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Article Summary: Read-Only Participants: A Case for Student Communication in Online Classes As technology advances more and more, computers and internet have become more accessible, affordable, and ever so popular in recent times. With easy accessibility to internet, the online learning environment is a growing trend. Schools all over the nation offer online programs and fast earning degrees. Students from different demographics and age groups fill online classrooms making it even more popular.

However, with such diversity in the classroom how does the instructor control communication in the classroom? Does the lack of participation from fellow students influence the learning environment? What are some of the different types of students often found in the online classes environment? This article will summarize the main points found in a research based on a case study prepared by Nagel, Blignaut, and Cronje. With extensive research, investigation, and observations Nagel et. al. (2007) put together an article highlighting the importance of communication in the online classes.

Noticing a significant drop-out rate in online classes, they were determined to research what affected this rate and which aspects of the online classes were setting students behind. The authors used different methods to gather data to support their findings, and used different articles to incorporate their research and back up their conclusions. In order to analyze student participation they “ presented an 8 week course on web-based distance learning to Masters students on a computer-integrated education course at the University of Pretoria” (Nagel et. al. , 2007, p. 41).

Matriculated in this course were students from a diverse background and different age groups ranging from 30 to 50 years old. Throughout this 8 week course Nagel et. al. (2007) were able to observe and evaluate students from different perspectives. The authors used the different tools provided online in order to analyze participation from each student, not only with each other but also with the instructor. Among other research methods, they used a qualitative methodology in order to analyze students' participation, and the reaction of the class toward less participating individuals (Nagel et. al., 2007). Using previously researched scholar articles and books, the authors were able to base their search, follow certain guidelines and compare their results with other results. Using tests such as the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test, Nagel et. al. (2007) were able to examine the differences in performance based on each grade group. Their primary findings was that participation and communication is certainly a requirement for successful completion of online courses.

When instructors are involved and encourage students to participate it motivates students to not give up or drop the class. They were able to classify students into different categories, and they found these types of students in the online class:

- Read only students who do not participate;
- Highly visible students who posts a lot but without contributing much of value;
- Invisible students who blame internet connectivity or high costs;
- Absent student for various reasons that try to stay on track;
- Non-contributing students that do not share with the class.

Furthermore, by analyzing the different modalities in the online class such as looking at the discussion posts of each student, quality of assignments, and <https://assignbuster.com/article-summary-read-only-participants-a-case-for-student-communication-in-online-classes/>

participation in the collaborative group assignments Nagel et. al. (2007) were able to draw their own conclusions. These authors found that if a student did not contribute in class and participate in the discussion forums as required, replied to other classmates and maintained open communication channels with the instructor it would be hard to succeed or even be able to complete the course.

A key point is to develop a sense of community with other students in the class which in turn will help more students to participate in the course. Their studies clearly showed that students who participate more in discussion questions, and fully participate in the collaborative learning were successful and passed the course. The authors also found that when the instructor motivates students to learn and participate it helps more students to get involved and complete the course. Students that have more motivation have a higher successful rate and tend to overcome the different difficulties involved in taking an online course. Although some students still drop out because of factors such as poor internet connection, slow dial-up, old computer, or lack of software installed, others still find ways to overcome those barriers and complete the course (Nagel et. al. , 2007). The biggest challenge for most of the students according to the authors was the collaborative experience. They observed that working in groups between students seemed to be somewhat of a failure, some students complained they had to do all the work and that not all the members participated.

However, they stated that collaborating with other students is a very beneficial interaction, learning as a group is easier, more ideas flow and when the group exchange thoughts they can understand the concepts
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better. To conclude, Nagel et. al. (2007) agreed that interaction plays an important role in the online learning environment. If students fail to interact and communicate with each other and the instructor it becomes hard to pass the class. Their study showed that even though some students posted a lot in the forums it did not indicate completion of the course.

It is more important to post fewer meaningful messages, than numerous messages with no real value or that are insignificant. Finally, “ the establishment of an online community is widely held as the most important prerequisite for successful course completion and depends on an interaction between a peer group and a facilitator” (Nagel et. al. , 2007, p. 37).

References L. Nagel, A. S. Blignaut, & J. C. Cronje. (2007). Read-Only Participants: A Case for Student Communication in Online Classes. *Interactive Learning Environments*. Vol. 17, No. 1, 37-51.