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MOTIVATION OF ONLINE LEARNERS: REVIEW OF PRACTICES AND EMERGING TRENDS

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ABSTRACT- ***E-learning holds the promise of educational opportunities for vast audiences of learners across the globe. New technologies and pedagogies will continue to increase the effectiveness of e-learning but the vision of truly global education can only be delivered by education providers that plan and invest to build learner motivation and expectation into the e-learning systems. It is needed to find ways to tap the internet's potential as a medium of exchange and collaboration between knowledge centers in a way that enriches the learner. The motivation to undertake this study lay primarily in the need, at organizational level, to gain some insights into where e-learning might be going in the immediate future based not on the expectations of the academic provider but rather on those of the e-learners themselves. The intention was to use the outcomes of the study to build a framework that would inform the ongoing development of the e-learning strategy within an organization and, by implication, also support the re-evaluation of the related IT strategy for providing better learning environment to meet the expectation of future online learners.***

INTRODUCTION:

Online teaching and learning was defined within the study as a form of flexible teaching and learning facilitated by the use of the Web-based technologies and resources. It involves programs of studies conducted fully online or hybrid program based on a mix of online and face-to-face strategies. It may take a relatively simple form such as providing course materials via the web or email communication between the facilitator and the learner or it may involve the use of complex and globally interactive activities amongst learners and between learners and facilitators. While the internet has brought changes in the education system, the e-learning technologies offer people the formal and informal learning delivery at anytime, anywhere, on any topic; fully inter-cultural, with learners - tutors drawn from all over the world. It may promise a global network of learning, expansion of resource base for learners, relevant learning effectiveness, more learner centered approaches, just-in-time learning, higher degrees of inter-activity and a greater range of teacher-learner, learner-learner interactions. These promises will not be realistic and no t lead to an effective learning if the factors such as requirement of the technology skills of the learners, the possibility of social isolation, and a reliance on learner initiative in an environment with less supervision are not addressed by the designers of e-learning systems. Just providing a pool of resources or email addresses of tutors to a learner is not enough and it is necessary to provide a software architecture facilitating the access to learning resources, teachers and peers while taking care of specific learners' needs, goals, preferences, i.e. to be adaptive to the learner, to the context and to the social factors. It has to ensure effective motivation mechanisms to stimulate the participation through seamless and natural interfaces for the users. Without careful management of the learning processes, the application of best principles and practices in e- learning design strategies, the provision of extensive learner support services, and a careful focus on a range of socio educational issues, the learner motivation of virtual learning environment may not be achieved.

MOTIVATING E-LEARNERS

One of the most crucial issues facing developers of online course is to maintain and develop the motivation of students since the factors that influence motivation are embedded in most aspects of online learning. Motivation in general is defined as "the magnitude and direction of behaviour and the choices of people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and to the degree of effort the y will exert in that respect" (Keller, 1983). Motivation itself can be difficult to learn. It can be extrinsic, imposed through the need to acquire new knowledge or skills, or it may be intrinsic, more of an internal force which encourages individuals to achieve personal objectives. While there is enthusiasm in many quarters about the integration of the internet into education, there appears to be a lack of substantive thinking about the goals, pedagogical dimensions, and outcomes of using the web in education. Some has selected cognitive tools which refer to technologies that enhance our cognitive powers during thinking, problem- solving, and learning (Jonassen & Reeves, 1996) to design elearning systems. Using the internet as a cognitive tool, learners tackle difficult problems and complex tasks, organize unique knowledge representations, and share what they have learned with others for analysis, critique, and revision.

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Although other software can be used as cognitive tools for learning (e.g., databases, spreadsheets, and visualization tools), web browsers and authoring tools can be especially powerful intellectual partners in learning (Salomon, Perkins, & Globerson, 1991). Three major challenges in using the WWW as a cognitive tool in education can be found. First, the majority of the instructional web sites currently available consist of arrays of links to other information sources or are simply web-based copies of print documents. Both pages of links and print documents fail to take advantage of the unique affordability of the WWW as a learning environment. These existing web formats represent "asynchronous communication" that are primarily passive rather than interactive. Without employing appropriate theories and instructional strategies with the unique features of internet, the expectations of higher learning outcomes will not be reached (Windschitl, 1998). It is unfortunate that most of the elearning systems do not engage students in active learning sufficiently.

A basic principle of contemporary cognitive learning theory is that the greater the investment of mental effort during acquisition, the more transferable and usable any knowledge gained will be (Salomon, 1984). If web resources do not demand or encourage strong mental efforts and cognitive investments from learners, learning effects will be very limited.The challenge of raising and sustaining learners' intrinsic motivation is the second main problem encountered in Web Based Instructions (WBI) (Reeves & Reeves, 1997). At the beginning of online learning, it was not unusual for non-completion rates for online courses, but nowadays figure should be lowered (Moore and Kearsley, 1996). Motivation is a particularly important learner characteristic because of its reciprocal effects on performance in hyperspace (Reeves & Reeves, 1997). The third problem pertains to the challenge of how to develop and implement web-based instructional innovations. It continues to be an abyss between research and development projects and actual classroom practice. The reasons for this frustrating gap including: "a dearth of adequate evaluation research designs, a paucity of appropriate measures of cognitive activity, and a plethora of financial and practical problems (van den Akker, 1999).

E-learning can be challenging socially and technically for learners. Outside of the traditional classroom setting, it's easy to procrastinate when one runs into a glitch or a problem. Quietly, alienation and frustration set in, time and patience dissolve, and the best out of intent ion begin to unravel. To prevent learners demotivation, online learning system designers should understand the factors which motivates on line learners and apply and use that knowledge in designing and developing e-learning systems. Understanding learner requirements and relevancy of the learning material which relate new skills and knowledge to learners' present needs should known to design E learning systems. Four motivational that influence learning in interactive learning environments have been identified as interest in or attention to the information and the technology; perceived relevance of the information; self-confidence in the ability to access and use the information; resulting satisfaction from successful access to and usefulness of the information (Grabowski and Curtis, 1991). One important need is helping online learners feel the flow experience —the state that people enjoy when they are deeply engaged in their tasks. Flow experiences are reported when a person describes his or her work experience as optimal or intrinsically rewarding (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985).

Keller (1991) delineated the motivational elements of instructions as encompassing four necessary components: engaging and maintaining learner interests, relating course content to student interests, enhancing student confidence in understanding course content, and satisfying students' inquisitiveness related to information thus encouraging students' active involvement in learning. These elements were summarized as (A) attention, (R) relevance, (C) confidence and (S) satisfaction in order to create the "ARCS" model of motivation. A modified version of the ARCS model (Keller, 1999) considers the nature of motivation in the online classroom. In his research, he has found that attention problems occur when learners work independently. In the computer based environment learners may not attend to important information because they do not find independent work interesting. Content in the online setting must be presented in ways that help or motivate students to attend to the information. The level of relevance any one learner attaches to instruction will differ as a result of their individual background and personal interests. Application is needed to promote learning by utilizing students' prior knowledge and making sure that personal connections to the course content are made. Not all learners have the same opportunity to develop confidence with online learning. When learners have experience and know that what they are expected to learn the y will begin to develop self-assurance. The online tutor can facilitate this process by providing manageable structures and reasonable pacing expectations. Motivating learners to continue learning can create satisfaction when the learning experience is enjoyable and fulfilling.

SETTING LEARNER EXPECTATION

Motivation affects retention, and is therefore critical to learning success. While there are a host of challenges at the macro level, the needs of the learner should be thoroughly understood. As with any programme of formal learning, e-learning policies, procedures and learner support need to be well-attuned to the needs of learners. The supports that can be realistically offered to e-learners should be first identified and how it can be accessed should be planned. The learners' own motivations and attitudes should also be analyzed since the learners are responsible for organizing their own learning, time and space. Therefore the need for self-motivation and learning independence is greater and prospective e-learners need to be well advised on this, and to have "Help Desk" assistance on technical matters as part of their educational service. Learners returning to study after a time away may also require help on how to structure their learning and access information.

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Further, people who are uncomfortable with technology will need to be assisted with guides, support and information about where they can get additional technical help. All of these issues highlight the importance of good e-learning design that results in meaningful interaction and encourages depth of thought. Without these supports, there is a risk that e- learners will not be retained or that their learning experience will be an inferior one. To gain insight into the e-learners expectations and motivations, following questions can be used:

1. *What are the characteristics of the ideal online learner?*
2. *What is the value of the virtual programme to the learner?*
3. *What do the learner hope to achieve from the programme?*
4. *What steps are taken when your audience of learners doesn't share ideal online learner characteristics?*
5. *How much interaction exists in a virtual environment compared to a face-to-face training session?*
6. *What are the most effective ways to design instruction for virtual environments?*
7. *How does virtual learning motivate learners who are not as self-directed or independent?*
8. *How can designers create collaborative learning environments on-line?*
9. *How does virtual learning operate?*
10. *How does one develop effective instruction in a virtual environment?*

Telling learners what is expected of them before they begin a course can be a powerful motivator. Later, those expectations will help learners gauge their own success as they move through the course. The course description may be used to provide specific information about course objectives, learning tasks, number of exercises and tests, and completion sequence of the course content. The goal should be to provide as much information as possible. Making the learning fun and interesting is important to motivate learners. In general, pedagogical model of online learning should emphasize the presence of the instructor, provide a clear set of learning activities, relate learning to students' personal experiences, use real world applications and foster student collaboration.

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

The outcome of the study concludes the structure of a framework for those expectations of the future e-learners against which emerging technologies could be mapped in order to identify how far they will meet those expectations. Such a framework could take the form of a diagnostic tool derived from the final placements of the various e-learning user expectations. It could then be used to position an emerging technology within a range of acceptability to e-learning users. From these findings, the priority of implementation and best support approaches can be identified in order to meet the future elearners expectations and motivations. The future expectations of elearners are categorized into three themes: the nature, style and format of the service or support provision, the types of learning technologies and the ways in which they were being used, the overall nature of the e-learning experience.

SERVICE/SUPPORT EXPECTATIONS

1. *e-learning tutors/facilitators will exhibit competence in supporting teaching and learning online*
2. *access to technical support services on an 'anytime/anywhere' basis through a number of different channels: i.e. auto-help, online, telephone, face-to-face.*
3. *e-learning programmes will be fully tried and tested prior to delivery, both from the technology perspective as well as from perspective of a coherent learning experience*
4. *support will be provided from the learning perspective on an 'anytime, anywhere' basis via a number of different channels i.e. auto-help, online, telephone, face-to-face.*
5. *explicit course structures with variations on delivery modes will enable learners, if they wish, to select learning pathways which support preferred individual styles, contexts and approaches.*
6. *service and support will be seamless across an integrated or blended delivery platform.*
7. *e-learning technical and learning service and support providers will be familiar with both the course specifications as well as the external context within which the users are learning.*

E-LEARNING EXPERIENCES EXPECTATIONS

1.Technology will be used appropriately to add value to the rather than for the sake of the technology itself.
2.Engaging and energizing learning experiences drawing on the strengths of a variety of learning approaches and technologies
3. Inclusion of an active learning orientation and authentic problem solving approaches
4. The e-content will be selected to ensure relevance to the learners' context and needs
5. Self-pacing will be a key element of the e-learning experience.
6. Will be characterized by a variety of levels of interactivity amongst all members of the learning community, according to purpose and individual needs.
7. An intuitive engagement with the learning journey, including supporting materials and supporting technology.
8.Use of virtual reality (i.e. simulations, ames) to ensure immediacy and engagement with the e-learning experience.

Technology/Delivery Expectations

1 The e-learning technologies and their delivery mechanisms will be both robust and reliable.
2. Equality of access whether from a geographical, technical or user special needs perspective.

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3. Progressive innovation in both the choice and use of technologies.
4. Tried and tested competent technological support of e-learning areas.
5. Capable of robust integration of different platforms identified for their effectiveness in delivering a required range of learning experiences.
6 Security/confidentiality guarantee of e-learning technologies.
7. Technology transparency of e-learning delivery.
8. Delivery will be at minimal cost both in initial outlay and in e-learning usage.
9. learning activities that are automatically time and location aware or sensitive.

The technical skills needed to use the system are simple to learn compared to those needed to make effective educational use of the resources provided. Self-regulated learning is the key skill that students need to actively control the learning environment. They have ability to chose cognitive strategies that have higher payouts and seek to understand ides and material rather than just memorize and recall. If learners perceive that the online learning material is unimportant or does not have any relationship with the rest of the course, then their motivation to participate in the learning process will be low. Web based material can not be simply bolted on to an another, but must be tightly integrated to be successful. Many learners seem to take a very pragmatic approach to their learning and focus almost exclusively on tasks that they know are assessed. This is a natural reaction when faced be strategized appropriately. In analyzing online learning, designers need to learn and understand more about how learner interacts with the media and how the web affects the learner expectations and learning outcomes. The learner expectations and desired learning outcomes should be the ultimate focus of developing successful online learning systems. It has proved that cooperative and collaborative learning have positive effect on both achievement and motivation. In general compared to a control group, cooperative group learning increases task value, self-efficacy and encourages the adoption of learning goals and deep processing strategies. have to use assessment to guide the efforts of students, it should be possible to develop their intrinsic motivation at the same time using techniques such as the ARCS model of instructional design or collaborative learning.

CONCLUSION

Effective online courses rely not only on the information, learning activities, and assessments, but also on how these materials are engaged by the student. Designing the online course contents by adhering to those motivational theories should be one of the challenges met by the designers. It is a challenge to the designers to increase and sustain learners' intrinsic motivation and keep learners from dropping out from online courses. The primary characteristics which can encourage learners to participate in online learning must.

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