Abstract

Over the past decade, the world has advanced exponentially in the area of technology, which has dramatically affected the college classroom; for example, learning has expanded from traditional classrooms to distance education and now the push is on for a more extensive use of the Internet (Tham & Werner, 2005). As a result, there has been an increase in the availability of college courses taught solely online, and with this proliferation of online programs comes an increased need for more research. The literature supports the importance of mentoring (Boyd, 1996; Edmonds, 1997; Horton, 1996; Reid-Martinez & Hunt, 1998; Shapiro, 2004; Summers-Ewing, 1994; Wadia-Fascetti & Leventman, 2000) and faculty-student interaction (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Grooms, 2000); however, this study sought to empirically establish the effect of interaction to assist in the future design of online programs. This study analyzed one overarching research question: What effect does faculty-student interaction have on the relationship between student mentoring and student success in an online doctoral program. For this study, student success was operationalized as grade point average (GPA) and passing comprehensive examinations on the first attempt. Both Norman Cohen’s Principles of Adult Mentoring Scale (1993) and Grooms and Bocarnea’s Computer-Mediated Interaction Scale (2003) were modified and compiled into one instrument, the Mentoring and Interaction Questionnaire, which was used to measure learners’ perceptions of faculty mentoring and interaction. At the conclusion of the 18-day collection period, 123 learners responded, yielding a 79% return rate. Once the mean was calculated (M = 4.91) for the CMIS, the data were dichotomized into high (M > 4.91)—those who experienced high faculty-student interaction—and low (M ≤ 4.91)—those who experienced low faculty-student interaction. The findings revealed that neither low
faculty-student interaction nor high faculty-student interaction had a significant effect on GPA or passing comprehensive examinations on the first attempt. However, this study sheds interesting light on the possibility of the online educational environment transmuting the traditional mentoring functions to exceed beyond Cohen’s (1993) six, and as a result suggests a probable need for an instrument that will adequately measure these new variables.