

IMPORTANT STUDENTS' COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN A UNIVERSITY E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Online teaching is becoming a common practice these days in providing higher education. Distance online education is defined as “a general term used to cover the broad range of teaching and learning events in which the student is separated (at a distance) from the instructor, or other fellow learners” [3]. The introduction of e-learning has become the technological imperative since it improves both teaching and learning and develops habits and routines referring to lifelong learning [5].

In the literature, there is no precise or widely accepted definition for the term “competency”. Those scientists who have used the concept of competency (or its plural competencies) have simply defined it in the manner that best suits the focus of their work [2].

However, competencies are groups of related knowledge, skills, and abilities that correlate with effective performance in the task or role. Critically, competencies are measurable and can be developed and improved [6].

Effective students' performance in university e-learning environments has been shown to require proficiency in some domains. A literature overview [1-6] gives us an opportunity to identify the main competencies which are considered to be crucial for students' effective performance in an e-learning environment. They are: student autonomy and self-direction; time management; reflection; computing and internet skills; interaction skills; identity and social presence.

Effective e-learners are autonomous and take decisions by themselves about when and where learning should take place, identify learning goals and results and determine the ways to achieve them [4]. Associated with student autonomy is self-direction. This term is defined as the “skill of learning how to learn” [1, p. 46]. It is

considered to be a very important skill as university students are afforded greater opportunities to control their own learning process and perform well in online courses.

Another important skill is time management. Effective e-learners are characterized by their ability to set goals, plan their programs, find a balance between work, family, and study, and, at the same time, avoid overload and burnout due to regular breaks into schedules.

In an e-learning environment, students have to be able to reflect and find connections between what they already know and what they have learned, they have to understand the importance of taking time to reflect upon the material they are learning.

One of the most important factors determining effectiveness in e-learning environments is computing skills. The level of development of students' computing skills greatly influences their activity, motivation, and effectiveness in online courses. As well it should be mentioned about the skills in using the Internet and web-based applications. They involve using browsers and search engines, understanding URL configurations, navigating through hyperlinks, locating websites, downloading and installing plug-ins to view multimedia files, evaluating web content, using tools that enable online communication, and engaging in e-learning activities.

Interaction is a crucial element of e-learning environments. Interaction can be defined as communication or dialogue that takes place between learners and instructors, learners and other learners, and users and the technology [1].

According to Mayes the formation of identity is believed to be as critical in e-learning environments as the construction of knowledge [4]. It's important for students to acquire a sense of identity in order to build supporting and trusting relationships with other students in e-class or e-environment. Closely related to identity is social presence. Social presence has been identified as having positive effects on the degree of interaction and collaboration online [2; 4].

Furthermore, factors that determine students' effective performance in a university e-learning environment are interrelated and do not function independently.

References

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