

Online educational empowerment

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Online learning communities flourish best if individual learners have self-governance. That is the conclusion of a US study published in the *International Journal of Web Based Communities*.

Binshan Lin and John Vassar at the College of Business Administration, Louisiana State University in Shreveport, suggest that online learning communities have many benefits because they offer [learners](#) social networks to effectively and easily acquire and share knowledge among themselves. However, key to success, they have found is individual self-governance.

Self-governance, or personal empowerment, can be measured in terms of self-efficacy, perceived behavioral control and personal outcome expectations regarding the interactions between learners and the online technology.

Online communities, and the internet more broadly speaking, extend the notion of personal empowerment that has emerged in health, welfare and now education. "The internet enables everyone to communicate with others and have immediate access to information," the researchers explain.

This paradigm shift in access to information means that today learners can, for example, educate themselves with minimal interaction from a higher power or traditional teacher. "In accepting this philosophy, an instructor may become the 'guide on the side' rather than the 'sage on the stage'," the researchers say.

However, in designing courses, educators must recognize that although self-governance is an individual, internal factor, not all learners will respond well to the online or community-led approach to education. Factors, such as personal goals, communication skills, information technology skills, and study environment, will also affect success.

The team offers ideas for testing the various approaches possible that should reveal any significant differences that will be invaluable in determining how well individuals will respond to education when they become a member of a dynamic learning community. The research will answer two crucial questions. First, in the learning process, is it better to design courses that are learner centered or community centered? Second, how can the development of critical thinking skills be most effectively developed in an online learning community?

More information: "Determinants for success in online learning Communities" in International Journal of Web Based Communities, 2009, 5, 340-350

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