Perceptions of Online Learning: Relationships with Personality, Learning Strategies, Adaptability, and Academic Performance

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Honours Thesis Summary

During the spring of 2020, the abrupt transition to online learning required by the COVID-19 pandemic led to overwhelmingly negative perceptions of online learning amongst students. Today the world has adjusted to a 'new normal' given COVID-19 vaccination options, yet many university courses are still taught online. The purpose of the present study was to determine students' current perceptions of online learning, given that they have now had almost two years of experience with the online learning environment. Specifically, this study was designed to examine how variables of interest (such as personality traits (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), learning strategies (i.e., academic self-efficacy, perceived intrinsic value of learning, test anxiety, cognitive strategy use, and self-regulation), adaptability (i.e., response to the COVID-19 pandemic), and academic performance (i.e., grade point average)) relate to perceptions of online learning at this unique moment in time. A second purpose of the present study was to examine the differences between students who prefer learning online, students who prefer learning in-person, and students who have no preference. Last, a third purpose of the present study was to discover which variables of interest (listed above) would predict perception of online learning and academic performance. A total of 143 university students completed an online questionnaire assessing the variables of interest (listed above). The results revealed that perception of online learning was significantly positively related to adaptability, openness, extraversion, self-efficacy, intrinsic value, cognitive strategy use and self-regulation, and significantly negatively related to neuroticism. Furthermore, perceptions of online learning were mostly positive as the majority of participants (62.4%) reported that they either preferred online learning or that they liked both learning formats. In addition, students who preferred learning online had significantly higher perceptions of online learning, academic self-efficacy, and adaptability scores, whereas students who had no

preference had significantly lower openness scores. This seems to indicate that students prefer learning online when they enjoy online courses, when they feel confident in their ability to accomplish new things, and when they adapt well to changes (brought on by the pandemic). This also perhaps indicates that students have no preference when they are not overly excited by, or interested in, either learning format. Additional results revealed that perception of online learning was predicted by adaptability, self-regulation, and intrinsic value of learning. This implies that students will view online learning positively when they adapt well to transitioned online courses, monitor their attention and behaviours when learning online, and view online assignments as curiosity provoking challenges. Likewise, academic performance was predicted by self-regulation which indicates that students will achieve high grades when they monitor their attention, effort, and study behaviours. Overall, the present study emphasizes that adaptability is key to students' perceptions of online learning at this point in the COVID-19 pandemic.