Perceptions of Online Classes

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ABSTRACT

Online classes can be defined as classes in which the instructors heavily rely on technology in order to convey information and teach their students, that might or not might be sharing the same room, or even the same geographical area. Furthermore, online classes have been classified under the same terminology as e-learning, which can be defined as "information and communication technologies used to support students improve their learning." (Ellis, Ginns and Piggott)

Throughout the years, online classes have become more popular and "more than 200 institutions now offer online graduate degrees." (Endres and Hurtubis) Many more offer online courses at undergraduate level to complete their academic offerings.

A survey was conducted of students who had taken both online and face to face classes. Results of the perception of the students are discussed and suggestions are made for delivery of online classes.

Introduction

During the last decade, the internet has become part of our culture and undoubtedly a new necessity in society. Since its release during the early 90's, people have started to rely more and more on online activities such as socializing and even using it to make monetary transactions, paying bills and checking their bank statements. It was just matter of time before the educational system adopted this new technology. Many colleges are using the internet not only to search for information, but also to communicate with their students and manage different activities of the academic life such as registering for classes or paying for tuition. However, colleges throughout America have taken a step further with the introduction of online classes. Online classes can be defined as classes in which the instructors heavily rely on technology in order to convey information and teach their students, that might or not might be sharing the same room, or even the same geographical area. Furthermore, online classes have been classified under the same terminology as e-learning, which can be defined as "information and communication technologies used to support students improve their learning." (Ellis, Ginns and Piggott)

Throughout the years, online classes have become more popular and "more than 200 institutions now offer online graduate degrees." (Endres and Hurtubis) Many more offer online courses at undergraduate level to complete their academic offerings.

However, unlike some predictions, online classes have not completely replaced face-to-face courses but have become a way of complementing them. Furthermore, different students see online classes as special opportunities according to their situation and background. For example, non-traditional students, working students, and students who are trying to balance family life with school, tend to rely more on online courses as they allow them to work towards their degree in a more flexible way and from their home.

On the other hand, regular students between 18 to 23 years of age tend to take online classes as a way to complement their face-to-face courses or to experience a new way of learning. However, up until now, it has been difficult to measure the value that online classes have in contrast to face-to-face courses.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to try to assess the perceptions that the students have towards online courses taking into consideration the different face-to-face courses they have taken in the past. The study compares, among others, the levels of difficulty, usefulness and convenience of online classes. The study conducted tries to measure the levels of motivation that students show towards online classes compared to face–to-face courses and analyze whether or not motivation affects the student's willingness to recommend online courses, or their desire to enroll in one.

METHODOLOGY

Survey was divided into several sections. First part had the filtering questions such as 'Have you ever enrolled in an online class' and other demographic characteristics. Part to focused on the differences between lecture classes and online classes with respect to attributes such as difficulty, stress, usefulness etc. Level of motivation was self reported, along with outcome such as learning. Next set of questions related to communication of material and feedback. Final section asked about their experience and if they would recommend the class to fellow students.

All the data needed was collected by using paper-based surveys that were proctored to students in classes selected randomly within   the university located in southwestern part of the country. Professors from different departments were contacted and asked for permission to give out the surveys during the class period; diverse dates and times were given. Even though the classes were selected randomly, the majority of survey takers were junior or seniors. This fact might represent an important factor as juniors and seniors have been exposed to university and the survey was conducted in a summer session.

A total of 183 surveys were collected, 25 of those surveys were considered invalid according to different criteria such as excessive blank fields (greater than 30 percent incomplete and extreme tendency. Also, the surveys filled by students who claimed not to have taken online classes before were voided as they could not accurately compare face-to-face courses to online classes. Furthermore, surveys were also voided if the student constantly used the same ranking for different questions (i.e. filling out all "3" on one section.) After the tests for validity were applied and every survey was checked individually, we obtained 158 (86.33%) valid surveys that were used as a base for the study.

Preliminary Analysis

89% of the students were full time as this study was done in the summer session. 15.8% were sophomores, 19.6 percent juniors, 51.3 percent seniors (probably had to graduate). %5% of the students were between 21 and 23 years old. 51.8 percent were males, 66.5 percent were Caucasians, 77% had a job , 28.5% worked full time and 50.4 percent had a GPA over 3.0.

When one controls for GPA and number of hours worked there is a significant relationship between motivation, ease of learning and quality of course.

Only a quarter of the students found the online classes stressful. Majority of the students found the online classes equally difficult and felt they learned as much as a face to face classes.

Surprisingly two third of the students either disagreed or had no opinion about the courses being suitable to their learning styles. Interestingly half the students rather be in a classroom setting.

Females found online courses more useful than males. There were no differences on any of the attributes of online classes such as stress, ease, complexity, communication etc. between male and female students.

Gpa determined whether the students found the class easy and suited their learning style. Student motivation was a major factor in ease and usefulness of online classes.

There was a relationship between motivation, GPA, ease, usefulness, however there was no relationship with number of hours worked.

This is a very preliminary analysis. A complete analysis and a formal paper will be submitted if accepted. My apologies for lack of a good results and discussion section due to time constraints.

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