



## The Use of Learning Portal: Reconnecting Students with Teacher for Practical Courses

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Learning to sail is more than on-water lessons. Prior to the global pandemic 2020, students were required to attend a day of theory lessons before their lesson on the sea. During the crisis, the in-person contact was prohibited. Therefore, the learn-to-sail programme continued with students attending the theory lessons online followed by a recording that could be accessed. For the practical part, the students were introduced to an app for virtual sailing experience. However, the synchronous online lessons attracted more attendance (i.e., up to 100 participants per session) than the virtual sailing experience.

Voluntary student feedback of 2020 and 2021 reveals that the students enjoyed the online synchronous theory lessons especially when they could re-watch the recording after the lessons to acquire certain skills at different individual paces (e.g., tying different knots). When the Covid restrictions eased and the students were back for their on-water session, the teacher realised that there is more practical time for students as the students were able to relate what they had learnt from the online theory lessons. Most importantly, the connection between the teacher and the students is found to be more engaging and interactive with Q & A than the previous in-class cohorts.

Therefore, in 2022, we piloted a learning portal for the Level-1 course to increase the meaningful learning experiences for students. Adopting a theoretical framework (2021) that integrated technology acceptance model (TAM) and theory of planned behavior (TPB), we redesigned the original in-class theory lessons into eight online self-paced modules. Each module is a short video clip that covers a topic followed by a short auto-generated quiz, and the modules are sequenced in a scaffolding manner but the students could re-visit any module(s) as frequent as they need to. The students will receive the feedback straightaway, and they will be able to compare their scores with other students in an anonymous manner. They can re-do the quiz if they wish to and the answers for each question are randomised in every attempt.

Pedagogically, the anonymous quiz results allow the teachers to realise the aspects that need to be re-emphasised/re-explained during the practical session. This helps the teachers to reflect if they have taught those aspects well in the modules. Also, the fact that the learning portal becomes a revision resource for the students after the course is beneficial, particularly if the students are embarking onto the next level(s).

The insights from the current voluntary student feedback highlight that the sense of connection and reconnection can happen efficiently and effectively when the learning is carefully designed to address student needs, particularly in higher education. The learning portal is self-driven and paced, and largely asynchronous, but the follow-up in person session can then focus on human relationships which are significantly the key ingredients for connection and reconnection among students and between students and teacher in higher education. The enhanced student learning outcomes shows that it is time for us to re-evaluate the ways we use digital tools in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Adult Learners, Connection/Reconnection, Higher Education, Learning Portal, Practical Courses

## References

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