Applying Case Study in Preparing to Teach Online Courses in the Higher Education: the Development of Case Studies

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Abstract: Online courses are increasing rapidly in the higher education. The faculty who are used to teaching in traditional face-to-face classes might not know how to prepare the material of online courses and solve online students' problems. Kashy, Thoennessen, Albertelli, and Tsai (2000) mentioned that the online learning was used to modify and complement the original course and thus represents and evolution rather than a revolution. Schrum and Benson (2000) presented that a case study approach is an appropriate manner in which to investigate evolving phenomena, particularly in situations in which the participants' understandings of the processes are primary importance. Therefore, case study is an appropriate method to transmit experienced online instructors' to novice online instructors. This proposed study is based on the case study method to gather teaching cases from the experienced instructors and applies those cases in online instructors' training.

Introduction

Online courses are developed rapidly, especially in higher education. The faculty who are used to teaching in traditional face-to-face classes might not know how to prepare the material of online courses and solve online students' problems. Case study is an appropriate method to transmit experienced online instructors' to novice online instructors. This proposed study is pertinent to how to apply the case study method to gather teaching cases from the experienced instructors and applies those cases in online instructors' training.

Wegerif, Hall, and Keynes (1998) pointed that online courses present a number of educational opportunities and advantages over traditional classes. Even though online courses are becoming ever more prevalent, there are still

several problems that need to be solved in order to ensure an effective online learning environment. The instructor, discussion environment, and course requirements are the essential elements of a successful teaching and learning environment. Of these three elements, the instructor has the key role in creating and maintaining the success of the online courses (Rossman, 1999). In addition, Also, Schrum and Benson (2000) and Smith, Ferguson, and Caris (2001) presented that online instructors are forced to develop and design their activities and interactions in new ways, and they may be frustrated because they lack the ability to recognize or remedy their s students' problems with the course. Schrum and Benson (2000) reported that although many institutions are experimenting with online education, little is known about the professional development of the faculty to prepare and plan for the transition to this new environment. Teaching in the online environment is a big challenge to instructors who have no online teaching experience. Murray (1996) reported that most college professors have never had a course in learning theory, and as a result, their web-based offerings are lacking in content based on learning theories. In order to establish interactive learning content in online courses, it is important for the professor to understand how to teach online courses and to be reassured as to the intellectual and academic integrity of this teaching environment (Smith, Ferguson, and Caris, 2001). Perhaps, it would be beneficial to the higher education, if experienced instructors could share their knowledge with less-experienced instructors.

However, Fredericksen, Pickett, and Shea (2000) presented that some mainstream faculty might resist online teaching because they are afraid of technology and are unsure of the pedagogy, because they are afraid of the unknown and potential work involved in trying something new, and because they believe online teaching is too impersonal and does not allow from meaningful interaction. These faculty responded that they would be less resistant to online teaching if there was a forum created so that current online instructors could explain advantages of the online format, provide guided, hands-on experience, explain pedagogy surrounding of this form of teaching, show them and online course, share examples of teaching experiences, and answer their questions. Moreover, the researchers also discovered that the faculty who do not have much online teaching experience were eager to know how to teach online courses and they needed the experienced instructor's experience and suggestions. Therefore, a faculty training of teaching an online course is necessary, which can provide a good teaching example to guide them teach in online learning environment and create some opportunities of discussion to find the answers for their doubts.

Schrum and Benson (2000) found that the experience of the faculty in their program provided insights for other faculty moving to the world of online teaching and learning. Rossman (1999) reported that he and his associates held teleconferences to provide the opportunities that the faculty can share their observations related to successes and problems in order to offer suggestions and comments designed to improve the instructional process of online courses. The sharing experiences from the other experienced faculty are very beneficial for the online novice instructor. How can we find a good channel to transmit the experience of the expert online teachers to the novice online teachers? Kashy, Thoennessen, Albertelli, and Tsai (2000) mentioned that the online learning was used to modify and complement the original course and thus represents and evolution rather than a revolution. Schrum and Benson (2000) presented that a case study approach is an appropriate manner in which to investigate evolving

phenomena, particularly in situations in which the participants' understandings of the processes are primary importance. Thus, this study is based on the case study method in order to gather the insights of experienced online instructors so that these experiences can be used in the future to train inexperienced online teachers.

Theoretical Perspectives

Case study is an effective way to exchange the experience from the expert to the novice. Mostert and Sudzina (1996) asserted that case studies can help novice teachers acquire the expert and experienced teacher's situational knowledge. Because case study provides substituted teaching experience, it can make the online novice teachers think about their problems from a professional perspective. In addition, for teacher training, case study is a very useful training method. Because online teaching environment is not linear but complex, the teachers who teach in this complicated environment can not solve their problems using only teaching theory. They might need to know how to solve the problem based upon the complicated environment. Merseth (1991) found that case studies are an effective tool for training teachers to analyze and to solve the problems after conducting research using the case study. These findings might also be applied to design strategies to train instructors to teach online courses.

Case study is a particular teaching method. Wassmermann (1994) and Shulman (1992) reported that case study is a method of pedagogy that uses the case to teach in class. It is also a channel between teaching theory and the real teaching situation. In teacher training, the instructor can use case studies as the teaching material and can use the concrete situations portrayed there to prompt the learner to discuss how to solve the problems introduced in the case studies. The learners can learn from the real situations and can absorb the experience from the experienced teacher. In addition, case study resembles an imitative game- the learner can imagine the original situation of the case studies and practice to making decisions of solving the problems, establishing new solving strategies, discussing possible solutions and outcomes, and analyzing relevant theories. The instructors applying case study in class can play a tutoring role. They guide the learner to discuss and solve problems and to summarize the solutions. The learners can enhance their learning motivation from the collaborative learning, discussion, and reading of the case study (McKeachie, 1990).

The core of case study method is the teaching case (a case study) which is a descriptive research document often presented in narrative form that is based on a real-life situation or event. It attempts to convey a balanced, multidimensional representation of the context, participants, and reality of the situation. It describes the real story by narrative description to portray the real situation, participants, and events in a multiple views. Because the teaching case is for the discussion of the training, the description of the teaching case should be as detailed and as clear as possible. Also, it should attract the learner's interest to facilitate the discussion of this situation from diverse perspectives (Wassermann, 1993; Merseth, 1994). Merseth (1994) also presented that case studies (teaching cases) are created explicitly for discussion and seek to include sufficient detail and information to elicit active analysis and interpretation by users with differing perspectives. There are three essential elements of a case study: first, it must be real; second, it must rely on careful research and study; third, it must foster the development of multiple perspectives by users. Also, the emphasis on reality-based case study is important for a novice teacher because it enables them to

explore, analyze, and examine representations of actual online class.

Lawrence and Warren (1992) created three stages and six steps of operating a teaching case are describing below. The three stages are the categories of the six steps. Three stages are sourcing and idea, documentation, and use of case studies. The first stage, sourcing and idea, includes a step- define the key concept of the case study. The second stage, documentation, includes four steps- write the teaching case, revise the description of the case study, revise the teaching case based upon the result of the pilot test, and provide training to the users (student and instructor). The third stage, use of case studies, includes one step- pilot test for the case study. Based upon Lawrence and Warren's three stages and six steps formulate the development steps of the online teaching case. First, define the topic of the teaching case- focus on the experience of the online instructor; second, select the provider of the online teaching case- choose experienced online instructors; third, construct and design the content of the online teaching case studies; fourth, gather the online teaching case studies- start interview and observe the instructors and students who enroll in those instructors' online courses; fifth, analyze the online case studies- transform and classify the data that gather from the interview and observation; sixth, revise the online case studies; seventh, the provider review the content of the online case studies.

Method

The proposed study will use qualitative techniques to explore instructors' experience of the online course to develop online case studies (teaching case) that could be exemplary for the other instructors. Each case study will include the instructor's experience, self-examination, and students' feedback. Unlike many case studies, the case study includes students' feedback because students' opinion of online teaching and learning can also inform all instructors how to revise their teaching. In addition, the interview process prompted instructors who will be interviewed to reflect on and examine their philosophy of teaching (Kleinfeld, 1992; Richert,1991; Shulman & Colbert, 1989). This study is a pilot study for developing online teaching case studies. Based upon the case study theory that presented above, the research will establish pilot case studies and the principles of creating a good case study of teaching online courses. In the future, it is hoped that this study may lead to the establishment of more online teaching case studies and to the application of those case studies in training the faculty to teach online courses.

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