Evidences of Validity of The Brazilian Scale of Learner's Attitude Towards Distance Education Programs

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ABSTRACT

Online learning is one of the fastest growing trends in educational uses of technology. In this study, an instrument to measure the social attitudes of the Brazilian students based on distance education was developed and validated. The study population consisted of public administration undergraduate students that has been providing by distance education by University of Brasília, in Brazil. The sample of the study consisted of 590 Brazilian students. The scale has 41 items, with total Cronbach alpha coefficient of .94, and reliability coefficient (KMO) of .94. The correlations of each item with total point were between .30 and .79. A factor analysis was run using direct oblimin rotation for construct validity, resulting in 4 factors structure explaining 47.12% of total variability. These factors are "Personnel and Dispositional Aspects", "Procedural Characteristics", "Negative Affects" and "Internalization and habituation of usage". Consequently, findings show that The Brazilian Attitude Scale towards Distance Education (BrazilASTDE) is a valid and reliable instrument.

KEYWORDS

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, online learning has become more popular and is becoming more widely accepted (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011). With the development of new communication and information technology, online learning has become a strategic tool directly related to the development of lifelong learning of individuals and the expansion and democratization of higher education (Mason & Rennie 2010).

Several emerging technology tools, concepts, innovations, and advancements are being employed in diverse educational settings. There are varied education-related purposes (e.g. instructional, social, and organizational goals), and the emerging technologies involve a dynamic state of change including cycles of acceptance, euphoria, adoption, maturity, and impact.

Distance learning is an instructional delivery system that connects learners with educational resources. This kind of learning provides educational access to learners in different educational institutions and can augment the learning opportunities of current students. Its implementation is a process that uses available resources and will evolve to incorporate emerging technologies.

According to Sabin, Settle, and Rutherfoord (2012) several key features of distance learning include the importance of the teacher-learner communications, the separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of each instructional process, the provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor, and learner, and the control of the learning pace by the student rather than the distance instructor (Shapiro & Hughes 2010; Venable, 2011).

Distance education tools provide a different sense of learning experiences to students. The use of informal learning strategies, such as intrinsic reflection and the search for help in written material, is more demanded of students who study at a distance. Meta-learning actions are expected, "learning to learn", with the continuous application of strategies of self-regulation, monitoring and control of the learning itself by the learner. (Jaggars & Xu 2016). This involves the continuous development of their cognitive and social competences and skills.

Online learning environments can make it difficult to keep a learner focused, engaged, and motivated. Other than designing and structuring an online course appropriately, there is also a wide range of online tools that could be used to promote student engagement and interactivity in the online learning environment.

One of the variables that facilitate the effectiveness of distance learning is the social attitude of learners. More positive attitudes towards distance education may result in more meaningful learning of the transferred content. Critical to a student-centered approach are the attitudes of the target audience which are an important element in the development of Brazilian distance education programs and systems. Probably having more positive attitudes towards distance education the engagement of students in performing distance learning courses will be greater. Attitudes facilitate behaviors. If there are more favorable attitudes, there are more possibilities of the learner's commitment to his/her own academic development.

Attitudes have long been considered a central concept of social psychology, education and pedagogy (Hussain, 2013). The initial definitions were broad and encompassed cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral components. An attitude can be defined as an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world (Mtebe & Raisamo, 2014). It refers to a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor.

An attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related. A simpler definition of attitude is a mindset or a tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual's experience and temperament (Ajzen, 2002). Attitudes help us define how we see situations, as well as define how we behave in response to the situation or toward the object. The tri-component model includes attitudes include feelings, thoughts, and actions.

The three-component model allows us to identify positive and negative pre-dispositions to learning from a distance. The student's mental models of distance learning may influence their behavior. It is hoped that the student who believes in this type of education will be more committed and involved, and this will reflect on their learning.

There are methodologies and teaching strategies offer the distance that create culturally different expectations. In addition, there are different templates of web platforms with differentiated features and online tools that are supported by the government funding programs, laws and regulations for the provision of courses. Therefore, it is necessary to validate a Brazilian model. However, little is known about students' attitudes towards distance education programs in Brazil.

Attitude refers to a construct formed from decoded stimulation on cognitive processes, capable of generating cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980; Oskamp &

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