Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Students Value Asynchronous Instruction, Individual Projects and Frequent Communication with the Instructor in an Online Library Science Classroom

Hajibayova, L. (2017). Students' viewpoint: What constitutes presence in an online classroom? Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, 55(1), 12–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2016.1241972

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:
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Abstract

Objective – Determine student perceptions of online learning.

Design – Survey questionnaire.

Setting – An online class in the School of Library and Information Science at a Midwestern US public university.

Subjects – 45 graduate students in an abstracting and indexing class.

Methods – Class participants filled in an online questionnaire at the end of the semester. The survey covered topics related to collaboration, communication, modes of instruction, and assessment. The researcher calculated frequency counts for questions and did a correlation analysis.

Main Results – For collaboration the author found that 62% of students expressed no or limited interest in participation in collaborative projects. Factors for successful completion of group projects included member commitment, instructor involvement, technology tools (discussion boards, wikis, blogs), group size

(3–5 people preferred), and the nature and design of the project.

Preference for communication frequency via email ranged from daily to never with the highest percentage (28.57%) preferring once a week. Communication frequency through the learning management system (LMS) was similar. The largest percentage of students preferred communication 2–3 times per week for virtual (38.89%) and face-to-face (41.67%) office hours. The correlation between communication via LMS and virtual office hours was $r = 0.89$, $p < 0.05$. Of students completing the questionnaire, 47.22% found the instructor's presence effective. While most students disagreed with using social media in an online course, many friended or followed the instructor or the class social media page.

Students preferred asynchronous over synchronous lectures and activities. Preference for frequency was once a week. There was a correlation between synchronous lectures and synchronous activities ($r = 0.77$, $p < 0.05$).

Student preferences for the frequency of overview and discussion of class materials were roughly equal in distribution (daily, 4–6 times/week, 2–3 times/week, weekly, or never). There was a correlation between synchronous overview and asynchronous overview of class materials ($r = 0.93$, $p < 0.05$). In terms of assessment, students found group discussion, individual projects, research papers, quizzes, and tests the most effective class assignments. Several correlation analyses were done between assignment types.

Conclusion – This study found students had limited interest in collaborative projects. It was also found that regular communication with the teacher was important. Students preferred asynchronous instruction and activities. They also preferred individual assignments for evaluation.

Commentary

This study is assessed using the CAT: A Generic Critical Appraisal Tool (Perry & Rathbun-Grubb, 2014). The author lists four

research questions (two are combined under one bullet point). The author also provides background on factors influencing the quality of online teaching and learning and then introduces the community of inquiry (CoI) framework with three core overlapping presences (social, cognitive, and teaching). The author references the validated CoI instrument (Arbaugh, 2008) that measures each of the presences and their interrelationships.

Although this study is based on CoI, it did not use the CoI survey instrument. The instrument is not referenced in the Methods section, and no questionnaire is provided in an appendix. The author asked students about instructor presence, but the reader does not know how it was defined in the questionnaire. The study includes student quotes in the discussion, but it does not indicate what questions the author asked or if the author sought ethics approval or if approval was required. The author presents a large amount of quantitative data in six tables in the results related to communication, social media, modes of instruction, and assignment frequency, delivery, and assessment. The author also includes several correlation analyses but does not reference the correlations in the discussion. This begs the question why they were done, especially as there is no hypothesis related to these correlations. The author finds a correlation between synchronous lectures and activities but indicates that most students prefer asynchronous modes and yet does not provide a correlation analysis for this conclusion.

The discussion addresses each of the research questions asked and ties in the results to the literature. The author acknowledges the limitation of this study: a sample size of 45 graduate students. The author connects the results to the CoI framework with respect to social presence (communication frequency and tools) and teaching presence (modes of instruction) in the discussion.

This is a timely topic with many institutions providing online instruction for the 2020–21 school year. Despite its flaws, this exploratory study provides a generous amount of data

about graduate student preferences for communication in an online environment as well as preferences for learning modes, activities, and assessment. It points to flexibility and engagement being critical for online learning, which is a valuable insight for instructors designing and delivering online courses.

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