E-LEARNING READINESS OF ADULT LEARNERS IN ADVANCED STUDIES

by:
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The inception of e-learning in advance higher education is supported by a policy background and technological developments especially in the new Philippine Commission on Higher Education Memorandum to be released in the first quarter of 2019, yet little is known of graduate student experience and use in the advance studies in the Philippines. Nowadays, graduate students are considered as digital natives because most of them are millennials and literally as adult learners.

There have been attempts to integrate e-learning used in formal education into non-formal or informal education for adult learners. However, use of instructional media in adult education has been skewed to development and implementation. As the most advanced media in the market has been adapted to the field without appropriate needs analysis, an adequate design and evaluation were not properly carried out. Consequently, it often not only excluded merits of traditional methods, but also confused learners by not being able to offer enough explanation and interpretation about subjects (Lee, 2010).

In order to respond to limitations of e-learning as well as changes in educational paradigm including advancement in smart devices and technologies, smart learning emerged (Noh, 2011). As an alternative to e-learning, smart learning is intelligent and personalized learning to meet learners' diverse needs and learning styles. It can also

improve communication, thinking and problem-solving skills by integrating a new type of e-learning technologies with smart devices.

The continuum model of lifelong learning illustrates how people use different modes of learning as they grow. It is built around objective, subjective and relational modes of learning (Smith, 1995). The objective mode is the dynamic process of the learner accumulating raw data, and the subjective mode is where the learner can internalize, personalize or own the meanings and experiences encountered in the objective mode. In this mode, it is no longer a matter of knowing, but rather a matter of understanding and expressing. In the relational mode, the learner integrates and organizes information and experience into an interrelated, holistic pattern. In this mode, the learner relates socially to a community as both a receiving and contributing member. These modes are innate, active processes used continuously and simultaneously by learners. In the continuum model of lifelong learning, adult learners predominantly use the relational mode (Smith, 1995). Adults tend to focus more on problem-centered tasks that correspond to the relational mode. They relate to people and issues. It is the work of the adults to not only come to a personal commitment to some integrated and balanced understanding of principles and relationships in life, but also come to an ever-widening discovery of their involvement within the large community of learners and the whole context of lifelong learning. In this sense, adult learners are more self-directed, motivated, goal-driven, cooperative digital natives.

In view of this, a review of study revealed that twenty-four HEIs used a virtual learning environment (VLE) and all respondents used e-learning to enable access to course materials and web-based learning resources wherein three main themes were identified from student interviews, 'Pedagogic use'; 'Factors inhibiting use' and 'Facilitating factors to engagement'. Student's main engagement with e-learning was at an instructivist level and as a support to existing face-to-face modes of delivery. Student use of Web 2.0 was limited, although a number were using social software at home. Limited computer access,

computing skills, technical issues and poor peer commitment affected use. Motivation and relevance to the course and practice, in addition to an appreciation of the potential for student-centered and flexible learning, facilitated use. Thus, there is scope to broaden the use of e-learning that would engage graduate students in the social construction of knowledge. Additionally, experiences of e-learning use could be improved if factors adversely affecting engagement were addressed.

Today, e-learning is a common delivery media for education and training within many organizations. Yet, while both the supply and demand for e-learning opportunities has risen in recent years, many professionals are beginning to question whether e-learners are prepared to be successful in an online learning environment (e.g., Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 2003; Watkins & Corry, 2005). After all, an adult learner's demonstrated success in a conventional education and training classroom may not be an adequate predictor of success in an e-learning classroom. One way of gauging a potential online learner's readiness is through self-assessment.

In other countries, recent studies have reported that the dropout rate of online students is higher compared to that of campus students (Dray, Lowenthal, Miszkiewicz, Ruiz-Primo, & Marczynski, 2011). As the dropout rate remains high, it becomes a critical issue for online learning and a major concern for universities that offer online courses. Although there have been studies focused on development of the student online readiness assessment tools, they seem to have ignored an important detail about the psychometric quality of these instruments. Then, the objective of this these studies is to identify via a systematic review the different tools that have been developed to assess online learning readiness and that have been psychometrically validated.

As mentioned, this systematic review has identified the lack of standardization among these published and unpublished tools as a factor that could discourage the students from using them due to their heterogeneity. A valid and reliable student online readiness tool

is very essential in order to identify graduate students who are ready to take online courses, and to reduce withdrawal rate but not available in the locale of this study.

Graduate students experienced a range of e-learning applications, but mainly as a support to existing face-to-face delivery. The pattern of experience and use described ads to the existing evidence that suggests e-learning is used as an adjunct to existing modes of delivery and learning experiences (Reime et al. 2008).

Pedagogically, graduate student experience of learning with technology tended to be limited to the more instructional levels described in the E-learning ladder. Where more constructivist approaches were used, students found elements of group working problematic. Students described poor motivation and commitment to the group learning experience in the online environment. Whilst achieving equal participation and effort can be challenging within all group work, whatever the setting, the online environment highlights such issues and creates tensions amongst the group that can detract from learning (Moule 2006). Such issues have led to the use of compulsory online attendance, an approach advocated by some e-learning models, such as that of Salmon (2000).

The majority of HEIs surveyed and all of the sites visited, used VLEs as a support to traditional learning opportunities and experiences. The students and staff described limited use of the VLE as a teaching and learning aid, a finding consistent with previous research (Levy 2005, Marsh et al. 2008). The VLE was a document repository for course information and learning materials, such as power points. This limited use of the VLE affected the parameters of student experience and use. Students felt the range of pedagogical options available within the online environment had been generally under exploited. They found the VLE often provided access to key information, but its use to support their learning was under-developed. This implies a general lack of development and progress in levels of engagement and use of VLEs across HEIs, with engagement remaining at the limited levels reported across a range of previous research (Crook &

Barrowcliff 2001, Britain & Liber 2004, Levy 2005). Thus, the purpose of this present study is to provide inputs on how adult learners as digital learners become ready on e-learning.

This study aimed to answer the following research objectives: (1) Profile of the Respondents on Learners' Possession, Use and Perspectives on Smart Devices; (2) Readiness on e-learning; (3) differences in the readiness on e-learning when the profile of the respondents are grouped accordingly.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception and needs for smart learning and its competencies. Results show that high percentage of adult learners already has smartphones and uses e-mails. Nevertheless, learners are not only uneasy with communicating with other users by using SNS, but also unskilled technically. This means that there is a need for teaching skills and transforming the culture. Moreover, regarding the smart learning competencies required for smart learning, learners all agreed with the needs for education. Specifically, abilities in technology, resources use, and adapting various resources were ranked high in the list. The implication of these results can be discussed as follows. First, high scores of possession and use of smart media reflect widespread of technological advancement among adult learners. Considering the Asian influence highest smartphone penetration rate of 67.6 percent in the world (Kim, 2013), possession rate of 70.4 in the analysis is even higher than the penetration rate. Moreover, even considering the high proportion of older participants in the Part I of the survey, many learners are equipped for smart learning in terms of its device. Second, low scores of perspectives on smart learning indicate that users are not yet aware of differentiated functions and benefits of devices. In particular, the lowest scores of self-efficacy and continuance intention imply that learners did not have many chances to experience social network services and interact with each other by using social media. Third, high scores of both possession and importance of smart learning competencies in second part of the

survey indicate that participants not only acknowledge, but also have developed these competencies.

However, even though they possess these competencies, they expressed needs for education. Contribution of this study is that it measured the current status of adult learners' perception on smart learning environment. Also, it analyzed the educational needs for smart learning and competencies required for smart learning. Finally, it provided areas of what to teach when preparing for smart learning. For successful smart learning, students need to learn about devices. Moreover, learners should develop smart learning competencies. Learners should acknowledge and understand that smart learning is not learning simply adopting smart phones in the classroom, but learning becoming more ubiquitous, effective, and humanistic with adequate and adaptive use of devices so that they can open, share, and collaborate with each other.

Seldom to found that graduate students are highly engaging in e-learning as part of their advance higher educational experience, the scope of use remains restricted to a mainly instructivist level on the e-learning ladder. This lack of development reflects continuing issues with access, IT skills and limited exploitation of e-learning for constructivist use. The results also suggest graduate students are engaging more widely with social networking sites and are concerned that these personal spaces are protected for private use.

These findings have implications for education, practice and research. Therefore advance higher education are urged to work with their respective faculty members to consider some of the technological issues still arising as part of the student experience of computer use, such as the need for student smartcards, usernames and passwords and to review the continuing skill and confidence issues described. Provision of training and information to support e-learning and computer use should remain on the program outcomes corresponding to the goals and objectives of the program

Given the rapidly changing technological environment it is recommended that further research is completed in the next few years that surveys the experiences and use of e-learning by graduate students in advance studies and clinical work environments. Given the financial investment and policy directions it is important to evaluate the impact and outcomes of the policies, which appear to have had minimal effect on the graduate student experience and use of e-learning. For the light of the findings of this study, the researcher had summarized the following key areas of research endeavor. For the digitalized curricular instructions that there is a need for the local to digitalize the curricular instructions as it will become evident in their instructional materials such as syllabi, instructional module and take homework assignments.

Also, in the outcomes based education that there is also a need to explicate the understanding that the e-learning concepts in integrating with the how the graduate students learn as adult learners and becoming as digital native.

Lastly for the pedagogical implications that for the faculty members to have an avenue for them to improve their pedagogical strategies in integrating e-learning as blended approach of their teaching instructions. A digital culture of instructions may also be established thru another study using the framework of focused ethnography.

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