

The high-learn system in Bar-Ilan University, its usage and the contribution to the students / Nimrod Mazor

Abstract

Different forms of distance learning have been practiced for over 2 centuries. The main goal of this kind of learning is to remove limitation of face to face learning which rely on geographical proximity, student and teacher availability, time dependency etc. Distance learning, which was initially mail based, evolved according to technological advancements, and especially in the last two decades which marked the vast increase in popularity of the internet. The demand for possessing cutting edge technology, the need to broaden the circle of potential students, and the desire to create more efficient learning tools, led universities to invest large amount of resources in developing distance learning systems. Similar to the rest of the western world, every Israeli university adopted a costume system based on its own needs and preferences. Bar Ilan University's distance learning system which is called High-Learn, offered since its beginning, thousands of independent online courses and support sites for traditional face to face courses, and was used by tens of thousands of students.

The aim of this study was to examine the benefits of the e-learning system (High-Learn) usage and the improvement of learning among Bar Ilan's students. The system is focusing on the relations between the extent of use of the system's various tools as well as the students' attitudes and perceptions of the system, and between satisfaction level, perceived improvement in learning and the extent of participation in courses. For the purpose of examining those connections, a questionnaire (consist of 8 sub-questionnaires) was composed aimed to isolate and analyze the following research Variables: learning improvement, system usage, students attitudes on e-learning tools, satisfaction level, and increase in student's motivation. The questionnaire was handed randomly to a group of Bar Ilan students which uses the High-Learn system in their studies. Of the total questionnaires distributed, 195 were returned and found usable. Those questionnaires were analyzed and the findings were presented in detail.

Discussion of research findings shows that the positive relationship between students' attitudes towards the system and level of participation indicates on the importance of previous experience and knowledge of students in using the system- AS the raw” of Students' daily familiarity with the various internet tools, their attitude toward online learning tools as supplement of face to face Lessons is generally positive. Furthermore it has positively effect on their opinion on improving the level of learning, even though the students did not noted an improvement in any measurable aspects. High and rising expectations of students from the system led to a certain degree of disappointment from the limited performance and capabilities of the High-Learn in its present form, and promoted a demand from many students to change or improve the current state.

The study suggests that there is a definite expectation on the part of the students for e-learning system that will accompany the traditional face to face courses. Furthermore, as long as the system will include variety of tools, learning materials, and other communication channels, so does the students' satisfaction will rise. In this context it should be emphasized that despite the connection found between use of the system (e.g. for performing tasks) and the satisfaction level, it was found that students showed preference of passive use of the system instead of an active one, which increases the perception according to which students see the system as a supportive tool for face to face lessons and not as independent system of learning.

Research continues and discusses the findings and the various connections that were found between the study variables, and also discusses recommendations for improving the system and presenting possible future development trends. Finally it presents the research and methodological limitations, and offer suggestions for future research on the subject.

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