Motivation and Online Adult Learners: How do we do that?

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Abstract

Motivation is a very complex topic. Various fields of study have defined motivation differently. Education is one of those fields. Motivation is one of the important topics in education that is essential for improvement of students` achievement. Motivation in education depends on different variables such as age, culture, gender, learning environments and so on. This study is concerned with one of the learning environments namely online learning. The primary task of instructors in online learning is to motivate their students. This paper offers literature review on motivation of adult learners enrolled in online courses.

This paper also provides insights on the essential theories and perspectives of motivation as well as brief information about ARCS model developed by Keller. The study poses some important questions that intend to challenge teaching skills of its readers.

Keywords: *Online Learning; motivation: ARCS Theory: adult learners*

Introduction

As an instructional technology specialist, I have made searching for the meaning of learning and effectiveness my priority. As the result of all my exploration I came to the realization that learning is an individual process. Teachers play an important role in this process by facilitating it and finding a correct way to encourage their students to learn. Like every educator, I cannot stop myself from asking these very important questions over and over again: "How do we do that?", "How can instructional technology specialists encourage students to learn?" or "Should we encourage them to learn?"

According to a large number of learning theories, students have to be encouraged actively participate in the classroom and instructors should know how to motivate them to learn. For almost half of a century, researchers have focused their efforts on the topic of student motivation and have learned a lot about it (Boekaerts, 2002).

Motivation is a very broad and complex subject of educational theory, and educators are expected to understand the factors, reasons and results of it. The recent changes in education have been a turning point in drawing the attention of educators to the developments of motivational beliefs. In this paper, motivation, motivation and education, motivation, and online learning environments were explained based on adult learning.

Motivation

Definitions of motivation are very diverse. Sharma (2005) argues that there is diversity of definitions of motivation: experimental psychologists` studies talk about motivation in terms of animal behavior, clinical psychologists` describe motivation in terms of abnormal behavior, and educational psychologists` define motivation in terms of human behaviors in educational settings. Sharma goes on describing motivation as "activity by one person designed to stimulate or arouse a state within a second person or group that under appropriate circumstances initiates or regulates activity in relation to goals; or it is the aroused state of the individual that under appropriate circumstances initiates or regulates behavior in relation goals" (pp.40). Sharma`s definition is more appropriate for the educational settings. Motivation drives us to do something such as getting up early to go to work, to study new things. It also encourages us to try again and again when we do not achieve our goals (Tileston, 2010). According to Ginsberg, & Wlodkowski (2009, pp.vii), "motivation is a concept that is intended to explain one of life's most elusive question: Why do we do what we do?". The definitions above prove that there is no commonly accepted definition on motivation (Murphy & Alexander, 2000).

Gredler (2005) presents three common assumptions of recent and current motivational perspectives: personal motivation develops interaction between person and the environment between person and person or peers; the person is in the center of the processing information; the person shows and communicate their beliefs to others.

Keller also categorized motivation into two parts, namely: Value Related Concept and Expectancy Related Concept. Twelve different motivational concepts were listed by Keller (2007).(See. Table 1.)

Gredler (2005) presents the expectancy-value model that includes five achievement related b ehaviors, influenced by motivational process. These are "choice, persistence, exteny of effort, cognitive engagement and actual performance." Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle (1988, pp.514) states that "student goal orientations are represented in the model as a set of behavioral intentions that determine how students approach and engage in learning activities. The model further assumes that students' goal orientations are important mediators of the effects related to individual and situational variables."

Table 1
Representative Motivational Constructs and Categories. (Keller, 2007)

Value-Related Concepts (concern with explaining how certain types of goals become important for students/people and affect their behavior)		Expectancy-Related Concepts (concern with the question of expectancy for success)	
Self-Actualization	: Maslow (1954)	Attribution	: Weiner (1985)
Need for Achievement	: McClelland(1976)	Personal Causation	: DeCharms (1976)
Sensation Seeking	: Zukerman(1978)	Locus of Control	: Rotter (1966)
Competence	: White (1959)	Learned Helplessness	: Seligman (1975)
Reinforcement Value	: Rotter (1966)	Self Efficacy	: Bandura(1977)
Curiosity	: Berlyne (1965)	Expectancy of Success	:Fibel &Hale (1978)

According to Barkley (2010), today's motivation theories bring together elements of needs and goals models and highlight the importance of factors within the individual. Dembo (2004) echoes this

thought by saying that all students have their own decisions about activities and tasks in which to engage, and many students choose to learn more about their subject of interest.

Expectations of teachers from student are sometimes limited by curriculum and crowded classrooms. Motivational concepts are focused on students` attitudes, beliefs and individual experiences. Motivational beliefs in education are also related to social involvement with family and friends.

Motivation and Learning

Motivation in learning environments is one of the most debated topics across different disciplines and fields. All students want to learn what teachers would let them learn (Sharma, 2005) and they must have confidence in possibility of achieving their goals with appropriate effort (Dembo, 2004). Therefore, one can assume that students will stay focused on achievement when they are motivated. Barkley (2010, pp: 12-13) describes student patterns as she cited from Covington (1993): "success-oriented students", "over-strivers", "failure-avoiders", and "failure-accepting students". All these patterns are ways of understanding how and what students would like to accomplish within their learning processes.

Many researchers have tried to investigate whether motivation has any role in enhancing learning. Their studies proved that motivation is one of the important factors that contribute to efficient learning. Breen (2002, pp.38) mentioned that "Motivation is closely related to reasons (conscious and unconscious) for engaging in activities and learning is an essential mechanism in any action domain (whether it is the goal of the activity, or incidental to it)". Motivation in higher education is different from other levels of education; some of these differences are learning strategies, motivational level, and self-direction. While investigating student motivation in higher education it is important to understand how to motivate adult learners and to find correct strategies for efficient teaching. The factors influencing work with adult learners are critically significant to see the big picture. This big picture will show us ways of motivations which teachers need to create efficient and meaningful learning environment in higher education.

Thoms(n.d.) underlined the principles of adult learning, by pointing out that instructors in higher education should:

1) present information in the way that help students to mastered it.
2) give meaningful and practical knowledge
3) teach one goal or concept at a time
4) give feedback as summary of context.
5) let them to practice and learn on their own.
6) be aware of their differences and speed of learning.
7) recognize that learning is lifelong/ often repeated.
8) help them know that what they learn is beneficial to their life.
9) know positive stimuli will strengthen learning
10) give them hands-on task which are related to their job and let them be active students
11) show them the steps of their process and help/show them to use their new skills in a new circumstance.
12) give them opportunity to learn collaboratively.
13) know that education must be well-structured.

Zemke & Zemke (n.d.), in the Innovation Abstracts, 1984 (National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development Publication) highlighted that adult learners search out learning experiences for understanding and dealing with their life events. They also stressed the importance of life-change events in terms of motivation. What are the life change events? They defined these events as moving

to a new place, marriage, losing a loved one, divorce, getting a new job, a promotion, being fired. How can instructors let students know that learning can aid in the midst of their life-changing events? At this point, we know that instructors should motivate them to learn, however, according to Lieb(1991), instructors should know how adults learn best and be aware that their needs are different from those of teens. How can instructors know these needs? Knowles, Holton & Swanson(2005) identified several assumptions for answering this question on Andragogical Model which was introduced by Knowles. "The six principles of andragogy are (1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5)orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn" (Knowles et al, 2005,pp.3). These assumptions mentioned above help us to understand the expectations of adult learners. Moreover, their characteristics are important. Knowles et al. (2005) stressed that adult learners are self-directed. It means that adult learners want to be free and relax and direct themselves. This information is a good start to understand characteristics of adult learners. Thoms (n.d.) also mentioned that adult learners have first-hand experience and a strong need to apply what is learned. I assume that it might make them goal-oriented. This is the reason why curriculum should be clear and well-designed.

There is no doubt that curriculum mediated learning environment is one of the most important keys to motivation. Environmental changes affect quality and/or quantity of learning. Different environments require different educational strategies and instructional techniques. It is clear that during last two decades technology has rapidly changed. These changes have brought new ideas in education such as online learning, computer based learning, mobile learning and so on. These significant movements also made some changes in learners` needs, abilities and attitudes. All these innovations brought up new questions: "Are new learning environments ready to delivery teaching and learning?" "Do instructors feel capable to teach online?" "Do learners want to learn something in the new learning environments?" and "Do instructional design specialists create efficient online learning environments?"

Motivation and Online Learning

Technology is like a treadmill. If you don't run with the same speed that has been already pre-adjusted, you can fall down. However, sometimes it is really difficult to keep up with that speed. It is very same in educational settings. If you don't follow the speed given by educational technology, it may affect your teaching. Online learning is one necessary way to keep up with the speed.

The growth experiences in distance education have challenged teachers to use new instructional methods and strategies. Morales (2010) also mentioned that the continuous growth of online learning in higher education will lead to the necessity of designing new courses and using internet technologies.

Does the new design mean new motivational strategies? The answer is absolutely yes. Another question was brought up by Knowles & Kerkman (2007,pp.70): "Should a researcher ask students directly how motivated they are to learn, ask them to rate their interest in the subject, ask if their attitude toward online learning has an effect on motivation to learn, and measure how their study processes affect their motivation?" Before trying to dig deeper in search for the answer, it would be better to understand what factors of motivation are effective for adult online learners.

Knowles & Kerkman (2007) concluded their research with the idea that student motivation relates to individual interest, external and intrinsic motivation, transformation of information into knowledge and depth of study process to understand how to measure student motivation. Timmis & Cook (2002) mentioned some educational strategies which helps motivate student for online learning. They recommended that:

- Online learning should provide learning, because it offers unique opportunities. However, instructors should pay attention to make sure all students have a need to engage during designing process
- Ideally instructional design should help student to maximize their intrinsic motivation.
- Expectation from learners should be clarified.
- Learners need to be guided in how to manage learning in online learning environments.
- Instructional design and environment should support collaborative team working.

Dennis, Bunkowski & Eskey (2007) emphasized that motivational level might change from student to student. Instructors must find out these differences and determine if students are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, or both. It is very clear that understanding students` behaviors is one of the important keys for motivation. Goleman (1996, p.78) mentioned that "Students who are anxious, angry or depressed don't learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well." Therefore instructors should predict or take into account not only students behaviors but also their feelings.

It is a difficult process to manage student learning. Keller developed and introduced his ARCS model for making this process easier.

ARCS Model

Researchers have noted that motivation is a strong predictor of success in online learning. Keller, 2008; 2010). Attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction (ARCS) is a model of motivational design which provides a systematic approach to designing motivational tactics into instruction (Keller, 1999).

Huett, Kalinowski, Moller & Huett, (2008,pp.160) stated that "The ARCS model is an attempt to synthesize behavioral, cognitive, and affective learning theories and demonstrates that learner motivation can be influenced through external conditions. The purpose of the ARCS model is to employ strategies that are used to improve the motivational appeal of instruction."

Keller(1999, pp.39-40), also mentioned that "This model has been applied to various types of learning environments, such as classroom instruction, self-paced print, computer-based instruction(CBI), and multimedia, but these applications have been limited in scope and function." Huett et al, (2008) summarized Keller` s ARCS Model:

Attention: Perceptual Arousal, Inquiry Arousal, Variability
Relevance: Goal Orientation, Motive Matching, Familiarity
Confidence: Learning Requirements, Success Opportunities, Personal Control
Satisfaction: Natural Consequences, Positive Consequences, Equity

In what follows I will explain Keller` s plan and add to it some questions to be answered by the readers. Keller`s ARCS model starts with Attention which refers to engaging and maintaining learner interests and capturing the attention of students. Attention comes with some unsolved problems and unanswered questions. For example: Does nature of online environments make it difficult to get attention? Does lack of face to face interaction affect students` attention?

Relevance refers to the study material being pertinent to students' goals while providing them with relevant information. Online learning sometimes has a lack of communication. Does communication become problematic while explaining the content and its relevancy?

Confidence is preoccupied with enhancing students' trust in content while helping them to gain self-assurance in achieving their goals. How can an instructor promote confidence? Does confidence relate to technology? Are abilities of students important for their confidence?

Satisfaction helps student to be content with the learning process. Apparently this sense of contentment cannot be fully controlled by instructors. If the feelings are changeable, how can an instructor control them? In addition, reflecting feelings in online learning environment is difficult and instructors should pay attention to understand learners` feeling individually. (Sarsar & Altun, 2008; Sarsar, Kisla, Aytekin & Bilen, 2009)

Keller came up with an expansion of the traditional ARCS model in his recent book. He called this expansion ARCS-V model. V related to volition. As Keller (2010, pp.7) says volition "is to the actions people take to achieve a goal". Additionally he supports this idea with pre-action planning and self-regulation or action-control.

Adults should be motivated for learning (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al, 2005), because motivation helps them to be present in the class on emotional and physical levels. The concept of dignity was mentioned in the research as well. What aspects of online environments can positively or negatively influence one's self-respect and dignity?

Another important aspect of the research relates to the adult learning being problem-centered, and adults are likely to use their experiences in problem solving. Does it mean that this phenomenon might help them to achieve their goals?

Sendall, Shaw, Round, & Larkin (2010) describe research conducted by Carp, Peterson and Roelfs in 1974. In this study, researchers found the top barriers to learning for adults such as age, bad experiences, lack of energy, dislike for studying, being bored and tired of schools, lack of knowledge, hesitation to seem ambitious. Some of these barriers may become an obstacle for online learners. Feeling too old to learn, dislike being student again and lack of experiences and knowledge of technology may cause some problems and also cause fear of success.

Knowles like other educational theorists believes that adults should be active in the learning environment. Because of this belief, instructional technology specialists have tried to find many ways to engage adults in online learning environments by means of enriched multimedia sources, blended learning and hybrid learning strategies.

Conclusion

Many models and theories in education have tried to explain motivation in learning and provide numerous advices for instructors. It is clear that instructors should be aware of the students' motivation in online learning environments. On the other hand, personal communication might become a problem in assessment of student motivation. It is important for students to know what is expected from them, so teacher should clearly communicate their expectations. Some other problems in distance education were mentioned by Keller (1999, pp.43) as follows: "The attrition rate alone can be viewed as an indication of motivational problems. Students' comments often focus on their feelings of isolation, lack of feeling of making steady progress, and great doubts about being able to finish the course given their other responsibilities and time constraints."

So far, I mentioned personal motivation, communication, lack of knowledge, unknown expectations, isolation and readiness as problematic issues in online learning. Additionally, environment may

represent a challenge for adult learners. Learning environments can impact learners' motivation. This issue can be contextualized in many ways in online learning. One of them might be lack of technology knowledge. If they do not know how to use technology, it may affect their motivation. Learners might be unfamiliar with online learning activities such as emailing, synchronous and asynchronous discussion forums, live video/audio communication applications, uploading / downloading educational documents etc. These activities might affect their attention. The e-feedback may be challenging as well. Some adult learners might not like to receive feedback via e-mails. They might believe that face to face interaction is more appropriate for receiving feedback. Therefore it may negatively influence their satisfaction.

Sendall et al (2010) also pointed out some factors such as fear of losing the control, the fear of technology, the fear of the unknown and the feelings of insecurity.

I have provided information about inter-relation between motivation, adult learning and online learning environments approached from various perspectives. Sendall et al (2010, pp.95) predicted that "for the next ten years, most faculty members will be Digital Immigrants, working with an adult population mixed with Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives". This leaves us with a question whether we are ready to be digital citizens as adult learners and as instructors. Are we motivated enough to be students and teachers for the next ten years?

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