

CHANGING ONLINE LEARNING BEHAVIOUR THROUGH ONE-TO-ONE ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE

KEEPING AN ONLINE STUDENT COHORT ACTIVELY ENGAGED HAS PROVED CHALLENGING FOR MOST UNIVERSITIES. LINC EDUCATION SHARES HOW IT HAS USED 1-1 ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE TO DRIVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT LEADING TO BETTER RETENTION AND OUTCOMES FOR ITS PARTNER UNIVERSITIES.

PREMISE

With ~10 million online learners globally and a 300% increase over the last decade, online learning is the biggest trend in higher education that universities need to adapt so they can deliver meaningful student outcomes and completion rates.

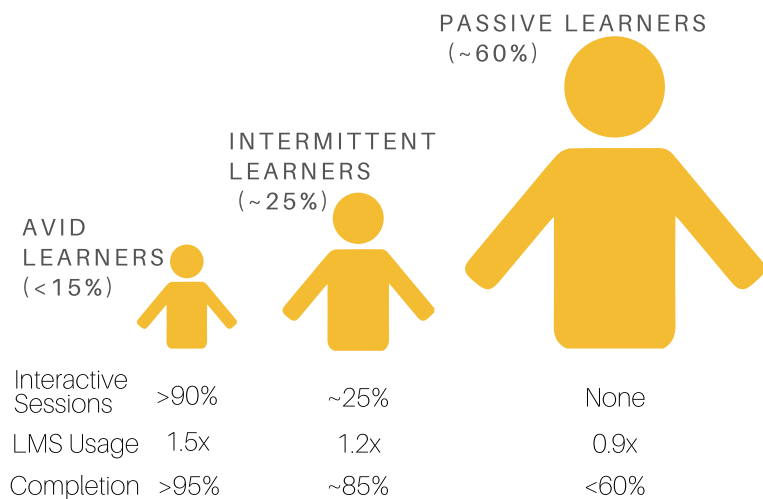
It is a well acknowledged and researched fact that the level of active student engagement with their learning tasks is directly proportional to academic outcomes. (Rodgers, 2008; Strydom & Mentz, 2010). But active student engagement needs formative communication with academic staff, and feeling legitimated and supported by the university's learning communities (Coates, 2007).

But how does one promote such interaction amongst online learners when their schedules often don't match available teacher hours or even with those of their peers? Can 1-1 academic engagement be leveraged to "activate" online learners and improve retention or outcomes?

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

LINC Education analysed the learning behaviour of over 1500 online post graduate students across subjects and universities. 3 broad types of learners were identified based on their course engagement patterns (see graphic).

TYPES OF ONLINE LEARNERS



Source: Analysis of 1500 online learners supported by LINC Education

Engagement was measured by student's participation in synchronous modes such as webinars as well as LMS usage including forum participation.

Unsurprisingly "Avid" learners had the best results with virtually no unplanned withdrawals whereas the "Passive" learners had 3x higher probability of withdrawing or failing.

Passive learners have multiple reasons for not participating in synchronous or interactive learning avenues available to them:

- Webinars/ drop in sessions: Unsuitable schedule or learning format
- Discussion forums: Fear of being judged, too many posts, timeliness and reliability of information
- Direct emails to teacher: Unsure of teacher availability, timeliness of responses, format limitations

Very often, by the time online educators identify such disengaged students it is already too late and the student ends up withdrawing or academic results are unsalvageable.

The challenge, therefore, is to *preempt* and *activate* this large and passive group of "Passive Learners" in order to uplift the overall outcomes and retention rate in online courses.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

It is clear that universities need to be learner oriented, proactive and personalised to change this behaviour. LINC Education partnered with 4 universities to offer an individualised, 1-1 academic assistance program to each student. This was done either through the unit's online facilitator or through a coach, who was qualified subject matter expert aligned to the prescribed content, working as an extension of the unit team.

With this support, students got open access to a subject expert who could clarify concepts, give guidance on assignments and review drafts ahead of time. The sessions were telephonic and could be setup within the same day, often within an hour. Additionally, LINC used technology-based analytics to identify passive students who were then proactively engaged by their facilitator or coach.

As a result, students could now avail academic assistance which was:

- Personalised: 1-1 safe space for relevant and tailored discussions
- Prompt: Quick to respond, even late in the evening or on weekends
- Proactive: Preempted passive or at-risk students, who hesitate to engage

QUANTIFYING BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

The impact of this service was best observed in the learning behaviour of Passive Learners. More than 60% of this group embraced 1-1 academic assistance and used it as their primary source for course engagement. They spoke for 15-20 min almost every week with their facilitator or coach which was supplemented by ongoing email exchanges. Some "Intermittent" learners also preferred the 1-1 assistance and together this group was classified as "1-1 Dependent Learners". It was interesting to note that almost all "Avid" learners used this assistance heavily in addition to other sources of synchronous support (See Graphic).

RESULTS

1-1 Dependent learners demonstrated significantly better academic outcomes and satisfaction (See Graphic):

- Completion Rate: 1:1 Dependent Learners had a ~85% completion rate vs <60% for other students (except Avid Learners)

- Grades: 1-1 Dependent Learners were disproportionately more Pass and Credit students suggesting the positive impact of 1-1 assistance on lower performing students.
- Feedback: Students expressed high levels of satisfaction (~4.5/5) with the highest ratings received from 1-1 Dependent Learners

Of the 1500 online students supported by LINC, 90% used 1-1 academic assistance with 60% using it nearly each week; less than 15% of the students withdrew before census date vs industry standard of 20-25%

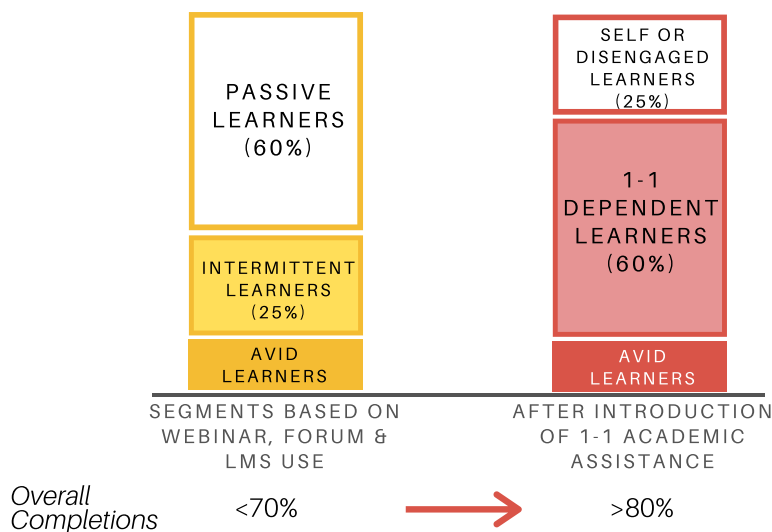
CONCLUSIONS

Numerous studies and best practices advocate that increasing student engagement with the course and teachers has a direct impact on improving retention and outcomes amongst online learners. However, the varied learning habits of online students make it extremely hard for universities to facilitate this. With LINC's support, universities are able to offer proactive, prompt, 1-1 academic assistance to students leading to quantifiable improvement in outcomes.

References:

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IMPACT OF 1-1 ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE ON STUDENT SEGMENTS AND OUTCOMES



"I honestly would not have continued without the support from my coach. His advice was so helpful and he explained things that I otherwise would have given up on. Responsive & available"
 - Online PG Student (1-1 Dependent Learner)

Source: Analysis of 1500 online learners supported by LINC Education