

Introduction to Section II

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This section of the new issue contains six articles from the general pool of papers submitted to the journal. In these articles authors investigate theoretical frameworks, retention, modality preferences, and language learning in online settings.

The first of two papers addressing theory is by Jessica Pool, Gerda Reitsma, and Dirk Van den Berg of North-West University in South Africa. In this qualitative study the authors investigate an emerging construct within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. This investigation builds on research my colleagues and I initiated into the construct of “learning presence”, the self- and co-regulatory learning behaviors students demonstrate in online and blended learning environments. The authors found that a lack of self-regulation, including time-management, coordination, and management of tasks, required a higher level of teaching presence on the part of the instructor in the blended learning setting that was the context of the study.

The next paper in this section is by Anthony Picciano of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. This work is an ambitious attempt to review learning theory to develop a new theoretical framing for online education. Building on behaviorism, cognitivism, and social constructivism as a foundation, the author argues for a multimodal model that expands on his previous “Blending with Purpose” approach and adds several new components including community, interaction, and self-paced, independent instruction. The result is a more comprehensive descriptive theory for online pedagogy based on instructional intent.

The following two papers in this section look at retention in online courses and programs. The first of these, focusing on the course level, is by Whitney Alicia Zimmerman and Glenn Johnson of The Pennsylvania State University. Introductory statistics can be a challenging course for undergraduate students and completing the course online can be even more daunting. In this paper the authors investigated malleable factors that predict completion of such a course with a goal to focus on issues that may be impacted through targeted interventions. Results suggest several interventions may be effective including reducing test anxiety, increasing existing content knowledge early in the course, and improving students’ perceptions statistics instructors.

A second paper dealing with retention is by Chris Sorensen and Judy Donovan of Ashford University. In this study the authors attempt to better understand undergraduate online program level retention in a for-profit institution. They conducted a mixed methods investigation in which they examined evidence using survey methods, interviews, content analysis, and classroom observations. They conclude that retention in the online program they studied was contingent on a combination of adequate support, student ability to balance multiple priorities and stronger academic performance earlier in a program. They reference specific interventions likely to address these issues.

The next paper, by Gary Blau and Rob Drennan of Temple University, seeks to understand how student perceptions of specific methods used in online courses (e.g. recorded lectures, discussion boards) impacts their acceptance and endorsement of online learning more generally. This survey-based study finds that student who preferred the specific methods used for online or hybrid classroom delivery also had higher perceived favorability of online/hybrid courses and higher intentions to recommend online/hybrid courses. These results suggest that it may be more than the flexibility and convenience that draws students to online education. The pedagogy and its implementation make a difference as well.

The final paper in this issue is by Alireza Shakarami, of Islamic Azad University in Iran and Karim Hajhashemi and Nerina Caltabiano of James Cook University in Australia. This mixed-methods study investigates net generation language learners who are increasingly engaged in online learning environments. The study focuses on compensatory strategies used by ESL students in online settings to overcome the absence of cues traditionally encountered in face-to-face language learning contexts. The authors conclude that compensatory strategies were repeatedly used by study participants, but that modifications in the strategy was necessary in communications of the students in online their language learning tasks.

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