

WHY IS 1:1 INTERACTION WITH ONLINE STUDENTS IMPORTANT?

By Sameer Shah,
Online facilitator for PG
courses in strategy and
human resources



I feel fortunate to have had an opportunity to facilitate eight units from management disciplines at Australian universities in collaboration with LINC Education. In this era where technology has taken the driver's seat in every sphere of life to enhance productivity, increase quality and improve access, online education is yet to do full justice to its promise of enhancing the student learning experience and teaching effectiveness. While technology seems to have added to the quality of experience across multiple services we use (think shopping, traveling, banking and many others we depending on daily), education delivery using technology (think online education) is perceived to be inferior to its traditional classroom counterpart.

One of the major reasons for the ineffectiveness of online education is the lack of student-student and student-teacher interactions. Education should ideally provoke a number of questions but when students do not have a platform to seek quick responses to their queries, they are bound to become a bit demotivated. In this blog, I will explore why 1:1 interaction is absolutely needed and required for an enhanced online student experience:

- **Motivation** – Most of the students in the courses I have facilitated have been mature-age learners. They typically enroll for online courses to upgrade their skills and grow in their professional careers. I have observed that these students are high on motivation when they enroll for a course. However, their perception of the time availability and the effort they would require to manage work, home and studies may not be realistic. Especially in the first few units they pursue, they realise that managing studies isn't as easy as they had hoped. Through 1:1 interactions with their facilitators or coaches, students get an important platform to voice their concerns and to find solutions to manage their time best. 1:1 interaction also helps

students understand that they are not alone in their academic journey and to receive advice on how to handle the ambiguity.

- **Query resolution** – Online learners with a full-time job find time to learn at odd evening hours or on weekends. When they have a query or require clarifications, they need someone who they can reach out for a discussion. If these queries get resolved in quick time, they feel encouraged and motivated to perform well. Also, 1:1 discussions, especially over voice calls help facilitators and students discuss and resolve queries much better. A better understanding of the problem or a quick resolution to their queries in short response time helps students stay motivated.
- **Personalisation** – Each student has a very different context and experience level, and need individualised support that is relevant to their context. The needs of each online learner are different from the others. Some require more assistance in understanding academic concepts while some would need help with academic writing whereas some just require a coach to periodically nudge them to do better. Their study preferences are different too, some are weekend learners while some prefer weekday late evenings for interactions. Likewise, goals also vary from student to student; some aim for higher scores while some are just aiming to pass the course. The effort student can invest in terms of time is also variable. 1:1 interactions allow facilitators and coaches to understand student needs and preferences better and customise the guidance to their unique contexts thereby helping them to achieve their goals in an effective and efficient manner.
- **Unfamiliar learning environment** – Most students have

experienced learning majorly in a classroom setting and they find themselves in an unfamiliar learning environment as they begin their online academic journey. With everything from discussion forums, library, lecture notes to seminars being conducted online, they sometimes find it difficult to adapt to the new learning mode and familiarise themselves with the demands of the new environment. 1:1 interactions help students get through this initial period and make them comfortable with the new learning environment.

- **Assessment advice** – Most students require 1:1 interaction when it comes to tackling assignments. In an in-classroom environment, students often catch up with their peers or teachers for any query they may have. In an online environment, students lack the sounding boards they need to stay on track for their assignments. They need clarification on their understanding of the task, or need another perspective about their thought process, or would simply like to know if they are progressing well. 1:1 interaction helps students not only improve their assignment quality but also learn a lot from the discussions they have with their facilitators while working on their assignments.

Overall, 1:1 interaction bridges a crucial experience gap in the online learning process. Students continue to maintain a high level of motivation and seek the required support in their academic journey. They are better able to manage work and other commitments while pursuing their academics and many go on to complete their degrees with a great learning experience. ■