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Lori Cook-Benjamin
Ft. Hays State University

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Abstract

The college course used in this project is required for students majoring in the Elementary Education and Early Childhood Unified Programs. Sections of the course are offered virtually as well as on the campus. This paper examines students' scores on an assignment called the Course Objective Reflection to determine if course format made a difference in the candidates' perceived learning of the six course objectives. Preliminary results indicate that virtual students achieved higher aggregate scores on the assignment than students completing the class on campus.

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Lori Cook-Benjamin, Ed.D.
Ft. Hays State University

Abstract

The college course used in this project is required for students majoring in the Elementary Education and Early Childhood Unified Programs. Sections of the course are offered virtually as well as on the campus. This paper examines students' scores on an assignment called the Course Objective Reflection to determine if course format made a difference in the candidates' perceived learning of the six course objectives. Preliminary results indicate that virtual students achieved higher aggregate scores on the assignment than students completing the class on campus.

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics in 2007–08, about 4.3 million undergraduate students, or 20 percent, took at least one distance education course and approximately 0.8 million, or 4 percent of all undergraduates, took their entire program through distance education (Aud et al., 2011). With the increase in students taking virtual course, the investigator wondered if the course format, that is, a face-to-face course and the same course offered virtually would influence students' perceptions when reflecting on their learning of course objectives. Distance education studies such as Bixler (2008); Chang (2007); Chung, Chung and Severance (1999); Cook et al. (2005); Crippen and Earl (2007); Nelson (2007); Saito and Miwa (2007); Shen, Lee and Tsai (2007); and Wang et al. (2006) have found that a tool or feature prompting students to reflect on their learning was effective in improving outcomes (as cited in USDE, 2010). This same report stated research evidence suggests that promoting self-reflection, self-regulation and self-monitoring leads to more positive online learning outcomes. Domine (2011) stated that "technology-based standards and policies do not acknowledge that instructional technologies shape the curricular message enacted within the learning environment" (p. 196). In another study, Larson and Keiper (2002) found that online classes give a voice to all students. An inference from the literature is virtual students may perform well on assignments that incorporate reflection.

Questions to Answer

The project was carried out in one college at a comprehensive university that offers students the option to take courses and entire programs virtually or on campus. Within the college, the majority of the faculty is expected to teach courses, virtually, as well as in the traditional college classroom. The investigator explored if differences existed in the students' perceptions of learning six course objectives when the same course was taught virtually and face-to-face.

Project Background

The two sections of the course were taught in a spring semester. One course was taught on the main campus in a face-to-face setting, while the other course was offered online through the university's platform. For consistency, the investigator used the same content materials and assessments. Enrollment in both sections of the course was close in number with 25 students in the on-campus section and 28 in the virtual section. The assignment used to determine students' perceptions of learning the course objectives was the Course Objective Reflection (COR). On this assignment, students were asked to reflect on their learning of six course objectives. The objectives included the following:

1. Attain an operational definition of multicultural education as an ongoing process by investigating the social and educational implications.
2. Attain an appreciation of cultural diversity, thus gain an understanding of one's self by attaining a greater understanding of others.
3. Develop an understanding of one's life experiences as shaped by membership in groups based on culture, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area.
4. Attain a knowledge base of the various aspects of diversity in the areas of culture, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area as well as other differences that impact teaching and learning.
5. Develop a knowledge base in the identification of discrimination (i.e., prejudice, gender bias, etc.) and effective means of the elimination of such discrimination in the school setting.
6. Attain an understanding of the implications of diversity in the school, upon the family, and community.

The students, in both sections of the course, were given one week to complete the typed COR. An assignment overview and the rubric used to assess the assignment were provided. The rubric was based on a five-point scale with a score of 1 assigned for "below expectations", a score of 3 for "at expectations", and a score of 5 for "exceeds expectations". The course instructor assessed all students' assignments.

Results

Table 1: Rubric Scores Per Objective - F2F Vs. Virtual Teacher Candidates

Rubric Score	Objective 1		Objective 2		Objective 3		Objective 4		Objective 5		Objective 6	
1	4%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	36%	25%	40%	25%	40%	29%	40%	32%	44%	29%	40%	29%
5	52%	71%	52%	71%	46%	68%	48%	64%	44%	68%	56%	68%
*Total %	92%	96%	96%	96%	86%	97%	98%	96%	88%	97%	96%	97%

N = 25 F2F (Face-to-Face) N = 28 V (Virtual) *Not every student completed each objective.

Table 1: Rubric Scores Per Objective – F2F Vs. Virtual Students indicates the percentage of students in both sections receiving a rubric score of 1, 3, or 5 on each of the six objectives. Table 1 shows students in the face-to-face section received a higher percentage of the scores 1 and 3; while students in the virtual section received a higher percentage of the score 5.

Table 2. Course Objective Reflection Rubric - Aggregated Results

	On-campus	Virtual	Difference
1.	3.96	4.5	-11%
2.	3.88	4.5	-12%
3.	3.6	4.25	-13%
4.	3.6	4.2	-12%
5.	3.52	4.25	-15%
6.	4.0	4.25	-05%

Table 2. Course Objective Reflection Rubric - Aggregated Results reveals that students in the virtual section of the course outscored the students in the face-to-face section on all six objectives. The most significant difference in the two sections' scores was the fifth objective at 15% followed closely by the third objective at 13%.

Limitations of the Project

A definite limitation in this project is the low total number. Due to a change in class assignment, the investigator has not taught a face-to-face and virtual section of the course in the same semester. Another limitation of this project is determining if the COR results were directly related to the course format or if other factors impacted the results.

Future Questions and Implications

The results suggest other questions should be examined. When looking at the aggregated results, were the virtual students' scores higher because the COR was writing intensive? Since the average age of virtual students enrolled in the course was higher than the average age of students taking the class face-to-face, was the chronological age of students a factor in virtual students' higher scores? A future implication of this project is to collect data in future courses to increase the data set. A second implication is to examine the disaggregated results for score trends on each objective. For example, scrutinizing an objective with the lowest overall score in both sections may indicate a need for additional instruction on that topic by the investigator. In conclusion, the project results appear to correspond to the review of literature cited in the paper suggesting that self-reflection leads to more positive online learning outcomes.

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