LEARNING STYLES, ACCEPTANCE AND EFFECTIVE USE OF VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN HIGHER DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Based on a literature review, this paper proposes the adoption of learning styles (Kolb; Kolb, 2013) to better understand acceptance and effective use (Venkatesh; Morris, 2003) of virtual learning environments (VLE) among academic staff and students in higher education. Kolb (1984) argued that learning is a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The learning styles are: divergent, assimilative, convergent and accommodative (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2013). Many higher education institutions have implemented VLE, such as MOODLE (Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), to manage teaching and learning online, because the adoption of VLE is supposed to create potential richer learning environments (Weaver, Spratt, Nair, 2008). There are several models and theories that seek to identify the factors that lead to the adoption, or not, of technologies in various social contexts. Venkatesh & Morris (2003) proposed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). According to Li (2010) the UTAUT is based on the Technology Acceptance Model – TAM (Davis; Bagozzi; Warshaw, 1989); Theory of Planned Behavior – TPB (Ajzen, 1991); Innovation Diffusion Theory – IDT (Rogers, 1995); Motivational Model – MM (Davis; Bagozzi; Warshaw, 1992) Model of PC Utilization – MPCU (Thompson; Higgins, Howell, 1991); Social Cognitive Theory – SCT (Bandura, 1986; Compeau; Higginins, 1995; Compeau; Higginins; Huff, 1999), Theory of Reasoned Action – TRA (Ajzen; Fishbein, 1980); and Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior – DTPB (Taylor; Todd, 1995). UTAUT model consider four key independent constructs in determining user acceptance and usage behavior: expectation of performance, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitation conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). However, even when applied to processes of teaching and learning online, the UTAUT seems not to consider adequately how the learning profiles can affect the acceptance and use VLE in higher education. It is argued that academic staff and students learning styles might be considered as another key independent construct of VLE’s acceptance and effective use in higher education. VLE’s design should be adapted to different learning styles, chosen resources and pedagogical activities in order to improve acceptance and effective learning in distance higher education.

Keywords: Learning styles, acceptance and effective use of technology, virtual learning environments, distance higher education