small groups, their self-motivation is strengthened (Liao & Hsueh, 2005). In these groups, students share
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