INVESTIGATING THE ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of Internet has provided an opportunity for offering online learning. The old online learning models are getting replaced by new e-learning models. Many universities worldwide have started offering e-learning or online learning through a variety of online learning methods. In fact, the current e-learning models are revolutionizing the instructional content delivery, learning activities, and social communication. Although online learning environments are becoming popular, there is minimal research on learners’ attitudes toward online learning environments. The purpose of this study is to explore learners’ attitudes toward online learning. Over 300 participants participated. The findings of this study of students’ perceptions and attitudes toward online learning not only will help assess pedagogical approach but also help university officials prepare Internet-based online education delivery.

Keywords: E-learning, E-learning Models, Learners’ Attitudes, Online Learning, Students’ Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Online learning can be defined as all forms of teaching and learning through Information and Communication Technologies (Guir-Rosenblit, 2005). This includes any course content that is delivered through the use of the Internet, audio and videotape, CD-ROM, satellite broadcast, MP3 players, podcasts, interactive television, PDAs, email, and blogs. Online learning is a relatively new phenomenon that is growing in a significant number of universities around that world, enhancing the learning and teaching processes. Enhancements include incorporating text, audio, video, and animation into course lectures; retrieving information from online journals, periodicals, and newspapers; including simulations and multi-media presentations in the classroom; enhancing communication and collaboration between professors and students; and uploading course content and tests to university websites. It should be apparent that the benefits of online learning to both students and professor have endless possibilities as we are only in the beginning stages of online learning adoption. Technology based online learning helps educators and students overcome time and place barriers. Bork and Gunnarsdottir (2001) described that technologies have benefited teaching and learning environments.
Technology-based online learning can benefit students and institutions in terms of course availability, affordability, and convenience (Deal, 2002). Using information technology in online learning can change the commuter student’s experience by offering opportunities to interact with an instructor and other students and be engaged in the environments that are not bound by time and place (Kruger, 2000).

Online learning has slowly become a part of Universities across the globe. A variety of information systems (IS) have since allowed online learning to become much more interactive for the online student utilizing such things as sharing video, audio, discussion board, and live interactions via the internet with students and professors. These types of changes make the online learning atmosphere far closer to on-campus learning (Ferratt & Hall, 2009).

Adults have experienced the largest benefit of online learning, making it possible for them to return to school and further their education while continuing to work (Li, 2007). Zhao et al. (2009) showed in a survey they collected of 300 students that approximately 75% of them were 25 years old or older. Over 50% of U.S. students have gone back to college or started college after starting professional career (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005). Online learning has been extremely popular to this demographic because of it flexibility, lack of commuting time, availability 24 hours a day, and typically flexible, to a point, deadlines (Zhao et al., 2009).

Online learning has also seen its fair share of growing pains. Over the years the main complaints to this style of learning has been problems submitting homework and papers, correspondence with professors primarily through email, learning curve involved for the technology required, and lack of face to face interaction with other students (Perreault et al., 2002). Unfortunately most universities are tackling these types of issues on their own, typically creating a duplication of efforts in solving the same problem as well as universities not pooling their resources and money to enable the best possible solution for everyone (Barker & Holley, 1996). Many IS software platforms have been created to help facilitate online learning as well as providing a widespread solution to general problems encountered by professors and students including Adobe Acrobat Pro, Blackboard, WebCT, and Moodle (Li, 2007). However there is still more room to improve and with the use of more IS systems and software online learning can become an even better environment to learn in, even over on campus learning.

Nowadays, technology in online education has extended its capability to reach students and university learning goals. Interactive and non-interactive learning have increased their role in online education. Berge (1999) mentions that interaction is an important component to learner satisfaction and it helps maintain student persistence in courses. Moore (1989) classified communication in interaction learning between 1) participants and materials, 2) participants and instructors, and 3) among participants. These classifications allow flexibility in the design of interactive learning programs (Northrup, 2002).

University professors and instructors who have taken on the challenge of teaching classes via online learning have undergone many different changes including how to alter their teaching methods to be the most successful for on campus and online learning students. Additionally online students have much different expectations of professors, expecting them to be readily available to answer questions at all times via email – causing high amounts of mental pressure on the instructor (Li, 2007). Along the same lines, universities are also held to a different standard by online students requiring more technical help, more course software to facilitate their courses, and many other new resources an on-campus only institution would not require (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005).

Kruger (2000) suggests using new technology applications in the classroom only if they are more effective and can improve student learning. Students’ technology skills should also be assessed before implementing new technology in the classroom. Online learning instructors need to be able to motivate students despite the lack of eye contact in this environment (Sherry,
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