

Research on the Factors Affecting Online Learning Participation of Learners in Teachers Distance Training

LAI Degang^{[a],*}

^[a]Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by Southwest University "Central Universities Fundamental Research Funded" Project (XDJK2012C105).

Received 5 April 2015; accepted 3 June 2015

Published online 26 July 2015

Abstract

Network-based distance training of teachers has been carried out more extensively. The online participation of learner in distance training has a direct impact on the effects of the training. This paper studies the factors affecting the online participation of learners in teachers distance training. The paper adopts Likert's five scaling method to conduct the investigation. We randomly selected 747 teachers who participate in online distance training to attend the investigation. They come from different areas and teach different disciplines. The results show that: (a) High-quality educational resources can promote learners to participate in courses; (b) Timely feedback from teachers, experts or assistants has a positive impact on learners' participation; (c) The easy use of online course platform has a positive impact on learners' participation; (d) Learning interest has a positive impact on the level of learning participation; (e) To obtain the credit or certificate has no positive impact on learning participation.

Key words: Distance training; Online learning; Participation

Lai, D. G. (2015). Research on the Factors Affecting Online Learning Participation of Learners in Teachers Distance Training. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 9(1), 19-23. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/7202> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7202>

INTRODUCTION

At present, China has launched a large scale of training programs for teachers' professional development, among

which online remote training has become an important learning approach to enhance teachers' professional ability. Distance training based on the networking environment is different from the traditional face to face training. It emphasizes participation, sharing and contribution, and is a process and participatory learning. Participation of learners is an important indicator of the effect of distance training. To ensure a higher participation of teachers in the training process is the key to success of remote training. However, the network-based form of training cannot be the same as face-to-face training which can directly access to learning participation of learners, and to relatively objectively and fairly assess learners' participation. Therefore, for remote online training, the understanding of the factors affecting learners' participation has a positive effect for the objective and fair assessment of learners' learning effect and better operation of remote training.

In addition to the general characteristics of learning, remote training also has its own unique features. In remote training, the participation is not explicit. It is a text-based communication model in which the learner's cognition, emotion and behavior are all based on the form of text to render. Online learning participation in remote training is reflected through the learner's posts and replies to posts, course browsing, forum and resource browsing, assignment submission, work sharing and interaction with other learners in the network environment. The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting online learning participation and help to find specific methods to increase the participation and promote enthusiasm of learners so as to contribute to the development of remote training.

1. RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, we use a structural enclosed questionnaire. The questionnaire adopts Likert's five scaling methods.

In each question, there are five choices: Completely disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree and strongly agree. Each questionnaire will take the respondents approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. We have chosen learners who participate in remote teacher training as respondents. They are from primary schools and secondary schools in Yunnan and Guizhou province in China and have attended the national training program (2014) primary and secondary school teachers remote training project organized by Southwest University. The survey uses an online survey questionnaire approach. Participants have submitted the questionnaire online. The investigation lasted for two weeks and 747 valid questionnaires were submitted.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Items	Options	Number of participants (total number of 747)	Percentage (total number of 747)
Gender	Male	339	45.38%
	Female	408	54.62%
Education	High school and below	10	1.34%
	Undergraduate	728	97.46%
	Master's degree	7	0.94%
	Doctoral degree	2	0.27%
Number of online courses taken	1-2	474	63.45%
	3-6	254	34.00%
	7-10	9	1.20%
	11 and more	8	1.07%
Average weekly time spent on online courses	Less than 1 hour	334	44.71%
	1-3 hours	301	40.29%
	3-5 hours	87	11.64%
	More than 5 hours	25	3.34%

2.2 Factors Affecting Online Learning Participation

The median of the item “high-quality education resources prompt you to participate in course learning” is the highest ($M=4.38$). The second highest is the item “Timely feedback of teachers, experts or teaching assistants to issues has a positive impact on your learning participation” ($M=4.17$). Items “the convenience of online course platform has a positive impact on your

2. STATISTICAL RESULTS

2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of respondents are shown in Table 1. Table 1 reflects the statistics about the gender, education, the number of times participating in online learning and weekly time spent on online learning of the participants.

All the participants are teachers from primary and secondary schools. Through the options for “number of online courses taken”, it reflects that most of the primary and secondary school teachers have participated in online courses. The time most of them spend each week on online courses is within three hours and only 3.34% of learners spend more than five hours weekly on online learning.

learning participation” ($M=4.07$) and “the fluency of video courses has a positive impact on your learning participation” ($M=4.03$) are followed. The median of the item “to obtain credits or certificates has a positive impact on your learning participation” is the lowest ($M=2.45$) and the second lowest is item “the limitation of the language of video courses (English, Korean, German, etc.) has a negative impact on your learning participation” ($M=2.97$).

Table 2
Shows the Questionnaire About the Factors Affecting Online Learning Participation

Questions/options	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Fairly agree	Strongly agree	Median
1. The active participation of team members in collaborative tasks has a positive impact on your learning participation.	42(5.62%)	23(3.08%)	314(42.03%)	256(34.27%)	112(14.99%)	3.50
2. High-quality education resources prompt you to participate in course learning.	29(3.88%)	20(2.68%)	50(6.69%)	181(24.23%)	467(62.52%)	4.38

To be continued

Continued

Questions/options	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Fairly agree	Strongly agree	Median
3. Peers learning together have an influence on your learning participation.	59(7.9%)	38(5.09%)	134(17.94%)	251(33.6%)	265(35.48%)	3.83
4. Interest in learning has a positive impact on your level of learning participation.	36(4.82%)	24(3.21%)	60(8.03%)	425(56.89%)	202(27.04%)	3.98
5. Bad study habits (such as procrastination) have a negative impact on your learning participation.	46(6.16%)	49(6.56%)	216(28.92%)	333(44.58%)	103(13.79%)	3.53
6. Timely feedback of teachers, experts or teaching assistants to issues has a positive impact on your learning participation.	40(5.35%)	36(4.82%)	77(10.31%)	189(25.3%)	403(53.95%)	4.17
7. The convenience of online course platform has a positive impact on your learning participation.	23(3.08%)	24(3.21%)	54(7.23%)	424(56.76%)	222(29.72%)	4.07
8. To obtain credits or certificates has a positive impact on your learning participation.	203(27.18%)	205(27.44%)	195(26.1%)	85(11.38%)	59(7.9%)	2.45
9. Failing online homework and exam has a negative impact on your learning participation.	60(8.03%)	77(10.31%)	159(21.29%)	213(28.51%)	238(31.86%)	3.66
10. The fluency of video courses has a positive impact on your learning participation.	33(4.42%)	17(2.28%)	83(11.11%)	374(50.07%)	240(32.13%)	4.03
11. Active follow-up posts of other participants (learners, teachers, teaching assistants, etc.) have a positive impact on your learning participation.	33(4.42%)	29(3.88%)	110(14.73%)	338(45.25%)	237(31.73%)	3.96
12. The limitation of the language of video courses (English, Korean, German, etc.) has a negative impact on your learning participation.	53(7.1%)	255(34.14%)	221(29.59%)	161(21.55%)	57(7.63%)	2.97
13. To enhance your own skills or abilities has a positive impact on your learning participation.	63(8.43%)	84(11.24%)	136(18.21%)	251(33.60%)	213(28.51%)	3.62
14. Video course renewal and assignment submission deadline and other push information have a positive impact on your learning participation.	56(7.5%)	66(8.84%)	293(39.22%)	210(28.11%)	122(16.33%)	3.37
15. The temptation of online games and shopping information occasionally popping up has a negative impact on your learning participation.	123(16.47%)	71(9.5%)	137(18.34%)	126(16.87%)	290(38.82%)	3.52

Note. The Questionnaire Survey Provides a Total of 15 Items

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Though the above analysis of the statistical results, we can see that most of primary and secondary teachers currently participating in distance training have remote online learning experience, but the time they spend on the online learning is not much. For the item "Average Weekly Time Spent on Online Courses", 44.71% of learners spend "less than one hour" every week on study. Primary and secondary school teachers participate in adult in-service training. They usually have their teaching task and their daily work occupies most of their time and effort. Some of them have been married and need to spare time to take care of the family. All these factors directly affect the time of their participation in training and learning. In-service adult learners mainly participate in learning activities in the evenings and on weekends. Their time to participate in learning is fairly limited.

The survey shows that 86.75% of learners agree that "high-quality education resources promote you participate in course learning" (68.52% learners strongly agree and 24.23% fairly agree). Analyzing the reasons, we find that study in remote training is mainly self-learning based on resources. Teaching resources are online resources to provide learners with learning content, including teachers' courseware, audio and video materials and text materials and etc. Scientific and authoritative learning resources can stimulate learners' interests and enthusiasm. Diversification of resource presentation way, sound and picture synchronized instructional videos, animation, games, concept maps, etc. as well as the concretion and visualization of abstract knowledge can stimulate students' interest, maintain and improve learners' enthusiasm to actively participate in leaning. From this we can see that the quality of teaching resources has an important impact on the effect of distance training.

Learning activities in remote training are online and virtual computer-based activities. All the teacher-student interaction and interaction between students are achieved through the Internet. The participation of teachers, experts or teaching assistants in learning activities has become more important. 79.25% of learners believe that “timely feedback of teachers, experts or teaching assistants to issues has a positive impact on your learning participation” (25.3% fairly agree and 53.95% strongly agree). In remote training it lacks teacher’s guidance of the learning process and it also lacks immediate answers to questions from learners, which can lead to the disorder and loose of the learning. It is not conducive to deep learning participation. Teachers and teaching assistants should be actively involved in the discussion among learners, strengthen interaction and weaken loneliness and tiredness in distance learning. For example, at the beginning of classes, teachers post welcome and greetings to the students, are concerned about the confusion and learning progress of learners at any time in the learning process, guide learning partners to encourage each other, appreciate each other and attract learners to deeply get involved in the learning activities. These behaviors can make learners feel even though teachers are very far from me, they always are concerned about our learning. They have a great role in promoting learners’ motivation.

With the popularity of MOOC and Khan Academy all over the world, video-based online courses become more and more popular among learners. Compared to text teaching resources, video teaching resources have their own unique advantages. Compared to text teaching content, teaching videos present teaching content vividly, create teaching situations and mobilize students’ various senses so that students can learn things more intuitively and vividly. Therefore, the fluency of the video teaching content becomes an important factor affecting the participation. In our survey, 82.2% of learners believe that “the fluency of video courses has a positive impact on your learning participation” (50.07% fairly agree and 32.13% strongly agree). The fluency of video courses is related to the design of online teaching platform. Good online learning platform will provide learners with easy learning path and support services and at the same time provide protection for the good operation of learning resources. 86.48% of learners agree that “the convenience of online course platform has a positive impact on your learning participation” (56.76% fairly agree and 29.72% strongly agree). In addition to providing basic learning conditions (such as stable and safe system and the interface is easy to use), online learning platform also needs to provide support tools which are also important guarantee to participate in distance learning, including learning tool, learning navigation, communication tools, system operations help, etc. to facilitate interaction and collaboration of teachers and students and avoid confusion in learning.

In addition, with the growing of globalized open classes and shared courses, instructional videos are fitted with appropriate language subtitles; therefore the language of the video courses is no longer a barrier. Only 29.18% of learners believe that “the limitation of the language of video courses (English, Korean, German, etc.) has a negative impact on your learning participation” (21.55% fairly agree and 7.63% strongly agree).

Survey results also show that distance training learners are less and less concerned about credits or certificates. Only 19.28% of learner think “to obtain credits or certificates has a positive impact on your learning participation” (11.38% fairly agree and 7.9% strongly agree). Compared to learners in the past who were more concerned to get qualifications or credits, the motivation has been changed in some way. With the advent of the era of “knowledge explosion”, the aging of knowledge accelerates and lifelong learning is more and more accepted. Learners’ motivation is gradually transferring from obtaining credits or certificates to actively accept new knowledge and enhance their capacity and literacy to meet the development needs of the community.

CONCLUSION

Remote training has become an important means to enhance the ability of teachers and is an extension and surpassing of traditional classroom teaching. It has provided learners with effective learning resources, opened up a wide range of interactive space, built a platform for active learning and created the environment for summary and reflection. Online learning participation in remote teacher training is a very important indicator of distance training. It can evaluate students’ participation in learning and is also an important part to achieve process evaluation and an important reference factor for the evaluation of learners’ involvement. Through the study of factors affecting distance training participation, we can promote distance learning platform designers to improve convenience and stability of training platforms, promote the designer and organizer of training project to fully understand the participants’ needs of content and provide appropriate teaching content, design strategies to stimulate learners’ active and effective participation, fully mobilize the participation of the learners, and further increase the participation of online learning and achieve efficient distance teacher training.

REFERENCES

- Liang, L. M., & Li, X. H. (2010). To allow technology to provide a more powerful participation experience for students - Visit learning technical expert in Harvard university Dr. Chris Dede. *China Educational Technology*, (9), 1-6.

- Luo, J., Liu, G. P., & Xie, T. (2011). Design and implementation based on second life virtual library learning environment. *China Distance Education*, (1), 79-82.
- Markauskaite, L., Sutherland, L., & Reimann, P. (2006). *Interaction and cognitive engagement in the community of practice: The contradiction of terms*. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies (ICALT'06).
- Ran, B. (2005). *35 Classical tools of management consulting*. Beijing: China Economic Publishing House.
- Renate, N. C., & Geoffrey, C. (2004). *Creating links: Education and human brain*. East China Normal University Press.
- Shao, R. Z. (2000). *Educational psychology*. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press.
- Wu, Q. W., & Lü, L. L. (2004). *Excel statistical application practice*. Beijing: China Water Power Press.
- Zhang, L. X. (2009). Two worlds and two classrooms—Education in information society. *China Educational Technology*, (6), 7-9.
- Zhang, L. X., & Zhang, L. X. (2010). Ecological problems and their solutions in virtual learning environment. *e-Education Research*, (10), 42-45.
- Zhu, Z. T. (2005). *Educational technology training tutorials (junior teaching staff)*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.
- Zhu, Z. T. (2007). *Educational technology training tutorials (senior teaching staff)*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.