

THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTOR IMMEDIACY AND SOCIAL PRESENCE ON ONLINE
STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. The theory guiding this study was Short's theory of social presence, as it explains the real and present interaction that affects the saliency and interpersonal relationships of the participants. The methodology for this qualitative study followed a hermeneutical phenomenological design of 10 asynchronous online students enrolled in universities in Southern California. Data were collected using individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. The data analysis included a phenomenological reduction of data coding to identify common themes and trends. These themes and trends were compared and contrasted against outlying experiences and synthesized to identify merging themes. Three themes and six sub-themes emerged from the study. The three themes included quality of instructor-student interaction, socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, and effectiveness of online learning. Findings from this study will help current and future asynchronous online instructors use social presence and immediacy to improve students' academic success.

Keywords: immediacy, social presence, learning perception, motivation, course satisfaction, academic success

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List of Abbreviations

Learner-Content Interaction (LCI)

Learner-Instructor Interaction (LII)

Learner-Learner Interaction (LLI)

Online Learning Self-Efficacy (OLSE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. Previous studies have explored the relationship between instructor pedagogical behaviors and student academic success. However, it has become even more relevant over the past few years due to the 2020 lockdown (Bolliger, 2018). Chapter One provides a background on the importance of instructor immediacy and social presence in online asynchronous college courses. This chapter includes the study's background, problem, and purpose. Concluding this chapter are the significance, research questions guiding this research, and definitions of terms relative to the study.

Background

Online college education has grown significantly in the past twenty years, with an annual average increase of 3.1% (Palvia et al., 2018). Increased online learning has mandated “education and training organizations to utilize electronically based interaction for direct, physically proximate interactions between students and instructors” (Rovai, 2016, p. 320). Online college students require instructor social presence and immediacy to stay motivated, have course satisfaction, and persevere toward academic success (Lavin & Mandviwalla, 2018). While face-to-face instruction has returned to most campuses, many instructors and students may choose to continue to participate in online courses today. These choices may result from the COVID-19 pandemic. Instructor immediacy and social presence are essential in both online and traditional courses. It is challenging to determine how much social presence and immediacy are required for students to remain motivated (Donham et al., 2022). No online course will be

considered satisfactory without some level of each (Costello & Welch, 2018). The following sections provide the historical, theoretical, and social context required to support the need for this study. These sections will help review how the challenge of online courses has evolved, understand the areas of society most impacted, and realize the theoretical underpinnings that define the need for this study.

Historical Context

Historically, a traditional college setting was face-to-face in a classroom on a college campus (Kingsbury, 2021). In the 1990s, online courses became more popular because of their convenience for students who could not attend courses in person (Martin Nunez et al., 2017). These online options also allowed students to attend to jobs, family requirements, and other external activities while completing their degrees (Cox et al., 2016). As online college courses evolved, they became more asynchronous, leaving students to complete assignments without a direct social presence from their instructors or classmates (Rovai, 2016). Additionally, online and face-to-face courses require immediacy in assignment feedback or critique. For students to learn from past mistakes and apply the feedback to future assignments, online courses must have immediate and effective instructor feedback (Liu, 2019).

The concept of online courses began in 1981 and relied heavily on the postal system to deliver books and courseware to online students prior to the start of their course. These online courses provide valuable insight into how the structure of courses needed to change. Instructor lectures were no longer the most effective teaching technique, and students expressed the importance of collaboration among their peers and instructor feedback, rather than engaging in classroom discussion (Harasim, 2000).

As online learning continued to transform after the introduction of the world wide web in the early 1990s, students became more able to choose what they learned, when to learn, where to learn, and whom to learn with. Online instructors also learned how to provide more effective feedback and social interaction with their students. Instructor participation was still significant and valuable. The instructor role needed to be less passive and more supportive and guiding in the online environment (Harasim, 2000; Kentnor, 2015). Additionally, as online courses continued to become popular through the early 2000s, instructors became more involved in using technology to interact with their students and proactive in determining the best instructional practices to foster an effective learning environment (Cardon, 2000; Kentnor, 2015).

Studies about learning outside of a classroom began in 2006 and concentrated on distance learning. Studies regarding online learning began to become more abundant in 2009 and have continued to grow over the past 15 years (Lim et al., 2021; Liu, 2021). The online learning studies began by comparing traditional face-to-face learning to online learning instruction. Studies concentrating on instructor social presence and immediacy began around 2013 (Huang et al., 2017). These studies showed that “structured asynchronous online courses that have the greatest impact on student performance are those that include instructor participation, interaction with students, and facilitation of student collaboration” (Kentnor, 2015, p. 30). Additionally, timely and individualized instructor feedback was identified as an important challenge in the online learning environment that instructors must manage to support the student learning process (Liu, 2021; Panigrahi et al., 2018).

The overall surge in the popularity of online learning has altered the use of traditional face-to-face learning environments in higher education. This change has also required instructors and students to adapt to new learning techniques. The increased use of online learning presents

challenges to instructors and students who are not comfortable using technology to learn, interact, and provide feedback (Harasim, 2000). As online courses continue to flood the educational society, the expectations and requirements of instructors' social presence and immediacy in learning environments must be investigated and developed further to ensure the academic success of their students.

Social Context

Online college education has recently increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ditta et al., 2021). Online learning is becoming a primary delivery method in higher education (Alawamleh et al., 2022). Instructors and students must be flexible when adapting from in-person classroom settings to online environments. Online instructors must understand how social presence and immediacy impact students' academic success in an online college course. Without the ability to provide direct face-to-face interaction, instructors must understand how their feedback is processed (d'Alessio et al., 2019). The means of communication and tone of the feedback provided can impact students' learning perception, motivation for academic success, and overall course satisfaction (Kaufmann et al., 2021). Although online learning provides a convenient and flexible means for college students to learn from a distance, it can also make students feel isolated and unmotivated to excel (Cinquin et al., 2019). Immediacy and social presence can significantly impact college student motivation. The results of this study may inform higher education stakeholders, instructors of asynchronous online courses, and online education content creators in determining the most effective instructor immediacy and social presence strategies in higher education (Alqurashi, 2019).

Theoretical Context

Understanding different theoretical frameworks related to the research being conducted is

significant because they explain different observations and manifestations that may be discovered throughout the research process. Identifying the significant theories that apply to the research topic can also make reviewing the associated literature easier. It is understood that empirical research identifies underlying theories and discusses the consistency of their results. Following up will offer a framework for considering the evidence acquired in theoretical literature (Gall et al., 2007). This study will also explore how instructor social presence and immediacy impact a college student's decision to remain motivated throughout their course and achieve academic success. Previous studies that explored social presence and instructor immediacy were grounded in various theoretical foundations. One study examined the transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2016), which identifies key experiences of adult learners that affect their personal and emotional feelings while involved in academic environments (McDougall, 2019). This theory stems from Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of human needs and their relevance to students' motivation in different school settings and can be applied to this specific study (Palvia et al., 2018). The expectancy violations theory is associated with the importance of this study (Houser, 2005, 2006). According to Enskat et al. (2017), this theory helps predict how students will react to specific actions of their instructors. It supports the idea that when instructors engage in behavior that violates the expectations of the students, they feel dissatisfied and unmotivated (Enskat et al., 2017). Specifically related to this study, Ashraf et al. (2018) found that students who experience immediacy through feedback and inclusion through social presence may be more motivated to excel academically. Conversely, Alshahrani et al. (2017) concluded that students who do not receive the social presence or immediacy they expect might value the instructor as less credible and have negative learning perceptions. Ultimately, this study will help build upon previous theories related to students' learning perceptions,

motivation, and course satisfaction based on the social presence and immediacy afforded by their instructors. Tinto's (1975) student integration theory and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning can be used to understand the experiences online students have within an online educational environment. The e-learning theory was explored by Hassan et al. (2020). They found that the theory revolved around using multimedia in conjunction with social interaction and immediacy to create an environment that supports online students (Hassan et al., 2020).

As the use of online asynchronous courses continues to grow, it is imperative that instructors and educational institutions provide effective online learning platforms and environments. Successful learning environments may also support a sense of community through social interaction and immediacy, which will likely increase student motivation to achieve academic success (Rovai, 2016). Understanding how to create an effective learning environment through student integration, social interactions, motivation, and a supportive e-learning experience will ensure online asynchronous students remain motivated to achieve academic success (Ferrer et al., 2022).

Problem Statement

The problem is that many asynchronous online college students feel disconnected due to a lack of instructor immediacy and social presence in an online learning environment. This disconnect may result in poor learning outcomes and decreased motivation to excel academically (Costello & Welch, 2018). Today's challenge is how instructor immediacy and social presence in an asynchronous online community may impact a college student's learning perception, motivation, and satisfaction. Additionally, it may be challenging to determine students' perceptions of their online schooling environment and understand student behaviors and choices based on their instructors' social presence and immediacy (Zajac & Lane, 2021).

Online college courses can be an excellent alternative for students with factors precluding them from attending a traditional in-person classroom course. Some of these external factors include maintaining a job or supporting a family (Ashraf et al., 2018). However, as the number of online students continues to increase, insufficient literature explains the impact of instructor immediacy and social presence in online learning environments.

During the COVID pandemic, most college courses were in an online learning environment. Instructors had to adapt to an unfamiliar environment and still provide enough social presence and immediacy to ensure their students would succeed (Ditta et al., 2021). In previous studies regarding the social presence and immediacy in online courses, most have been quantitative and included instructors and students familiar with the structure and nuances of online courses (Turnbull et al., 2021). Previous immediacy research has shown positive outcomes during college asynchronous online courses but has been conducted primarily at research universities, not liberal arts colleges (Furlich, 2016; Kim, 2018; Liu, 2021). Research previously completed regarding instructor social presence has centered on course design strategies but lacks information on social presence techniques for online course facilitation (Lim et al., 2021; Kim, 2018). Previous studies have shown that the motivation for academic success is positively related to verbal and non-verbal instructor immediacy behaviors. Course satisfaction and students' desire and tendency to perform better in a course directly result from this motivation (Steele & Holbeck, 2018; Parrish et al., 2021; Liu, 2021). Finally, previous research has shown that online college students' learning perceptions may differ from their instructors and other students. Additional research is required to determine what factors would help build a more robust online learning environment (Martin et al., 2019). Therefore, the problem is that instructor

immediacy and social presence in an asynchronous online community may impact a college student's learning perception, motivation, and overall course satisfaction.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. At this stage in the research, *instructor immediacy and social presence* will be generally defined as the connection, and interaction instructors have with the students and how quickly these instructors respond to students' inquiries and assignments. These connections and interactions are essential to study because asynchronous online students continue to grow, and instructors must adapt to provide a constructive college learning environment (Sneyers & DeWitte, 2018). The difference this study can make is that it will inform instructors about immediacy and social presence techniques that are most effective in motivating students and creating positive learning outcomes. The research design guiding this study was van Manen's (2017) hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology focused on a description of the experiences the students had with their instructor during the asynchronous online class.

Significance of the Study

Existing studies have shown that the motivation for academic success is positively related to verbal and non-verbal instructor immediacy behaviors (Steele & Holbeck, 2018; Parrish et al., 2021; Liu, 2021). Many students use feedback from previous assignments to complete future assignments, which can be impacted by how quickly instructors provide that feedback. Instructors must know how quickly students expect feedback to maximize their academic success and motivation (Liu, 2019). The comprehensive exploration of the experiences of online students

with instructor immediacy and social presence will add to the existing literature and offer a more rigorous understanding of its impact.

Theoretical Significance

The social presence theory can be further explored and built upon through a theoretical perspective. This study will provide additional information for future studies to construct effective data collection and research designs. Theories are not stagnant and need to evolve based on past experiences and the needs of future educational environments. This study will support the evolution of adult transformative learning from in-person to online courses (Kingsbury, 2021). Specifically, Alawamleh et al. (2019) and Kim et al. (2016) reported that student interactions with their peers and instructors help motivate them to continue online courses and excel. Additionally, studies found that fostering a sense of community through social interaction and immediacy supports online students' efficient use of online tools to develop a positive relationship with online tools during asynchronous courses (Lim et al., 2021; Mandernach et al., 2018; Pandney, 2021). This study will further connect college students' expectations when taking an online course to the means and effectiveness instructors interact with their students and provide responses to support their academic success (Sneyers & DeWitte, 2018).

Empirical Significance

Recent studies have determined that online students who feel a social presence from their instructors and peers develop increased satisfaction with their online learning environment, and the ability to understand the course material is more prevalent (Alqurashi, 2019). This study can relate to other studies concentrating on the ease of use of online courses and increased computer-based technology (Enskat et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2017). Studies from Cardon (2000), Donham

et al. (2022), and Rovai (2016) show that social and cognitive presence from instructors has a strong influence on the likelihood that students participate in the online environment and internalize the course information they receive. Understanding the impact of instructor social presence and immediacy on online students will also aid in the future design of asynchronous online courses to ensure the course material, design, and environment support academic success (Lim et al., 2021; Stone & Springer, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022). The current study will build upon previous studies of the impact of COVID-19 learning environments on the impact of future students' academic success. Ultimately, this study will add to the current literature by improving instructor social presence and immediacy in online asynchronous college courses (Alquarashi, 2019; Ferrer et al., 2022; Kreijns et al., 2022).

Practical Significance

Finally, this topic was important to study because the number of asynchronous online students continues to increase, and instructors need to adapt to provide a constructive college learning environment for these students. This study can make a difference in informing instructors about immediacy and social presence techniques that can motivate students and create positive learning outcomes (Rovai, 2016). The general population has recently become increasingly reliant on online courses due to the COVID pandemic. In order to ensure that teaching outcomes and academic standards are maintained, instructors must be flexible in determining the most effective ways for their students to succeed (Donham et al., 2022). This study will help provide instructors with the information necessary to adjust to students' unique needs during an online course. It will also provide universities and colleges insight into how to better train and develop their curriculums and instructors for successful online courses (Palvia et al. 2018). Finally, this study is essential for the students involved because it allows them to mold

the future of online education, providing a path for students to define the importance of instructor immediacy and social presence.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this hermeneutical phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

What are online students' experiences with instructor immediacy and social presence in asynchronous online courses?

Sub-Question One

How do online students describe online immediacy and social presence when connecting with instructors and peers in an online course?

Sub-Question Two

How do online students describe experiences with an instructor's online immediacy and social presence related to student motivation?

Sub-Question Three

How do online students describe the communication techniques an instructor should use to assist students throughout the online course?

Definitions

The following terms are pertinent to this qualitative research design.

1. *Immediacy* – Immediacy is how instructors respond to their students' inquiries or provide feedback on submitted assignments (Schutt et al., 2019).
2. *Learning Perception* – Student learning perception is the quality of the online experience they receive based on course design and organization, direct instruction, and discourse facilitation (Oyarzun et al., 2018).

3. *Motivation for Academic Success* – Motivation for academic success is the student's desire to learn and perform better in the course (Liu, 2021).
4. *Overall Course Satisfaction* – Overall course satisfaction is the students' positive responses to the instructor and course content associated with effective learning outcomes (Schutt et al., 2019).
5. *Social Presence* – Social presence is the connection and interaction the instructor has with their students during the online course (Parrish et al., 2021).

Summary

As the importance of instructor social presence and immediacy during an asynchronous online college course becomes evident, it is imperative to continue to study this topic. Understanding how students experience instructor social presence and immediacy and how these experiences impact college students' learning perception, motivation to learn, and overall course satisfaction will benefit students, instructors, and leaders in higher education. This Chapter defined the problem for this study as the idea that many asynchronous online college students feel disconnected between instructor immediacy and social presence in an online learning environment, resulting in poor learning outcomes and a lack of motivation to excel (Costello & Welch, 2018) academically. It further identified the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at multiple universities in Southern CA. For this study, social presence and immediacy are the connection and interaction instructors have with students and how quickly these instructors respond to students' questions and assignments. All students deserve the chance to excel academically, whether in online or in-person courses. Therefore, this study will ensure that current and future instructors have the most effective tools to provide

social presence and immediacy in online college courses to encourage students' learning perception, motivation, and overall academic success.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. Chapter Two provides a background on the importance of instructor immediacy and social presence in an online asynchronous college course. The background includes an overview of the historical background, a description of the theoretical framework, and an explanation of the society-at-large for this study. A systematic literature review was conducted to evaluate the reasoning behind how instructor immediacy and social presence impact a student's overall success. The following sections will present a review of the theoretical framework and current literature related to the topic of study. The first section will discuss the theory relevant to student success and learning perception. This theory is the social presence theory, presented by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). In the end, a gap in the literature will be identified, presenting a worthwhile need for the current study

Theoretical Framework

The theory guiding this study was the social presence theory, presented by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). This theory concentrates on two main concepts that impact a student's motivation. These concepts include immediacy (Weiner & Mehrabian, 1968) and intimacy (Argyle & Dean, 1965). Since social presence in an online course can set the climate for learning, this theory may aid instructors in prioritizing how and when they provide immediacy and social presence during their courses (Kreijns et al., 2021).

Ultimately, it is evident that there has been a recent substantial increase in online college education (Oyarzun et al., 2018). Instructors and students must be flexible and able to adapt to the ever-changing online environment, including understanding how immediacy and social presence impact learning perception, motivation for academic success, and overall course satisfaction. Although online learning provides a convenient and flexible means for college students to learn from a distance, it can also make students feel isolated and unmotivated to excel (Lavin & Mandviwalla, 2018). The immediacy and social presence can significantly impact college student motivation, and instructors need to understand how much of each is sufficient for their students. While online courses can provide flexibility in teaching at any place or time, the quality of online instruction depends on how engaged the instructor is and how motivated online students are during their course. Therefore, online instruction requires instructors to describe the design, development, and implementation used to maximize their social presence and immediacy, promoting student academic success (Wu et al., 2021). This study will present conclusions that will help instructors find a balance of immediacy and social presence their students require to, ultimately, enjoy the success of a promising academic future. Additionally, the results can assist future asynchronous online course creation and determine the most effective instructor immediacy and social presence techniques for course design and students' success (Richardson et al., 2017).

Short et al.(1976) created social presence theory to understand how communication and relationships built within online media impacted motivation and the nature of interaction. They referred to social presence as the real and present interaction that affected the saliency of interpersonal relationships and stated that social presence “varies between different media and influences that medium chosen by the individual who wished to communicate” (Short et al.,

1976, p. 65). Furthermore, social presence could be further rated on four scales, to include unsociable-sociable, insensitive-sensitive, cold-warm, and impersonal-personable. These ratings were also related to the immediacy and intimacy experienced by the participants (Kreijns, 2021). Immediacy behaviors are verbal and non-verbal experiences that communicate warmth, closeness, and interest. Immediacy is based on a measure of psychological distance a communicator places between themselves and the object of their communication (Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). Intimacy behaviors include experiences that create comfort and avoid producing conflict. Within a communication medium, these behaviors are influenced by physical and emotional distance and personability (Argyle & Dean, 1965). Ultimately, social presence focuses on the interpersonal emotional connection created between communicators and the experience of feeling that someone is present or real. It can be a significant predictor of motivation and satisfaction within computer-based media, including perceived social presence in online courses (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018).

The theory of social presence is applicable to this study because technology has significantly evolved over time, and there has been a growth in online courses due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Sobaih et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic forced learning to transition to online formats across the world. This transition was typically government-mandated, concluding that emergency remote teaching conditions were the only way to avoid the spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout school systems (Alawamleh et al., 2022). These online courses are predominantly conducted on web-based media that precludes personal one-on-one interactions. Using forums such as Blackboard and Canvas automatically create a delay in communications as the instructor does not usually respond or provide feedback immediately. Therefore, social presence and immediacy are often lacking in online courses (Wut & Xu, 2021).

Since the shift from traditional to online education with the support of digital technology has been largely recognized as a trend or a forecast mainstream in the near future (Sobaih et al. 2020; Palvia et al. 2018), the long-term environment requires a better understanding of online education with effective preparation and better technological experiences.

Related Literature

Online college courses can appeal to students with factors precluding them from attending a traditional in-person classroom course. These external factors include a worldwide pandemic, job maintenance, or family support (Birt et al., 2016). However, as the number of online students continues to increase, insufficient literature explains the effects of instructor immediacy and social presence in online learning environments.

During the COVID pandemic, most college courses began learning in an online educational environment. The COVID crisis created new challenges for the worldwide educational systems and transformed traditional in-person courses into predominantly online courses to prevent the spread of COVID (Wu et al., 2021). Instructors had to adapt to an unfamiliar environment and still provide enough social presence and immediacy to ensure their students would succeed. Although research exists regarding instructor social presence and immediacy in online courses, most studies have been quantitative (Arasaratnam-Smith & Northcote, 2017). Many asynchronous online college students feel disconnected between instructor immediacy and social presence in an online learning environment, resulting in poor learning outcomes and a lack of motivation (Beaver, 2014). Previous immediacy research has shown positive outcomes during college asynchronous online courses but has been conducted mainly at research universities (Liu, 2021). Research previously completed regarding instructor social presence has centered on course design strategies. There is a lack of information on social

presence techniques for online course facilitation (Freitas et al., 1998). Previous studies have also shown that the motivation for academic success is positively related to verbal and non-verbal instructor immediacy behaviors (Palvia et al., 2018; Parrish et al., 2021; Liu, 2021). Finally, previous research has shown that online college students' learning perceptions may differ from their instructors. Additional research is required to determine what factors would help build a more stimulating online learning environment (Costello & Welch, 2018; Palvia et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a significant gap in the literature related to a qualitative analysis of the experiences online college students have with instructor immediacy and social presence needed to support students' learning perception, motivation for academic success, and overall course satisfaction.

Online Learning

Before understanding the importance of instructor social presence and immediacy during asynchronous online courses, it is crucial to understand the adoption and continuance of online education. Students' experiences and attitudes have become the backbone of online course development and academic success. Online educational environments differ from traditional in-person courses, forcing students to adapt to learning methods and technological advances not previously relied on to achieve success (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2020). Online learning is impacted by the quality of the content and the assistance provided to students (Zhu et al., 2020). Additionally, online learning experiences differ based on students' personal interactions with their instructors and peers. These interactions are considered essential learning components in both online and traditional education environments (Short et al., 1976). The following sections will review the literature on these topics that have supported the worldwide popularity of online courses and a 7.07% annual growth rate (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Specifically, the following

section will discuss the environmental and personal factors that impact online course technology adoption, course continuation, and overall academic success.

Technology Adoption

Technology adoption was the first difference students encountered between online and traditional courses (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Adopting technology in online asynchronous courses can be both constructive and challenging. One of the goals of developing and improving online technologies is to activate effective social responses and minimize the perceived existence of the technology (Yang et al., 2022). As the national culture and society become more accepting of the use of technology in online courses, students' perceived usefulness and ease of use of technology impact how students utilize technology and their attitudes toward technological interactions. Cognitive absorption, self-distraction, cognitive age, social networks, and surrounding conditions such as thermal climate and national wealth can impact students' attitudes toward technology (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Perceived behavior control, performance expectancies, and user resistance also fluctuate concerning different factors and can encourage or discourage how much each student involves technology in their online education (Shen et al., 2013).

Environmental factors impacting students' use of technology in online courses include how the technology is facilitated, specific inhibitors encountered, and perceived innovation characteristics. Organizational support and prior use of technology will help manage students' expectations in online courses and promote technology adoption for online education (Zhu et al., 2020). Ultimately, many personal and environmental factors impact the acceptance and use of technology in online courses. Although these factors are primarily positive for students, challenging factors also exist. These factors include intrusiveness, redundancy, information overload, and deceptiveness (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Therefore, organizations and schools need

to study these factors before and while implementing online courses to give each student the best chance of academic success (Martenev & Bernadowski, 2016).

Technological advancements have directed changes in the expectations placed on K-12 teachers (O'Neal et al., 2017). Fox-Turnball (2015) identifies the importance of looking deeper into the experiences of teachers in elementary schools and their understanding of the significance of technology integration. This study added awareness to Title I schools about the importance of technology integration in the classroom. The comprehensive exploration of the experiences of teachers' technology use in Title I elementary classrooms added to the existing literature and offered valuable understanding of the topic of technology integration by giving a voice to Title I teachers who utilize this technology in their learning environment.

Online college students require instructor social presence and immediacy to remain motivated and feel part of an educational community. Instructor immediacy and social presence increase students' course satisfaction and academic success (Lavin & Mandviwalla, 2018). Students' past experiences in online college courses have changed significantly over time. Their ability to achieve academic success has become very dependent upon instructor immediacy and social presence (Thomas et al., 2017). Therefore, changes must be made to adapt to the significant evolution from in-person classroom courses to online asynchronous courses and provide practical learning to students (Enskat, 2017).

Course Continuation

The second concept to examine is when students pivot from traditional courses to online courses is course continuation while using new forms of technology. Panigrahi et al. (2018) discussed that students might initially choose to participate in online courses because they follow peers and classmates. However, some students struggle to adapt to technological changes and

advancements, negatively impacting online course continuation. Personal factors that are taken into consideration by students when deciding to pursue continued online courses include habit, flow, satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013). Habit can be a positive factor if there is little to no change in the technology used in the course.

Conversely, if technology advances and students cannot adapt, they may discontinue their online education. Flow includes a balance of give and take between the student and instructor and involves creating clear goals, providing immediate feedback, and understanding the skills required to complete the course. A positive flow will encourage students to continue their online courses. Satisfaction is primarily based on whether students are satisfied with their online education. Students will be more likely to continue online courses when satisfied (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Self-efficacy is a student's judgment of their ability to organize and execute to achieve desired goals (Bandura, 1986). Online courses that support student self-efficacy will encourage students to continue their online education.

Environmental factors that affect online course continuation include confirmation, perceived responsiveness, belongingness, commitment, interactions, and motivation (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2020). Confirmation occurs when students' original expectations of an online course are met after they begin the course. Confirmation positively impacts the continuation of an online course (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Perceived responsiveness includes the communication frequency in the online course between a student and their instructors and classmates. The more responses and interactions a student receives, the more motivated they are to continue their online education (Zhang et al., 2022). Belongingness is a direct result of a student feeling familiar with their online course, understanding similarities and differences within the course compared to a traditional course, and

feeling trust among the other students. Belongingness results in relationship bonding and encourages course continuation. Similar to belongingness is commitment. Students feel more committed to pursuing future online courses and participating in course discussions when they feel like they belong to the online learning community (Shen et al., 2013). The primary interactions include communication, collaboration, and discussion, and high levels of these interactions positively impact a student's decision to continue their online education. Finally, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation provided through awards or personal interest positively impacts students' intent to continue their online education (Zhu et al., 2020). Ultimately, organizations need to understand the factors that help students determine if they will continue participating in online education by encouraging and adopting technology that satisfies students' learning requirements. The quality of online education, particularly instructor involvement, student satisfaction, community inclusion, perceived usefulness, and enjoyment, will all be crucial in providing an educational environment that encourages academic success in an online course (Panigrahi et al., 2018).

Overall Success

The final factor is the student's overall learning success after changing from a traditional course to an online one. This success is the measure of effectiveness and perception of academic achievement through an online learning environment (Shen et al., 2013). Personal factors that impact overall success include motivation, engagement, design interventions, and team collaboration (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2020). Personal interest or the involvement of the instructor and classmates' social and emotional interactions may result in motivation. Remaining motivated throughout an online course will create a positive atmosphere to achieve overall academic success (Shen et al., 2013). Student

engagement directly correlates with how much time and effort students spend on online coursework. Therefore, students who believe their engagement provides learning effectiveness and satisfaction will achieve higher academic success (Zhu et al., 2020). Design intervention includes how the student uses the online system, instructor interactions, relevance and quality of the course, and effective communication. Designing an online course that supports these factors will foster a student's involvement in the course and provide for overall success (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Team collaboration is crucial in achieving academic success because students who depend on team cohesion and technology use have proven to have higher grades than students who feel like individuals in their online courses (Zhang et al., 2022).

Environmental factors that impact overall academic success include learning interventions, virtual world characteristics, and content management (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013). Learning interventions are directly related to how students reflect on observations they obtain throughout their online course (Bandura, 1986). Students who learn by experience exhibit higher overall academic success and self-efficacy than those who do not participate in enactive learning (Shen et al., 2013). Virtual world characteristics positively promote cognitive learning by encouraging learning satisfaction and task participation in a virtual world. Online courses rely heavily on the virtual world to facilitate social and educational environments. Positive virtual world interactions will increase students' academic success (Panigrahi et al., 2018). Content management includes academic content, delivery medium, instructor presence, presentation styles, and assessments. Students who believe their course content is organized and effective achieve high overall academic success (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013). Ultimately, overall success is the goal that all students and instructors should strive for in an online course environment. Organizations must understand this and train staff and

instructors to assess learning outcomes by incorporating the personal and environmental factors affecting students' overall academic success (Panigrahi et al., 2018).

Particular Learning Needs in an Online Environment

Students who participate in online asynchronous courses begin the course with different levels of preparedness and readiness. Although organizations can provide techniques and assistance in preparing students for online courses, instructors must also be willing to provide support through socialization for the online course duration (Joosten & Cusatis, 2020). An instructor can provide this support in four primary ways: informational feedback, interactive support, member education, and educational objectives (Zhang et al., 2022). These four strategies positively impact the development of an online educational community, resulting in students continuing their online education due to increased motivation and a desire to achieve academic success (Zhu et al., 2020).

Informational feedback from instructors to online students promotes the student's understanding of their progress and goals within the course (Zhang et al., 2022). It can also provide administrative information that students need regarding their enrollments, upcoming requirements, or changes to academic policies (Shen et al., 2013). Providing informational feedback to students early in the course will help them adapt to the learning environment they are about to enter and quickly integrate into the online community. Specifically, in an online learning environment, students who receive feedback will be more apt to contribute and interact, allowing them to understand the community's norms. If the positive feedback and interactions are successful, students will feel more valuable and choose to continue their online education. Conversely, students who violate the norms and rules of their online community will receive

negative feedback. Those students can use that feedback to correct their participation to better integrate into the online educational community (Zhang et al., 2022).

Interactive support involves organizations and instructors creating interactive platforms and assignments that facilitate better communication between students and their instructors and classmates. This interaction promotes social presence in an online environment and builds relationships (Horowitz, 2018). Students do not always join an online learning platform to gain knowledge. Often, they join to share knowledge, and interactive platforms will aid them (Shen et al., 2013). Interactive support includes social and interactive activities planned by the organization or instructor to help build interpersonal relationships, dispel uncertainty about the course, provide feedback, and clarify the goals and learning outcomes the course will provide. It promotes positive interactions and socialization and provides motivation and self-efficacy to achieve academic success in the online education environment (Shen et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022).

Member education refers to continuous educational activities provided by the organization to instructors and students about the online environment to ensure they are current on the usage and adoption of various virtual updates and changes. This education allows students and instructors to maximize the socialization and satisfaction they receive from the online platform used for their course and improve their competence by utilizing the features of the online platform (Zhang et al., 2022). Utilizing member education within an online course will help better meet the needs of the students and instructors, increase the ability to gather knowledge efficiently, enable them to use the platform correctly, and understand the value of the platform to achieve academic success. These combined features will promote a student's choice to continue their online education (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022).

Providing educational objectives promotes students' understanding of their goals and the purpose of belonging to that specific academic course and online community. Since the socialization of students in an online class may be significantly more difficult than in a traditional setting, instructors who provide objectives, feedback, and social presence motivate students to maintain a stable and productive progression throughout the course (Zhang et al., 2022). For students to adjust to their online environment and remain active in their pursuit of academic success, they need to work towards achievable goals and objectives set forth by instructors at the start of the course (Zhu et al., 2020). By providing these objectives and offering feedback as the course evolves, students will be more motivated to adjust their learning behaviors to conform to the online platform utilized. Ultimately, providing educational objectives will improve the student's confidence that they are using the online platform appropriately to enhance their ability to achieve academic success (Shen et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2022).

Asynchronous Online Learning

Asynchronous online courses are not in real-time. Instead, these courses provide several assignments to the students. There is a specific timeframe for when the assignments are due to the instructor. They are one of the most common tools for online education, collaborative knowledge building, social interaction, assignment discussion, and project group assignments. Asynchronous online learning provides students with flexible and convenient learning environments to promote self-paced education. It can be customized to meet the student's needs and maximize their use of technology. These courses also reduce restrictions on students' time commitments and support access to different online platforms to aid the educational process (Wei & Chu, 2020). Interactions occur using blogs or discussion boards and often consist of

questions that each student needs to answer in addition to commenting on other students' answers (Thomas & Thorpe, 2019; Phanphech et al., 2022).

Although asynchronous online courses offer a very flexible and open approach to education, student participation may be lower due to a lack of real-time interaction with other students and instructors. Research by Parks-Stamm et al. (2017) noted that the most influential role of an instructor depends on the desired outcomes and goals of the course and students. They found that frequent posts made by the instructor did not lead to more posts from the students, and the more often the instructors posted a thread, the shorter the responses from the students were. It noted that students responded more often to other students' posts than instructor posts mainly because they believed they were helping each other out and providing a better online learning community (Thomas et al., 2017).

Later research by Jagers and Xu (2016) provided mixed results about instructor interaction with asynchronous online courses. There was no evidence that higher levels of instructor interaction hampered student participation. Additionally, students welcomed instructor interaction because the instructors were considered the subject matter experts and added to the value of the course. This same study found that students disliked imposed peer interaction requirements because they did not provide value to their learning experience (Thomas et al., 2017).

In addition to a lower level of participation, asynchronous online courses cause more anxiety among students than traditional in-person courses. Anxiety was heightened in asynchronous courses because students did not feel they had a sound support system from their instructors or the educational organization (Perbandt et al., 2021; Phanphech et al., 2012). As technology and the use of online courses increase, understanding how instructor immediacy and

social presence impact students' academic success is imperative. Although some studies find online learning ineffective (Alquarashi, 2019; Kingsbury, 2021), others believe it is effective but will never replace traditional in-person courses (Babcock et al., 2019; Kim, 2018). Specifically, the lack of communication and interaction between students, instructors, and other classmates during asynchronous courses is a critical factor that may result in low student participation in the course, lower learning achievement, and higher dropout rates (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Perbandt et al., 2021; Phanphech et al., 2012). Conversely, incorporating learning management systems, such as Blackboard, and social media tools can support effective and efficient social interactions and instructor presence, resulting in higher motivation levels, greater student satisfaction, and overall academic success (Perbandt et al., 2021).

For students to succeed in asynchronous online courses, instructors have identified several tools they can use to promote social presence, immediacy, and motivation. Discussion boards and forums produce more reflective and deeper conversations for the individual student and online community because students can document their responses clearly without worrying about needing an immediate response (Perbandt et al., 2021). Another tool used to support learning achievements is having one student post a question that their classmates need to answer, which promotes introspection for the student posting the question and the ability for the other students to respond to help further educate their peers (Thomas et al., 2017). Quizzes and videos are the final two less interactive tools that promote learning in an asynchronous online course. Quizzes created by the instructor help focus students on specific learning outcomes for the course. Quizzes create a more streamlined approach to ensure students complete reading or textbook assignments. Videos are also compelling because they provide instructors the ability to prioritize learning requirements, review literature associated with the class, and incorporate

personal stories that help create a stronger feeling of belongingness within that asynchronous online community (Perbandt et al., 2019; Phanphech et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Videos can also extend the perception of immediacy from instructor to students, as well as from students to instructors. Using asynchronous online feedback helps establish relationships and allows instructors to more accurately observe the motivation of their students when the students provide video feedback to their instructor (Robinson et al., 2019; Schutt et al., 2019).

Instructor Social Presence

Instructor social presence connects to the relationships formed and the sense of community established between an instructor and their online college students. These relationships can also foster support from adults associated with the students, peer relationships, positive online climates, and effective learning engagements (Ashraf et al., 2018). Instructor social presence is a meaningful way to thwart the impact of isolation for online college students since these students are often more susceptible to feeling disconnected due to their physical separation from other students and instructors. Feeling a sense of community and having relationships in their online course will create a sense of motivation, belonging, and protective factors that impact their health, social engagements, and emotional well-being (Horowitz, 2018).

Based on early research completed by Short et al. (1976), social presence was determined to be a complex idea and was defined as “the degree of salience of the other person” (p. 65). More recent research has determined that social presence is essential to online student performance and success (Cho & Kim, 2013; Muir et al., 2019; Tsang et al., 2021). This determination is primarily due to how essential social presence plays in formal online education and because social presence was not abundantly available during the onset of online courses (Pandney, 2021). Notably, throughout all studies regarding social presence during online

courses, social presence provides effective learning only if the course and instruction have effective design implementation. Quality social presence was more important and influential than the quantity of social presence (Tsang et al., 2019). Since social presence includes the personalities of communicators, quality social presence helps communication be clearer, allowing students to understand messages from instructors and peers with less cognitive work than in courses with lower quality social presence (Kelly & Westerman, 2016). The function that online social presence has on student satisfaction and learning perception, as studied by Cho & Kim (2013), found a positive relationship between social presence and satisfaction and that motivation predicted satisfaction. They also found that information sharing and development between instructors and students predicted learning perception.

To maintain a positive relationship between instructor social presence and student academic success, online communication technologies must continue developing and improving. Additionally, it is essential to minimize the perceived existence or hindrance of technology associated with learning (Yang et al., 2022). Previous studies have shown that when students perceive the existence of their instructors as being interactive and participating in communication activities, social presence is maximized (Biocca et al., 2003; Nowak & Biocca, 2003; Short et al., 1976). Since communication activities in an online environment continue to advance, it is crucial to understand how the different aspects of social presence continue to develop through advanced online learning technologies (Yang et al., 2022).

There are four primary challenges associated with online education for college students that instructor social presence may address. These four challenges include difficulty accessing online learning tools, using technology, disrupting routines connected to learning, and concerns about isolation (Page et al., 2021). Instructor social presence is most effective with support from

the school associated with the online class. Four categories of social presence have proven to provide the most reliable and capable support for online college students. These support categories include bonding, attachment, engagement, and climate (Su et al., 2019).

Instructor social presence supports bonding between students and instructors and creates relationships between students and their peers (d'Alessio et al., 2019). Bonding can also promote a commitment to the student's school and education. Positive bonding techniques work directly with instructor social presence when instructors provide online college students with alternative learning methods and technological assistance. Bonding through social presence also reduces the possible challenge of isolation and supports the student's motivation to learn (Page et al., 2021).

Beyond promoting attachment, instructor social presence may also provide positive perceptions about the school experience (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). As many online college students transition from the typical in-class learning environment to an online environment, it is vital to maintain their idea of being a part of a school community and environment (Ditta et al., 2021). Instructors use social presence to attach the idea of being at school and feeling like contributing students of an academic organization to their student's online learning environment, helping to thwart the challenges of using technology and disrupting their learning routines (Page et al., 2021). Effective instructor social presence fosters engagement. Engagement occurs by promoting school-related behaviors for online college students. These behaviors include consistently attending school, participating in classroom discussions, completing assignments, and arriving on time. Online students must maintain these behaviors even when attending classroom courses, let alone in an online environment (Cho & Kim, 2013). Therefore, instructors' social presence encourages adopting these behaviors through technology and prevents disrupting their learning routines (Page et al., 2021).

Finally, instructor social presence supports the school climate by providing a sense of safety by implementing policies and guidelines promoting positive social behavior and peer interaction (Ferrer et al., 2022). Instructors who commit to supporting students in an online course show dedication to the other members of their staff, the school, parents, and society (Guevara et al., 2021). By providing a safe and secure open climate for every student, the instructors encourage students to overcome the challenges of accessing online learning tools, difficulty using technology, disrupting routines connected to learning, and concerns of isolation (Page et al., 2021).

Ultimately, instructor social presence connects online college students, their peers, the school, and other adults. Social presence also creates an interactive learning environment, maintains clear lines of communication, and encourages a strong rapport between students and instructors (Choe & Kim, 2013). It is evident that “instructor presence in online education helps teachers gear lesson content to match the learning styles of almost every student and provide resources in different technological forms to help students achieve academic success” (Martenev & Bernadowski, 2016, p. 192).

Instructor Immediacy

Instructor immediacy for online college students is a significant aspect of ensuring timely feedback. Often used as a technique to improve social presence, previous studies have determined multiple other names that may describe immediacies, such as mediated immediacy, generalized immediacy, perceived immediacy, and electronic immediacy (Andersen et al., 1979; Kelly & Westerman, 2016; Kelly et al., 2020; Limperos et al., 2015). Mediated immediacy was the most impactful with social presence since it can promote course satisfaction, perceived interactivity, motivation to learn, and perceived learning (Kim et al., 2016; Richardson et al.,

2017). Mediated immediacy refers to whether students' direct communication with their instructors increases or decreases based on their perceived closeness to the instructor. The effectiveness of this communication can further predict perceptions of instructor credibility, student classroom behaviors, student-instructor relationships, and public speaking anxiety (Kelly & Westerman, 2016). Ultimately, instructor immediacy promotes more social presence and transparent communication, allowing students to understand information and tasks from instructors with less cognitive work than courses with low immediacy (Kelly & Westerman, 2016). Utilizing less cognitive work to understand tasks gives students more practical mental resources to understand course material and advance their academic success (Yang et al., 2022).

Four specific categories of immediacy dictate the methods instructors provide feedback. These four categories include the number of feedback items addressed in responses, understanding the feedback, quality in addressing feedback, and student holistic thinking (Huang et al., 2017). The number of feedback items addressed in responses can range from addressing the majority of feedback provided to addressing only feedback that requires responses. Some students may also choose to address extra or only a limited amount of feedback (Cook et al., 2016). Instructors need to understand the most effective way to provide feedback to ensure the students can process it in an academically beneficial manner.

Understanding the feedback can be one of the most challenging aspects of immediacy for online college students. If a student receives too much feedback too quickly, they may be unable to process it. On the other hand, if they receive too little feedback, they cannot use it for future assignments or discussions (Alshahrani et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2016). Understanding feedback happens when the student understands the appropriate problem representations. The students can elaborate, show internalizations, and restate feedback and accurate understanding (Robinson et

al., 2019; Tu et al., 2021). Instructors must be able to use different methods of immediacy and types of feedback to ensure the students process the information correctly.

The quality of addressing feedback allows online college students to incorporate the feedback they receive into their studies (Kim & Kim, 2022). It includes the application of feedback, integration into an existing project, correcting current challenges, and creating solutions for future projects (Alawamleh et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2017). Instructors can determine the immediacy of feedback required to equip their students with quality information to support current and future learning environments.

Finally, student holistic thinking is impacted by instructor immediacy because it promotes student decision-making to determine solutions driven by specific problems (Huang et al., 2017). Additionally, it creates mindful navigation between multiple problem spaces, allowing for more transformed and transparent problem-solving (Stone & Springer, 2019; Tu et al., 2021). Instructors must gauge the immediacy of their feedback to ensure the students are not overwhelmed and that holistic thinking is encouraged.

In addition to the immediacy of feedback, instructors provide, the way the student uses the feedback is vital to understanding. There are two learner characteristics in online college students' process of feedback. These characteristics are epistemic beliefs and the need for closure (Huang et al., 2017). Epistemic beliefs include having conceptions of the nature of knowledge and certainty in addition to an attainability of truth. The need for closure includes decisiveness and the desire for a concrete answer to avoid ambiguity (Huang et al., 2017). Instructors need to understand their students' characteristics to determine the immediacy they use throughout the online course. Ultimately, many aspects of immediacy impact the academic growth of students. Instructors who exploit the methods they use to provide immediacy “optimize the process of

helping students move towards deep learning as they gain competence in an online problem-based learning environment” (Cinquin et al., 2019, p. 164).

Historically, a traditional college setting was face-to-face in a classroom on a college campus. In the 1990s, online courses became more popular because of their convenience for students who could not attend courses in person (Martin Nunez et al., 2017). They also allowed students to attend to jobs, family requirements, and other external activities while completing their degrees (Cox et al., 2016). As online college courses evolved, they became more asynchronous and left students to complete assignments without a direct social presence from their instructors or classmates (Rovai, 2016). Additionally, immediacy in the form of assignment feedback or critique became highly important for students to learn from past mistakes and apply the feedback to future assignments (Liu, 2019). Online college students require instructor social presence and immediacy to remain motivated and feel like a part of an educational community to have course satisfaction and academic success (Lavin & Mandviwalla, 2018). Therefore, research is needed to examine ways to adapt to the significant evolution from in-person classroom courses to asynchronous online courses.

The Impact of Interaction on Student Satisfaction and Perceived Learning

Student satisfaction may evaluate online courses, while perceived learning is often considered an indicator of effective learning. Four specific methods used to predict student satisfaction and perceived learning include online learning self-efficacy (OLSE), learner-content interaction (LCI), learning-instructor interaction (LII), and learner-learner interaction (LII). Previous studies have determined that LCI was the strongest predictor of student satisfaction, and OLSE was the most significant predictor of perceived learning (Alqurashi, 2019). Self-efficacy

can be associated with student motivation and is the “level of confidence that someone has to perform a particular task, activity, action, or challenge” (Alqurashi, 2016, p. 45).

The strongest predictor of student satisfaction, LCI, considers the process and method of creating effective learning environments and positive student learning experiences. Online instructors have the formal role of developing these interactions and, with the appropriate resources, can offer online students’ exposure to the required course materials and learning activities. These allow online students to acquire lasting skills, access relevant information, and practice higher levels of thinking through technology (Cardon, 2000). Ultimately, the effectiveness of LCI can influence students' learning processes and outcomes. A recent study reported that online courses with well-developed content could increase student satisfaction. Some of the components listed to facilitate a well-developed online course include breaking up classes into groups for group projects, holding live sessions that allow students to ask real-time questions, and streamlining class activities (d’Alessio et al., 2019). Therefore, instructors who adjust their online course designs to provide deliberate provide online students with higher levels of perceived learning outcomes and motivation (Ferrer et al., 2022; Freitas et al., 1998).

Instructor-student dialogue, also referred to as LII, includes the process of an instructor delivering information, encouraging students, listening to students, and providing feedback. Conversely, students interact directly with their instructors by asking questions and communicating about their course activities (Kreijns, 2022). Since instructor-student interaction significantly contributes to student satisfaction and learning, instructors must provide social presence and immediacy when creating online course material. Since interaction between students and instructors can enhance students’ comprehension of course material and stimulate learning interest, a higher level of instructor-student dialogue results in a higher level of

perceived learning outcome and increased student motivation (Martin et al., 2019; McDougall, 2019).

As the most important predictor of students' perceived learning, OLSE supports student motivation in online courses. High-motivation students regard complex tasks as challenges to develop their skills rather than obstacles to avoid. In conjunction with instructor support, this enhances learning performance and increases satisfaction with achieved academic results (Pandey, 2021; Tsang et al., 2021). Previous studies on motivation have focused on the technological aspect of self-efficacy, specifically computer and internet self-efficacy (Jan, 2015; Kuo et al., 2014). Internet self-efficacy did not predict student motivation or satisfaction. Instead, internet self-efficacy led to higher performance during search tests but not during written tests (Jan, 2015). Kuo et al. (2014) found no significant relationship between computer self-efficacy and overall course satisfaction. However, another study by Lee et al. (2021) researched the impact of online student motivation and student satisfaction. They found that the strongest predictors of course satisfaction were self-efficacy and motivation to complete an online course and the interaction of instructors with students. Additionally, a study by Zwanch (2021) found a positive and direct correlation between motivation for learning and student satisfaction in a self-paced online course.

Implications for Future Use

As online courses and education become more popular among college students, educational instructors, and administrators must understand the most effective methods to assist student learning. Educators must understand how to increase their social presence in an online course and provide the proper immediacy to ensure students receive a successful education. In order to achieve these goals, there are several recommendations for future course design and

execution. These recommendations include more discussion and less individual reading.

Instructors must also ensure that all course material can be accessed no matter where the student conducts the course. The instructor should provide instructions on using technology, alternate forms of assessments and written lectures, and support systems external to the online course (Farooq & Matteson, 2016).

Incorporating more discussion into a course allows an instructor to be more socially present and available for questions or assistance. These discussions promote students' ability to communicate with peers and share learning techniques and challenges (Page et al., 2021). Since many students have a variety of technological acumen, accessibility to course material may be challenging. Some students require more audio instruction, while others require more succinct learning objectives (Schutt et al., 2019). Educational instructors can rely on immediacy to determine what levels of accessibility each student requires. By providing timely feedback, instructors can determine how each student views the accessibility of the course. Feedback allows instructors to change their course to promote a more efficient learning environment based on the student's needs. Providing instructions on how to use the technology associated with the course will be helpful for the student. Instructions on using the technology and troubleshooting any issues will ensure both instructor immediacy and social presence. As technology evolves, instructors must ensure that their instructions are up-to-date and accurate. These updates will ensure that students are successful when attempting to complete their courses. Providing alternate forms of assessments and lectures in an online course allows students to have various ways to complete their education in a method that is most effective for their learning success. Alternate forms of assessments will also maximize the student's potential for academic success and comprehension (Ballard & Dymond, 2018). Finally, providing support systems will ensure

that the instructor's social presence and immediacy are used to teach and provide academic feedback instead of being used to support the student's well-being. Support systems, such as mentors or tutors, will provide academic guidance for the students and enable the instructors to concentrate on the learning objectives. Ultimately, online courses and students require more patience, guidance, and support than in-person courses. Instructors can provide these requirements through the social presence and immediacy and promote the student's academic success. By using these recommendations and techniques, instructors will be able to provide the most effective online learning environment for students in an online environment (Fernandez et al., 2016).

Role of Motivation

Motivation plays a significant role in a student's successful graduation from college. Some students excel in an asynchronous online learning environment, while some become demotivated and disengaged (Ferrer et al., 2020). Online students who are actively involved in the learning process and receive value from the courses they are enrolled in have a propensity to achieve more academic success. The opposite is evident for disengaged students who lack motivation (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Sanders et al., 2016). Online student disengagement can predict poor learning outcomes and lower online university retention rates (Lawlor et al., 2016).

Students' connection to their learning environment, participation in the learning process, and the effort, energy, and time they give to learning determine motivation (Ferrer et al., 2020; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Although these studies tend to attribute motivation for academic success as the student's responsibility, it is also the responsibility of the university to promote motivation. Through a holistic approach to engagement, Kahu & Nelson (2018) determined that student motivation is most significant when it is influenced by student and university factors,

where the online university environment makes a purposeful contribution to learning. Utilitarian, hedonic, and social motivation primarily influence students' intent to engage in their online educational community. Interest and self-regulation are key learning variables that promote motivation. Interest can be created by both the student and the university in order to promote online engagements. Self-regulation is the student's responsibility and helps a student focus on different ways to use motivation to achieve academic success (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013).

Ryan & Deci (2000) found three instrumental motivators online students experience. These motivators include intrinsic, extrinsic, and demotivation. Intrinsic motivation directly results from a student's internal values and is also considered self-determination. Extrinsic motivation is due to others or their external environment. Finally, a student who experiences a lack of motivation has no intent to act or participate in their learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stone & Springer, 2019). The motivation exhibited by online students connects to their engagement in their online courses. Specifically, the technology associated with an online course offers flexibility to students, which can increase their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, ultimately promoting engagement in their learning environment (Wengrowicz et al., 2018).

Two specific types of motivation that impact students are their self-motivation and motivation from within the college they are attending. Some students have a definitive plan to succeed when they enroll in college. However, some students pressure themselves to earn a college degree because that is what society dictates, and they lack motivation during college. "Without motivation and a goal more specific than to 'just get a degree,' the road to graduation is more challenging (Ashraf et al., 2018, p. 87). The following sections will discuss how self-motivation and motivation within the college can influence students to excel in online courses.

Student Self-Motivation

Two main factors influencing student self-motivation to graduate college are their instructor's involvement in online courses and feeling of support from the educational community where they belong (Ashraf et al., 2018). Students with defined goals for their college career and support from faculty likely know which major they want to pursue during college. Self-motivation is an aspect of Eccles's (1983) expectancy-value theory because a student studying a major that they enjoy will "gain personal importance, value, or intrinsic interest in doing the work" (Cook & Artino, 2016, p. 999). Four main concepts positively influence self-motivation. These concepts are competence beliefs, value beliefs, attribution, and social-cognitive interactions (Fong et al., 2017). A feeling of competency will encourage a student to participate and excel in their online course. Understanding the value of obtaining a college degree, either in-person or in an online course, will support a student in motivating themselves to gain fruitful employment options. Finally, social-cognitive interactions, including support from college faculty and staff, will help students successfully complete their college education and transition to adulthood.

Within the College

Students do not need to rely solely on themselves to motivate to succeed in college. College personnel, such as administrators, faculty, and counselors, can assist in motivating students to excel in online courses. Some examples of social presence practices that college personnel can use outside of a typical course are orientation programs, accurate course placement, early alert process, financial aid advising, and structured degree roadmaps (Su et al., 2019; Sneyers & DeWitte, 2018). Orientation programs ensure students feel welcomed and a part of the college, promoting their satisfaction. The early alert process requires faculty to intervene

early if a student shows signs of academic struggle or desires to delay graduation. Financial aid advising removes economic stress from students and allows them to focus on their studies. Structured degree roadmaps and accurate course placement guide a student's course selection each semester, increasing their probability of success (Su et al., 2019). Faculty-student mentoring, which includes orientation programs, early alert process, and financial aid advising, "had a positive and significant effect and led to a 7.5% increase in retention and 5% increase in timely graduation" (Sneyers & DeWitte, 2018, p. 224). Additionally, students with a degree roadmap and who can be placed in courses efficiently increase their timely graduation rate from 7.9% to 22% compared to students who do not have a roadmap (Su et al., 2019). Ultimately, this information should encourage college administrators and faculty to be socially present and provide immediacy to optimize resources within the online college environment.

Summary

Current research suggests that, over the last decade, a recent trend for undergraduate students has emerged to enroll in asynchronous online college courses. Online courses are significantly different from traditional in-person courses, and specific factors must be considered when students transition into an online educational environment. While online courses are considered convenient, instructor immediacy and social presence in those courses have become significantly different from online in-person courses. As such, this impacts students' perception of learning, motivation, and academic success.

Understanding different theoretical frameworks related to the research being conducted is significant because they explain different observations and manifestations that may be discovered throughout the research process. Identifying the significant theories that apply to the research topic can also make reviewing the associated literature easier. It is understood that

empirical research identifies underlying theories and discusses the consistency of their results. Following up will offer a framework for considering the evidence acquired in theoretical literature (Gall et al., 2007). This study will also explore how instructor social presence and immediacy impact a college student's decision to remain motivated throughout their course and achieve academic success. A theory assists in explaining how unrelated empirical explanations relate and makes sense (Fong et al., 2017). The constructs of immediacy and intimacy will be discussed concerning how they can help influence a student's need for instructor immediacy.

Ultimately, this research study aims to provide recommendations to future instructors on how to improve their immediacy and social presence during an online course to promote their students' academic success. This research will also help higher education facilities implement best practices and adopt innovative instructional techniques to meet learning needs of online students. Understanding current students' positive and negative experiences will provide the most efficient data to complete this research study and mold the future of online asynchronous college courses.

Studies show that online college students require different levels of instructor immediacy and social presence. Studies also show that technology and self-efficacy impact students' choice to participate in online courses and continue them until they achieve their academic goals. Additionally, motivation has a significant role in encouraging students to be successful in online courses (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2013; Zhu et al., 2020). Without motivation and goals, graduation is more challenging (Ashraf et al., 2018). Motivation can come from the student or college faculty and staff. The theory of social presence explains how intimacy and immediacy can impact students' motivation and academic experiences in an online course based on their instructor's immediacy and social presence. "We need to implement the intervention in

online college courses promptly and help students ‘do the right thing at the right time’” (Sneyes & DeWitte, 2018, p. 212). Research continues to explore instructor immediacy and social presence’s impact on students’ learning perception, motivation, and overall academic success. This study aims to fill gaps within the current research and provide college administrators, faculty, and staff with an understanding of balancing social presence and immediacy during college online courses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. Chapter Three describes this qualitative research study's design, procedures, and data analysis plans. Additionally, this chapter addresses the study's setting, participants, frameworks, and trustworthiness. The following information provides detailed descriptions of each section to support future replication.

Research Design

A qualitative research method was used for this study because qualitative study researches experiences in a natural setting. The goal was to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meaning people offer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological research design following van Manen's (2014) approach. Quantitative studies collect numerical data to determine a calculable or measurable outcome. Qualitative studies are often more personable and help researchers understand the why behind certain behaviors (Denny, 2019). This study relied on a qualitative method because it deeply examines students' experiences in an online course.

A phenomenological approach captured a common understanding for several individuals that will experience a similar phenomenon. Additionally, the researcher reported what the individuals experienced and how they felt during their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach supports this research because each participant had experience completing asynchronous online courses and shared similar experiences of how instructor social presence and immediacy contributed to or deterred their academic success and motivation (van

Manen, 2017).

Hermeneutical phenomenology was appropriate for this study. This design allowed the researcher to relate to the experiences as an online student. Since the transcendental approach removes personal bias and experiences from the study, it was not appropriate for the current study. The hermeneutical approach allowed data collection to be completed more efficiently since there was familiarity with the experiences each participant faced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A hermeneutical approach was most appropriate because of positive and negative personal experiences with the instructor's social presence and immediacy during an online course. These experiences helped create the interview and focus group questions. During this study, these experiences related common themes and trends to support future modifications to online courses that instructors can adopt to promote students' academic success (van Manen, 2017).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this hermeneutical phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

What are online students' experiences with instructor immediacy and social presence in asynchronous online courses?

Sub-Question One

How do online students describe online immediacy and social presence when connecting with instructors and peers in an online course?

Sub-Question Two

How do online students describe experiences with an instructor's online immediacy and social presence related to student motivation?

Sub-Question Three

How do online students describe the communication techniques an instructor should use to assist students throughout the online course?

Setting and Participants

The following sections describe the setting for this qualitative research study and the profile of the students who participated. Since this was a phenomenological research study, the participants all experienced the phenomena and articulated their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants were students at different universities. Their site location differed based on where they completed their online course assignments, so the phenomena they experienced varied significantly among the participants.

Setting

The setting of this research study was universities that offer asynchronous online courses located in Southern California. Many southern California universities provide asynchronous online learning for up to 5,000 students. On average, there are 50 undergraduate programs and 20 master's degree programs provided by these universities. The demographics for the typical university are approximately 60% male, 40% female, 53% Caucasian, and 47% another ethnicity. Students' average age range is 22 years. The leadership for most universities includes a President, an Executive Cabinet, a Board of Trustees, and approximately faculty members. The ultimate inherent mission of colleges in southern California is to develop students for a successful life and employment with a commitment to dedication and learning (Guevara et al., 2021).

Participants

Participants in this study included 10 adult students of various races, ethnicity, and

gender from multiple different asynchronous online courses. The number of students that were asked to participate were chosen since qualitative studies focus on 10-14 participants to be included in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants included part-time and full-time online students who attended online courses in the Fall semester of 2022 and Spring semester of 2023. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to choose participants who were rich in information that can aid in answering the research questions and the purpose of the study (Gall et al., 2007). Participants were recruited through Facebook posts and flyers. The flyers were posted in the local military education offices to attract military members currently enrolled in online education through Southern CA universities. For this study, the participants previously participated in at least two online courses to have different perspectives on social presence and immediacy.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and students could opt out of participating if needed. The participants had taken at least two online courses before their current course and were familiar with Blackboard as their primary source of course interaction. The participants received emails with directions, survey questions, and pertinent information before, during, and after the course.

Researcher Positionality

As online education continues to evolve, I want to ensure instructors understand how immediacy and social presence encourage students to achieve academic success. Students will always require instructors to support them and motivate them to learn, but how instructors teach and the tools they use may change. This study helped discover best practices on ways to enhance the educational experience for online students. The following section describes the interpretive framework utilized throughout the study. It also supports how ontological, epistemological, and

axiological assumptions support data collection and analysis.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism is the interpretive framework that shapes this study, which supports the idea that learning occurs more actively when students interact socially with their instructors and peers (Homayouni, 2022). Social constructivism is appropriate for this study as it relies on the students' views of the courses and how they understand their work environment. Since I believe that social constructs result from human interaction, I aimed to understand how online students and instructors interact concerning social presence and immediacy. Broad questions were asked of the students during interviews to understand their course experience. Using broad questions allowed the researcher to facilitate discussions and interactions so the participants could re-construct and focus on the specific shared experiences they encountered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These questions, ultimately, helped generate patterns and themes of the students' shared experiences with an online college course.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions used in this study primarily included ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions. The study had ontological assumptions because it “related to the nature of reality and its characteristics” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20), precisely the nature of online courses. It had epistemological assumptions because subjective evidence from students was collected, and quotes were collected from the students about their feelings towards the online courses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, it had axiological assumptions because “the researcher acknowledged that biases are present concerning their role in the study context” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20) but attempted to avoid allowing these biases to influence their data collection and analysis.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology determines what reality is and is essential to create a holistic view of knowledge found in that reality (Patel, 2015). Using ontological assumptions created an understanding that the nature of reality is seen through the researcher's and participants' different views. I believe there is one reality that stems from God's truth. Humans are imperfect, and these imperfections may be reflected in their interactions with others. This idea is further supported in Ephesians 4:29 (ESV, 2001), which states, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such that is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology measures and interprets reality to discover the meaning of societal events and activities (Patel, 2015). Using epistemological assumptions created a more personal study. Knowledge is derived from the subjective experiences of many participants who are not experts in the phenomena being studied. I believe that knowledge is subjective and can be derived from individuals who have had experiences with the issues at hand. Therefore, I used the evidence collected from the participants based on their experiences with their online courses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although I was present in the actual physical lives and work of each participant, the fact that I have had personal experience taking online courses supported the collection and analysis of data using epistemological assumptions.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology determines what procedures and approaches can be used to understand an event in society (Patel, 2015). I believe an individual's values impact how they relate and react to every encounter and situation. These values tell the story of who we are; what drives us. Using

axiological assumptions assisted in determining what personal biases may impact the study. Avoiding these biases created challenges during the study; it was essential to realize the need to share all potential biases with the participants before and during the data collection. Axiological assumptions permitted me to position myself in the context and setting of the study by disclosing personal experiences, social positions, and political and professional beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My experience with previous online courses became apparent to the participants. However, political, professional, and social positions were minimal to promote neutrality during the data collection and analysis. This topic is vital because I believe that the future of education will continue to grow online, and educators must be able to influence this environment positively. Specifically, instructor immediacy and social presence are significant factors in student academic success, so this topic will help instructors determine how to provide the best education to motivate the success of online asynchronous students.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument conducting this qualitative research study, it was my job to organize all data collection and analysis steps. I conducted all interviews, reviewed the written letters, and conducted the focus group. My relationship with all participants was professional. I had a neutral relationship in which I politely interacted with each participant to gather the most valuable data for the study. By using a neutral site for the interviews, everyone involved felt that they could be open and frank in their responses. Although I did not expect to be biased toward this study, the fact that I have personally participated in online asynchronous courses provided some helpful background knowledge about how the participants may have utilized Blackboard to complete their assignments. My experiences also provided insight into how instructors could provide more immediacy and social presence by manipulating Blackboard. Finally, as a

phenomenological design, I identified themes based on what each participant experienced during the study. The participants' experiences helped me focus on specific responses and statements made during interviews and in letters to develop results that future instructors can use to improve their social presence and immediacy in online courses.

Procedures

The following section will further define how this qualitative study will promote replication. Specifically, this section addresses receiving permissions, recruiting participants, securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and collecting data. Ultimately, this section will present how I achieved triangulation to produce effective results for the study.

Permissions

Once IRB approval was received (Appendix A), I hung the flyers in local education offices and placed the Facebook post online. Twelve students responded about participating, but only two chose not to participate because they were going on travel and would not be able to participate until two weeks later. Finally, I collected the names and contact information of the ten students who volunteered to participate in the study and set up times to conduct interviews. I also provided consent forms (Appendix B) to each student involved in the courses to include them in the study.

Recruitment Plan

Participants in this study were drawn from different asynchronous online courses at various universities in Southern California. Participants were selected based on replies from the Facebook posts and flyers. Then, a Liberty University IRB-approved consent form (Appendix B) was sent to the selected 10 participants. This email included the researcher's identity and reason for the study. It also included the method by which the study will be conducted. The goal was to

have a total sample pool that included students who have taken online asynchronous courses in various universities across Southern California. The sampling type was criterion sampling because criterion sampling works efficiently when all participants have experienced the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research, specifically, studied a group of students who have all experienced instructor social presence and immediacy during an asynchronous online college course. Participants were at least 18 years of age. To be in this study, all participants must have had experience with at least two asynchronous online courses within the last academic year. Participants were students at various universities who have experienced different online courses under the instruction of different instructors. Demographic data, including gender, age, course level, and ethnicity, was collected. Finally, all participants provided consent before being included in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. Since asynchronous online students continue to increase, this research is vital to provide instructors and educational leaders with tools and techniques to provide a constructive online learning environment (Liu, 2019). As a phenomenological study, data collection was completed to understand the students' shared experiences in an online college course (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three primary means of data collection were utilized, including individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. Individual interviews were conducted first to understand what the students experienced during the study and how they reacted to those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Letter writing was used to purposefully direct the participants to reflect on their experiences and write a letter about

different actions they would have taken if they were the instructor. This approach allowed the participants to document how they would improve the online course if they could change it. Finally, a focus group was conducted to discuss significant themes, trends, or outliers found within the answers of the individual interviews (van Manen, 2014). Ultimately, these three methods provided compelling data collection to determine the impact of instructor immediacy and social presence on students' learning perceptions, academic success, and course satisfaction.

Individual Interviews

The first method of data collection was individual interviews. The interviews provided the most helpful information about instructor immediacy and social presence during online courses. This is because the interview process allowed immediate follow-up questions and clarifications. I used one-on-one interviews to concentrate on individual participant responses and avoid the group-think mentality. I focused on determining the appropriate questions to prepare for the interviews properly. Then the interviewees were identified. I then collected data with trusted recording devices, designed the interview protocol, located a distraction-free interview location, obtained consent from the interviewee, and followed reasonable interview procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I scheduled the one-on-one one-hour interviews via Microsoft Teams. The questions were open-ended, and I recorded the entire interview to collect the most resourceful data. The research question that was addressed using this data collection method was determining what techniques instructors can use to improve their immediacy and social presence in asynchronous online courses as information and communication technologies advance.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Describe your educational background, including how many online courses you have experienced. CQ1
2. Describe different techniques instructors can use to make you feel more comfortable to contact them with questions or requesting clarification or feedback. SQ3
3. How can an instructor improve communicating on-time and efficient feedback during an online course? SQ3
4. How can an instructor maintain or improve a social presence that helps you feel a connection to the class and learning environment? CQ1
5. Describe your comfort level in asking your instructor for improved immediacy and social presence in a course, especially regarding the timely return of graded assignments. SQ1
6. What can your instructor do to help you feel motivated to excel in your online course? SQ2
7. What strategies or platforms would work best to improve instructor immediacy? SQ1
8. What strategies or platforms would work best to improve instructor social presence? SQ1
9. What strategies could the instructor improve to increase your motivation throughout a course? SQ2
10. Describe your sense of community in an online course. SQ1
11. What communication strategies from an online instructor do you believe were most effective during your course? SQ3

12. Describe ways in which an online instructor fostered relationships among your classmates. SQ1
13. Describe ways an online instructor fostered a relationship with you. SQ1
14. How does an online instructor's social presence affect a student's academic success? SQ2
15. If you could change your asynchronous online course experience, how would you do so? CQ1
16. Describe why you would choose a synchronous or asynchronous course in the future. CQ, SQ3

Interview question 1 was an introductory question that created a neutral and conversational environment for the participant. This environment fostered a more comfortable and natural atmosphere that encouraged open and honest answers (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). This question also collected details on the participant's experience with online courses that helped determine trends within the responses based on experience levels. Question 2 served to understand the various ways instructors can encourage their students to contact them for feedback or clarification. While email and online communication are often the most popular means, phone calls or meetings via Microsoft Teams are also viable options (Kim, 2018).

Questions 3 and 4 encouraged participants to express the ways in which instructors can improve their communication and social presence. Ultimately, the answers described how the learning environment can create a cohesive online educational community (Page et al., 2021). The questions were used to transition from introductory questions to the key questions that provided the most useful information for the study. Questions 5 and 6 focused on how online instructors can make students feel more included, comfortable, and motivated during an online

course. They also described how student motivation affects how comfortable students are to ask their instructors for more or less communication and social presence (Bolliger & Martin, 2018).

Questions 7, 8, and 9 addressed the specific strategies and platforms an instructor can use to improve social presence, immediacy, and student motivation. Since students have various experiences with online platforms and online education, instructors need to be willing to use various strategies to maximize students' online learning environment and success (Stone & Springer, 2019). Question 10 was used to understand the importance of community in an online course and whether it is a significant factor for academic success. As online courses become more popular and the need for personal interaction decreases, there has been a shift in educational community importance and this question will determine how that shift impacts online courses (Kingsbury, 2021).

Question 11 was used to determine what each participant would do, if able, to improve their online course. This question provided significant insight into the areas of online education that need the most improvement according to online students. The responses could fall under a number of various categories, to include instructor social presence, course material, or platform effectiveness (Zhu et al., 2020). Finally, question 12 provided a better understanding of whether students are satisfied being a part of an asynchronous course or if they would prefer a synchronous course in the future. This question related to question 10 since synchronous courses would provide a better sense of community. This question also provided insight for institutions to provide more or less asynchronous courses to attract students in the future (Tsang et al., 2021).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The individual interviews provided insightful data that needed to be concisely analyzed. Five specific strategies were utilized to conduct the analysis. These strategies included organizing the data, documenting emergent ideas, classifying codes into themes, developing interpretations, and representing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before the data was analyzed, I transcribed all of the interviews. I also organized all observations and notes taken during the interview process. Organizing the data helped me eliminate redundant data and further scrutinize the replies (Babcock et al., 2019). Transcribing the interviews helped me become more familiar with the data, document emerging ideas, and classify common codes into themes from each interview. During the transcription process, I remained unbiased by focusing on each reply without letting my personal experiences interfere (D’Uggento et al., 2021). Transcribed data was manually transferred to a Microsoft Word document and divided into sections so that each section had one common theme to focus on. These themes allowed me to incorporate my personal experience into understanding the specific phenomenology experienced. These themes “also have certain qualities such as focus, a simplification of ideas, and a description of the structure of the lived experience” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 202). Once themes began to form, significant statements made during the interviews were used to develop interpretations of the data. These interpretations included determining if there is irrelevant and repetitive information not related to the specific phenomenon (Babcock et al., 2019). Although each participant had their own experiences, each personal experience was examined in relation to the others. Through data representation, I thoroughly described what happened, how the phenomena were experienced, and an overall understanding of the essence of the phenomena (van Manen, 2014). For participant security, I created a Microsoft Word document that is password protected to

house all transcriptions and data. The entire analysis was documented within an audit trail (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Letter Writing

The second data collection method was letter writing. The participants were given two weeks to draft, edit, and finalize a letter based on a prompt appropriate to this research study. However, all participants finished their letter within three days of their interviews. Students were asked to write a letter to themselves on how they would improve social presence and immediacy if they were an asynchronous online instructor in the future. All letters will remain confidential in order to encourage personal and substantive responses. Additionally, this method allowed students to thoroughly answer the prompt over a defined period in a comfortable environment (Lavin & Mandviwalla, 2018).

Letter Writing Data Analysis Plan

Two specific analytic strategies were used to analyze the letter-writing data collection method. These strategies included taking notes while reading and reducing codes to themes. Since the participants finalized the letters, transcription was not needed. At the same time, reading was an efficient method to compare the primary ideas presented in each letter (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While taking notes, I compiled lists of common themes and future ideas to improve online learning. Once all letters were reviewed, I prioritized the codes extracted and reduced them to themes. Ultimately, these themes helped me understand the space felt by the participants, the physical presence experienced, the time, and the relationships experienced with other participants to define an overt meaning of the lived experience (van Manen, 2014).

Focus Group

The third method of data collection was a focus group. The focus group was conducted

virtually over a synchronous Microsoft Teams meeting to provide a convenient method for participants to answer the group questions and respond to other participants effectively (Creswell, 2017). The focus group took 42 minutes to complete. After the individual interviews were conducted, 4 participants were asked to join the focus group discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to host a quality focus group that collected effective participant feedback and experiences, a focused interview protocol was followed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before asking the focus group questions, all participants introduced themselves and guidelines were established to keep the group attentive and on track. Notes and memoing was used to collect data required for further analysis of the experiences of online students with instructor social presence and immediacy on their academic success. Once these notes were compiled succinctly, they were sent to the focus group participants to review the accuracy and provide any additional feedback. This member-checking technique ensured the validity and reliability of the data collected (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, the purpose of the focus group was to highlight themes applicable to all students who participated in this study by discussing significant commonalities experienced during their online courses (van Manen, 2014).

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to the group and describe your academic background and any future goals. CQ1
2. Why did you choose to enroll in an online course? CQ1
3. What have been the greatest challenges you have encountered in your online course?
CQ1
4. Describe any communication challenges you have faced while enrolled in your online course. SQ3

5. What aspects of an online course motivate you to achieve academic success? CQ1
6. Describe what effective social presence and immediacy would look like from an instructor when taking an online course. SQ1
7. Describe how an instructor's online social presence affected your motivation and overall course performance. SQ2
8. What would you like online instructors to know about social presence and immediacy?
CQ1

Focus Group Data Analysis

For data analysis, the data collected during the focus group was concisely organized by themes. This strategy included counting the frequency of shared experiences and relating these experiences to the amount and frequency of instructor social presence and immediacy provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Keywords and phrases were also coded to identify common interactions between instructors and students. Relating themes to different universities and student goals provided additional information regarding common experiences and helped me determine if the themes are new due to an abundance of students experiencing online education. This analysis will be beneficial in the future to improve instructors' social presence and immediacy and the overall academic success of students (Liu, 2019).

Data Synthesis

Data synthesis was conducted once all analysis was sufficiently completed. The synthesis combined the results of all analyses to create common themes and trends from the data collected by the participants. I journaled the most significant themes apparent during each analysis and then compare and contrast them against each data collection method. Trends and themes common among all methods were the most significant for the phenomena experienced. I also

searched for outlying themes inherent to only one method to determine if there was a specific reason that the theme did not appear in the other methods. Comparing the answers from the in-person interviews with the personal letters helped merge immediate responses with detailed thought-out comments about experiences throughout the course. The letters provided deeper insight into how the participants experienced the phenomena and how future studies can be crafted for further research (van Manen, 2014). Ultimately, the synthesis provided the complete story of the participants' experiences and suggested strategies for instructors to improve their immediacy and social presence to support college students' academic successes.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of participants is essential to ensure that students do not face retribution based on the information they provide about their instructors or the university. This also helped me create a relationship with the participants to conduct the most effective research study possible. The following section describes how credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations were considered throughout the study.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe credibility as confidence in the truth of the findings of a study. For this study, credibility was achieved by ensuring that the findings and results accurately describe the reality experienced by all participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The two techniques specifically used to uphold credibility were triangulation and member-checking. Triangulation was achieved by collecting three forms of data. This data collection included one-on-one interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. Since these three methods are significantly different data collection forms, they supported triangulation and ensured that the results are credible and created based on various input types. Credibility is achieved when multiple data

collection methods deduce similar results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member-checking was conducted in two primary ways during this qualitative research study. First, I used immediate member checking during the interview to document the participants' statements and descriptions properly. By asking them follow-up and clarification questions, I ensured I obtained credible information during the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My second form of member-checking was completed after I transcribed the interviews. I provided each participant with a copy of the transcription highlighting any answers I found noteworthy and particularly relevant to the study. Member checking allowed the participants to agree with or correct my findings and transcripts in order to achieve credibility.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved in this study because the results will be able to be applied to other studies or to online college courses that occur in the future. A thick description of how the study was completed and presenting detailed findings will support the ability to apply the results to other academic environments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Understandably, the transfer of findings will be controlled by reviewers of this study and is not guaranteed. However, it may provide fruitful recommendations to future educators to help them improve online college courses and promote their students' academic success.

Dependability

Dependability is ensuring the findings of a study are consistent through the practical descriptions of the study's procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was achieved in this study by detailing the research methods and procedures required to formulate the results. Effectively describing these methods allowed the research study to be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, all referenced literature has been included to provide background

support for future related studies. I relied on an inquiry audit to review the processes and findings to ensure dependability is accomplished. Liberty University's inquiry audit occurs with a systematic review of the methods and research findings. The dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director completed the inquiry audit.

Confirmability

Confirmability was achieved by maintaining neutrality when collecting data and processing the results. Maintaining neutrality occurred by ensuring there was no bias or personal motivation used during the entire study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The two techniques used to accomplish confirmability were audits and triangulation. The audit trail allowed all procedures, collection processes, analyses, and deductions of results to be transparent and readily available. The use of triangulation proved that various neutral methods were used in order to provide the least biased results.

Ethical Considerations

Maintaining ethical procedures during this study was continuously taken into consideration. First, permission was received from the IRB and all participants prior to the commencement of the study. During this process, the participants were notified that the study was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time. Next, pseudonyms were created for all participants to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. As the study proceeds, I ensured all data was stored in password protected devices. Following the Liberty University IRB, this data will be destroyed three years after collection since it will not be included in the dissertation documents. Finally, all participants were briefed about the benefits that will come out of this study and were asked if there were any additional risks they think may affect them (Newman et al., 2021). No additional risks were brought to my attention. Ultimately, this study will provide

insight into the impact of instructor immediacy and social presence on online student learning perception, academic success, and course satisfaction. However, upholding ethical means of conduct was an utmost priority to ensure the study succeeds by receiving informed consent from all participants, holding an IRB, and making the study voluntary with the ability for participants to withdraw at any time. Additionally, confidentiality was protected by using pseudonyms for participants and ensuring all data was stored in a password protected location.

Summary

This chapter described the methods used to collect and analyze data for a successful research study. A qualitative phenomenological study generated themes based on the participants' experiences of instructor immediacy and social presence during an asynchronous online college course. The setting and participants supported the research because each participant experienced asynchronous online education and provided pertinent, timely data. The participants expressed how their learning perceptions, academic success, and course satisfaction were impacted through interviews and written letters. A focus group provided further insight into this shared phenomenon. Trustworthiness was provided through credibility and considering all ethical concerns. Finally, data was analyzed through phenomenological reduction and using codes to identify common trends and themes throughout the information provided by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study aims to provide recommendations to future instructors on improving their immediacy and social presence during an online course to promote their students' academic success. Understanding current students' experiences provided the most useful data to complete this research study and possibly impact the future of online asynchronous college courses.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. Using a phenomenological design permitted me to focus on the students' shared experiences and determine if similarities existed in the phenomena presented to them. This phenomenological study was based on the theory of social presence developed by Short et al., 1976. This chapter provides descriptions of the participants that were chosen by purposeful criterion sampling, describes the themes that emerged at the completion of the study, and explains the outliers present in the study. Themes emerged based on data coding through phenomenological reduction based on individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Participants

The 10 participants in this study were composed of asynchronous online students from various Southern CA colleges using purposeful criterion sampling. Each participant is a part-time student who has previously participated in at least two asynchronous online courses. Recruitment was conducted using Facebook and flyers. I received responses from several students interested in participating in the study. The students provided me with their availability, and we coordinated times to meet over Teams to conduct the interviews. Immediately following the interviews, the participants received the letter-writing journal prompt and were asked to reply within a week. Four participants engaged in a focus group. Protecting the identity of the

participants was completed with the use of pseudonyms. Table 1 provides more detailed information about each participant.

Table 1

Participants

Student Participant	Gender	Age	Focus Group Participant	# Online Courses
Amanda	F	31	Y	4
Brian	M	46	N	30
Charles	M	41	N	10
David	M	35	Y	3
Evan	M	42	N	64
Frances	F	28	N	3
Gavin	M	30	N	14
Hans	M	26	Y	24
Ivan	M	33	Y	40
Juliette	F	36	N	20

Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide an understanding of the experiences asynchronous online college students have in achieving academic success based on their instructor's social presence and immediacy. This study was created based on one central research question and three sub-questions. Data was collected from the 10 participants using

individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. All 10 participants were a part of the interviews and letter-writing collection methods. Four participants took part in the focus group. Data analysis was conducted using van Manen’s (2021) phenomenological reduction. Data coding was used to define common themes and trends and determine outlying experiences. All participants were helpful and willing to provide additional information if needed. No participant chose to withdraw. The following sections describe the three major themes and associated sub-themes developed from the phenomenological reduction and synthesis of the data collected.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Quality of Instructor-Student Interaction	Timely Communication Effective Interactions
Socialization and Connectedness with Instructor and Peers	Collaborative Course Projects Importance of Feeling Connected
Effectiveness of Online Learning	Motivation Benefits

Quality of Instructor-Student Interaction

The first major theme identified in this study was the quality of instructor-student interaction. Two sub-themes associated with the quality of instructor-student interaction emerged: timely communication and effective interactions. Participants explained that the quality of online education directly correlated with instructors who were interactive and engaging. Amanda stated, “When it comes to online schooling, building quality student-instructor

interactions is vital. I think the most important factor is breaking the ice through a Teams meeting early on so that the students and instructors establish a sense of rapport.” Expanding on that point, David proclaimed, “Instructors that remain engaged themselves and show that they are putting as much time into the course as they expect you to, it feels much more like a traditional learning environment and motivates me to participate more.” Finally, all participants made at least one comment about incorporating Zoom or MS Teams meetings to improve the quality of interaction. Specifically, Gavin mentioned, “I personally really enjoyed interacting through live Zoom sessions or a multimedia medium; being able to ask questions in the moment and actually put a voice and face to the online instructor made the instructor more relatable.” Evan added, “Body language, even over Zoom, says a lot about the instructor; if an instructor looks more approachable, answers questions in a less combative way, and provides meaningful and insightful information, I feel way more comfortable engaging with them, and asking questions throughout the course.”

Timely Communication

The first sub-theme that emerged under the quality of instructor-student interaction was timely communication. Although communication and feedback are always welcomed, every participant made it clear that they are only effective when made in a timely manner. Juliette commented, “The best instructor I ever had would have graded responses and provide critiques by Wednesday of each week (assignments were due every Sunday), so we had the remainder of the week to make changes and improve our work.” Another participant, Evan, proclaimed, “some instructors provide vague ‘DM or text me at any time’” statements in their curricula, but then don’t get back to you in a timely manner, which can make the class feel like a low priority.” Finally, Hans further explained the importance of timely communication by stating, “Being

responsive to the means of communication they do have is important because there is nothing more frustrating than sending an email asking for clarification and getting nothing in return for days.”

Effective Interactions

The second sub-theme identified under the quality of instructor-student interaction was effective interactions. Specifically, all participants commented on the usefulness of feedback and social interactions with their instructors. Evan stated, “Provide me with real feedback, not the basic ‘great work’ comment. Also, proofread your reply. I’ve had instructors spell my name wrong or use improper grammar and spelling. That makes it seem like they don’t care.” Charles furthered that idea and commented, “I’ve been significantly underwhelmed by the quality of feedback I get and can rarely use it in upcoming assignments. However, I did have one instructor who actually called me when she had questions about my assignment. It was awesome because I felt like she really cared to provide personal feedback.” Quality interactions were not just dependent on the instructor initiating the interactions. Hans commented, “I appreciate instructors who give their personal cell phone number or email address for us to use. Instead of waiting for an instructor to check their school email, it was great to have the opportunity to call them after school hours so I could get help with homework.” Finally, Amanda explained, “Quality interactions are whatever needs to be done to help a student learn and be successful in school. Whether it is maintaining reliable office hours, providing meaningful feedback, or giving out personal contact information, instructors need to realize that they owe us something/anything to help us in our course work or we just feel like we are paying to get a degree and not actually learning anything.”

Socialization and Connectedness with Instructor and Peers

The second major theme that emerged was socialization and connectedness with the instructor and peers. Two sub-themes associated with socialization and connectedness with instructor and peers were collaborative course projects and the importance of feeling connected. Each participant agreed that one of the most challenging parts of participating in an asynchronous online course was not having ways to socialize with and feel connected to their instructor and peers. Brian commented, “I have never felt a connection with a class or learning environment, and I am not sure there really is a way to do this. Discussion boards are meant to be the tool to help with this, but all my discussion boards were more about a response rather than an ongoing dialogue or discussion. It is very impersonal.” Amanda further suggested, “I felt most connected when the instructor made us break up into focus groups and meet via video chat twice a week to discuss our assignment. At first, we all thought it would be difficult to do this, but it was super rewarding to actually see who our focus group teammates were over video.” Many participants remarked that socialization and connectedness was a challenge because online courses have limitations on how socialization can be achieved. Juliette asserted, “Socialization and connectedness in an online class are contradictions in terms. Online removes an important feature of social presence and connectedness that many people crave and are looking for.” Additionally, Gavin stated, “I’ve had instructors who tried to promote socialization through video chats and meetings, but the internet or web connection had issues, and the entire process became frustrating. Also, people would talk over each other, and some didn’t even know how to use ‘online etiquette.’ Someday, someone will figure out a way to make online socialization easier, I hope.”

Collaborative Course Projects

The first sub-theme identified under socialization and connectedness with instructor and peers was collaborative course projects. Every participant in the study commented that collaborative course projects would create significant motivation to succeed in the course because they would feel more included and supported by participating in a project with other students. Evan stated, “A collaborative course project would be fantastic because students could interact socially, even if it isn’t in person, and instructors would be able to succinctly provide comments and immediate guidance to a group of students at once.” Frances supported that idea and added, “Discussion Boards are useless because I just reply to the same people each week and rarely get feedback from the instructor. I would really feel satisfied participating in a semester-long group project in which the instructor meets with each group weekly.” Although every participant welcomed the idea of a collaborative course project, most were unsure how they would be executed. David commented, “working in even one group project would be a huge win to encourage socialization, but it might be tough to coordinate since it is an asynchronous course; however, I am certain a class project conducted through email and not virtually would be way better than what we experience now.”

Importance of Feeling Connected

The second sub-theme that emerged under socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers was the importance of feeling connected. Specifically, it was found that connectedness was achieved by creating student-friendly learning environments, maintaining clear methods of communication, and encouraging personal interactions. Regarding student-friendly learning environments, David stated, “Instructors who actually respond to my Blackboard posts and provide clear instructions on how to engage in the learning environment

are the best because that removes the ‘technology barrier’ that impedes feeling connected with the class.” Clear methods of communication were essential to feeling connected, especially when the instructors shared comments or questions among the students. Ivan supported this idea by stating, “I appreciated when instructors would use the class Discussion Board to post questions and answers that everyone could benefit from, so I didn’t think my questions were a ‘me only’ problem. Reading other students’ questions and comments help me feel connected with the entire class.” Finally, personal interactions were necessary for students to feel comfortable contacting the instructor. Brian commented, “Instructors who set after-hour times to meet or personal emails to use made me feel more comfortable to ask them a question or get help; I felt more connected with the instructor and course, and like I was actually a student and not just a name in a class.”

Effectiveness of Online Learning

The final major theme that emerged was the effectiveness of online learning. Two sub-themes associated with the effectiveness of online learning were identified as motivation and benefits. All participants expressed their concern about not being motivated enough to benefit from learning in their asynchronous online courses. Some participants also commented that some courses were so ineffective that they would pass their course just because they paid the tuition instead of earning a passing grade. For example, David commented, “Online schooling does kind of give you the impression that if you are willing to make your payments and submit the minimum required homework, you’ll get straight A’s.” Other participants explained that measurable and scheduled outcomes help them remain motivated to reach their academic goals effectively. Amanda exclaimed, “I like receiving course corrections when needed. I prefer to have a plan and let the instructor help me maintain or change the plan to get the most out of my class.” Gavin further commented, “If I know where I need to be academically at the end of the

class, I feel more motivated to dare myself to exceed that goal. If I have no direction, I end up stressing out and end up doing as little as possible to pass.” Finally, Charles encompassed the totality of effective online learning by declaring, “The best instructor I ever had created a phenomenal learning environment by showing that he cared, creating a goal for each student, and fueling success in the form of motivation through humor and excellent communication.”

Motivation

The first sub-theme that emerged under effectiveness of online learning is motivation. Participants’ responses reflected that how they interact with their instructors directly related to their motivation to achieve academic success and their ability to remain interested in their coursework. Students with instructors who make time to support and interact with them feel that it impacts their achievement. All participants commented how meaningful personal interactions with their instructors motivated them to excel instead of simply meeting a standard to pass. Specifically, Charles stated, “When instructors are engaging, I am motivated to learn as much as I can from them or the text; this, in turn, helps me motivate myself to produce products that will ensure future interactions with instructors.” Brian agreed, explaining, “just having an instructor answer my phone call, or text is motivating; it’s the little things that make me want to do better in the course and studies.” Frances further commented on how feeling motivated reduced stress. She said, “I am most likely to give my best in a class when I don’t feel stressed to meet certain expectations without instructors providing guidance.” Finally, some participants agreed that making instructor interactions personable increased their motivation. Gavin stated, “I had a course where each week we had to write a journal entry of how that week’s course was used in our everyday job; when the instructor commented on my entries, I felt even more motivated to incorporate my course work into day-to-day activities.” According to Ryan and Deci (2000),

student autonomy is a quality student and instructor interaction characteristic. Therefore, the quality of interactions motivated students to achieve academic success.

Benefits

The second sub-theme identified under effectiveness of online learning is benefits. Participants discussed common benefits they received by participating in asynchronous online courses instead of synchronous or in-person courses. Specifically, flexibility and the ability to maintain a full-time job as a student were the two most important benefits. Amanda commented, “The biggest benefit is the freedom I have to set my own schedule around work and my kids while learning at my own pace as long as my weekly assignments are completed.” Furthermore, Gavin added, “I would never be able to complete a degree, maintain a full-time job, and provide for my family if I had to take classes in person. I don’t feel academically satisfied all the time, but I feel satisfied being able to balance family, work, and school life at once.”

Additionally, participants described how flexibility allowed them to learn in a comfortable environment or on travel. Hans explained how his personal comfortability benefits by stating, “I learn better in person, but online courses are the new normal, so I am happy to be able to decide when and where I learn. That way, I can travel, take a vacation, or stay at home in my pajamas and still complete my assignments towards my degree.”

Outlier Data and Findings

Two unexpected findings that do not align with the specific research questions were also presented. The first unexpected finding was that one student believed some instructors do not provide more social presence or immediacy because they are unaware of how beneficial both are to academic success. The second unexpected finding was that only one student would prefer asynchronous online education if given the opportunity in the future to choose between

asynchronous and synchronous online courses. Both unexpected findings are discussed in the following sections.

Oblivious Instructor Attitude

Frances was the only participant who attributed her instructor's lack of social presence and immediacy to the instructor being unaware that students would benefit from both. She said, "My last two instructors were brand new and young. I don't think they really experienced any courses other than online, so they just taught my course how in the same manner they were taught." Later in the interview, she related that her personal limitation of only having three asynchronous online courses completed compromises her opinion of online instructors. She was the only participant to believe that the method online courses were taught based on current educational circumstances rather than instructor attitudes. The other participants believed the instructors did not provide social presence or immediacy for various personal reasons. Hans stated, "Some instructors are overworked and treat their online courses as a part-time job that gets less attention." Ivan explained, "Less instructor social presence and immediacy have become the norm; it's unfortunate because I don't want to believe online instructors are lazy, but they just don't have the satisfaction of standing in front of a class and experiencing physical and verbal interactions with students." For this research, it was eye-opening to relate instructor immediacy and social presence to prior instructor experiences and the possibility that they were unaware of how important both can be for a student to succeed.

Preference for Asynchronous Courses

Since all participants in this study indicated that they were not satisfied with the quality of the instructor's social presence and immediacy in their asynchronous online courses, I expected all 10 of them to conclude that they would prefer synchronous online courses in the

future if given the opportunity to choose between asynchronous and synchronous. Nine of the participants came to that conclusion. Juliette stated, “I like the ability to have flexible online courses with the option of interacting often with the other students.” Additionally, Evan said, “I’ll take online courses forever, if possible, but I really want the social aspect and quick feedback associated with a synchronous course.” However, Brian was the one participant who would not prefer an online synchronous course. Brian explained, “I would choose an asynchronous course because, although I don’t think I’m really learning much, I can set my schedule to do as little or as much as I want for the class.” Brian’s response was unexpected and concerning, especially if Brian does not believe he is learning from his asynchronous online instructor.

Research Question Responses

Formulated by one central research question and three sub-questions, this hermeneutical phenomenological study was conducted to provide insight into the impact of instructor immediacy and social presence on online asynchronous students’ academic success. Three themes were identified when the data analysis was completed, including the quality of instructor-student interactions, socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, and effectiveness of online learning. Each of these themes supported the participants’ responses provided during data collection.

Central Research Question

What are online students’ experiences with instructor immediacy and social presence in asynchronous online courses? The participants provided helpful descriptions of their experiences with instructor social presence and immediacy in asynchronous online courses. Although the number of online courses each participant had previously taken differed significantly, they

agreed that instructor social presence and immediacy were predominantly lacking in their online courses. Frances commented, “In many of my online courses, I have gone weeks without feedback on assignments, which is frustrating, and if a student is unsure of the material, that hinders course correction. I hate to say it, but sometimes I wonder how these instructors are even getting a paycheck based on the poor quality of immediacy and presence in my courses.” Hans furthered his frustrations with online instructors by adding, “Academic satisfaction was much higher if the instructor actively participated in every aspect of the class and seemed to make a real effort to be available outside of designated class times. Then, it didn’t feel like they were just checking off requirements, not really taking an interest in educating the class.”

Additionally, the participants did not feel a sense of community and wanted more quality interactions with their instructors and peers. Gavin concluded his interview by stating, “I never felt like I was in a classroom with a bunch of other students. My instructors were rarely present or reachable, and I felt alone. I would usually respond to the same 2 or 3 people each week, and that was the most community I ever felt.”

Sub-Question One

How do online students describe online immediacy and social presence when connecting with instructors and peers in an online course? The participants effectively described immediacy and social presence when connecting with instructors and peers in an online course. The participants agreed that timely and quality feedback provided them with the greatest chance to achieve academic success in their course. David proclaimed, “How can I improve or fix my homework and papers when I don’t even find out what I did wrong on previous assignments until three weeks after I turn it in?” Amanda agreed and added, “I really dislike the neutral comments, like ‘Great job. Keep up the good work.’ Even commenting on one thing that I can either

improve on or I did really well would go above and beyond in making me feel immediacy in my online courses.” Social presence between the participants and their instructors and peers was also a topic each participant would like to have improved. Some did provide examples of methods used in their previous courses to promote social presence. Juliette stated, “I do just fine learning by myself in a class, but being paired with a team of other students to complete an assignment gives me insight into other students’ understanding of the course and lets the instructor efficiently teach multiple students at once. I just think that humans are social creatures, and creating any type of social presence would really increase student motivation and their desire to perform well.” Finally, Brian expressed his belief that social presence could be increased with better Discussion Board topics and commented, “Discussion Boards and posts are a common tool. Since most online students are already used to these types of assignments, instructors who make them more personable and relatable to everyday life could significantly increase social presence and the quality of student responses. Right now, they feel cumbersome and impersonal. I comment with that idea on all my post-course feedback reports but have never seen it implemented.”

Sub-Question Two

How do online students describe experiences with an instructor’s online immediacy and social presence related to student motivation? The participants provided helpful descriptions of how instructors increase student motivation through social presence and immediacy. Each participant agreed that increasing instructor social presence and immediacy would directly increase their motivation in the asynchronous online course and overall academic success. Evan proclaimed, “In my program, I have received straight A’s to this point without ever really communicating with the instructor, so I honestly have no reason to be motivated. A much-needed

intangible element of learning and growth occurs when students receive feedback or have interactions that make them feel motivated and want to succeed.” Ivan agreed, “It’s one thing to achieve good grades. It’s another thing to learn how you are motivated in school and life. Motivation is essential to becoming successful in our prospective fields, whether it’s motivation from me, my peers, or my instructors. I fear that there is an entire ‘online school generation’ that will struggle mightily when it comes to real life without understanding important motivation can be in daily life.”

Sub-Question Three

How do online students describe the communication techniques an instructor should use to assist students throughout the online course? The participants provided detailed insight into ways instructors can improve communication techniques to assist students through an asynchronous online course. The most popular technique the participants discussed was the incorporation of online class meetings. Gavin mentioned, “I personally really enjoy live Zoom sessions or using a multimedia platform for class meetings. Being able to ask questions in the moment and actually put a face and voice to the instructor made them more relatable and made me more comfortable to ask for help during the course. Instructors who fail to attempt to socialize with their students other than that first week don’t bring much to the table. It might as well be a computer grading my work.” Amanda also noted, “When we did group projects, our instructor placed us into groups based on our introductory posts at the beginning of class by pairing us through mutual interests. This was great because it made the group meetings more fun and sociable. It showed the instructor cared and was helping us succeed.” The second communication technique most desired by the participants was having instructors provide personal email addresses or phone numbers to improve their chances of reaching the instructor

outside school hours. Although each participant said they would not overuse the privilege of being able to contact their instructor during after-hours or on the weekend, they did feel like that provided them more options for success. Evan was most motivated by this idea and stated, “We are all adults and should know when it is appropriate to call or email an instructor’s personal accounts. I have maybe done it once on a weekend for an emergency, but just having the information gives me a sense of inclusion and like the instructor really cares for us and wants us to excel.”

Summary

Chapter Four included detailed descriptions of the 10 participants that provided information for this hermeneutical phenomenological study. The participants included students enrolled in asynchronous online college courses and had previously completed at least two asynchronous online courses. The study's primary purpose was to understand how instructor immediacy and social presence impact the academic success of asynchronous online students. Data was collected through individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. Themes were developed from the data collected using van Manen’s (2021) phenomenological reduction. Data analysis revealed three main themes: quality of instructor-student interaction, socialization and connectedness with instructor and peers, and effectiveness of online learning. Six sub-themes and two outliers also emerged from the data reduction. It was evident that asynchronous online students were more motivated to excel and achieve academic success when their instructors provided social presence and immediacy throughout the course. Comments and direct quotes made by the participants were included in the findings to support the themes and sub-themes identified. Additionally, the information gathered from the interviews, letter writing, and focus group was used to answer the one central research question and three sub-questions about how

instructor immediacy and social presence impact students' academic success. This chapter concluded with a summary of the results found in this section.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California. This chapter begins with an interpretation of the findings that were identified through the three themes and associated sub-themes. Other subjects discussed in this chapter include implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future use. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overall summary of the essential conclusions determined by the study.

Discussion

This hermeneutical phenomenological study describes the impact of instructor social presence and immediacy on students' academic success during asynchronous online courses. In Chapter Four, participants shared their experiences with the instructor's social presence and immediacy through individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group. The data collected was reduced to form three major themes. These themes include the quality of instructor-student interactions, socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, and the effectiveness of online learning. Additionally, this chapter identifies the interpretations of the findings based on the experiences shared by the study participants. Finally, recommendations for future asynchronous online instructors and students will be presented.

Interpretation of Findings

Purposeful criterion sampling was used to identify the 10 participants that contributed to this study. Each participant was currently enrolled in an asynchronous online college course and

had previously completed two asynchronous online courses. All 10 participants participated in the individual interviews and let writing data collection. Four participants volunteered to take part in the focus group. After completing the data reduction and analysis, three themes and six sub-themes were identified. The following section interprets the findings that contributed to identifying themes and sub-themes. The themes that emerged from the study included the quality of instructor-student interactions, socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, and the effectiveness of online learning. Each major theme had two distinct sub-themes that further explained the themes and highlighted the specific experiences of the participants. Related to the quality of instructor-student interactions, each participant was steadfast about the importance of receiving quality feedback in a timely manner through the most efficient interaction possible. Pertaining to socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, participants felt they had little or no connection in most online courses and agreed that more connectedness would significantly increase their course satisfaction. Additionally, all participants exclaimed that instructor social presence and immediacy would increase their motivation to succeed academically. Ultimately, this led the participants to believe they were more engaged and better prepared to succeed once their external motivation and autonomy were fulfilled (Ashraf et al., 2018).

Summary of Thematic Findings

Based on data reduction and analysis, three themes emerged from this study. These themes included the quality of instructor-student interactions, socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, and the effectiveness of online learning. Each theme was aligned with the theoretical framework used in this study. The theme quality of instructor-student interactions included the sub-themes of timely communication and effective interactions. The participants

expressed the difficulty of incorporating feedback into future assignments when feedback on past assignments was not provided in a timely manner. They also described the importance of effective interactions. Quality interactions were more helpful than the quantity of interactions. Students felt more motivated to participate and learn when they experienced quality interactions alongside timely communication.

The theme of socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers included the sub-themes of collaborative course projects and importance of feeling connected. The participants expressed the difficulty of socializing in asynchronous courses. They all commented that collaborative course projects would significantly increase socialization and connectedness along with quality discussion board posts. Although some participants understood that group meetings may be challenging, they agreed that the socialization aspect of these meetings would outweigh the challenges. Feeling connected in an asynchronous online course was important to increase motivation and students' desires to participate more. It also encouraged students to contact their instructors with questions and clarification.

The theme of the effectiveness of online learning included the sub-themes of motivation and benefits. Participants expressed how quality instructor interaction positively impacts their motivation. Participants felt more motivated to excel when their instructors answered emails, provided their personal contact information, and created socialization among peers. Benefits included ease of access to the course from anywhere, flexibility, and lack of interference with their work schedule. These benefits contributed to why the participants enrolled in asynchronous online courses despite their dissatisfaction with instructors' social presence and immediacy.

Students Desire Quality Feedback in a Timely Manner. Each participant commented on the desire to receive feedback on assignments that they can use to improve future

assignments. Research has shown that students welcome new knowledge and use it to improve their own learning (Ashraf et al., 2018). Although the participants understood that instructors had other courses, they agreed that academic success could only be achieved by learning from the mistakes they made during their courses. They also wanted to have a schedule for feedback.

Evan commented, “All of my online courses have had weekly modules. If assignments are due on Sundays, instructors should have feedback given by Thursday. That gives me the time to incorporate comments into my next assignment.” Hans explained, “In my last class, I randomly got feedback and only actually got one comment that was helpful. I had no idea if I was on the right track or not. How can I learn if I have no idea if I could improve? Maybe I’m just an amazing student, but I doubt it.” Also, participants explained that the feedback must be effective, not just timely. Juliette stated, “It doesn’t help if the instructor just replies with ‘nice work’ every week. I need some kind of quality feedback. It can be anything from grammatical mistakes to APA mistakes to actual content problems.” Finally, it was evident that positive feedback was also welcomed. Amanda mentioned, “I like hearing that I did well. But, instead of just responding with a positive comment, say something like ‘I like how you explained XYZ. Next time, why don’t you consider writing/referencing/citing ABC? I’d love to see something like that.’”

Students Desire a Feeling of Connectedness to Instructors and Peers. The participants expressed the importance of feeling connected to their instructors and peers. Research has shown that students can improve their retention of information and increase their self-learning in an online course when interacting with other learners and instructors (Ferrer et al., 2022; Page et al., 2021). Brian commented. “It’s difficult to know that there are other students in the same course as you, but you have no idea who they are or if we are all learning the same stuff. Other than the

discussion boards, I have no interaction with any of them. Even then, I don't get anything out of the responses to my posts because I feel they are forced just for the 'A' at the end of the course."

Additionally, instructors who provided methods to promote connectedness received the most praise from the participants. Juliette mentioned, "My very first instructor had bi-weekly Zoom meetings with whoever could participate and, just putting a face to a name, made me more excited to participate, and I definitely felt connected to all the students. That was awesome, but definitely not common for instructors to do." Ultimately, it was evident that online course connections significantly increase the motivation for asynchronous online students to excel.

Student Motivation is Directly Related to Instructor's Social Presence and Immediacy. One major attraction to online courses is the students' ability to be a self-directed learner. This requires students to be motivated and self-directed to succeed in the course. Participants agreed that this motivation they need to succeed is directly associated with the instructor's social presence and immediacy. Connecting to instructors is imperative to student intrinsic motivation and allows the students to create relationships within a learning environment that helps them achieve academic success (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Frances commented, "When an instructor participates in the course and makes me feel like they actually care about my success, I feel motivated. It doesn't take much. The difference between me truly caring about what I am learning and just doing the minimum can hinge on one or two small social interactions with the instructor." Ivan agreed and stated, "The good instructors stay engaged, make comments that challenge students, provide quality feedback, offer different points of view, and reinforce important points. That is motivating because it shows they care about me, not just their paycheck."

Implications for Policy and Practice

This phenomenological study found that there are significant policy and practical implications that can be adopted to help instructors provide more effective social presence and immediacy to students enrolled in asynchronous online courses. Based on the data collected during the study, it is apparent that online students' experiences in online courses have been challenging and unmotivating. Students desire quality, effective, and timely communication and feedback. They also desire more connectedness and motivation through interactions with peers and instructors. The following recommendations are made to support students' course satisfaction and overall academic success and are intended for college administrators, policymakers, and instructors.

Implications for Policy

This phenomenological research study concluded that several policy implications can be incorporated into asynchronous online courses relating to instructor social presence and immediacy. The participants agreed that instructor-student interactions and engagement motivated them to succeed academically. This study also determined that students' academic identity directly reflected their motivation to participate in their learning environments (Chen et al., 2020). Based on this study, three specific policies that could be adapted are creating a research and development team, implementing a college-wide standardization for instructor involvement, and creating anonymous course critique forms with specific social presence and immediacy questions.

A research and development team would be able to interview asynchronous online instructors and students to identify better techniques to improve social presence, immediacy, and connectedness. Ivan mentioned, "There has to be a way to improve socialization. Schools just

need to ask. With how intelligent and technologically driven some people are, I am sure they could find a way to make us all feel more connected in online classes.” Since online courses have become extremely popular, there would be enough data to help create a better program or online assistant to promote socialization and immediacy. With the understanding that instructor social presence and immediacy posed one of the most significant challenges in online courses, the research and development team would have the means to ensure online learning tools were current and as effective as possible.

The second policy that could be implemented would be creating a standardization for instructor involvement. This would provide a description of the detailed amount of social presence and immediacy instructors need to provide in each course. Based on feedback from the past few years of online learning, colleges could implement a checklist of involvement that each instructor must complete and turn in after a semester. Colleges should also hold training for instructors to teach them how to improve their social presence and immediacy. Finally, if instructors do not adhere to the standardization, they must be held accountable and reprimanded, as needed.

The third policy that could be implemented is creating anonymous course critiques for students with specific questions about how instructors can improve social presence and immediacy. Amanda commented, “Many questions on the course critique forms are very vague, and I never know if the instructor knows that I filled it out. So, I always write positive comments just in case I have that instructor in the future. If the questions were more specific, I could provide better feedback that they could actually use.” Additionally, it would be beneficial to have a critique halfway through the semester, so instructors could make adjustments in time to impact their current class.

Implications for Practice

This phenomenological research study concluded that several practical implications can be incorporated into asynchronous online courses relating to instructor social presence and immediacy. Information and suggestions collected from the data analysis will enable online instructors to explicitly change their course structure and personal participation in their asynchronous courses. Specifically, this study recommends that instructors incorporate cooperative course assignments and activities for the students to participate in. These group activities promote socialization and motivational interactions (Alshahran et al., 2017). Amanda expressed, “Communicating with the other students would be very helpful and push me to continue to participate more and actually understand the course material on a deeper level that I wouldn’t have done by myself.”

Additionally, although this study focused on students in Southern CA colleges, colleges nationwide could utilize the findings to improve instructors' social presence and immediacy in asynchronous online courses. There may also be a desire to create further communication between schools regarding good practices that may be used across the country. Asynchronous online course challenges quickly increased due to the popularity of online courses after the COVID-19 pandemic, and instructors should be proactive now to reduce those challenges (Donham et al., 2022). Agreeing with this statement, Hans mentioned, “COVID-19 really forced instructors to teach online exclusively. Now that it’s been a few years, instructors and schools need to take the time to learn from goods and not-so-goods of online courses and change how they create a learning environment for the future”.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This phenomenological study collected information about the experience with the impact instructor social presence and immediacy had on asynchronous online students' academic success. The following section describes the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. The 10 participants explained positive and challenging experiences and perspectives with their interactions with instructors and peers in an online learning environment. Specific theoretical and empirical implications are described in the following subsections.

Theoretical

The theoretical framework for this hermeneutical phenomenological study was the Theory of Social Presence by Short et al. (1976). This theory supported the idea that instructor real and present interaction affects participants' saliency and interpersonal relationships (Short et al., 1986). Additionally, social presence is considered a significant predictor of motivation and satisfaction with computer-based media (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2018). The data collected from this study supports the theory of social presence. All participants expressed how important instructors' social presence and immediacy are concerning their motivation in the course and satisfaction with the learning environment.

This study discovered that, due to the increase in online learning platforms, it is crucial to understand how instructors can improve students' academic success with social presence and immediacy. As technology continues to improve, changes to online learning environments may be implemented to increase student motivation in an asynchronous online learning environment (Costello & Welch, 2018). Fong et al. (2017) believed that when appropriate levels of social presence combine with instructor immediacy, higher levels of academic success are achieved. For many participants in this study, social presence and immediacy could be improved through

group activities and assignments. Juliette mentioned, “I have never really enjoyed group projects until I started my online courses and realized how important it is to have a social bond with other students and instructors. Now, I want more socialization to motivate me through some of the tougher courses.” Gavin added, stating, “Social presence should be a ‘must’ for instructors. Students are going to slowly lose the ability to socially interact in the world or at their jobs. I’m not even a social person, but I do enjoy learning about other students and how they navigate through the online schooling process.”

Empirical

The empirical significance of this phenomenological study was to add to current research on how online students feel a social presence from their instructors and develop increased satisfaction with their online learning environment and the ability to understand the course material. The findings from this study discussed multiple topics from previous literature reviews, including challenges instructors face in creating a sense of connectedness, the lack of motivation students have without a social presence, non-stimulating course material and assignments, and the desire for timely feedback. Additionally, this study affirmed that social and cognitive presence from instructors has a strong influence on the likelihood that students participate in the online environment and internalize the course information they receive (Cardon, 2000; Donham et al., 2022; and Rovai, 2016).

Empirically, the data collected from this study expanded on the fact that students desire more social presence and immediacy from their instructors in asynchronous online courses. Through individual interviews, letter writing, and a focus group, the participants explained their experiences with the challenges they faced in the online learning environment. They also expressed ways instructors could motivate them to excel by creating a more social environment

and providing timely feedback. Ultimately, this study will add to the current literature by aiding in the future design of asynchronous online courses to ensure the course material, design, and environment support academic success (Lim et al., 2021; Stone & Springer, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022).

Limitations and Delimitations

This hermeneutical phenomenological study contained several limitations and delimitations. Limitations include unavoidable challenges to the study that are not controllable. Delimitations are specific choices the researcher makes to limit and define the boundaries of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following section describes two limitations and three delimitations encountered during this study.

The two limitations encountered during this study were participants' experiences with online courses and instructor familiarity with teaching online courses. Some participants had taken multiple asynchronous online courses and were able to provide responses based on an extensive collection of experiences. Other participants only met the requirement of previously enrolled in two asynchronous online courses, so their experiences were not as detailed or recurrent. Additionally, the participants' instructors were not interviewed, so their experience as an online instructor was unknown. Participants may have experienced instructors with little or vast experience with online courses, and their experience would have influenced how much social presence and immediacy they provided. Despite these limitations, suitable data was collected to define major themes, indicating that the number of courses taken and instructor experience did not hinder the study.

The three delimitations associated with this study were the geographical location of participants, the choice to conduct a phenomenological study, and the minimum number of

online courses participants have taken. The geographical delimitation was determined based on the fact that I live and work in Southern CA and could conduct the data collection without the challenge of time changes. Additionally, Southern CA provides a wide variety of colleges that offer asynchronous online courses. I chose to conduct a phenomenological study to understand and share my experiences with asynchronous online courses with those experiences my participants encountered. Finally, I decided to have each participant previously enrolled in at least two asynchronous online courses so I could collect data from students with different levels of experience. Two courses were determined so that each participant had some specific data to relate their personal experiences as opposed to first-time online students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering research findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on this study, multiple recommendations and directions were determined for future research. First, the sample population should include a more vast area of concentration. This study only focused on asynchronous courses in Southern CA. Future studies could be conducted in other parts of the country to ensure these are not isolated responses.

A second recommendation would be to define how many online courses participants had previously completed. For example, one study could focus on students with broad experiences with over 30 online courses, and another could focus on participants who have taken less than ten courses. This would help define how students with significant experience in asynchronous online courses compare to those with much less experience. It may become apparent that students desire less social presence and immediacy as they complete more online courses. Or, it may show that students desire the same instructor interactions no matter how much experience they have had in previous courses.

A third recommendation would be to complete this research study in a synchronous online course. A synchronous course would require social interaction and promote immediacy. The participants' experiences in a synchronous course could be compared to the results of this study to further explain the importance of social presence and immediacy. It may also provide examples of ways instructors could implement social presence and immediacy into asynchronous courses.

Conclusion

This hermeneutical phenomenological study focused on the impact of instructor social presence and immediacy on students' academic success during asynchronous online courses. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Short et al.'s theory of social presence (1976). One central research question and three sub-questions were derived from this theory to support this study. A total of 10 asynchronous online college students participated in this study. The participants were students in colleges located in Southern CA and had previously completed at least two asynchronous online courses. Participants described their experiences with instructors' social presence and immediacy through personal interviews, letter writing, and a focus group.

Data analysis was conducted through coding based on van Manen's (2021) phenomenological reduction process. Once reduction was complete, three main themes and six sub-themes emerged. The three themes were the quality of instructor-student interactions, socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers, and the effectiveness of online learning. The theme quality of instructor-student interactions included the sub-themes of timely communication and effective interactions. The theme of socialization and connectedness with instructors and peers included the sub-themes of collaborative course projects and the importance of feeling connected. The theme of the effectiveness of online learning included the sub-themes

of motivation and benefits. Furthermore, this study listed implications for policy and practice, limitations, and delimitations.

The findings of this study suggested that asynchronous online students desire more instructor social presence and immediacy in their courses. The participants feel more motivated to achieve academic success when they feel connected with their instructors and peers. The participants also desire more quality and timely feedback from their instructors. Some participants agreed that creating a social learning environment may be challenging for instructors. Nonetheless, the participants all agreed that increasing social interaction and connectedness within an online course would significantly improve autonomy and the desire to learn. Altogether, it was evident that the participants agreed that small changes to improve instructor social presence and immediacy would promote overall academic success in asynchronous online courses.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

May 25, 2023

Colette Lazenka
Rachel Hernandez

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1492 THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTOR IMMEDIACY AND SOCIAL PRESENCE ON ONLINE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

Dear Colette Lazenka, Rachel Hernandez,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. **Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.**

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: The Impact of Instructor Immediacy and Social Presence on Online Students' Academic Success: A Hermeneutical Phenomenology Study

Principal Investigator: Colette Lazenka, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a Southern California college student enrolled in asynchronous online courses, which allow you to complete them at your own pace over a set period of time. You must also have previously completed at least 2 asynchronous online courses. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities in Southern California.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an audio and video recorded, virtual interview that will take no more than 30-45 mins.
2. Respond to an essay question through letter writing that will take no more than 15-20 mins. This will not be recorded.
3. Potentially participate in an audio and video recorded focus group with 4-5 other participants that will take no more than 45 mins.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improving future asynchronous online course interactions and environments to facilitate student academic success.

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What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the following paragraph. Data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Colette Lazenka. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Rachel Hernandez, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical

address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA , 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

- The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-1492
Approved on 5-25-2023

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTOR IMMEDIACY AND SOCIAL PRESENCE ON ONLINE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

- Are you a college student enrolled in online courses at a Southern California college or university?
- Are your current courses asynchronous, which allows you to complete them at your own pace over a period of time?
 - Have you previously completed at least 2 asynchronous online college courses?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities that offer asynchronous learning in Southern California.

Participants will be asked to share their personal experiences with asynchronous online courses by completing an individual interview, answering an essay question through letter writing, and potentially participating in a focus group.

Benefits include improving future asynchronous online course interactions and environments to facilitate student academic success.

If you would like to participate, please contact the researcher at the phone number or email address provided below.

A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview.

Colette Lazenka, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Colette at [REDACTED] for more information.

Appendix D

Recruitment Social Media

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctor of education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of instructor social presence and immediacy on student success for asynchronous online students at universities in Southern California. To participate, you must be a Southern California college or university student enrolled in asynchronous online courses, which allow you to complete them at your own pace over a set period of time. You must also have previously completed at least 2 asynchronous online college courses. Participants will be asked to participate in an individual interview (30-45 mins), complete an essay question through letter writing (15-20 mins), and potentially participate in a focus group (45 mins). If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please contact me at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for more information. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview, and you will need to sign and return it prior to the interview.