

AGE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ONLINE BEHAVIOR, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there are differences between different age and gender groups of adult learners when they are compared simultaneously on the number of messages they post, self-efficacy improvement and academic performance in an online learning environment. A two-way MANOVA revealed significant main and interaction effects on the dependent variables. Older students posted significantly more messages, but younger students improved their self-efficacy significantly more. Female students improved their self-efficacy significantly more and scored significantly higher on the final exam than male students. Younger male students' exam scores and younger female students' exam scores were significantly different from each other.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main phenomena characterizing education since the late twentieth century is the use of Internet-based technologies. Currently, the World Wide Web is a ubiquitous pedagogical tool, and online instruction has become popular for various age groups and both gender groups of learners. However, online learning is viewed as more challenging than traditional classroom learning (Wyatt, 2005). Because computer technology must be used as a delivery vehicle during online learning, some students may have difficulties if they

are not familiar with using computers. For example, older students tend to be less-competent computer users than are younger students (Yu, Kim, & Rho, 2001), and female students tend to be less familiar with or have lower self-efficacy toward computers than male students (Bradshaw & Johari, 2003; Thompson & Lynch, 2003). To help instructors design their online instruction to be effectively tailored to individual learners of different age and gender groups, research should provide an answer to the question of how age and gender influence learners' online performance.

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The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, Volume 8(3), 2007, pp. 213-222
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ISSN 1528-3518

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