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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TOOLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the perceived reasons for increased student engagement in online learning platforms, highlighting both their advantages and drawbacks. Findings indicate that 61.5% of participants attribute higher engagement to interactive activities, while 76.9% value personalized learning paths. However, concerns arise regarding absenteeism and decreased motivation, with 23.1% of students indicating they can disengage during lessons. The results illustrate the necessity for a balanced approach to online education that enhances interactivity and accountability, ensuring that engagement translates into meaningful learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: online learning, student engagement, interactive activities, personalized learning, academic outcomes

INTRODUCTION

The sociology of student engagement has thus become an important aspect of study since the change toward web-based learning systems has radically altered the learning environment. The purpose of this research is to identify the perceived motives for heightened participation from learners who use online platforms and analyze the opportunities and challenges that the use of these platforms offers over traditional classrooms. The study also explores how particular kinds of interactive activities used with students, personalized pathways, and difficulties of attention and engagement in an online environment are reflected in students' feedback. From this, the study aims to shed light on the engagement-academic performance nexus and inform educational practice about improving online learning.

Rafiq et al. in their research study they comprise the students enrolled at private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. A sample of 350 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique, which involved the selection of four universities through simple random sampling, followed by proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure a representative distribution based on enrollment size. This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of student perceptions and experiences regarding the integration of digital tools and online learning platforms in higher education. [3, p. 361].

The results of the study state that the students and teachers have a relatively positive attitude toward the use of digital tools – the summed mean scores [range 1.00–5.00] for the statements: 'For me, interactive e-learning activities helped to deepen my knowledge and understanding of complex course material' and 'The timely feedback from digital learning platforms has helped me to work with learning gaps' show this. Such outcomes indicate that existing digital technologies enhance learning processes and enhance academic outcomes. However, the study

also revealed several barriers to the effective application of the tools mentioning challenges such as technical; limitations in resource availability; insufficient training; and data privacy and security. The solutions for these concerns are important to improve the flow of digital literacy and achieve effective implementation of digital technologies in contexts of learning [3, p.366].

Alyoussef in his study examined the students enrolled in bachelor's, master's, and PhD programs at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. A total of 275 questionnaires were distributed, and 260 valid responses were received, representing a 94.5% response rate [2, p.6]. Findings from this study show that both information quality and system quality influence PEOU and perceived usefulness as hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 hold. In particular, these four types of information quality increase students' confidence in the e-learning system and are important to realise students' learning purposes. These findings show that improvement in students' perceived usefulness and ease of use is raised by their perception of the e-learning system as capable of delivering useful and up-to-date information. In the same study, researchers also discovered that if the system is designed properly and closely suits the needs of the utility of the tool prompts students to see the utility of the tool as a valuable resource for study. In sum, the implications of the results presented in this study call for attention to the quality of informative flows and system performance that would contribute to a positive e-learning experience and improve students' satisfaction [2, pp.8-10].

Additionally, Alenezi focuses on how online learning is transforming educational access, enabling students of diverse ages and socioeconomic backgrounds to participate in continuous learning. It highlights the critical role of educators in leveraging technology to facilitate flexible learning experiences that cater to students' individual preferences and cognitive strategies [1, p. 8]. Some of the important discoveries that we derived from the study include the following; although e-learning opens up a range of possibilities to improve the dissemination of education, students still harbor a lot of doubt concerning online learning. While e-learning is acknowledged to afford access to resources and increase the student's overall level of digital literacy, the existing students also admit they have certain doubts concerning the efficacy and integration of the current e-learning strategies. The study also observes that students in developed countries who are greatly exposed to technology prefer a digital learning environment, saying that will pay more attention to it than traditional teaching. However, barriers like indifference and uncertainty remain so institutions must deal with them to unlock the full benefits of e-learning for student's diverse learning needs.

Hence, this paper addresses the engagement that applies to students in a scenario of use of online learning platforms and as discovered there are strengths and weaknesses of engaging in learning through an online platform. This paper has shown that though students and educators have a positive disposition toward e-learning technologies, challenges including technical breakdowns, resource constraints, and inadequate training exist. This study highlights information quality and system usability as critical predictors of students' perceived heuristic use of e-learning systems hence promoting greater usage and performance. Based on the institutions' experiences while implementing these platforms in the curriculum, responding to the concerns and doubts that arise from students will be vital in properly harnessing the full potential of e-learning to respond to the dynamic needs of the learners as the world shifts more towards the digital realm.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The online survey, using Google Forms, was designed to gather the responses from the participants to examine the research hypothesis that the students using online learning platforms demonstrate higher engagement levels compared to those in traditional classroom settings, leading to improved academic performance. The questionnaire consisted of 13 personal multiple-choice questions to analyse the responses in depth.

Participants' demographic

A total of 13 participants took part in this research study. All of them were current students from the English Practical Course Department at Fergana State University. A gender proportion of the participants was 92.3% and 7.7% for females and males respectively, and their average range was 21 years old. Additionally, according to their responses, the majority of them have a teaching experience, particularly 69.2%.

Data collection and analysis

This paper adopted Google Forms for the online survey to capture the participants' responses in the data collection exercise. The survey was administered and collected from the students of the English Practical Course Department of Fergana State University to make the sample relevant to the research hypothesis.

Descriptive analysis was used after data collection to examine the results in detail considering both the quantity and quality of the responses. Quantitative analysis involved calculating the percentage of responses for each multiple-choice question, which provided insights into the overall trends in engagement levels and academic performance between the two groups: the students who are engaged in online learning through an online learning management system as well as; the students in a traditional face-to-face classroom.

In the quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were performed on the scores provided by the participants, if any, to determine the general perception of the students about the learning processes in both contexts. The advantages of this dual approach were that it was possible to, on one hand, assess the level of activity of the participants and, on the other hand, to examine the academic impact in terms of factors that were significant in their case.

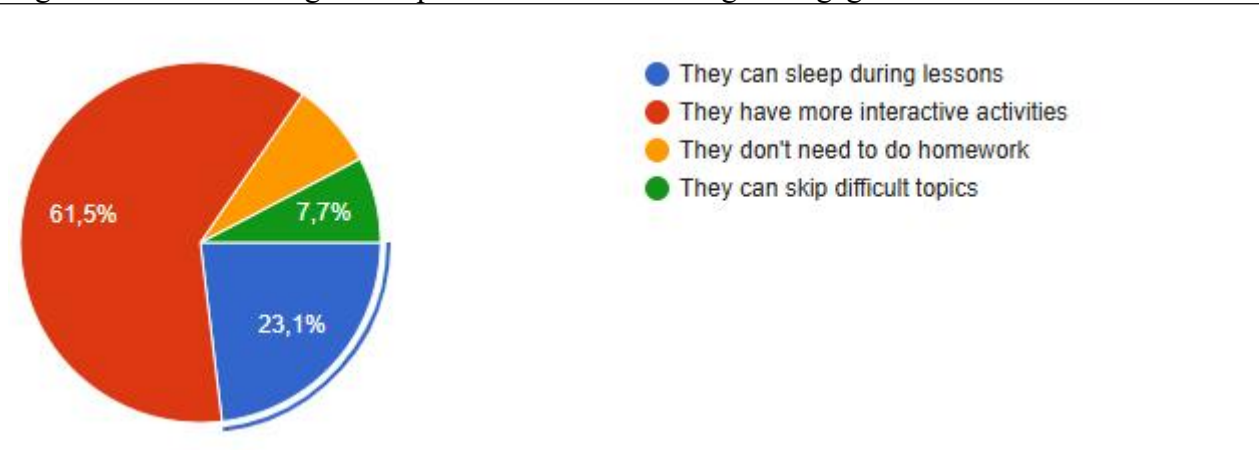
Comparisons were made with the research hypothesis to establish the equality or otherwise of the engagement levels and consequent academic performance between the two groups. Quantitative data was analyzed by using the t-tests or chi-square tests to compare and check the significance of results given to reduce on making wrong conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The validity of perceived reasons for increased engagement among students using online learning platforms is obtained using the question “Students using online platforms often show higher engagement because”. The responses suggest that a substantial number of learners (61.5%) think that online platforms provide more interactive activities, hence increased productivity (fig.1). Nevertheless, a considerable portion of them, which is 23,1%, stated that they can sleep during the lessons that are conducted utilizing the platforms, which means that active participation is not the only kind of engagement. Also, 7.7% of students. The foregoing findings could be a sign that students think that by doing all their assignments online they will be able to escape doing homework together and or skip topics that are challenging and which cost them more time, all these in favor of the online platforms, though actual, might have adverse effects

on learning achievements as deemed by higher perceived engagement. The responses provided by the students indicate that, although the use of online learning platforms may bear some relative benefits that would increase learners’ interaction.

Figure 1: Students using online platforms often show higher engagement because



Source used: was composed by the author

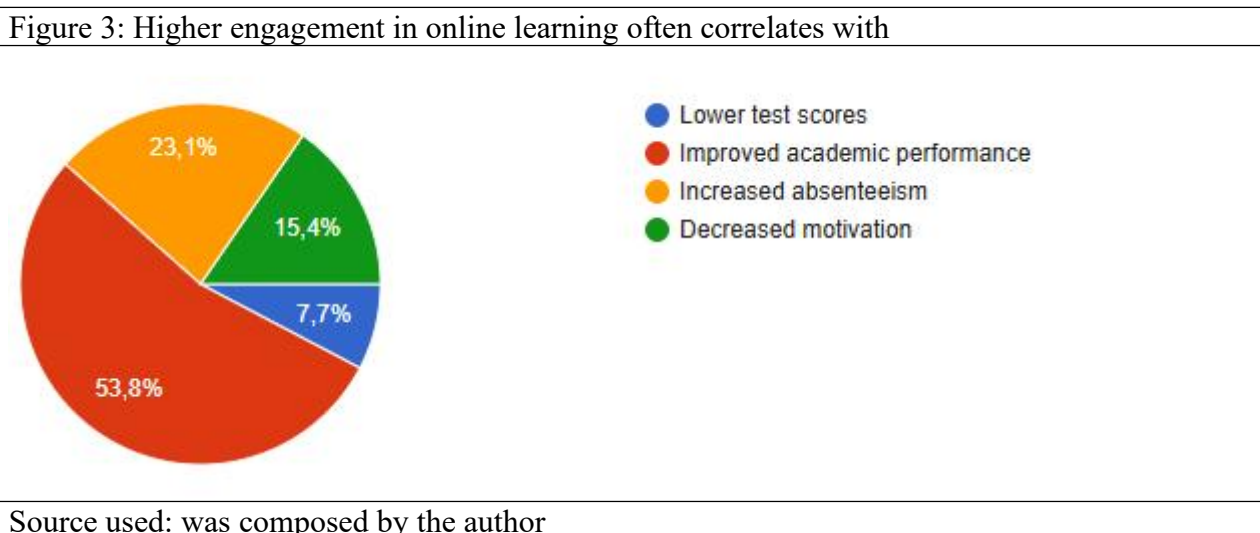
When answering the question “Compared to traditional classrooms, online learning platforms generally offer” some of the responses were: More than half, 84.6% responded that online platforms offer more chances for individual learning and emphasize the great flexibility that such environments can provide for the learning processes by one’s needs and to one’s rhythm (fig.2). However, this advantage is mitigated by concerns to interaction as more than half of the students pointed out that they feel that communication in technology-enhanced environments is limited compared to face to face interaction, which is important towards collaboration. Furthermore, 7.7% of respondents suggested online learning means more distractions, as in line with this learning platform, which means more distractions are possible when compared to a structured setting. The minority (7.7%) who felt that online platforms offer less educational content means that although the issue may not be the availability of content quality and delivery options that allow learning in a more personal and self-driven approach is still an essential aspect of relative gains to offer of online learning versus face-to-face teaching.

Figure 2: Compared to traditional classrooms, online learning platforms generally offer



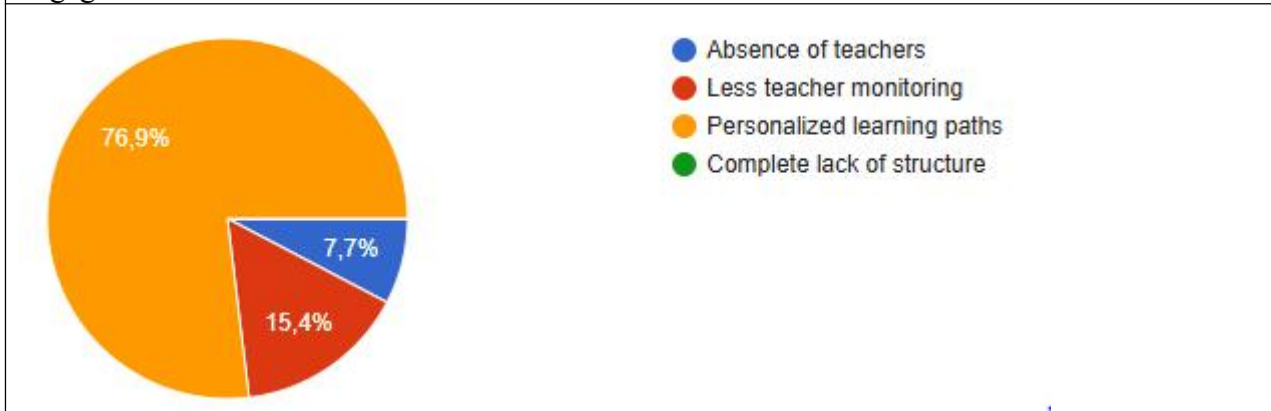
Source used: was composed by the author

The relationship between students’ engagement level in online classes and their academic performance is not that straightforward when looking at the responses to the question “Higher engagement in online learning often correlates with.” 53.8% of the respondents pointed out that more learning engagement brought about better academic performance as shown in (fig.3) These findings imply that the students who engage more in their online learning are bound to be good performers in their class work. However, 23.1 % of participants mentioned that higher engagement is strongly tied to increased absenteeism Moreover, it also points to problematic situations like students preferring flexibility over attending classes or they lack self-discipline in a virtual environment. Further, 15.4% wrote that higher engagement might cause demotivation which raises the idea that high levels of engagement may lead to either burnout or fatigue among the employees of an organization. The weakest of the correlations, 7.7% with more engagement to fewer test results, raises additional questions on the nature of engagement in an online environment and whether it translates well in generating positive academic results, therefore though engagement is significant, its relation to other factors has to be examined in online learning.



Some of the following views are the responses to the question Where do online learning platforms have advantages over traditional settings when it comes to student engagement? Overwhelmingly emphasise the benefits of the LSM approach, particularly the flexibility of learning solutions and of individual learning paths, which is mentioned by 76,9 % of participants (fig.4). This preference perhaps indicates that students value the flexibilities associated with the structuring of their learning to match with their unique learning styles and rhythms, with a resultant increased involvement and accountability for their education. However, a few respondents mentioned that there are no teachers (7.7%) and less teacher monitoring (15.4%) as the benefits – though this suggests that although some students may prefer the freedom that comes with less Adult supervision, it is not seen as a pro. The “complete lack of structure” might suggest that the author worries that if learning goes online, then all the negative aspects may descend upon the students since there will be no clear organization of classes. The predisposition to individual learning paths emphasizes the need and focus on the flexibility and individual approach towards learning while using online platforms and consequently points out that the creation of effective online platforms should include these aspects to improve students’ engagement.

Figure 4: What is a significant advantage of online learning platforms regarding student engagement?



Source used: was composed by the author

The research conclusion shows that students believe the role of online learning platforms in increasing engagement is best expressed through improving the level of interactivity, 61.5% of respondents. This implies that the layout and presentation of content on the website considerably influence students’ engagement and level of activity. However, this survey also undesirable trends, where 23.1% of students highlighted that they can sleep during lessons, which means that participation will not necessarily mean that students actively learn. These two forms of postures pose questions about participation in internet-mediated environments; interactivity is potentially plenty but comprehension and retention may not follow. Thus, both educators to engage, as well as platform developers, must ensure that more interactive tasks are not only stimulating but also meaningful.

The distance created between instructors and students is also evidently provocative when distincting online classrooms and physical classrooms. Sixty-four point six percent of respondents also offered valuable feedback concerning self-scheduled programs seen in the online mode welcoming the opportunity to choose free time for studying and organize education to personal preferences. , but this flexibility has its drawbacks – fewer communications with other students and tutors which play a crucial role in learning. That 7.7% of respondents admitted that online learning can cause distractions proves that it is harder to concentrate in a more open environment. These implications point to the conclusion that in addition to benefits derived from approaches like personalized learning paths within an online learning environment which is a highly valuable aspect of education, it is necessary to coincide it with interaction and limited distraction to increase the overall effectiveness of the education process.

Last, the relationship between high levels of engagement and academics can be considered rather ambiguous. Among the answers received 53.8 percent of respondents mentioned that higher engagement will result in better performance while 23.1 percent stated that engagement could result in absenteeism and 15.4 percent in decreased motivation. Such complexities indicated that while engagement is an important factor of achievement, it should be well monitored to minimize reducing factors such as burnout or disengagement. Only 7.7% expect that increased engagement leads to poorer test performance, which causes additional doubts concerning the gain of engagement initiatives in terms of improved academic performance. These observations are encompassing, and this only points towards the direction that a multi-pronged strategy is most necessary while pursuing online learning, one that engenders interaction but also fully

considers the possible consequences of this tendency while encouraging students and guiding them in their learning processes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be seen that despite the advantages of online learning platforms, the students' engagement was low as found in this study. As valuable assets, that can result in greater student involvement and better achievement, the interactive activities and individual learning plans are also brought to light some issues connected with truancy, demotivation, and risks of nonattendance. As online learning modalities gain ground in place of traditional class learning, it is important to devise ways and means of improving interaction as well as flexibility while also discouraging carelessness and negligence. In this way, addressing these complexities defines how teachers can optimally take advantage of the enhanced engagement that comes with online learning to enhance positive learning and academic retention among students.

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