ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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The role of psychology in eLearning

What psychological techniques can be used to create a better online learning experience?

Psychology plays a very important role in eLearning design: it is crucial in helping designers of learning experiences to create effective and engaging eLearning solutions. In this article we will explore the main types of psychology that are used in eLearning and highlight some key psychological techniques that can be used to create a better learning experience.

Use of psychology in eLearning design

Those who work in training know that psychology is among the **educator's main tools**.

A successful educator must in fact 'deliver' his knowledge to learners and to do this he must put them in the best position to receive it. The way to do this is to use psychology. There are certain branches of psychology that are particularly used for eLearning.

Cognitive psychology

One often hears about students' concentration problems and tends to pinpoint the cause to the fact that attention spans have decreased in the younger generation, so much so that a goldfish would have greater attention spans than young people today. This is where cognitive psychology comes in: insights and research in the field of cognitive psychology help designers of learning experiences to find interesting eLearning solutions that **keep students' attention** and motivate them to learn more. The following branches are part of the cognitive psychology family and are among the main ones to consider when creating eLearning courses.

Colour psychology

Have you ever wondered why every person has a favourite colour? The answer is more complex than it seems. **Colours play an important role** in our daily lives, even if we do not realise it. In fact, as we grow up, our brains associate emotions and moods with the colours we see. Colours therefore have an important significance in psychology because they can arouse emotions. This is why colour psychology is studied in marketing. Interestingly, colours can also affect the speed at which we process information and understand something. When it comes to eLearning design, the layout of the course template, the position, shape and colours of course buttons and indicators can play a key role in how learners approach the course. Over the past decade, there has been a significant shift towards a minimalist approach and a unified design language and theme.

Psychology of the text

If you open a newspaper page, whether online or in print, you will see that some words and images are larger and others smaller. The larger text and images relate to the more interesting news and tend to attract us more.

This is the **psychology of text** that deals with the impact that words written in a certain font and size have on readers. In eLearning, the arrangement of content on the template, different font sizes, and a consistent font style play an important role in how learners associate with the content. Text psychology is not only about content consumption, but also about the usability of applications. For example, if the home page of the application or platform I use for e-learning- has a homepage with poorly made text (in the use of font size, font, bold, etc.) students will suffer.

Psychology principles for developing eLearning courses

Knowing how learners acquire information and why they need it is the key to becoming a successful educator. In traditional training, the use of the principles of psychology has been studied for centuries, but in the case of eLearning this is not the case, as it is a type of training that has only been in existence for a few years. Of course, speaking of training, many of the principles of psychology that are valid for traditional training are also valid for eLearning, but there are certain principles of learning psychology that are particularly relevant because they offer eLearning professionals the possibility of optimising courses and platforms. So, if you are an online course creator consider spending some **time researching the human mind and how it works** because it can give you the opportunity to tap into the power of the subconscious mind and develop eLearning courses that engage, enthuse and inspire your learners. Below are some tips from educational psychology that you should keep in mind when creating an eLearning course.

1. The benefits of the course

If learners cannot see the real world applications, they will not see the **value of the eLearning** course. Our mind wants to know the immediate benefits of what it is about to learn in order to be motivated to do it. Although long-term benefits are important, immediate gratification is often more attractive and satisfying. Therefore, informing learners about what they should expect to achieve or attain after completing the eLearning course is important because it leverages this psychological mechanism. A good way to do this is to develop learning objectives and performance targets being as specific and detailed as possible. Make sure that learners know exactly what skills they will develop, what key knowledge they will learn and, most importantly, what they will be able to do with all this newly acquired information. For example, if you are creating an eLearning course that will enable your learners to develop a particular skill, mention how this new skill can be applied in both personal and professional contexts, or list the potential benefits they could receive by developing this skill set. In this way, participants will be inspired and motivated to learn, so that they get the most out of the eLearning experience.

2. Independent learning

People have an **intrinsic need to learn and experience new things**.

Human beings are curious by nature and, if they develop a sincere interest in something, they tend to want to learn more and more about that topic, regardless of age, cultural background or profession. In other words, we have the need to explore things that interest us, we want to be able to delve deeper into a topic to learn all we can about it, which can be harnessed for the benefit of eLearning professionals. It is possible to harness the power of curiosity to want to delve independently into a topic by creating activities such as eLearning games that encourage learners to think about course content on their own and outside the classroom. Another key component of this particular psychological principle is experimentation. Designing activities that require students to apply the knowledge they have already learned to solve problems allows them to increase their understanding of a particular topic. This can take the form of group exercises in which students have to create blogs discussing a particular topic, or develop an eLearning presentation that elaborates on an idea or theory that they have to present to their peers.

3. Positive reinforcement

It is said that learning is in itself a reward, but as true as that may be, the statistics are less romantic and indicate that our brains crave positive reinforcement. It is human nature to want to feel appreciated and valued. When eLearning courses are dumped on the learner without a clear path or without rewards, learners are not motivated to complete the training programme. If, on the other hand, there is a clear pathway that explains to learners how the courses will be useful for them or offers rewards, learners will be motivated to complete the course. Therefore, even though the individual may benefit from the training, it is essential to offer learners some form of positive reinforcement. This positive reinforcement can be as simple as **feedback after they have successfully completed a task**. It can also be a game in which students move up a level after achieving a sufficiently high score in a task. Even a simple digital leaderboard showing learners' progress and appreciating their efforts can have an extremely positive impact on learners. All these elements give learners the immediate reward they need in addition to the long-term benefits they will receive from acquiring new knowledge or skills.

4. Collaboration

Learners are oriented towards **collaborative experiences**. Human beings are indeed social creatures and even the most detached of us have the desire to be with others at times. It is known that one of the main criticisms of the online learning experience is the lack of social interaction between participants, but technology is solving this problem. In fact, new tools allow us to create collaborative experiences that allow learners to benefit from the experience and expertise of their peers, even if they are far away from each other. You can design collaborative experiences using social media sites in your eLearning strategy. Learners can form groups with other like-minded peers or interview professionals to learn more about a particular topic.

5. Relating to the audience

Students must be able to relate to the information and structure of the course. One of the most useful ways to integrate this psychological principle into an eLearning course is to make it relatable. Students want to feel in tune with the subject matter and see how it applies to our lives. They want to be able to **identify with the characters in the stories** and see familiar images or concepts in order to gain maximum benefit from the learning experience. To integrate this principle, it is essential to have studied and analysed the target audience. Only then will you be able to get to their emotions and create a connection. Learn as much as you can about their cultural, professional and educational background to make the content relatable and relevant to them.

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