E-Tutor Perceptions towards the Star Rural Area E-Learning Project

Chiung-Wei Huang, National Central University, Zhongli, Taiwan
Eric Zhi Feng Liu, National Central University, Zhongli, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

The authors examine e-tutor perceptions of the star rural area e-learning project, service learning. The study employed 125 volunteer e-tutors twice per week for one semester. A survey found that e-tutors had the most positive perceptions towards teaching preparation. The results showed that only e-tutors from different grades reflected various perceptions of the star rural area e-learning project and no significant differences existed regarding genders, schools, and majors’ perceptions. Integrating digital technology into teaching improves e-tutee abilities in information technology and balances the educational resources gap between city and county.

Keywords: Distance Education, E-Tutee, E-Tutor, Online Tutoring, Service Learning, Star Rural Area E-Learning Project

INTRODUCTION

With the progress of modern technology, online tutoring over long distances can work. Online tutoring system is used in today’s private education which allows e-tutors and e-tutees to communicate each other in a real time (Arif & Khalifa, 2012). Online tuition is as a means of supporting, supplementing, and in some cases, replacing face-to-face teaching and tutoring (Jopling, 2012). The Ministry of Education (1994) planned a distance education system actively, promoting online tutoring of elementary in 2006. This project was adjusted to “The Project of Online Tutoring for After School Online Learning” in 2010 and the service includes one-on-one distance learning. The development of this star rural area e-learning project, online tutoring for after-school learning, as kindled hope that this type of online learning can improve student learning interest and achievement. In this study, northern Taiwanese university students are given service learning opportunities via the star rural area e-learning project. The star rural area e-learning project has received considerable attention from e-tutors (online preservice teachers) and e-tutees (online elementary school students).

The effectiveness of the star rural area e-learning project cannot be overlooked in an
M-shape society, where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, which affects educational opportunities (Cheng, Liu, Ko, & Lin, 2007a, 2007b). The e-learning project provides greater educational opportunities for e-tutees in rural areas and overcomes geographic limitations (Cheng, Liu, Ko, & Lin, 2007a; Liu & Ko, 2007). The importance of undertaking this service learning project is to help students in rural areas overcome their learning problems because of their inconvenient transportation, economic factors, lack of environmental resources, and very few qualified teachers. The unequal allocation of educational resources between city and country could improve and be more equally distributed.

E-tutees from urban and remote areas receive remedial instruction through an e-learning platform and e-tutees designed math courses for e-tutees. All of the e-tutees received one-on-one instruction through online learning, breaking space and time limitations. Few studies have reported on e-tutor perceptions of the star rural area e-learning project and how it has benefited learning and instruction by service learning. Although the e-tutors derived from various demographic backgrounds, scant attention has focused on their perceptions regarding this project, which affect teaching quality. Clarifying e-tutor perceptions of this service-learning project can assist supervisors in implementing future curriculum and improvements. Therefore, our study attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are e-tutor perceptions toward the star rural area e-learning project?
2. To what degree do e-tutor background variables (grades, gender, schools, majors) generate different perceptions of the star rural area e-learning project?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distance Education

Distance education is a broad term, comprising several different delivery modes (Meyer, 2002). Distance education is a useful and flexible way of learning, communicating, and sharing (Sahin & Shelley, 2008; Strambi & Bouvat, 2003). One-on-one online programs are beneficial for people who are not financially, physically or geographically capable of receiving traditional education (Gunawardena & Mcisaae, 2004). Providing this type of e-tutor project to e-tutees has considerable advantages. Hence, the number of students enrolled in online courses has increased rapidly since 1990 (Wang, Shannon, & Ross, 2013) and online learning in higher education has grown exponentially in the past decade (Yuan & Kim, 2014). Hung, Hsu, & Rice (2012) also found that the majority of online instructors rely on web-based course evaluation surveys to evaluate online courses.

Asynchronous and synchronous learning models play crucial roles in e-tutee learning processes. Asynchronous instruction allows student and teacher interaction to occur at different times (Chen, Ko, Kinshuk, & Lin, 2005; Ge, 2012). Asynchronous distance learning is beneficial to learning and instruction by offering recorded learning and teaching processes, in which e-tutors post their pre-recorded teaching materials on a webpage for students to download (Cheng et al., 2007a, 2007b; Lin, Liu, Ko, & Cheng, 2008; Liu & Ko, 2007). E-tutees can also read information and messages at a later period (Roblyer, 2006). Asynchronous models include video, voice and text-based learning sources, such as discussion, web-based instructional material, homework, and face-to-face teaching videos (Wang & Chen, 2009).

Synchronous distance learning, which sends and receives communications immediately, is similar to traditional face-to-face instruction. Teachers and students communicate with each other immediately, breaking time and space limitations (Lin & Ko, 2007; Roblyer, 2006). Synchronous distance learning occurs when the teacher and pupils interact simultaneously from different locations. Students enrolled in synchronous courses are typically required to log on to their computer during a set time at least once per week (Littlefield, 2013). Synchronous learning provides learning activi-
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