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Introduction

In this issue we present 6 papers. Anders Nordby, Kristine Øygardslia, Ulrik Sverdrup and Harald U. Sverdrup talk about gamification in a case of teaching the subject sustainability in elementary school. Their intention was to teach sustainability to 5th and 7th graders through system thinking, and the paper presents the research methodology used, the development of the game, and how the children played the game.

In the following paper by Jamie Costley and Christopher Lange the research question of whether instructors can have an impact upon satisfaction and perceived learning through various instructional design decisions is raised. The study investigates this by looking at three different online environments and the degree of instructor control made possible in these environments. It then analyzes whether the level of instructor control has an impact upon satisfaction and perceived learning. Though no significant difference was found in regard to level of satisfaction, the results showed that increased instructor control lead to an increase in perceived learning.

On the same point, the effectiveness of instructor-personalized and formative feedback is investigated in the paper by Dolors Planar and Soledad Moya. The paper is a review of formative feedback in higher education in the period from 2000 to 2014, in order to find answers as to which aspects are relevant, when wanting efficiently to implement personalized feedback prepared by the teacher in classes with a high student-staff ratio in virtual higher education.

Mugenyi Justice Kintu and Chang Zhu provide a contextual case study from the Ugandan University, investigating student characteristics and learning outcomes in a blended learning environment. They examine if learner characteristics and background are significant factors for learning outcome. Students from three schools and one directorate form part of the case study, who were involved in a face-to-face set up in the first part of a seventeen-week semester and in an online set up in the second part. The data consist of a background questionnaire survey (270 respondents), the examination results and an online self-regulated learning questionnaire for data on students' self-regulation, the intrinsic motivation inventory for data on motivation and other self-developed instruments to measure the other constructs.

The next paper explores the relationship between an online synchronous learning environment and knowledge acquisition skills and traits, and suggest viable ways forward in order to enhance this relation. The case is the Blackboard platform, and the authors, John D. Politis and Denis J. Politis, collected data from 84 learners who studied online courses in a Higher Education Institution in the United Arab Emirates. The method applied the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) and the statistical software to determine the factor structure of the examined variables.

Finally, in a case study from an Asian university, Choosri Banditvilai discusses enhancing students' language skills through blended learning. The context is a course in "English for Specific Purposes" in Thailand in which e-learning strategies are used in parallel with traditional classroom language teaching methods. The achievements and attitudes of students were compared between the control group and the experimental group to measure the potential of available technology to develop language skills and learner autonomy. The findings from this study show that online practice is directly beneficial to enhance the four language learning skills as well as autonomous learning and learner motivation.

We hope you'll enjoy reading these six papers.

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