

Dissertation Jay Wilson

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**An examination of the relationships of interaction,  
learner styles, and course content on student  
satisfaction and outcomes in online learning**

A Dissertation submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the award of

Doctor of Education

Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland

2007

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## Declaration on Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the University of Southern Queensland's Human Ethics Review Committee (approval number **H06STU556**).



December 12, 2007

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Jay Wilson

(date)

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## **Abstract**

Online education offers many people the opportunity to begin or continue their education. The option to undertake studies has also expanded dramatically due to increasing numbers of online programs. One of the strengths of online learning is the ability to provide a rich learning experience where students have the opportunity to interact using technology. Although a general profile of students who enrol in online courses has been developed, very little of the research is comprehensive enough to create an understanding of the experience of individual online learners. Many studies have been conducted on the process of interaction and there is a need to learn more about how students use interaction and tools in online learning.

A review of current research into online learning uncovered a need for a deeper understanding of how online students engage in interaction, their learning styles, and the types of content they use in their online courses. The research review raised a number of specific questions:

- What types of online interactions are students having?
- Are there particular learner types that are more successful in the online learning environment?
- Is there specific course content that is used more often than others in online learning?
- Are there obstacles to online interactions for students and if so what are they?
- What factors influence student satisfaction in online learning?

In particular do learning styles, course content and interaction influence learner satisfaction and outcomes in online learning? What impact do these variables have, separately and together, on online learners? This study looked at the educational experience of 124 online students using a 125 item online survey and follow-up interview.

The outcomes of this study showed that Participant and Independent learner styles were important factors contributing to the success of online learners. Even if they did not possess the skills before they entered the courses, the ability to demonstrate, analyze, and apply course content was of benefit to learners. Interaction did not have a significant impact on the outcomes or satisfaction of learners. The more closely the online courses matched the individual's personal learning style and approach to online learning the more satisfied and successful they were.

The results of the research include a number of practical examples that can be easily integrated into the online learning environment. Those delivering, teaching, and studying in online programs can use these results to increase their understanding of online education and apply that understanding to making online education more effective.

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