mLEARNING ACTIVITIES AS A MOTIVATION ENHANCING FACTOR

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The increasing popularity and evolution of distance education worldwide is nevertheless undermined by the problem of high dropout rate due to different factors. One of them lies in insufficient motivation of distance students. As suggested by researchers, it may be the isolation of distance students (from other students, their tutors and the institution) that is a principal factor in the higher probability of dropping out. Consequently, improved interaction between students, tutors and institution would enhance students' motivation and improve student retention.

Most educators would agree on the central importance of motivation to a learner's success. Indeed, some educators argue that motivation is not only a necessary condition for success but is also a sufficient one. A learner who is fully motivated will overcome barriers of situation and time, find ways of developing appropriate skills and be able to deal with the stress of study with very little extra external support.

In the last few years, an exponential growth in network coverage, speed, and technological innovation around the world has taken place. The variety of new products such as smartphones and tablets has allowed students at a distance to choose how they interact with course content and with their classmates and tutors. Until recently, students have only been able to access their online course resources through their computers and laptops. Being tied to a desktop or laptop computer restricted their ability to learn and share knowledge while traveling or when in areas without good Internet connectivity. Instructional designers and faculties involved in Distance Education are constantly seeking new ways to engage the online learner, and the implementation of mobile learning tools in their online courses may enable students to access course information on handheld devices from anywhere.

Nowadays mobile devices are widely utilized to provide instructional options for distance learners. Mobile course sites are created in order to reach as many learners as possible via many different portable devices and platforms. According to the latest research, students involved in Distance Education show interest in receiving educational content and information on their mobile devices. Course content and information delivery on mobile devices has a beneficial influence on the students' motivation to learn.

Mobile learning (mLearning) is emerging as a new way to reach and connect with students. It is incorporated as a component of online learning, though in comparison it provides greater convenience and flexibility for the learner to access course material and interact with the instructor anytime and anywhere. The growth of mobile learning is largely tied to the need for distance education that is not dependent on an Internet connection. Students are able to send and receive messages almost instantaneously instead of waiting for days for the information to reach them. mLearning activities include mobile sites, mobile flashcards, audio podcasts, video and audio feedback from the teacher, blogging, quizzes, forums, wikis and a variety of mobile applications. By utilizing mLearning, educators can deliver a better quality learning experience, more easily personalize education and allow students to choose their preferred learning style and access to content based on their time and location of choice.

According to the survey focused on learners' motivation, online learning that is designed to incorporate optional activities for students to choose, based on their personal learning style, adds to student motivation, engagement, and learning success. Using mLearning as a mechanism for incorporating those optional activities also adds to the flexibility and convenience valued by most learners. For adult learners who are more autonomous and independent by nature, mLearning adds efficiency to the learning process and makes it easier to fit studying into busy schedules. The immediate response from the tutor, facilitated communication with classmates and constant access to course material strengthen student learning motivation which results in dropout rates decrease. Motivated Distance students acquire suitable preparation and learning

skills development for themselves, become more persistent when facing difficulties, and effective independent learners, doing whatever they need to succeed.

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