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 provide 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.

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).

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. 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 stakeholders. 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.