Facilitation of Self-Regulation for College Students in Online Courses

Abstract. Various aspects of online education have been studied extensively in order to identify the most effective pedagogical tools and elements of online teaching (e.g. Gayton & McEwan, 2007); however, attrition rate remains higher for online classes than for on-site classes. Consistent feedback, a sense of community (Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, & Lee, 2007) and "online presence", and highly interactive learning activities are related to student satisfaction with online courses. The purpose of this study was to examine students' affective responses to different online instructional tools and activities, and to assess the impact of specific strategies on self-regulation and retention of students in online classes. Instructional tools and strategies implemented in college online courses included discussion boards and controversial topic discussion boards, use of wikis, audio lectures, quizzes with immediate feedback, web-based assignments, and self-guided lesson pages that included a virtual tour of relevant sites. Student affective response was assessed through a survey administered after semester midterm to online students; self-regulation was assessed through examination of Blackboard's statistics for each student demonstrating how often, at what times of day, and in what sections of the course students log in; and by tracking attrition rate.

Objectives or purposes. Colleges, community colleges, and universities across the United States offer online courses across many degree programs and to hundreds of thousands of students. As the demand for online courses has grown, higher education has responded by seeking to identify the element that make the online environment a successful learning environment for students. Attrition rate is higher for online courses than for on-site courses, and elements such as highly interactive activities and a high degree of “social presence” may promote student participation and retention. In an online environment, students must be self-regulated to log in, check messages and discussion board requirements, and work asynchronously yet on the same schedule as the rest of the class. What are the best online instructional tools and strategies for promoting self-regulation and retention of students?

Perspective(s) or theoretical framework. Self-regulation is examined through Meichenbaum’s theory of self-regulation, and learning theories including inquiry learning, brain-based learning, and constructivism are utilized to explain the rationale for, limitations of, and intended purpose for different strategies.