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Myths about Online Learning

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Abstract: ‘Teach me and I forget, show me and I forget, involve me and I learn.’

The Chinese proverb sounds appropriate in case of online learning. The pedagogical paradigm shift in higher education to 24-hours learning environments, encompassing several delivery formats including online courses, blended or hybrid designed courses, and the traditional face-to-face lecture classes have increased student access and engagement into global, lifelong learning. Online teaching is an innovative approach and opens up new vistas to distance education. A large number of colleges and universities across the world are transitioning traditional face-to-face classes into fully online, blended, or web-facilitated courses. This is due to the need to maintain a competitive edge and make courses handy to an expanding and diverse student population. Online learning offers new, exciting opportunities to expand the learning environment for diverse student populations. In spite of all the advantages online education is still labeled with number of myths that discourage many learners from taking online courses over traditional face to face teaching and learning. This paper gives an understanding to some of the common predominant myths about online learning and methods to minimize them.

Keywords: Online learning, blended learning, hybrid learning.

Introduction:

Online learning appears to be the greatest revolution in contemporary education that had a huge change in the system and opened great opportunities for everyone inquisitive to learn. Despite the fact that the traditional system of education has several advantages but there are issues like the expensive fee structure, infrastructure problem, and busy classrooms. Such issues prevent many to get education. It is understandable why online education is gaining popularity among organizations and students. Over the past decade, the number of online courses and programs have also grown



tremendously (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Sugar, Martindale, & Crawley, 2007; Wait & Lewis, 2003). A large number of students (about 3.94 million) were enrolled in at least one online course in the Fall semester of 2007 (Allen & Seaman, 2008). This is an increase of 12.9% over the previous year. As student enrollment and the number of online courses continue to rise, institutions will need faculty who are willing to address existing challenges and participate in developing and teaching online courses.

Online courses offers flexibility of location to the students had helped promoting this modality. Online education has grown tremendously but still in spite of most the institutes adapting the blended online learning teaching methods, there exist myths that hampers the total success of the methodology. DTL is now more than 40 years old Western Behavioral Sciences Institute offers the first online program in 1981. Nova southern east university began offering the first online doctoral program in 1985. In Latin America institutes like Anahuac University of Technology offers online programs for more than twenty years. Though the dimensions of DTL have greatly increased over the years but still the myths exist. Nevertheless, online education is still related to stereotypes. People often think that online students are not smart enough for a traditional college or university, they are lazy, and there is no authenticity of the degrees. Such myths discourage many people from taking online courses and they opt for the traditional educational system that consumes money, patience and time.

This paper gives an insight to some of the common prevailing myths about online learning and ways to minimize them.

1. F2F courses exhibit better quality than online courses: Despite the clear demonstration of the benefits of using technology in education, there continues to be a marked reluctance by academics to engage with online learning (Anderson, 2008). Heaton-Shrestha, May, and Burke (2009) found teachers to be much less positive than their students about the learning benefits of an online learning component. Start with smaller initiatives, and once the technology works, build on that success, and incorporate lessons learned. This reflection is created as there is a basic difference in the pedagogy of the two modalities, f2f teachings are synchronous interactions and contents are presented as lectures, pencil and paper assessments, and therefore, content can be planned session



by session. Online teaching involves asynchronous interaction, discussion forums, alternative assessments thus content must be planned out in advance of development. This myth can be minimized by working on the following steps

(A) Clear learning objectives: Articulating the learning objectives will help select and organize course content, and determine appropriate assessments and instructional strategies. It will also motivate learning appropriately and monitor the progress.

(B) Aligned assignment: Aligned assignment will keep the learners curiosity high and they would be able to find the relevance of the course. For this, we need to ensure that the teacher and learner effort is focused on objectives that are rewarded by assessment, and vital to the subject, so that achievement is maximized. Learners are in practice of procrastinate long assignments, such as projects, presentations, or papers, thus, it need to be duplicated throughout the course as check points to create session reminders.

(C) Ample material: Organize the content in logical units, or modules, in which each module is organized around a major topic and contains relevant objectives, material, and associated activities. In the introduction to the module, include information about how long the student should expect to spend working on the module.

(D) Technical tools: E-learning makes use of many technologies some of which have been developed specifically for it, whilst others conveniently complemented the learning process, for example computer games. Communication technologies are also widely used in e-learning. Starting with the use of email and instant messaging, message forums and social networks, we see a plethora of tools that any internet user would use in any case. In addition, some technologies work in a complementary manner to other software and enable new features. For example, software that adds a whiteboard on your video conferencing tool to allow you or your peers to make changes on other people's work for review, or screen sharing which allows someone to make a presentation while still making comments and giving input using the microphone. E-learning makes good use of database and CMS (Content Management System) technologies. These two work hand in hand to store your course content, test results and student records. The data is stored in the database and the CMS provides a user interface for you to add, update and delete data. A good LMS will often



provide reporting tools to generate and store progress reports. E-learning tools and technologies used to improve the quality of content are manifold. Software such as Flash and PowerPoint will help you make your presentations slick and interesting, with high quality, graphically rich content. There are word processing packages and HTML editors available these days that make formatting your text or web pages a breeze, removing a lot of the complexity. There are also many online services available that you can use to create interactive elements for your courses such as quizzes and games.

2. Plagiarism is common in online course: Another common myth is the notion that online students are more to cheat than f2f students. However, there is mounting evidence to suggest that this is not the case. Studies have shown that self-reported cheating rates equal in f2f and online. Certain forms of cheating are more likely for f2f students. The effects of this myth can be reduced with the support of the institute, structured curriculum and well-developed and well-planned interactive activities developed with faculty support. This myth can be minimized by working on the following steps

(A) A policy should be established on academic integrity that enunciates faculty and student responsibilities. Faculty should be instructed to mark the violated cases. Organization can prevent plagiarism by securing student logins and password to access online courses and related resources, discussions, assignments and assessments

(B) Awareness of academic integrity policy among students is required. Activities or the assignments that require innovative and promote critical thinking should be cooperated in the course. Use of different assessment strategies should be taken under consideration.

(C) Faculty should be provided access to internet so that any search engine could be used for a unique text string or phrase from the discussion or post. Moreover, faculty development program should be held on the regular intervals as to update them with the latest ways to check plagiarism and to use the setting on the LMS to reduce cheating.

Plagiarism can be reduced to an extent by taking the above measures but still it is the student has to decide to cheat in a course regardless of the modality revealing the notion of the increased cheating online is unfounded.



3. Online learning is a solitary and disconnected experience: Often it is presumed that online learning is a solitary experience. Students are left themselves to understand the course and proceed further. This myth could be eliminated by involving students in various activities that make use of online tools. Assessment results can be monitored, tracked, and used to ascertain that all requirements have been met. Also, facilitators or course managers should stay in contact with participants to ensure expectations are understood. The truth is that online learners have many tools to connect. Adobe connect, canvas, ePals, edX, facetime, schoology, Google Plus Hangouts, skype, udacity, youtube are various tools where they can connect during the course. Rightly it can said learning community occurs equally for face to face classes and online classes. It should not be assumed that all students have experience with online learning or using the necessary technology. Provide ample technical support for learners by including links to resources, making yourself available to students, and promoting collaborative peer problem solving on the discussion board. Items that appear to be optional generally will not be completed; therefore, assessment is one of the critical success factors to overcoming this challenge.

Faculty has to be present and be responsive to student needs and concerns (Savery, 2005). The instructor should engage in a balanced level of participation and communication—both publicly and privately; in such a way that the students know he or she is engaged and available. This includes modeling good participation by frequently contributing to discussions through responding to students' posts and asking further questions. The instructor is instrumental for creating a warm and inviting atmosphere that promotes an online sense of community (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Jiang & Ting, 2000).

4. Procrastination is agreeable: Generally, it is believed that procrastinate submission of assignments and activities is a common practice. Studies indicate that students who succeed in online courses are self-directed and independent learners who can take responsibility for completing assignments on time and meeting deadlines. Since there are no outside warnings or reminders, online students must have excellent time management skills and discipline to develop and adhere to schedules.

5. Online courses are easy credits: Online courses have the same rigor and expectations as face-to-face courses. They allow flexibility and convenience but online courses have definite time



frames, deadlines and due dates for accomplishing assigned reading, writing, participating in discussions and other activities. Online courses demand engagement and a high level of participation. Discussions require the exchange of ideas and provide opportunities for all students to contribute in an unthreatening environment. Students respond that the online environment helps them gain confidence in their ability to interact with others.

6. Online course devalue the role of instructor: The increased demand for online learning as well as more institutions of higher learning striving to provide diverse educational opportunities, online learning continues to grow as a viable means of providing increased access to a greater number of students (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Saba, 2005) . As a result, at some point in their teaching career, university instructors may be asked to consider teaching their classes either partially or fully online (Clark-Ibanez & Scott, 2008). Becker and Jokivirta (2007) also found that academics worldwide reported low enthusiasm for using technology in learning. More recently, a large-scale study (over 4,500 teachers) by Allen et al. (2012) found that 65% of faculty was more afraid of teaching with technology than they were excited by the new modality. Prepare facilitators by immersing them in a online learning program so they fully understand the participant experience. A team teaching approach, using another facilitator or an online learning producer, can help to maintain energy and interest, and ensure all details are addressed. Facilitators also must understand that each individual component of blended learning needs to be treated as critical. Online faculty should be involved in course development. Instructor student interaction is highly important in online learning that evolve the role of instructor, but not diminish.

7. Online degrees are unauthentic: Research tells us that online education is as good and, often better than other instructional modes. Online programs must meet the same accreditation standards as their traditional on-campus counterparts. Nowadays employers consider the performance rather than considering the modality. Furthermore, the ability to work in cyber teams is quickly becoming a required work skill, and students with this experience may have an advantage.

Conclusion

Every learning modality has its own strength and challenges. Online classes seem to be more successful by helping students to achieve their learning goals. The technical challenges are not



about getting technology to work on networks (though that is an important first step) rather, they are concerned with ensuring the success of the program by utilizing and supporting appropriate technologies. Digital technologies are changing higher education around the globe. Students expect the flexibility, personalization, and connectedness that online and blended courses offer. Also, employers want graduates who are proficient with technology and who can collaborate at a distance. The resources that supported me as an instructor transition into the online teaching and learning environment are not only restricted to learning of one particular course. It is an overall effort, which involves getting enrolled into courses that helped in learning new methodologies. Moreover, reading blogs, research available on internet also helped me a lot in understanding the online classroom environment. Besides, information can be gathered from the discussions and exchange of ideas with colleagues. That sense of community helps become a better teacher. Since the instructor don't have a physical presence in an online course, thus it becomes important to establish an instructor presence virtually using other methods like discussion tools, blogs, and chat groups embedding of videos that motivates learners to get engaged in the course. Most online classes require students to log-on several times a week. This ensures active participation and maximum learning. The nature of online learning requires more interaction to establish community and presence in the virtual environment of a course. In a recent study of undergraduate students at an American university enrolled in both traditional and online courses, students preferred online courses to the traditional classroom saying that they learned more in these classes, spent more time on these classes, and found these classes to be more difficult yet of higher quality than traditional classes (Hannay & Newvine, 2006).

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