Chapter IV

The Determinants of Web-based Instructional Systems’ Outcome and Satisfaction: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract

Post-secondary distance education via the Internet is now commonplace. Tremendous advances in information technology have allowed colleges and universities to offer Web-based courses as a way to meet the growing demand for educational experiences from those who, because of distance from campus or scheduling conflicts, would otherwise not be able to take
courses. This chapter develops a model explaining the relationship between two dependent variables (the perceived student satisfaction and learning outcomes) and six independent variables based on two statistical tools: correlations and structural equation modeling. The findings indicate that student self-motivation toward Web-based courses has a strong impact on the level of interaction; the perceived student satisfaction has a direct link to the learning outcome in Web-based courses; and higher levels of student self-motivation toward Web-based courses can lead to greater learning outcomes.

Introduction

The landscape of distance education is changing. This change is being driven by the growing acceptance and popularity of online course offerings and complete online degree programs at colleges and universities nationwide. *U.S. News and World Report* recently reported that 70% of American universities have put at least one course online, and that by 2005 that number may grow to 90% (Shea & Boser, 2001, p. 44). Further, the growth of “distance learning” programs gives students a wider choice of schools without regard to location. The trend towards more online offerings is also being seen internationally.

The primary objective of this study is to determine the primary factors (independent variables) that influence learning outcomes and user satisfaction (dependent variables) in online courses. The study also aims to analyze the strength of correlation among dependent and independent variables, thus allowing us to make recommendations to online instructors about which factors, if focused on, will yield the greatest results in terms of user satisfaction and perceived learning outcomes. Therefore, this research can help educators manage the critical factors by maximizing factors with the greatest positive relationship to learning outcomes and user satisfaction. This will allow online instructors, faculty members, department chairs, and computer service departments in teaching and learning institutions to design, implement, and facilitate online courses in a way that enhances these positive factors. Furthermore, class surveys and instructor survey assessments could be created around the identified factors where applicable, thus creating an assessment tool more closely aligned with the factors that must be positively managed in order to most
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