

Social-Cognitive Perspective in the Educational Programs of Students in Non-State Higher Education

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Article Information

Received: Aug 15, 2023

Accepted: Sep 16, 2023

Published: Oct 19, 2023

With increasing interest in incorporating blended learning into higher education curricula, many private higher education institutions are seeking to understand how educational technologies can be effectively used in blended learning to increase the learning engagement of undergraduate students.

This study examined the nature and extent of private higher education students' learning engagement in blended learning programs at a private higher education provider. Through the lens of Bandura's (2000:121, 2009:180) Social Cognitive Theory, the study examined private higher education students' involvement in blended learning during post-secondary education and how this affected teaching and learning. A descriptive quantitative research design was adopted along with a positivist research paradigm. Using a cross-sectional survey, descriptive data were obtained from a sample population of 567 respondents who answered the study's research questions. Research has shown that student-centered programs are related to students' self-efficacy, which then directly affects their blended learning programs and results expectations, goals, and social -affects structural barriers. In addition, socio-structural facilitators influenced outcome expectations and student engagement. The results of the study created a new framework, namely the social cognitive participation of students in blended learning.

The widespread use of the Internet and the advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has led to the development of new teaching and learning approaches, both in formal and informal settings. These teaching and learning approaches include: problem-based learning, personal learning networks, student-created content, collaborative learning, competency-based education, active learning, integrated subjects, competency-based learning, social learning, gamification, Electronic Learning (e-learning), Mobile Learning (m-learning) and Blended Learning (BL) when referring to ICT in teaching and learning the word that is often used is "integration" (Eady & Lockyer, 2013). The integration of technology means that technology becomes an integral part of the teaching and learning experience and an imperative part for lecturers from the onset of preparing for the learning experiences through to teaching and learning with students. Eady and Lockyer (2013) further postulate that the role technology plays in education provides lecturers the opportunity to design meaningful learning experiences. Not only is meaningful learning experience achieved, but current literature also highlights many benefits in using technology to provide rich global resources and a collaborative environment for dissemination of learning materials; interactive online discussions; flexible, convenient and

active learning, and research information. Technology can also support students' autonomy and individualized learning approaches ensuring that students achieve greater learning outcomes through increased engagement and collaboration. Rajkoomar and Raju (2016:3) state that technology facilitates easier communication and interaction motivation and metacognition enhanced program delivery with improvement in cognitive and reflective skills; improved student retention and the identification of "at risk" students; improved and effective pedagogy; increased access and cost-effectiveness.

The technological environment is only one part of a teaching and learning environment. Läänemets and Rostovtseva, (2015:34) cite the Manninen, Burman, Koivunen, Kuittinen, Luukannel, Passi and Särkkä (2007:36–41) study in which they specify five learning environments for use in education. The five are (1) physical, (2) social, (3) technological, (4) local, and (5) didactic environments.

Information transfer is no longer the sole purview of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Umunadi and Ololube (2014:220) indicate that technology has created change in all aspects of society, which in turn has changed the expectations of what students must learn in order to perform in the new global economy. According to UNESCO, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015, by stakeholders from 160 countries, in which the international community recognized that education was essential for the success of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG4, known as Education 2030, aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Quality education necessitates that students develop their higher-order skills and acquire relevant knowledge, skills and. Technology is the fundamental driver of that vision (UNESCO, 2016) to create "equitable, dynamic, accountable and sustainable learner-centered digital learning ecosystems that are relevant for the 21st century" in agreement with Adekola, Dale and Gardiner (2017:1) assert that the rapid advances in technology are revolutionizing the way in which teaching and learning are conceptualized, designed, and implemented within Higher Education (HE).

Bandura has only recently added socio-structural factors to his theory (Conner, 2010). Conner explains that the socio-structural factors refer to the impediments or opportunities associated with living conditions, health systems, political, economic or environmental systems. These factors are assumed to inform goal setting and be influenced by self-efficacy. Bandura argues that those with a strong sense of self efficacy appraise obstacles and barriers as well as the self-management facilitators available to them differently to those with a depleted sense of self-efficacy.

Understanding engagement has become particularly important in the HE sector (Bowyer & Chambers, 2017:19). As PHEIs start embracing the use of BL as part of the curricula in various programs, lecturers and program developers and instructional designers need to know and understand how they can use LMS effectively in BL to enhance the students' learning engagement. It is important that when HEIs incorporate BL within their programs that they should not just simply add technology onto an existing F2F program, but they should rather rethink the program design with the goal to optimise SE (Owston & York, 2018:23). Granito and Chernobilsky (2012:5) state that the integration of technology within a program must have a purpose in order for it to be beneficial for producing positive results. Students have access to a wide range of engaging and interactive learning tools through the LMS which has been known to foster satisfaction, have a significant effect on student motivation and active SE (Hiralal, 2012:324; TovenLindsey, Rhoads & Lozano, 2015:2; Zirkin & Sumler, 1995). Students also need multiple cognitive opportunities to connect theory and practice by engaging in attention, enactment, reflection, critique, adaptation, and articulation (Lock & Remond, 2015).

However, even with the implementation of BL within programs and its interactive learning tools,

there is no guarantee to ensure that students are actively engaged in learning. Some studies even indicate that the use of technology in certain areas is not beneficial to students (Granito & Chernobilsky, 2012:5). Lecturers must therefore continue to pursue the understanding and acquire insight in strategies that support SE through BL. The negative consequences of not engaging students in learning are well referenced in literature (Chipchase, Davidson, Blackstock, Bye, Colthier, Krupp, Dickson, Turner & Williams, 2017:32; Taylor & Parsons, 2011:5).

Disengagement, according to Chipchase et al. (2017:32), whether ongoing or intermittent, obvious or subtle, may result in: (1) students dropping out from a program, (2) the accumulation of debt, or (3) achieving lower grades with poorer employment prospects. Disengagement may take various forms or degrees such as disengagement with a class, activities, tasks, assignments, module, or across an entire program of study (Bryson & Hand, 2007).

The effects of a student's impairments (Ambati, 2018:132) or disabilities (Khazanchi & Khazanchi, 2018:190) may have an influence on their participation in educational activities as it involves excessive effort, fatigue, pain, and tiredness or a feeling of incompetence which may lead to disengagement or withdrawal. The type of impairment and disability affects how much students are engaged in activities. For HEIs this may result in loss of income and, if the problem is sufficiently large, have reputational impacts, and/or the students' representative council evoking protests against the HEI. Harris (2008:57) posits that some educationists consider engaging disengaged students to be one of the biggest challenges facing lecturers, as between 25.0% (Willms, 2003:53) and over 66.0% (Cothran & Ennis, 2000) of students are considered to be disengaged. According to Rahayu and Malang (2018:16) if lecturers expect students to be engaged and to participate in the teaching and learning process actively, the lecturers need to modify their approach to enhance the students' learning engagement in BL activities so that the students interact deeply with activities given and therefore meaningful learning can be attained.

When designing a BL model or incorporating technology into educational program for engaging or re-engaging students, it is essential to consider how the program aligns with the HEI's mission and meets the needs of the students (America's Promise Alliance, 2016:10). While BL shows promise as an educational strategy to engage students, research is needed to better understand its efficacy in adequately preparing students for their studies as well as graduates for employment.

Since the implementation of BL at a PHE provider in 2015, it is still not clear whether BL has improved the learning engagement of students attending BL program. It is important to understand the views of the students in making BL effective. Also, the levels of social engagement, fear of, and anticipated outcomes of blended programs on the part of students are currently unestablished. Therefore, this study sought to investigate student learning engagement in BL from the SCT perspective at the PHE provider.

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