Chapter 2
Exploring Chinese Faculty Perceptions of Quality Standards for Online Education

Dave Dai
Michigan State University, USA

John M. Dirkx
Michigan State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how U.S. quality indicators for online education are perceived by Chinese online faculty. Thirty-one quality indicators from the U.S. literature were analyzed to develop a survey that was administered to 400 Chinese online faculty and their teaching assistants at a Chinese institution. The results indicate that U.S. quality indicators for online education are perceived by Chinese faculty as relevant and valuable. Based on responses to this survey, however, the U.S. based standards do not fully capture the essence of quality for online education because these indicators focus more on inputs rather than outcomes. The findings underscore the importance of the local settings in determining the characteristics of online education quality. Chinese scholars and administrators should not blindly adopt quality standards from other countries but use them as tools to help Chinese universities develop their own standards to improve quality of their online education programs.

INTRODUCTION

Online education faces a major challenge of how to widen access and reduce costs while at the same time ensuring quality (Mariasingam & Hanna, 2006; Parker, 2008; Shelton, 2011). Countries around the world are increasingly being confronted with this challenge but China represents a particular case in point with respect to providing more access to higher education. Chinese higher education has expanded greatly over the past two decades. In 1995, five million college students were enrolled in 1,000 post-secondary institutions. By 2010, 21 million college students were enrolled in 2,305 Chinese institutions

(Jung, Wong, Li, Baigaltugs, & Belawati, 2011). Even the additional institutions, however, are still not able to meet the demand.

In the year 2000, the Chinese government initiated an educational experiment by granting 38 national universities rights to start online education programs. After a decade of development, online education has become a major component of Chinese higher education, with over three million students enrolled in online programs in 2010 (Jung et al., 2011). This expansion of online education in China, however, is not without serious challenges. Three years into the online education experiment, growing concern in China was expressed over the quality of these pilot online programs (Wu, 2006). Implementation of these programs raised questions about China's efforts to increase access to higher education through online programs. As China expands its online education, concern for the quality of these programs has become a significant issue for their stakeholders. To comply with the external demands for accountability, institutions are feeling increasing pressure to improve the quality of online education.

Online Education Quality Assurance in China

To improve the quality of online education requires that quality be defined and measured. Because online education is a recent development in China, policy makers and administrators have not been able to attend to the development of quality standards that is evident in other countries, such as in U.S. organizations (such as SLOAN-C) and accreditation agencies (such as C-RAC). China lacks a regional accreditation agency (such as CHEA) or organizations like SLOAN-C, to coordinate and develop comprehensive quality benchmarks. Rather, each Chinese institution has to experiment and establish quality criteria on its own. As a result, great variation in quality exists among these online programs.

Over the past decade, many Chinese scholars and organizations have been seeking to clarify standards of quality for online education. For example, a technical standard, based on the ISO9000, was developed to enable meta-data compatibility between different online education platforms (Zhu, 2001). In addition, Chinese scholars have been working on a national standard for the management aspects of online education (Guo, 2009). Lacking in this effort so far has been the development of standards with detailed quality indicators.

Chinese scholars realize that additional work is needed to develop quality standards in order to help Chinese online programs become more successful (Guo, Huang, & Chen, 2009). In order to speed up the process of developing quality standards for online education, Chinese scholars are looking to learn from other countries that have had more experiences in this area (Chen, 2012; Ding, 2005; Pan, 2006; Zhang, 2004). In its *2020 National Educational Plan*, the Chinese government also called on Chinese higher education institutions to improve their quality and to become better connected to the international academic community (Chinese MOE, 2010). Because of the international reputation of its higher education, the U.S. experience with online education is being used as a major resource in this effort. The Shanghai Jiao Tong University *Academic Ranking of World Universities* ranked 17 U.S. institutions among the world's top 20, 35 among the top 50, and 52 among the top 100 (ARWU, 2013). The good reputation U.S. higher education has in China makes it logical for the Chinese to investigate whether there are parts of the U.S. quality standards that can be used to inform Chinese efforts to improve the quality of online education.

As the Chinese look to the U.S. for help with defining standards for their online education, it is important to ask if U.S. based standards are suitable for a Chinese environment. Are criteria that are considered important by U.S. scholars perceived the same way by the Chinese? On one hand, one could

Related Content

An Evaluation of Blending Technology with Pedagogy for Teacher Education and its Implication for their Classroom Teaching
Paul Lam, Josephine Cseteand Carmel McNaught (2010). *Web-Based Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (pp. 1347-1361).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/evaluation-blending-technology-pedagogy-teacher/41417

Framework for Developing and Assessing Business Education Wikis
Sunil Hazariand Tiffany Penland (2010). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-13).*
www.irma-international.org/article/framework-developing-assessing-business-education/46158

Some Basics to the Initial Setup and Maintenance of Serialized Online Learning
Shalin Hai-Jew (2023). *Research Anthology on Remote Teaching and Learning and the Future of Online Education (pp. 48-59).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/some-basics-to-the-initial-setup-and-maintenance-of-serialized-online-learning/312719

Social Networking Theories and Tools to Support Connectivist Learning Activities
M. C. Pettenatiand M. E. Cigognini (2007). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 42-60).*
www.irma-international.org/article/social-networking-theories-tools-support/2987

Big Data and Internet of Things (IoT) Technologies' Influence on Higher Education: Current State and Future Prospects
Vardan Mkrttchian, Leyla Gamidullaeva, Alexey Finogeev, Serge Chernyshenko, Vsevolod Chernyshenko, Danis Amirovand Irina Potapova (2021). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 137-157).*
www.irma-international.org/article/big-data-and-internet-of-things-iot-technologies-influence-on-higher-education/284475