

RECONSIDERING STUDENT SUPPORT: Student Perception of Support and Learning Outcomes

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Introduction

Support for student learning is a key element in optimizing student learning experiences in any learning environment and its importance has been widely discussed. This study looked at student support, particularly in the course context, focusing mainly on guidance provided to students within a course.



Research Questions

This study examined the relationship between students' perception of support and learning outcomes. This study addressed the following questions:

1. Does students' perceived support influence their overall satisfaction of an undergraduate online course?
2. Is students' perceived support related to their learning outcomes in the course?

Methods

An introductory undergraduate online course in public health at a large southeastern university selected for this study during the spring semester in 2010. A total of 110 students completed a Web-based survey.

- Data collection: Web-based survey (25 items on 5-point Likert scale & 1 open-ended question)
- Data analysis: Correlation analysis

Support for Student Learning

Instructional Support

refers to instructional guidance to learning, which involves answering students' questions, correcting their misunderstandings, providing clear instruction, relevant resources, and constructive feedback on their assignments and performance.

Peer Support

refers to peer-to-peer learning which involves students supporting each other on academic or non-academic issues.

Technical Support

includes providing assistance for any technical issues that students may face in the online and blended courses.

Correlations among Students' Perceived Support, Course Satisfaction, and Final Scores

	Course Satisfaction (<i>p</i> -value)	Final Scores (<i>p</i> -value)
Instructional Support	.695* (.000)	.086 (.189)
Peer Support	.557* (.000)	-.028 (.389)
Technical Support	.541* (.000)	.004 (.482)

Discussion

1. **Various Types of Support:** Having a variety of support available allows the learner to have access to a learner experience that is tailored to his/her learning style, which may result in a more favorable course satisfaction.
2. **Easy Access to Support:** Students should have easy access to the support that is available to them.
3. **Immediate Communication:** Teachers' immediate responses to students' questions and problems influence students' learning outcomes and satisfaction.
4. **Feedback:** Specific and constructive feedback from an instructor (or other support personnel) provides guidance to students in a time of need. Providing this timely and constructive feedback changes student perceptions of the course, to increase course satisfaction.