



A Case Study of Teachers' use of Instructional Methods in Online Learning at Eastern Mediterranean University

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Abstract:

Online learning in higher education has been increasingly popular all around the world. One of the main online educators' issues is creating effective online teaching methods that foster actual learning and teaching with curiosity, energy, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The purpose of this study was twofold: first, to identify the online teaching methods that are used for online classes, and, second to find the degree of interactivity of online instructors in online courses at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU). This case study was done within the qualitative research paradigm, analyzing data through content analysis methods. Semi-structured interviews with predetermined open-ended questions were used to collect data about the existing online courses. Findings indicated that the traditional lecture method is the main online teaching method and the degree of interactivity in online classes is low. The findings also showed that due to the low level of interaction between teachers and students in online classes, teachers do not get feedback from the students. At the end of this research, it is concluded that replacing the traditional lecture method with another interactive strategy such as the reflective teaching method can affect the quality of online programs in the university.

Keywords: Online learning, teaching methods, interaction, reflection



1. Introduction

Online learning, which is a method of delivering educational information without needing to participate in face-to-face classrooms, has been a part of the educational revolution. However, recently due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, most of the universities have offered online/Hybrid education, and how to ensure its quality is getting a great deal of practitioners' attention. According to Bozkurt et al., (2020), the pandemic disrupted the education of more than 1.5 billion students, which is roughly 90% of the student population (UNESCO, 2020a; b). The findings of a research conducted by The International Association of Universities Global indicated that in 67% of the educational institutions, face-to-face classrooms have been replaced by blended/online education (Marinoni et al., 2020). These statistics show that, educational methods which are used in online classes should be taken into consideration by researchers.

One of the major factors that extremely influence the effectiveness of online courses, is teaching methods (Mayes, Luebeck, Yu Ku, Akarasriworn, & Korkmaz, 2011). Teachers play an important role in the teaching process and should select the best teaching strategies to maximize the students' learning, thinking, and activeness. According to John Hattie's famous book "Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement" (2009), students' performance is strongly impacted by instructors' teaching strategies and methods, among which the interactive teaching method has the greatest impact, with an effect size of 0.74.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Online Teaching Methods

Traditional teaching methods emphasize direct instruction to the students, which is transferring knowledge from instructors to students. In modern teaching, teacher-centered approaches pave the way for students-centered approaches and the methodology used for teaching is very interactive. According to Partlow and Gibbs (2003), teaching is a "process of helping learners construct or create their own meaning by providing them with authentic learning experiences and guiding them through the meaning-making process".

The main goal in face-to-face and online education is encouraging students to engage, and seek knowledge. However, assisting students to learn collaboratively and independently arises with online learning that requires the educator to be more innovative in meeting pedagogical results (Sharoff, 2019). In an online environment, teachers should look critically at the online teaching methods because using new technologies without effective teaching strategies sometimes acts as impediments to successful learning as Oliver (1999) emphasized that "the content of the course, the learning activities and the learning supports" are three critical components to having a successful online program.

According to Sun and Chen (2016), creating an online learning community and motivated interaction between students and teachers is the key to having a successful online instruction. They argued that effective online teaching is dependent upon well-designed course content, high level of interaction between the instructor and learners, supportive instructors, and creation of a sense of online learning community.

Interaction between students and teachers is one of the most important components in online education, and it refers to action between individuals in the online environment. A high level of interaction between students and teachers in a classroom provides teachers with students' feedback, which is an essential source for improving teaching strategies (Iqbal et al., 2016). Students' feedback gives the ability to teachers to do self-assessments that allows them to be more reflective of their teaching (Choy et al., 2017). One of the most effective strategies is reflective teaching that involves using reflection techniques to present information, in the goal of generating feedback.

2.2 Reflective Teaching

The terms "reflection" and "critical reflection" have increasingly appeared in descriptions of approaches to teacher education. It is a method of developing training skills and competencies. According to Reddy (2014) reflective teaching, reflective inquiry, and reflection-on-practice helps teachers to improve their professional skills and



teaching strategies. Each teacher has their own idea about the way of teaching according to their experiences, and reflecting on teaching practice helps them to evaluate their own teaching methods to make them more effective. According to Larrivee (2000), being successful in today's classroom environment "requires that the teacher remains fluid and able to move in many directions, rather than stuck only being able to move in one direction as situations occur". Consequently, it is important to consider what methods have already been implemented and how we can improve and change these methods to have a high quality and more effective instruction of online learning (Sudarsana et al., 2021).

Sudarsana et al. (2021) investigated how English teachers perceived themselves as reflective thinking practitioners during online learning. They used a reflective teaching skill scale questionnaire, by which two English teachers showed how they perceived their reflective thinking ability. The result of this study showed that online teachers need feedback from their students and colleagues to select the appropriate teaching strategies. The researcher stated that reflective teachers think about what they teach and students' feedback should be used as a reflection tool because it provides useful information for teachers.

Sharoff (2019) discussed one educator's reflective practice process who designed an e-learning course that has led to successful online participation. This educator believes that creating an interactive learning environment is the key to having a successful online course. Group work was the main teaching method in this course and considering the various learning styles, a variety of learning tools including PowerPoints, social media platforms, such as YouTube and Ted Talk, voice thread and screen capture had been utilized. This innovative online teaching strategy promoted reflection, active participation, and that thoughtfully engages collaborative learning. Not only did this interactive environment help students to get feedback from their instructor, but also it helped instructors to understand what most hinders and/or enhances the learning process to be able to continue to improve the teaching-learning collaboration.

3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the existing online teaching methods for two online courses which are Banking and Finance Master's program and Hotel Management Master's program at the Department of Banking and Finance (B&F) and Faculty of Tourism Hospitality and Management (TH&M) at EMU. In order to shed a light on the existing problems in the use of teachers teaching methods in online learning, there is a need for further research regarding this issue at EMU. The aim of this research can be listed as follows:

- To reveal the teaching methods that teachers use in online classes.
- To find the degree of interactivity of online instructors in online courses.
- To suggest a more effective teaching method to teachers in orders to help them to improve their teaching strategies for online courses.

4. Research Method

The case study approach is used as Yin (2014) suggested, case study is an effective method when our questions include "how" or "why" and also when researchers don't have control over current phenomena. As a qualitative research methodology, this case study aims to explore online teaching methods being used for online courses at EMU. Qualitative research is an effective approach that researcher can explore human experiences in both personal and social contexts in order to know what affect these experiences (Gelling, 2015).

4.1 Research Participants

The researcher has formed the population of this research by using random sampling method, including teachers from the Department of B&F and Faculty of TH&M Management at EMU. For this study, 8 instructors were interviewed to explain their teaching methods and techniques that are used in detail.

4.2 Data Collection



The current research uses semi-structured interviews for collecting data, as semi-structured interviews consist of prepared questions with a defined theme that can evoke more elaborate responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The researcher had carried out the semi-structured interviews with instructors including 4 instructors from the Department of B&F and equally 4 instructors from Faculty of TH&M who had already experienced online teaching in their academic career in order to provide complex textual descriptions of how instructors experience an online course. The semi-structured interview was piloted with teachers before actually being put into process. For analysis, we carried out a content analysis of the interviews.

5. Results

5.1 Instructors' Interview Analysis

Online Instructors were asked questions about different aspects of the teaching methods which are used in online classes in Department of B&F and Faculty of TH&M in EMU. To identify the teaching methods, we asked questions about the existing online teaching strategies, utilized tools and techniques, and the method of evaluation and monitoring. We also ask questions about teachers' perceptions about the degree of interactivity of online instructors in online courses.

Regarding the application of teachers' teaching methods in online classes, it can be said that altogether instructors are using the lecturing method for online courses in both departments. They prepare the instructional materials and then present them to the students. Students are expected to participate in online sessions, read the materials and do the assignments. For example, T1 explained that:

"We present all the materials to those students who participate to online classes. The learning materials includes power points, copyrighted textbooks, course outline, the questions that they have to solve and also the solution of those questions. Students have to follow the course outline till the midterm. For the midterm exam they are assigned to do some cases and assignments which they are supposed to do and then they submit their work and we grade them."

Likewise, T4 said:

"I always updated information on the module system. In this system I write in detail what are the expectations of the assignments that I expect. In order to follow the lectures, I asked students to prepare some assignments. These assignments are a combination of reading materials and then searching related up-to-date information. Students are expected to read the concepts, understand the concepts and find some examples and prepare a report of assignment to submit."

Lecturing means transferring information from teachers to students, which is not an ideal form of instruction for online classes. According to Partlow and Gibbs (2003), online instructors should not deliver instructional materials to students, rather students must actively find materials. However, collected data represents misuse of the effective teaching methods for online classes in EMU. A low level of interaction is the result of lecturing method while in an online learning environment, the level of interaction between students and teachers plays an important role. In such an environment, teachers do not get students' feedback.

Instructors were asked a question about the tools and technologies which they use in online classes. Overall, teachers expressed that there are plenty of communication tools and technologies they can use such as Microsoft Teams, Module, instructional websites, Email, Skype, phone in both departments.

T2 said:

"There is a Moodle for online courses which include everything students need such as: e-books, the course outlines, the list of selected chapters, the quizzes and problem questions, the power points, the chapters and assignments and the multiple choice questions."

Instructors believed that some tools such as applications, Skype, Facebook, YouTube, and discussion board could affect the level of interaction in the classroom. For instance, T6 explained that:



“The best way to achieve interaction and collaboration between students in online classes is to apply applicable technologies and methodologies in teaching. Otherwise interaction is not high in the classrooms.”

Some of the instructors said that they are using interactive tools. For instance, T3 said:

“we are using Skype in our classes. Plus, if students need some more explanation related to the lecture we use a recorder to record the voice and then send it to them. Actually 70% of our communications with the students are through the module system and sometimes these communications are on the phone as well.”

However, the existing communication tools are used only to transfer information from teachers to students. It is not a two-way street; students do not give any feedback to the instructors. The only way with which instructors can reflect on their teaching process is through monitoring and evaluating the learners’ performances.

Regarding the monitoring of learners’ activities in online classes, instructors expressed that basically they can monitor students’ activities through homework and assignments. T4 said:

“Using some tools such as Module for sending assignment with limited time for doing to students regularly and then checking their activities constantly in the module can be effective for monitoring students’ activities.”

Moreover, T6 emphasized that the type of assignments and projects which are assigned for courses can help instructors to have a careful monitoring of students’ activities. T6 said:

“Don’t ask definition and don’t give multiple choice questions to students. If instructors give them creative task, they will do it by themselves for sure.”

Basically, evaluation for online courses is based on students’ scores. 4 out of 8 instructors underlined that the process of assessment in online classes should be done through different type of project and assignment. For instance, T3 expressed that:

“I evaluate students through their works. For example, I would give them 10 or 12 different assignments such as summarizing reports and articles, writing an essay on a topic and summarizing a chapter of a book. I’m trying to at least give students various types of works.”

2 instructors emphasized that the evaluation should be done during the whole semester from the beginning till the end, which is known as ongoing evaluation. For example, T4 explained that:

“I strongly believed that if we wait until the end of semester, students will be lost. In addition to the final exam we have case study, term project, discussion questions which are 60% of the course grade. Students need to work and submit these assignments until the final exam.”

Likewise, T6 said that:

“Frequent evaluation encourages students without make them board.”

Reflecting on teaching process needs students' feedback, which is the result of effective interactions between students and teachers (Sarihan et al., 2016). However, the most of the instructors perceived that the degree of interactivity of online instructors is minimum and the system of online programs is not interactive. 3 out of 8 participants strongly underlined that instructors should apply strategies which increase the level of interaction in classes. T2 expressed that:

“Providing opportunities for more interaction and constant communication between students and teachers is important. it would be much better to give students constantly more interactive exercises such as interactive multiple questions instead of reading and summarizing assignments and also lead students to do group assignments.”

To support the T2 argument, T6 said:

“Frequent interaction and evaluation is very important because the benefit of online education is our ability to make it flexible. We can increase the number of evaluations and the amount of interaction with students by dividing context into very small pieces and sending them to students at any time.”



6. Results Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore teaching methods that are used for online classes, and also to find the degree of interactivity of online instructors in online courses at EMU. Researcher made semi-structured interview with instructors who teach online courses at the Department of B&F and Faculty of TH&M.

The results of the study indicated that lecturing method is the main teachers' teaching method for online courses in EMU. While many researchers such as Swan (2002) and Gleason (2012) concluded that a high level of interaction is the key to having a successful online education, the findings showed that the degree of interactivity of online instructors at EMU is low and instructors could not get any feedback from students.

Traditional lecture method is under attack by many critics, especially those who have supported the constructivist theory of learning such as Kim (2005). Many researchers such as (Dufva & Dufva, 2016; Arise, 2018; Richards & Graber, 2019; Bohari, 2020) concluded that traditional lecture method has not been successful to convey conceptual knowledge to the learners. This method keeps collaboration, interaction, and Reflection in the lowest level and instructors transfer information to the learner without getting any feedback and also without any interaction with students (Sarihan et al., 2016). Teachers need students' feedback in the learning process in order to realize if their teaching method is effective. They need to change their teaching practices if such practices do not lead the teaching process to the objectives of instruction that is what reflection on teaching means. Teachers should reflect on their teaching method not only by asking questions, but also by using answers to these questions.

7. Conclusions

In order to promote and increase the effectiveness of online classes and also to enhance students-teachers' interaction, "Reflective Practice" can be used as a teaching and learning method in educational settings such as EMU. Reflective teaching method helps teachers to be aware of what they do in their classrooms because more interaction between teachers and students helps teachers to be able to evaluate themselves and to know if their teaching method is effective. In this way, teachers use reflective practice, observe students' activities and examine the learning process during the semester. They can ask students questions and use their answers in order to change or improve their teaching methods.



8. References

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