

College Professors' Perceived Impact of COVID-19 on College Teaching and Instruction

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat to higher education with the rapid and forced transition to remote teaching and online instructional practices. This qualitative study sought to understand the impact of COVID-19 on college professors in rural South Texas pertinent to teaching and instructional methods. The transition from face-to-face instruction to virtual instruction meant college professors had to completely alter teaching and instructional strategies to ensure the success of their students. The conceptual framework guiding the study was the Concerns-Based Adoption model developed by George Hall which is used to explain the perceived lack of adoption of teaching innovations. The primary purpose of this study was to understand the impact on faculty from multiple disciplines and the instructional practices employed to facilitate continued learning. Emergent themes revealed that college faculty endured profound loss as a result of their experiences but prevailed with differentiation techniques and conscientious efforts to maintain student engagement. Implications for practice and recommendations for continued instructional support of higher education faculty are discussed.

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, educational institutions all around the world were forced to rapidly adjust their teaching and instructional methods due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions of higher education were no exception.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the student experience is a growing focus of current research. Lacking in the literature however is research to understand how the rapid and compulsory shift to online learning impacted higher education faculty. This qualitative study sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of higher education faculty as they transitioned to online teaching in compulsory fashion as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

Concerns-Based Adoption model (Anderson, 1997).

- Perceived lack of adoption of teaching innovations.
- Seven levels of concern experienced by educators when presented with a new strategy, tool, or practice:
 - **Awareness** - Teachers have little concern or involvement with the innovation.
 - **Informational**- Teachers have a general interest in the innovation and would like to know more about it.
 - **Personal**- Teachers want to learn about the personal ramifications of the innovation. They question how the innovation will affect them.
 - **Management**- Teachers learn the processes and tasks of the innovation. They focus on information and resources.
 - **Consequence**- Teachers focus on the innovation's impact on students.
 - **Collaboration**- Teachers cooperate with other teachers in implementing the innovation.
 - **Refocusing**- Teachers consider the benefits of the innovation and think of additional alternatives that might work even better.

Research Questions

- **RQ1: What was the impact on college professors as they transitioned to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **RQ2: What instructional practices did college professors employ as they transitioned to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Methods

- Purposeful sampling technique (Merriam, 1998).
- Sample of participants from one institution of higher education in south Texas.
- Sample criterion:
 - Faculty member rank as assistant professor, associate professor, or full professor;
 - At least one faculty member from each of five colleges on the university campus.
- Sample size: Five college professors.
- Data collection method:
 - Virtual interviews (average of 45 minutes in length).
 - Field notes during participant interviews used to aid as evidence in the interpretation of outcomes.
- Data analysis:
 - First coding cycle: coding analyzing of transcript data for identification of themes.
 - Second and third round of data analysis: aimed to verify the identified themes.

Results

Research Question #1

Emergent Theme	Findings
Loss	Dr. Felix indicated a loss of students and stated, "Some of them did not make it they failed and that was to me anticipated or expected after about the first months of teaching that we're going to lose some students here."
Satisfaction	Dr. Becky said, "nobody knew what we were doing, so getting anything up and running felt like a big success." Dr. Kate said, "We made it. Was it difficult? Yeah, it was a killer, but we're fine."

Research Question #2

Emergent Theme	Findings
Differentiation	Dr. Felix talked about how he understood the importance of being flexible in what proved to be atypical circumstances, magnifying those diverse needs even more, and said, "I don't like the word lenient, but I had to be flexible to make sure that the education process happened. I found flexibility was the only way to work in this pandemic situation."
Student Connections	Dr. Henry highlighted the importance of student connections. He said, "I would find the interaction with the students is what makes that class more fun, more engaging, and without that it's just information"

Code Frequencies

Research Question	Theme	Frequency
RQ1: Impact	Loss	154
	Satisfaction	74
RQ2: Instructional Practices	Differentiation	123
	Student Connections	116

Discussion

- This study offer insight into the experiences of higher education faculty members as a result of the rapid transition to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Emergent themes tell the story of complexity in higher education teaching, and merit enhancements and intentional attention to teaching and learning in the university context.
- Relevant research in the field of university pedagogy has so far highlighted this need (Plota & Karalis, 2019; Raikou, 2019), and the findings of this study as a result of this crisis confirm that need.

Research Implications

- Due to COVID-19 college faculty were forced to experiment with instructional practices not used before.
- A perceived lack of educational pedagogical knowledge in some areas proved to intensify the challenges these professors were already facing (Marcelo & Yot-Fominguez, 2018).
- Some faculty were experiencing high levels of frustration and stress due to the need to adapt quickly to new delivery structures and any latent affects experienced through challenging student interactions.
- Educators are the foundation of the future. If educators do not have the support and tools needed to effectively teach, regardless of classroom setting, then we have not only failed the profession, but most importantly our students.

Recommended Research

- Future studies designed to identify the need for continuing education and/or professional development for professors of higher education in the form of:
 - Lesson planning
 - Differentiating for student's needs
 - Integrating teaching innovations
- Future research to compare student performance between the two delivery methods (face-to-face and virtual).
- Future research to determine whether changes in student persistence in higher education was perhaps a result of the move to online learning.
- Future studies aimed to examine the impact of academic support services and supplemental education programs designed to facilitate student success within the context of online learning.

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