The Critical Success Factors in an E-Learning Environment

*Bharati Nadakarni

Abstract

This paper studies the overall impact of E- learning on student learning and employability. With the rapid growth of digital technology and rise in virtual learning centres offering online courses and degrees to students, Moreover, dropout students (non-completers) reported to have significantly lower satisfaction with e-learning than students who successfully completed (completers or persistent students) the same e-learning courses. Additionally, results of this study show that the academic locus of control appears to have no impact on students' decision to drop from e-learning courses. Discussion Multiple research is conducted that shows the various factors that contribute to persistence and student success in e-learning courses (Bawa, 2016; Deschacht, & Goeman, 2015; Geri, 2012; Levy, 2007; Perry et al., 2008, Willging, & Johnson, 2009). The study conducted by Mason (2001) suggests that major reason for student withdrawal from the courses is the lack of time rather than the long distance.

Introduction

The study also confirms that e-learning is preferred by the students as it is easy to use & occupation oriented that make them ready with job specific skills. Further, it suggests that transfer of skills & knowledge is also one of the factors of e-learning considered by users. The researchers, however, agree that the student's level of skills with information & communication technology has a significant impact on the participation in e-learning activities (Fredericksen et al, 2000; Hara & Kling, 1999). Thus for educators involved in e-learning business must ensure to incorporate, easy to use and occupation oriented modules for e-learning along with flexibility. This paper basically focuses on identifying different factors that motivate the students adapting e -learning for developing job- related skills. Research work can be of relevance for the educators while developing their course modules and delivery methods.

Objective:

This study explores two main constructs: (1) academic locus of control; and, (2) students' satisfaction with e-learning. Pros:

Before any online program can hope to succeed, it must have students who are able to access the online learning environment. Lack of access, whether it be for economic or logistic reasons, will exclude otherwise eligible students from the course. This is a significant issue in rural and lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Furthermore, speaking from an administrative point of view, if students cannot afford the technology the institution employs, they are lost as customers. As far as Internet accessibility is concerned, it is not universal, and in some areas of the United States and other countries, Internet access poses a significant cost to the user. Some users pay a fixed monthly rate for their Internet connection, while others are charged for the time they spend online. If the participants' time online is limited by the amount of Internet access they can afford, then instruction and participation in the online program will not be equitable for all students in the course.

Computer Literacy

Both students and facilitators must possess a minimum level of computer knowledge in order to function successfully in an online environment. For example, they must be able to use a variety of search engines and be comfortable navigating on the World Wide Web, as well as be familiar with Newsgroups, FTP procedures, and email. If they do not possess these technology tools, they will not succeed in an online program; a student or faculty member who cannot function on the system will drag the entire program down.

Limitations of Technology

User friendly and reliable technology is critical to a successful online program. However, even the most sophisticated technology is not 100% reliable. Unfortunately, it is not a question of if the equipment used in an online program will fail, but when. When everything is running smoothly, technology is intended to be low profile and is used as a tool in the learning process. However, breakdowns can occur at any point along the system. For example, the server which hosts the program could crash and cut all participants off from the class; a participant may access the class through a networked computer which could go down; individual PCs can have numerous problems which could limit students' access; finally, the Internet connection could fail, or the institution hosting the connection could become bogged down with users and either slow down or fail altogether. In situations like these, the technology is neither seamless nor reliable, and it can detract from the learning experience.

Sometimes administration cannot see beyond the bottom line and look at online programs only as ways to increase revenues and are thus not committed to seeing online programs as a means of providing quality education to people who would otherwise not be able to access it. In such a case, an institution that is not aware of the importance of proper facilitator training, essential facilitator characteristics, and limitations of class size would not understand the impact that these elements can have on the success of an online program.

The Online Environment

Levels of Synergy

Online learning has its most promising potential in the high synergy represented by active dialog among the participants, one of the most important sources of learning in a Virtual Classroom. However, in larger classes (20 or more students), the synergy level starts to shift on the learning continuum until it eventually becomes independent study to accommodate the large class. At this point, dialog is limited as well as interaction among participants and the facilitator. The medium is not being used to its greatest potential.

What Should Not Be Taught Online

Even with recently generated excitement and enthusiasm for online programs, it is important to recognize that some subjects should not be taught online because the electronic medium does not permit the best method on instruction. Examples include: hands-on subjects such as public speaking, surgery, dental hygiene, and sports where physical movement and practice contribute to the achievement of the learning objectives. These subjects are probably best taught in a face-to-face traditional learning environment. Hybrid courses may represent a temporary solution to this problem, thus making that portion of the course more accessible to a greater number of people who would otherwise have difficulty getting to campus. However, solutions of that sort still underline the fact that online teaching cannot satisfy all educational needs and goals. Just because it may be technologically possible to simulate a physical learning experience, this does not necessarily mean that it is the best way to teach it.

Employability and eLearning

Student Centered

Within an online discussion, the individual student responds to the course material (lectures and course books, for example) and to comments from other students. Students usually respond to those topics within the broader conversation that most clearly speak to their individual concerns. These situations result in smaller conversations taking place simultaneously within the group. While students should read all of their classmates' contributions, they actively engage in only those parts of the dialog most relevant to their own interests. In this way, students control their own learning experience and tailor the class discussions to meet their own specific needs. Ideally, students make their own individual contributions to the course while at the same time taking away a unique mix of relevant information.

Level Playing Field

In the online environment, learners have a certain measure of anonymity. Discriminating factors such as age, dress, physical appearance, disabilities, race, and gender are largely absent. Instead, the focus of attention is clearly on the content of the discussion and the individual's ability to respond and contribute thoughtfully and intelligently to the material at hand.

Conclusion

It is easy to include distinguished guest experts or students from other institutions in an online class. Furthermore, today's students have access to resources and materials that may be physically located anywhere in the world. An instructor can compile a resource section online with links to scholarly articles, institutions, and other materials relevant to the course topic for students to access for research, extension, From the above study, it can be concluded that factors like easy to use and occupation oriented, transfer of skills & knowledge and flexibility in learning influence students in adopting the e- learning course. These factors facilitate job specific skills among the learners, and the educators must consider the above- mentioned factors while planning and developing their activities and modules for e-learning. The study is exploratory in nature and the data has been collected from the students up to 25 years of age in Delhi/ NCR with 337 valid respondents only, therefore, the findings cannot be extrapolated to a larger population. Further research with more inputs can be explored for better results.

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