Teleconference Sessions in Distance Learning Courses:
The Influence of Psychological Factors

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ABSTRACT

A teleconferencing learning environment has the potential to increase interaction between educators and learners. Interaction must be designed and continuously supported by the educator. When using teleconferencing in distance education, there is a set of psychological factors which may impact learner involvement. The objective of this study was to identify what psychological factors influence the learner involvement in distance learning courses during teleconferencing sessions. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used as the research tools. The results show that anxiety, learner satisfaction, and expectation of success affect learners and educators in teleconferencing learning environments. Finally, concerning the interconnection of the psychological factors and the effectiveness in teleconferencing sessions as it appears, the main premise of a successful teleconferencing session is laying down the groundwork for adequate planning and preparation taking into account all the influencing psychological factors.

KEYWORDS

Distance Learning Courses, Learning Environments, Psychological Factors, Teleconference

INTRODUCTION

Teleconferencing refers to real-time communication via audio, live video and data (files, presentations, graphics, etc.) between two or more remote locations (Anastasiades, 2007; Anastasiades et al., 2012). Audio and video transfer is achieved by the transmission- reception of compressed video-audio signal (streaming video-audio) using appropriate software. Learners may ask questions, work in groups, interact at the same time, gain access to primary sources of information and combine electronic communication tools, to discuss and collaborate (Tomei, 2011; Panagiotakopoulos, Tsiatsos, Lionarakis, & Tzanakos, 2013).

Lack of familiarization with technology, lack of technological support, and limited network resources causing disconnect are important factors which may stress participants and impact

the effectiveness of teleconferencing as an educational tool to support distance education (Panagiotakopoulos et al., 2013). The type of educational activities, techniques and tools that the educator uses during a teleconferencing session support the effectiveness of the session and the degree of communication among participants (Karvounis & Anastasiades, 2019).

The effectiveness of a teleconference session largely depends on the 'lesson plan' and the coordination of cooperative activities and communication by the educator (Alqurashi, 2017; Taskiran, 2019). The achievement of learning goals is not influenced by the type of technology used, but rather by the design of the teaching methodology (Lionarakis, 2006; Karvounis, & Anastasiades, 2019).

A wide range of technological, pedagogical, psychological and social factors affect teleconferencing environments in the literature review (Saade & Kira, 2009; Smith, 2011; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Penny, 2011; Hart, 2012; Mikroyannidis et al., 2014; Armakolas, Panagiotakopoulos, & Karatrantou, 2018). Additional challenging factors are the lack of personal contact and the long response time of both fellow students and tutors, leading to a situation where they feel unable to complete their studies without the appropriate support (Lionarakis, Niari, Apostolidou, Sfakiotaki, & Ligoutsikou, 2019).

Psychological factors mainly refers to anxiety, learner satisfaction, self-regulated learning, and expectation of success (Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams, & Wiklund, 2002; Cheawjindakarn, Suwannattchote, & Theeraroungchaisri, 2012). These factors outline a part of the psychological profile of learners that will help us understand his/her engagement during a teleconferencing session. In order to achieve a successful educational experience, the senses and actions of the participants in the teleconference should lead to a reduction in the perceived transactional distance between tutor and learner and enhance the motivation, emotion and will of the learners (Kanellopoulos, Koutsouba, & Giosos, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is defined as the expected pressure that exceeds a person's perceived ability to cope with (Palmer, Cooper & Thomas, 2003). Stress is in any case a situation that concerns one person at a time and not all participants of a distance course (Allan & Lawless, 2003). Each factor that affects distance learning may result in different kinds of stress, such as computer anxiety or concept-specific anxiety (Saade & Kira, 2009). Research on online learning concludes that this practice may cause stress among learners when there are time constraints, high dependence on their performance or on the performance of their peers, and the co-dependence on assignments submission (Allan & Lawless, 2003). It is worth noting that computer anxiety may bring a significant disadvantage to the individual in relation to his/her peers (Saade & Kira, 2009) in order to complete the course. Sun, Tsai, Finger, Chen, and Yeh (2008) suggest that people who are familiar with technology will approach e-learning with a positive mindset, resulting in a less stressful experience. So, we can conclude in relation with the source of stress, its existence could have a negative influence on the learner. The provision of information, explanations and special tools adapted in the context of distance learning is considered as a fundamental element in the completion of studies. The need for interaction and communication is also highlighted (Lionarakis, Niari, Apostolidou, Sfakiotaki, & Ligoutsikou, 2019).

On the other hand, learner satisfaction is an important psychological factor for the successful completion of an online course (Chang & Fisher, 2003). It is defined as the perception of pleasure and accomplishment in the learning environment (Sweeney & Ingram, 2001). Moreover, in many cases, it contributes to the creation of motivation, an element that is necessary for the learner's success. As a result, the effort to measure satisfaction is complex and varies according to the nature of the learning experience (Shee & Wang, 2008). Similar to stress, satisfaction is a condition that is unique to the learner and influenced by a number of factors, which may differ depending on the situation. Hart (2012) ranked satisfaction and relevance as the main mediating factors of persistence in e-learning environments. She noted that the learners who persist derive satisfaction from the quality of the program, the interactions with their peers, the relevance of the course to individual's needs and the

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