Concurrent Mixed Methods in Online Higher Education Evaluation:
A Pilot Course Evaluation Case Study
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Abstract

The research is a **multiple case study** evaluation of two online **pilot graduate writing courses** using a **concurrent mixed methods** design. Concurrent mixed methods provides an approach to capturing the complexity of **multiple stakeholder perspectives.** **Qualitative interviews** and **surveys** with open and closed-ended questions are used with stakeholders for a comprehensive evaluation strategy.

Problem

Educational evaluation continues to evolve rapidly. There is increasing pressure to demonstrate educational outcomes, quantify course objectives, and balance student satisfaction with faculty and administrative concerns.

Innovative educational interventions are increasingly **piloted** as educators seek to improve delivery and raise the quality of instructional techniques. The **online** educational environment presents additional unique evaluation challenges.

Evaluation strategies must be **timely, cost effective, efficient, and reflect perspectives of a diverse audience** of faculty, students, teaching assistants, and administrators.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to discover the **perspectives of multiple stakeholders** in online graduate course evaluation and determine factors contributing to **intervention evaluation decisions**.

Relevant Literature

•**Student course evaluations** are standard measures in the educational context. Problems with the **validity** of student evaluations indicate the need to use comprehensive measurement methods to supplement student surveys (Clayson & Haley, 2011).

•Different stakeholders may have **divergent and multifaceted perspectives** (Dunet & Reyes, 2006; McAllister, Harold, Ahmedani, & Cramer, 2009).

•**Mixed methods** may capture the intersectionality, diversity, and complexity of multiple identities that emerge in higher educational environments (Griffin & Museus, 2011).

•**Socio-technical systems theory** has been used as a basis for comprehensive evaluation models in online education (Wang, Solan, & Ghods, 2010).

Research Questions

RQ1: What were **stakeholder perceptions** of 2 pilot interventions (limited peer mentoring & an online whiteboard) in online writing courses ?

(Stakeholders were: students, faculty, teaching assistant/peer mentor, and administrators.)

RQ2: What **factors contributed to the decision** on whether or not to continue the pilot interventions?

Procedures

A **multiple case study** of **two** online graduate writing courses using a **concurrent mixed methods** design will be used to determine stakeholder perspectives in online graduate course evaluation.

• An online graduate writing course providing **limited peer mentoring** and
• An online graduate literature review **course piloting an online whiteboard tool** with a teaching assistant/peer mentor will be assessed.

Sampling:

• An attempt to census student satisfaction through surveys of 2 pilot course participants
• Purposeful sampling of teaching assistants, faculty, and administrators

Post-course evaluation **surveys** will be administered to students. **Interviews** with stakeholders (teaching assistants, faculty, administrators) will be conducted.

Data Analysis

• Surveys will be analyzed using **descriptive statistics** on student satisfaction.
• Interviews and open-ended survey questions will be analyzed using the **constant comparative method** (Glaser & Strauss, 2012) with open, axial and selective coding to determine themes from stakeholder perspectives (Boeije, 2010).
• **Integration** of the mixed methods will assess evaluation strategies in the case study.

Findings

Preliminary findings indicate **discrepancies** in stakeholder perspectives of the pilot course evaluations.

• **Student surveys** indicated satisfaction with both pilots.

• Both pilot interventions were **cancelled**.

• Next steps: **Interviews** to determine factors contributing to the evaluation decision to cancel pilot interventions.

Limitations

• **Self-selection** of students that register for the optional graduate writing courses.

• The **researcher was also the teaching assistant** in the online whiteboard pilot.

• Students were at **different levels** of progress in their graduate programs, **different programs**, with both ESL and native English speakers.

• **No academic or financial outcome** measures were used in the evaluation.

• Sampled courses were from a **large private, for-profit, exclusively online university** and may present limitations in generalizability.

Conclusions

Divergent stakeholder perceptions introduce complexity and affect evaluative decisions on pilot course interventions.

• Preliminary findings indicate high rates of student **satisfaction** but **cancellation** of interventions.

• A mixed methodology is expected to reveal **additional factors** beyond student satisfaction influencing final decision making on pilot interventions.

Social Change Implication

Piloting and **evaluating** innovative strategies to improve the educational experience in online higher education contributes to the ultimate success of students. **Concurrent mixed methods** has the potential to integrate diverse stakeholder views for a **comprehensive** evaluation strategy. This practice may contribute to well-informed evaluation decisions in higher education and improve the experience for all stakeholders.

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