Poster paper

Night and Day: Different expectations by students – a Preliminary study

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Anecdotal evidence suggested that students enrolled in a full-time course offered at night, had a better success and retention rate than those enrolled in the same course offered during the day. In an effort to determine the validity of this viewpoint, the author is collecting and analyzing data from a number of classes that are enrolled in the Diploma in Information and Communications Technology Level 5 (DipICT L5) programme at a regional polytechnic. This programme is offered both during the day and at night. These equivalent classes will be tracked over a number of semesters.

Apart from the quantitative results, the author is also trying to establish whether there are perceived differences in environmental factors that come into play for each of the student groups. The day students tend to be full-time students, mostly direct entry from secondary school or from another tertiary programme they have completed. The night students come from a variety of backgrounds, but generally from the workforce. These students tend to want to maintain their full-time employment and to continue with full-time study. The night classes are taught from 5:30-9:30PM, Monday to Thursday. On Friday, there is only one class, 5:30 to 7:30PM. A number of day students make critical comments about the adequacy of resources available to them: yet the night students do not seem to have the same concerns.

METHODOLOGY

Two classes during the day and two classes at night are to be given a multi-part questionnaire to fill in. This questionnaire is based on the Computer Learning Environment Inventory (CLEI) as developed by Newby and Fisher. There are two forms of the questionnaire, the Actual Form and the Ideal Form. The Actual Form is concerned with what the student actually thinks is currently happening in the computer laboratory; the Ideal Form asks the student to answer the questions from their point of view of an ideal environment. Respondents will complete both forms.

The scales used by the CLEI are

- Student Cohesiveness

Sample question (SQ): I get along well with students in this laboratory class.

- Open-Endedness (of laboratory work)

SQ: In my computer sessions the instructor decides the best way for me to solve a given problem.

- Integration (of theory and practicals)

SQ: I use the theory from the lecture sessions during my practical sessions.

- Technology Adequacy (for the required tasks)

SQ: The computers are suitable for running the software I am required to use.

- Material Environment (Laboratory is 'fit for purpose')

SQ: I find the laboratory is crowded when I am using it.

Additional questions will be on age, previous education, and whether the student entered the programme as a school leaver, or from the workforce. The responses will be scored and grouped by class. Comparisons will be charted over each of the scales used.

DISCUSSION

While the quantitative statistical data can produce some interesting results by themselves, the chance to compare different student group's perceptions of the same physical environment is an opportunity not to be missed. The results will assist us in critically evaluating how we target the delivery of our programme to each group. Are there indeed differences in expectations (by the students) between the two groups? How can we cater for these? What about the class's general backgrounds? The same or different? How can we (the staff) use this information to enhance learning? Are the motivational factors the same for each group? Are the responses to the questionnaires consistent across class groups over time? There are any number of further research questions to follow up on.

What will result from this study? This will enable us to take appropriate actions that will lead to an increase in the success rate of the students overall, and a decrease the number of 'drop-outs'.

Newby, M., & Fisher, D.L. (1997). An instrument for assessing the learning environment of a computer laboratory. Journal of educational computing research, 16, 179-190.