Chapter 22
The Same but Different:
Reframing Contemporary Online Education in Higher Education Towards Quality and Integrity

Maria Northcote

Avondale College of Higher Education, Australia

ABSTRACT

The field of online learning, like many other technological innovations, has not burgeoned without controversy. Despite the debates about the role and value of online learning, it has continued to grow in many sectors, especially in higher education. Alongside the growth of online learning, discussions about its benefits and limitations have also flourished, and many studies have investigated the quality and integrity of online courses. This chapter offers an investigation of some of the history of online learning, concluding with a collection of practical recommendations and suggestions for future research directions to guide institutions embarking on online learning programs.

INTRODUCTION

Discussions around the topic of online education in higher education often feature strong views by those who design, teach or learn in online courses. While some are supportive of e-learning, espousing its benefits and affordances, others are not so positive. Such views may be dependent on the designers', teachers' or students' experiences in the online learning environment. An unenjoyable online experience can result in the formation of intense negative opinions about online learning. In contrast, positive online learning or teaching experiences can create loyal advocates of online education. In addition to students' and teachers' online experiences, many researchers and educators have explored the impact of online learning environments on the quality of students' learning. Whatever the overall balance of views expressed and the results of research studies about the value of online learning, it appears to be here to stay, along with its varied and associated emerging online pedagogies.

This chapter is written from two perspectives: one that acknowledges the benefits and limitations of online education; and the other in relation to the practice of converting on-campus courses to online courses, and vice versa. This chapter recognizes that online education in the higher education sector offers many benefits for both teachers and students but that an awareness of the limitations and challenges of online education is essential to maintain the quality and integrity of courses offered in the online realm. Also, at the basis of this chapter is an assumption that the design of online courses should not necessarily be limited to the conversion of a similar on-campus or face-to-face course; instead, the quality of an online course is often greater when it is designed according to a fit-for-purpose approach, that is, *for a specific audience* and *expressly for the online learning context*.

While the early days of online learning appear to have been characterized by discussions, frequently dichotomous in nature, about the benefits and dangers of facilitating learning in an online context (Kim, Liu, & Bonk, 2005), and lengthy debates about how to define terms such as online, blended, hybrid, integrated, interactive and distance learning (Leh, 2002; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Rumble, 2006), current explorations of online education have entered a new era. Recent conversations about online learning and teaching have addressed a more comprehensive range of issues such as equity of access (Rose, Kennedy, & Plants, 2014), course preparation times (Kenny & Fluck, 2014), the quality of learning (Gómez-Rey, Barbera, & Fernández-Navarro, 2016; Smidt, Li, Bunk, Kochem, & McAndrew, 2017), the integrity of student assessment submissions (Lee-Post & Hapke, 2017) and the use of social media for learning (Mbati, 2013; Wang, Niiya, Mark, Reich, & Warschauer, 2015) and teaching (Murray & Ward, 2017). In these contexts, teaching is often equated with the facilitation of learning.

This chapter aims to:

- Summarize past developments in online learning;
- Analyze research about the quality and integrity of online learning; and
- Offer practical recommendations and suggestions for future research to guide educators engaged in the process of designing, teaching and researching online courses in higher education.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

After examining some of the history associated with the growth of online learning in university contexts, including some problems associated with online education, the chapter offers pedagogical advice, practical recommendations and possible directions for future research to online course administrators, course designers and online teachers for consideration when moving into or continuing their work in online education. Beginning with a review of some of the common themes that appeared in the early days of online learning research, this chapter sets the current scene of online education by acknowledging the work of some of the pioneering researchers and educators in the field of e-learning. Some of this literature reports on educators' early attempts to "convert" on-campus, face-to-face courses to online learning formats. Also present in the early e-learning literature were the see-sawing considerations about the value and limitations of online education, and comparisons between face-to-face and online learning. With this background of the early days of online learning acknowledged, the chapter then explores a selection of the more recent developments in online learning that have led to some sector-wide realizations about the preparation and facilitation of online courses. Such considerations are often closely associated with issues of quality and integrity set within institutional bounds.

22 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-same-but-different/312738

Related Content

Fostering Effective Learning Community in the Online Classroom
Mary I. Dereshiwsky (2021). *Research Anthology on Developing Effective Online Learning Courses (pp. 1786-1802).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/fostering-effective-learning-community-in-the-online-classroom/271233

The Integration of Web2Quest Technology into Multicultural Curriculum in Teacher Education: A Potential for Globalization
Li-Mei Grace Linand Chris L. Ward (2013). *Curriculum, Learning, and Teaching Advancements in Online Education (pp. 46-60).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/integration-web2quest-technology-into-multicultural/76736

Purposefully-Designed and Mindfully-Facilitated Online Courses
David Starr-Glass (2022). *Handbook of Research on Managing and Designing Online Courses in Synchronous and Asynchronous Environments (pp. 251-272).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/purposefully-designed-and-mindfully-facilitated-online-courses/292368

Teaching and Assessing Problem Solving in Online Collaborative Environment
Yigal Rosenand Rikki Rimor (2013). *Teacher Education Programs and Online Learning Tools: Innovations in Teacher Preparation (pp. 82-97).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/teaching-assessing-problem-solving-online/67972

Integration of Cloud Computing, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, and Internet of Things: Review and Open Research Issues
Drissi Saadia (2021). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 10-17).*
www.irma-international.org/article/integration-of-cloud-computing-big-data-artificial-intelligence-and-internet-of-things/266412