Online Teaching Overview and Misconceptions: Two Keys of Sustainability in Online Courses and Tools

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While online courses are gaining more acceptance and attendance in them is growing, there are still some misconceptions regarding online courses and how to sustain quality education through the course. In this paper we discuss two keys to sustainability, course design and delivery. Tips about how to create and sustain effective, quality online courses, from both the student and teacher's perspective will be presented. Also, fables and fiction associated with online teaching and course delivery will be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Is it hard to create and sustain an online course? There is a misconception that online tool usage and online courses are meant to automate learning to online, robotic students, following a one size fits all learning strategy. Additional issues persist in how to encourage student use of online tools, whether in the format of a fully online course or utilizing a publisher's base online content (Austin, Biss, & Wright, 2010). There is also the misconception that cheating is prevalent and in fact encouraged with online courses. With the use of Respondus, iThenticate, Turnitin, and webpage monitoring/webcam software –it has been shown that online courses are not at a higher risk for "cheating" practices. Regardless of course delivery, instructors need to be on their toes to evaluate cheating and plagiarism by trying to aid students in understanding proper academic integrity practices. Plagiarism often occurs because of a lack of awareness of proper citation practices.

Online learning courses and tools are not meant to make the instructor redundant (Mantravadi, 2017). In fact, it is just the opposite. In order to fully sustain online education, instruction is the center of the entire program and education. Instructors are especially needed to facilitate the educational process in online based learning (Li & Akins, 2004). Online tools and educational courses represent a disruptive innovation, as education is offered at a more affordable and accessible rate. Online tools are enhancing the learning experience, and learning management systems customize and complement content in far more ways than a face-to-face course (Christensen & Eyring, 2011).

Thus, online courses and education are not about automatic courses, but the viewpoint becomes about sustaining quality education. Education in previous years has not seen the rise of disruptive innovation products and platforms, as the quality of education has become harder to monitor. Online courses and tools are the true version of disruptive innovation featuring a low cost, high quality product. Hybrid

instruction from the use of online tools combined with a face-to-face setting, enhances effectiveness (Christensen & Eyring, 2011), and sustainability of online courses. However, online courses often do not provide appropriate engagement and support for students, leading to attrition and unsustainability of the online educational process. Preventing attrition is one thing (The New York Times Company, 2013), but being able to sustain a quality online course, or the use of online tools is another. Online course education is being questioned, and factors affecting sustainability of online courses in the educational process should be considered in depth.

The two keys of online teaching sustainability are course design and delivery. Course design is the planning involved for the course, as well as the topics and tools used in the course. The difference and implications of course delivery versus design in both online and face-to-face teaching is covered here, first. Course design illustrates the mantra - tell them what you will tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them – only in the context of learning! Course delivery involves the actual instruction that occurs in the course. This paper illustrates tips about how to create and sustain an effective, quality online course in the business disciplines, from both the student and teacher's perspective. Fables and fiction associated with online teaching and course delivery will be addressed.

Course Delivery

Attrition among first time online learners is high (Bawa, 2016). Thus, course delivery becomes key to sustaining an online course. Having meaningful activities that are geared to student interests is key. It also stimulates critical thinking and higher learning (Ally, 2004). Providing more interactive instructional activities, as well as supplemental readings, will encourage students to apply concepts towards practical applications. Discussion boards facilitate interactive thinking and peer-to-peer learning. The gradebook allows the student to explicitly, and clearly view his/her progress in the course. The use of the gradebook is easier for the student to evaluate course progress, rather than manually adding up grades from each assignment. Discussion posts allow studies to interact with peers and as well as critique articles; the simulation assignment enables students to think more in terms of applying information from instructional activities towards industry and professional applications. The development of student learning outcomes, assessment, and rubrics in online courses are considered to be mandatory learners' success in online courses. The various opportunities for learner-learner, learner-instructor, and learner-content engagement are discussed in the context of online courses.

In addition, some subjects are more appropriate or a better fit to an online classroom. Large class sizes, as in freshman courses being delivered in a hybrid or online setting – rather than in a large auditorium, can be better suited as online courses because they would facilitate interaction and adaption towards various learning styles and needs. With online courses, the option of online office hours is more effective and efficient. Office hours in online classes can be set up with Blackboard Collaborate Ultra; whereas in a face-to-face course, office hours are held usually in a one-on-one setting. In online courses, office hours can be made open to all students who happen to drop by virtually, and students reap the benefits of the immediate answers and quick feedback.

Student engagement is key in sustaining an online course, and remains important after course development. Essentially, with the entry of Web 2.0 based teaching, online learning has flourished (Enonbun, 2010). Students' learning from online tools and learning management system based courses can vary with the content. The exchange of ideas through discussion boards, group projects, and frequent instructor contact – creates an interactive experience. Ensuring that every student is on the same page is key. Online tools aid with student connectivity with technology content, increase the population of online-based learning, and avoid disengagement that is present in face-to-face courses (Austin, et al., 2010). Personalized feedback also is a great strategy to maintain a communication pathway between instructor and student. Informal feedback, concerning several students' similar questions, that is sent out to the entire class is another chance to guide students on concepts that are becoming confusing in an online setting.

Participation in online versus face-to-face courses can be compared in the context of constructivism (Enonbun, 2010),, as online learning is most effective with active learning, as well as providing methods

for effective feedback, student engagement, and motivation in online courses. The theme of communication really sticks out for use in online tools and courses. The constant interactivity involved in online courses – with discussion boards, emails, and feedback is essential and the lifeblood of online courses. Feedback is often provided quicker and more in-depth in online courses. Frequent and appropriate timing of grades and feedback is essential in encouraging students in the course. This is akin to an "Invisible hand" guiding students and working towards the interest of improving student motivation. Self-motivated learners, who enjoy active learning, will find time management easy to attain with online learning. Both online and face-to-face learners need to be able to keep track of deadlines; with online courses and the course software, students are often able to track assignments with email/calendar reminders built into the course, sending reminders about due dates. With online courses, it is helpful to get into the schedule of course deadlines and due dates; the asynchronicity of online course makes it easier to miss deadlines if course calendar reminders are missed.

Course Design

The use of online teaching in the age of Web 2.0 based teaching and learning (Enonbun, 2010), is a great way to adapt to different learner circumstances, learning styles, and backgrounds. Ensuring that every student is on the same page is key. Techniques for preparing for success in online instruction and course delivery are discussed, especially in the areas of communications (especially feedback), student engagement, and coordination of discussion. The main time saver for online instructors is having the course prepared and ready to go for the start of the semester; instead of waiting until the last minute, scrambling to adjust test bank questions, broken web links, unpublished modules, etc. Being able to apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and adapt to students is especially important in online courses; for example, large font text for adult learners. Although this is important in face-to-face courses, in online courses it is important to keep communication lines open and ensure that content is accessible and meets student capabilities. Spending more time on grading assignments and providing student feedback instead of communicating with students to encourage course engagement, is more effective in the long term. Course preparation is one aspect that becomes an important instructor role that is often forgotten in the big picture when also taking on the roles of student tour guide, co-learner, teacher, cheerleader, and mascot in an online course (Yang & Cornelius, 2005).

Traditional courses cannot be directly translated to online tools and courses (Li & Akins, 2004), and course design using online technologies should be prioritized to ensure sustainability of the online course. Poorly designed courses can negatively affect learning, especially in the most vulnerable students (The New York Times Company, 2013), thereby affecting the chances of online teaching sustainability. There are several components and steps in the design and construction of a sustainable online course:

- **Building blocks:** learning objectives
- **Concrete:** assessments/rubrics
- **Building tools:** online tools/materials
- **Tenant experience:** learner interaction
- **Maintenance:** construction and sustainment of online course and tools used in learning management

Leaning objectives should be measurable, especially with usage of online tools, to set the foundation of what students should learn. Bloom's taxonomy is used to create learning objectives that coincide with the level of learning/thinking involved whether at the graduate or undergraduate level, as well as align with the assessments used. The Bloom's taxonomy involves a spectrum of thinking skills that are meant to align with your learning outcomes– from knowledge, compression, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; the former are geared towards beginner/undergraduate learning, while the latter are geared towards graduate level learning. Demonstrable measures and precise learning objectives are the key to designing courses that are sustainable and effective (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956).

An important component of online course design and maintenance is to clearly illustrate how students will be assessed on each activity. The use of rubrics aids in consistent grading and assessment for each

assignment, especially long term papers. Rubrics can be holistic or analytical. Holistic rubrics are the most general form of rubrics, and illustrate levels of overall performance; analytic rubrics assess each characteristic of an activity, and illustrate whether the level to which certain criteria have been met. Rubrics offer the chance for course design to indicate expectations for work, and address the opportunity of student attrition due to the lack of communication of course expectations.

Online Tools

In addition, there are various eTechnologies and online tools and technologies that can be incorporated for increasing student interaction and improved course delivery. These are discussed here in the context of improving, creating, and sustaining quality online courses, as well. Issues can arise with extensive and inappropriate use of technology – instructors should not just use technology for the sake of it in an online course. If bells and whistles do not fit with your content and teaching strategy, it creates further complications and misconceptions about the course delivery. The age of technology and online learning allows for innovative teaching strategies that may not fit in face-to-face class design. In addition, students might become discouraged and disengaged in the course at the prospect of concurrent technological issues; if you do not have the "answer", students might negatively affect motivation and engagement due to the lack of appropriate, expected response in the prospects of this online course.

Implementing more techniques to encourage self-learning, providing more interactive instructional activities, as well as supplemental readings, will encourage students to apply concepts to practical applications. These activities are relevant and effective for course delivery as students learn from processing and applying concepts and theories from the business industry. Discussion posts allow studies to interact with peers and as well as critique articles; while the simulation assignments enable students to think more in terms of applying information from instructional activities towards industry and professional applications.

Here are ways that learner interaction can be implemented within the course design itself, such that students are encouraged to interact in online course in various manners:
- Learner-learner
    - Discussion posts for discussion and simulation assignments (from perspective of insurance company, etc.)
    - Peer evaluations
- Learner-content
    - Readings
    - Textbook, articles
    - Websites
- Learner-instructor
    - Feedback for assignment submission
    - Questions for instructor regarding assignments – discussion forum
    - Discussion forum
    - Announcements
    - Weekly review emails – concerning demand for Medical care

Enter The QM Innovation: Outsourcing Faculty to Internet Robots?

How do quality online courses fit into all of this? Construction and sustainment of online courses and tools usage in learning management systems can best be illustrated using the Quality Matters (QM) process. Quality Matters is a disruptive platform-based innovation in the online education industry. Initially formed as a smaller new entrant as the Maryland Online Learning group, the group created a market for assessing the quality of online education (MarylandOnline, 2017), to aid in sustaining online courses. It now dominates the market for quality assurance, review, research, professional development, and communities geared towards online education. Further, Quality Matters is a platform for online

assessment; (Evans & Schmalensee, 2016; Sampere, 2016). The QM platform is used for several products, including certifications, training, research/whitepapers, and institutional buy-in.

Finally, QM certification processes can be discussed in the context of improving course design, with the aim of sustaining use of online courses or tools. The Quality Matters review process offers the opportunity to apply the usage of online tools and Web 2.0 based learning techniques to discipline specific courses. With a QM course, activities, materials, and tools align with course and module objectives and assessments, as each learning activity is geared towards preparing the student for reaching the module level objective, and completing the assignment task. Module level objectives become aligned with course level objectives, as module level objectives explain in detail how students will achieve the course level objective – by performing – instructional activities and assignments. Rather than automatic courses that reduce the chances of sustainability, QM offers a peer review process to improve effectiveness of design – not delivery. Course and module level objectives should be measurable, based upon Bloom's Taxonomy, where each objective is based on the appropriate level of higher thinking/learning.

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