Towards an Understanding of the Influence of Personality on Student Engagement in Distance Learning Courses

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Student engagement has been examined pervasively in the literature and constitutes a desired element of a course (Barnacle and Dall’Alba 2017; Schwarz and Zhu 2015). Instructors have found engaging students in online courses to inherently be challenging (Carraher Wolverton 2018) and have therefore sought novel approaches to understand engagement (Heflin et al 2017).

Personality has been scantly investigated to determine its influence on distance learning (DL). Researchers have concluded that personality influences performance (Kim and Schniederjans 2004) and student satisfaction in DL courses (Bishop-Clark et al 2007; Irani et al 2003). However, no research to date has examined the impact of personality on student engagement in DL courses. I therefore seek to determine the extent to which personality impacts student engagement in distance learning courses.

In Spring 2018, a survey of MBA students in an online course was conducted to determine the influence of personality on engagement. I utilized the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality which depicts the five traits of personality as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability (Feist et al 2018). Furthermore, I employed Schaufeli et al’s (2002) measure of student engagement.

I analyzed the data using structural equation modeling, selecting the partial least squares (PLS) approach, specifically employing the Smart PLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) software.

The findings indicate that two traits, namely agreeableness and conscientiousness, significantly impact student engagement in DL courses. Thus, students who are trusting, generous, and ambitious will tend to be more engaged in an online course.

Instructors can utilize these findings to better understand their DL students. When developing groups for a course, an instructor may consider designing the groups in such a way that each group contains at least one student who is agreeableness and conscientiousness. These students who tend to be more engaged will bolster the less engaged students. I will present additional implications for practice and research.

References


