

Reduce Academic Fatigue and Enhance Retention for the Determined Ones (TDOs) in Online Learning

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Abstract

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had a remarkable influence on approaches to the day-to-day activities around the world, an influence which had led to a 'new normal'. In the spring of 2020, with the abrupt and essential transition from on-campus learning to distance learning, students and educators had limited time to prepare for such a massive shift in teaching and learning. Not many could have been prepared for such a shift, and new approach in teaching and learning. The impact has been felt more by students with disabilities, because their normal routines have been abandoned, leading to anxiety and stress resulting from the unknown. The move to online learning was a reactive than a proactive approach because no one apparently saw the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on lifestyles coming. By summer 2020, as a result of online learning, key issues relating to academic fatigue and retention in students were widely identified through surveys and other data. This study emanated from these concerns to provide the opportunity to address the issues from a reactive approach into a proactive one, including the use of methods that will enhance student retention. Although digital technologies are a regular part of learning in the 21st Century, it cannot be denied that the sudden change to online learning platforms has affected both students and educators. Institutions went digital, relying on video conferencing programs like Zoom and Microsoft Teams for individuals to carry on working in isolation from their homes. Therefore, as the majority of interactions moved to this virtual realm, with the most widely used software being Zoom, it has come to be commonly referred to as 'zoom academic fatigue' as dubbed by Duong, T. (2020). Consequently, combating this new form of exhaustion has directly impacted on students' learning, especially for students with disabilities in higher education institutions. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), The Determined Ones (TDOs) is the official appellation given to people with disabilities. This study will therefore be referring to students with disabilities at The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), in Abu Dhabi, the higher education institution where this study is taking place. Reports from surveys conducted at HCT in the summer of 2020 when the Covid 19 pandemic was raging revealed that the transition to an online learning platform left students feeling tired, anxious and stressed out as they waited for the next video call lesson. Their normal routines no longer applied. The effects of this academic fatigue within online classrooms requires attention and solutions to combat it.

Keywords: Online remote Learning, students with disabilities, academic fatigue, student retention.