Perceptions of Online Teaching Among Faculty at a Medium-Sized Liberal Arts University

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Abstract

An academic institution employed a diverse array of research methodologies in order to address gaps in knowledge regarding instructors' utilisation and involvement with online learning environments. The main objective of this research was to analyse and differentiate the perspectives on online teaching strategies among professionals in liberal arts education employed at a university of medium size. The survey was completed by a total of seventy-nine individuals, providing both quantitative and qualitative data. An examination of faculty members' perspectives on online education yielded six major themes. A significant majority of respondents reported that seventeen out of the twenty-one quantitative characteristics studied had an impact on their participation in online training. While students have a natural inclination towards online learning, the poll participants expressed the need for comprehensive monitoring measures. The key factor leading to this outcome is the general public's perception that online education diverges from traditional teaching approaches. The ultimate selection was impacted by the need to enhance academic resources, develop technologies, and expand infrastructure, as well as the particular preferences of the members. This study is centred around examining considerations and exploring potential areas for further research.

Keywords: Mixed-methods survey; liberal arts education; online instruction; instructors' perspectives on these topics

Introduction

How Faculty at a Medium-Sized Liberal Arts University Feel About Teaching Online

The effect of developing technology has led to modifications in the approaches that are used in educational settings. This problem is especially noticeable in the realm of education provided via the internet. According to Seaman et al. (2018), the number of students enrolling in higher education programs at traditional college campuses has fallen, while the number of students enrolling in online versions of the same programs has climbed correspondingly. This trend is expected to continue in the foreseeable

future. It is vital to keep in mind, however, that a significant number of educators in higher education have shown opposition to online instruction, reflecting a pessimistic or wary perspective of online learning (see Allen & Seaman, 2015; Allen et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015; Vivolo, 2016). This is something that must be taken into consideration. This is an important point that must be taken into account. Researchers have looked into the factors that educators consider while deciding whether or not to participate in online learning settings, and the results of their studies have been compiled in a number of different papers. According to the findings of study conducted by Allen and Seaman in 2015, the percentage of faculty members who favor online learning has stayed stable at thirty percent throughout this time. According to Schopierary (2006), the level of faculty engagement and approval in the process of constructing online teaching is one of the most important variables in determining the overall success of online education within an educational institution. This is one of the most essential aspects in determining the overall effectiveness of online education within an educational institution. Learning that takes place through the use of the internet presents educational institutions with the possibility of generating alternative revenue streams, which can assist in offsetting the effects of a falling enrolment rate. Faculty members in higher education institutions continue to demonstrate a considerable reluctance to engage in online instruction, despite the plethora of data on the benefits of online learning (Mitchell et al., 2015; Vivolo, 2016). In order for educational institutions to successfully recruit and keep online teachers, they need to have a complete understanding of all of the elements that influence faculty members' preparedness to teach online courses. This information is absolutely necessary for finding new online instructors and keeping the ones we have. There hasn't been a lot of research done on the attitudes that liberal arts professors have towards online education. It is highly possible that this is the result of the faculty's opposition to pedagogical innovations, which have traditionally served as the basis for an education in the liberal arts. This study aimed to investigate faculty perceptions of online teaching at a medium-sized liberal arts college in order to comprehend faculty involvement and engagement in online teaching at the university. The purpose of the study was to understand faculty participation and engagement in online teaching. The final objective was to get a deeper understanding of these two ideas. The following research questions served as the foundation for the investigation that is given here:

Educating in liberal arts

Academic scholars specializing in the realm of liberal arts education, including Deneen (2014), Thompson (2015), and Wells (2016), have noted the existence of a tension between the imperative for faculty members to accommodate evolving circumstances and their inclination to uphold the distinctive attributes that have been nurtured within the domain of liberal arts education for more than a century. This observation has been made by several experts specializing in the field of liberal arts education. The aforementioned tension mostly arises due to the faculty members' need to adjust to evolving circumstances and their inclination to safeguard the institution they are affiliated with. Based on the research conducted by Clark (1987), it was observed that the experiences of faculty members employed at diverse academic institutions, including community colleges, liberal arts schools, and research institutions, exhibited significant variations. This category of organizations encompassed community colleges, liberal arts schools, and research institutes. The need of establishing robust relationships between students and teachers at liberal arts schools situated in the intermediate stages of education has been consistently emphasized by academic experts (Clark, 1997). Baker and Baldwin (2015) posit that educators who opt to pursue careers at liberal arts universities may exhibit a greater degree of resistance towards initiatives that seek to modify the pedagogical approaches they employ within the classroom. The aforementioned hypothesis is one of the propositions put out in the study conducted by the writers. Furthermore, the notion of acquiring education through online platforms may elicit unease or contradict the traditional methods individuals are accustomed to for accessing knowledge. It is imperative to undertake a comprehensive investigation on the attitudes held by educators at liberal arts institutions towards online education, as this will facilitate a deeper understanding of the diverse range of opinions within this specific population.

Motivating Factors for Online Teaching

There are a number of variables that contribute to the support of online teaching, including expanded student access, diversified instructional options, institutional incentives and recognition, better flexibility and convenience, as well as personal development and satisfaction. According to Shea (2007), faculty members may be enticed by the possibility of boosting both their personal and professional growth through the acquisition of innovative pedagogical practises and technical knowledge.

According to Borup and Evmenova (2019), the adoption of professional development programmes for online teaching has the potential to improve faculty members' in-person instruction, as well as their self-assurance, drive, and perspectives regarding online education. This might be accomplished through the implementation of professional development programmes for online teaching. Asynchronous online learning has several benefits to offer, including the potential to reach a larger number of students and greater flexibility (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Maguire, 2005; Schopieray, 2006; Shea, 2007; Wasilik & Bollinger, 2009). Because of these benefits, some instructors decide to teach their courses online (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Maguire, 2005; Schopieray, 2006; Shea, 2007). The additional benefit of being able to instruct at any time or location is something that the faculty members place a great value on. This flexibility has the potential to improve work-life balance and provide more opportunities for study, travel, or caring for family members. According to the findings of an academic study, the potential that online teaching provided for additional flexibility was the primary motivator for faculty members to engage in online teaching. Because of this flexibility, they were able to devote more time to activities such as conducting research, travelling, caring for family members, or improving their work-life balance (Hiltz et al., 2007; Shea). According to Dooley and Murphree (2000), the potential usage of innovative teaching and learning approaches, namely those that combine personalised and adaptive learning, may serve as a source of inspiration for faculty members. According to the findings of a number of studies, educators are able to discover successful techniques for developing interaction between peers and between peers and instructors in the setting of online education (Wasilik & Bollinger, 2009). This skill was found to exist despite the fact that online education is relatively new. For instance, making an asynchronous online forum available to students could guarantee that each and every one of them gets an equal opportunity to participate. According to Hiltz et al. (2007), this strategy is especially helpful for students who may be shy, who are learning a second language, or who are unable to participate in class discussions as a result of absences. It is crucial for faculty members to examine whether or not their institution offers recognition and incentives for such activities when they are contemplating the implementation of online instruction. This may take the form of financial stipends, course releases to allow for more time for growth, teaching awards, considerations in the promotion and tenure processes, or any number

of other applicable measures. Several research, including Betts and Heaston (2014), Haber and Mills (2008), Hoyt and Oviatt (2013), and Johnson et al. (2015), have underlined the value of these elements in fostering faculty engagement in online teaching. According to Woolcott and Betts (1999), a sizeable fraction of faculty members make the choice to participate in online teaching after doing an analysis of the return on investment.

Methods

The present study utilised a convergent, parallel, mixed-methods approach to gather empirical data regarding the viewpoints of faculty members on the subject of online instruction and learning. In order to obtain a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon, a survey instrument employing a cross-sectional design was utilised to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, which were separate yet mutually reinforcing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Conclusion

At a liberal arts college with a mid-sized student body, the purpose of this study was to investigate faculty views towards online education with the goal of increasing acceptability and engagement among faculty members in this modality of instruction. This study extends the findings of earlier research by studying the viewpoints of faculty members at a liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest region of moderate size regarding the practises of online teaching. During the course of the investigation, a mixed-methods approach was utilised, which resulted in the formation of a solid consensus about six key themes and seventeen important elements. In general, it appeared as though the factors discovered in earlier studies and supported by the theoretical framework of the Diffusion of Technology in Pedagogy and Practise (DTPB), which is an acronym for "Diffusion of Technology in Pedagogy and Practise," exerted either a positive or negative influence on the propensity of faculty members at this particular institution of higher education to engage in online teaching. The educators who took part in the discussion reached a consensus that online learning has the potential to give improved educational possibilities, particularly for learners who are not typical. The aforementioned crucial component, which highlighted the influence of students and the perceived usefulness of online learning (two parts of the DTPB), was further supported by additional study. This research provided further evidence for the validity of the DTPB. The feature of compatibility known as DTPB (Differential

Trait Personality and Beliefs) was evident in the concerns raised by faculty respondents regarding the extent to which online learning was consistent with both their own personal teaching goals and the standards that are promoted by the university. In addition to taking compatibility into account, faculty members have pointed out a number of additional requirements. These include the requirement for technology that is both dependable and cutting-edge, as well as comprehensive technical and instructional assistance, adequate amounts of time for development, adequate training, and the allocation of other resources that are relevant. The resource and technology aspects of the DTPB show alignment with these findings, which are consistent with the findings of previous studies. The faculty members who took part in the study made it clear that they want to apply a variety of guidelines and restrictions in order to successfully monitor distance education within their company. It is possible that the requests made by faculty members for the implementation of laws regarding online learning are an indication of their dedication to sustaining pedagogical ideals as well as their concerns over the potential obstacles connected with adjusting to new instructional methods. These requirements are concerned with aspects of the DTPB pertaining to its perceived efficacy as well as its compatibility.

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