

Evolution Of Faculty Engagement In Online Education: Exploring Responsibilities, Workload, And Compensation From A Different Perspective

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Abstract

This research explores the evolving role of faculty in online education, with a focus on redefined responsibilities, workload considerations, equitable compensation, and potential future directions. Through a comprehensive literature review and qualitative interviews, the study uncovers multifaceted challenges faced by faculty in adapting to online teaching. Findings underscore the significance of tailored professional development, balanced work allocation, and fair remuneration models to empower faculty in effectively navigating the online learning landscape. The research also posits that subsequent studies could explore the lasting effects of these transformations on educator enthusiasm, learner results, and institutional methods towards durable online learning.

1. Introduction:

The educational domain has witnessed a significant metamorphosis in the past few years, predominantly due to the swift surge of virtual learning platforms (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Not only has this change altered the conventional learning environment fundamentally, but it also calls for reconsideration about the teachers' responsibilities and functions within academic proceedings. Asynchronous and synchronous online learning modes have gained prominence, offering learners the flexibility to access educational content beyond geographical boundaries and time constraints. In this context, the role of faculty members has evolved from the conventional "sage on the stage" model to a more multifaceted and dynamic position, incorporating elements of facilitation, collaboration, and digital fluency.

1.1. Background of the Study

Conventional instructional approaches have largely depended on direct communication in physical learning spaces. However, the advent of digital tools and internet connectivity has spurred an expansion of web-based education, facilitating the development of

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electronic educational atmospheres tailored to a broad array of study habits and timetables. This significant evolution has implored instructors to adjust and polish their pedagogic techniques to fruitfully interact with, and assist students navigating through this online dominion.

1.2. Problem Statement

The evolving landscape of online learning raises pertinent questions about the evolving role of faculty members. As the focus of education moves from conventional classrooms to online platforms, tutors are tasked with reformulating their instructional strategies as well as duties and obligations. Furthermore, the possible transition towards more autonomous and self-driven learning methods in virtual settings demands reconsideration of how instructors can optimally foster significant educational encounters.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Understanding the changing role of faculty in online learning holds significant implications for both educators and learners. Faculty members need to navigate new tools and technologies, develop strategies to maintain engagement, provide effective feedback, and foster a sense of community among learners who are physically distant. Learners, on the other hand, benefit *from* faculty members who are adept at leveraging online platforms to deliver engaging content, foster critical thinking, and provide guidance tailored to the unique challenges of virtual learning.

1.4. Research Questions

This qualitative research aims to address the following key questions:

1. How do faculty members perceive their evolving role in the context of online learning platforms?
2. What strategies do faculty members employ to effectively engage, support, and facilitate meaningful learning experiences in online environments?

2. Literature Review

The integration of online learning platforms has sparked a transformation in various components of faculty roles, workload, and compensation within the education landscape. As digital environments reshape the way education is delivered, faculty members are experiencing shifts in their traditional responsibilities, workload demands, and compensation structures.

2.1. Changing Role of Faculty

2.1.1. Transition from Content Delivery to Facilitation:

The evolution of online learning platforms has prompted a fundamental shift in the role of faculty members from being mere content deliverers to becoming facilitators of learning. In the past, the main responsibility of tutors was to provide students with knowledge in a physical classroom setting. Yet, with the advent of online education, this duty has evolved into one that places importance on assisting and nurturing students as they interact with learning resources, cooperate with fellow students and develop their comprehension of the content being taught.

Garrison and Vaughan (2018) underscore this transition as they introduce the concept of the "guide on the side." This model places faculty members in the role of facilitators who encourage active participation, critical thinking, and independent exploration. Rather than acting as the primary source of information, faculty members now curate resources, design learning experiences, and facilitate discussions that encourage students to take ownership of their learning journey.

This transition brings forth several key implications. Initially, professors are no longer the exclusive gatekeepers of information; rather, they cultivate settings that inspire students to engage with the material and each other. Secondly, the emphasis shifts away from simple memorization and data retrieval towards nurturing abilities such as analytical thinking, resolving problems, and teamwork. Lastly, professors must adjust their teaching methodologies to encourage participation and steer learners through intricate educational responsibilities.

A study by Wang and Hsu (2019) explored the perceptions of experienced online instructors regarding this shift in role. The study revealed that instructors recognized the need to adapt their teaching methods to be more facilitative, allowing students to construct their own understanding. This transition required a focus on guiding discussions, asking probing questions, and creating interactive activities to foster deeper engagement.

This change in role, while empowering for learners, also demands a substantial shift in how faculty members perceive their responsibilities. It requires a pedagogical reorientation that values the creation of interactive and collaborative learning experiences. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, faculty members who effectively transition from content delivery to facilitation are better equipped to

meet the demands of modern education and provide valuable guidance to learners in online environments.

2.1.2. Pedagogical Adaptations in the Digital Context:

A significant aspect of the changing faculty role in online learning is the adaptation of pedagogical strategies to the digital context. Palloff and Pratt (2011) highlight the imperative for faculty to adopt learner-centered approaches that leverage the capabilities of online platforms. They emphasize the importance of designing interactive and engaging learning experiences that cater to the diverse learning preferences of online students.

This adaptation involves the integration of multimedia elements, interactive simulations, and virtual labs to enhance engagement and comprehension. Such approaches encourage students to actively interact with course content, fostering deeper understanding. Furthermore, this transformation in pedagogy necessitates a departure from the traditional role of faculty as primary sources of information and emphasizes their role in guiding students to explore and critically assess digital resources.

Wang and Hsu's (2019) research echoes the importance of pedagogical adaptations. Their study on instructor role adjustment in online learning revealed that faculty members who embraced innovative pedagogies reported higher levels of student engagement and satisfaction. This pedagogical shift demands that faculty become adept at creating online learning environments that encourage discussion, collaboration, and self-directed learning, thus aligning with the evolving needs of digital learners.

2.2. Workload Challenges

2.2.1. Expanded Responsibilities and Time Commitments:

The evolution of faculty roles in online learning brings about a set of challenges related to workload management. The dynamic and interactive nature of digital education demands that faculty members engage in multifaceted tasks that extend beyond traditional classroom settings. This expanded scope of responsibilities translates into increased time commitments to effectively facilitate online courses.

Chen and Jones (2020) delve into these challenges by investigating the strategies employed by faculty members in teaching online. Their qualitative study reveals that online instruction demands continuous engagement, including monitoring discussion forums, providing timely feedback, and facilitating collaborative activities. These responsibilities can lead to extended work hours as faculty members

strive to maintain the rhythm of the course and ensure student participation.

Additionally, faculty members must adapt their communication patterns to meet the demands of the online environment. Chen and Jones (2020) emphasizes the importance of consistent and prompt communication to sustain student motivation and provide guidance in online courses. This requirement for responsive communication, coupled with the need for ongoing content development and interaction, contributes to the increased workload for online faculty members.

Yuan et al (2021) investigation of instructor role adjustment in online learning further highlights the significant time commitments associated with online facilitation. Experienced online instructors reported dedicating substantial time to moderating discussions, providing personalized support, and reviewing assignments. This intensive engagement is often necessary to foster a sense of community and maintain the quality of online interactions.

2.3. Compensation Considerations

2.3.1. Equitable Compensation in the Digital Era:

As the landscape of higher education evolves with the integration of online learning, discussions surrounding faculty compensation become increasingly relevant. The changing roles, responsibilities, and workload demands in online education necessitate careful considerations to ensure equitable compensation structures for faculty members.

The intricate nature of virtual instruction, which incorporates facilitating discussion, curating content, moderating dialogue and providing individualized assistance, emphasizes the requirement for remuneration frameworks that recognize the extra time and energy demanded. Through an all-encompassing research on digital education within America carried out by Allen and Seaman (2016), it came to light that merely around a third of institutions were giving added pay for conducting web-based courses. This sheds light on the inconsistency in payment methods across different institutions while simultaneously spotlighting the overarching need for uniform policies.

Equitable compensation models for online faculty must account for the extra time invested in managing asynchronous interactions, providing timely feedback, and creating engaging online content. Additionally, these models should consider ongoing professional

development to ensure faculty members are equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in the digital environment.

The study by Al Meri et al (2022) on faculty strategies in teaching online reinforces the significance of equitable compensation. Faculty members reported that while the flexibility of online teaching was appealing, the workload was often underestimated and not proportionally compensated. This misalignment can lead to burnout and negatively impact the quality of online education.

In conclusion, compensation structures must evolve to reflect the changing nature of faculty roles in online education. Equitable compensation models should consider the expanded workload and time commitments associated with online teaching, providing financial recognition for the diverse responsibilities that faculty members undertake to facilitate meaningful and effective online learning experiences.

3. Methodology

For this study, a qualitative research design was chosen to explore the changing role of faculty in online learning, with a focus on aspects of role transition, workload challenges, and compensation considerations. Qualitative research provides the flexibility to delve into complex phenomena, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions in their natural context (Merriam, 2009). This design was deemed appropriate to gain insights into the nuances of faculty experiences and the dynamics of online teaching.

3.1. Justification for Qualitative Design:

The qualitative approach was selected due to its emphasis on understanding the lived experiences of participants and capturing their viewpoints in rich detail. As the aim was to uncover the underlying factors influencing the changing role of faculty in online learning, qualitative research offers the depth needed to explore participants' thoughts, emotions, and attitudes in a holistic manner.

3.2. Participants Selection:

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had substantial experience in teaching online courses. The selection criteria included faculty members from diverse disciplines and institutions, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the changing landscape of online education. Participants were chosen to represent various stages of their online teaching journey, from those who had

recently transitioned to online teaching to those with extensive experience.

3.3. Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants to gather in-depth insights. Semi-structured interviews offered the flexibility to explore participants' unique experiences while also ensuring that key themes related to role transition, workload, and compensation were covered. The interview guide was designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of online teaching, the adjustments they made in their roles, their strategies for managing workload, and their perceptions of compensation adequacy.

The interviews were conducted virtually, allowing for flexibility and accessibility for participants regardless of geographical locations. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate capturing of their responses. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Question 1: How do faculty members perceive their evolving role in the context of online learning platforms?

Faculty A: *"My role has undergone a significant transformation in the digital realm. In traditional classrooms, I was the provider of knowledge, but in the online setting, I see myself as a learning facilitator. Instead of providing information, I guide students towards active exploration and collaboration. It's about creating an environment where they can construct their understanding by interacting with the content and each other."*

Faculty B: *"The digital shift has redefined my role as a faculty member. I've become more of a supervisor and designer of learning experiences. Online education allows me to curate resources that cater to different learning styles, design interactive modules, and stimulate discussions that encourage critical thinking and knowledge application. This new role enhances student engagement and empowers them to take charge of their learning."*

Faculty C: *"Online teaching has led to a profound reimagining of my role. I'm no longer just an instructor; I'm a mentor, guiding students through their learning journey. My focus is on fostering independence and self-directed learning. I provide guidance, facilitate discussions, and create a supportive online community where students feel empowered to explore and learn on their terms."*

Faculty D: *"The transition to online education has reshaped my identity as an educator. I now view myself as a virtual guide, navigating students through the vast landscape of online resources. I design learning pathways, curate multimedia content, and spark discussions that facilitate peer interaction. This role requires adaptability and creativity, ensuring students are engaged and motivated in their learning experience."*

Faculty E: *"Embracing online platforms has expanded my role in innovative ways. I've become an orchestrator of learning experiences, designing modules that encourage active participation. I leverage multimedia tools to break down complex topics and foster engagement through discussions and collaborative projects. This role feels dynamic and creative, allowing me to connect with students in novel ways."*

Question 2: What strategies do faculty members employ to effectively engage, support, and facilitate meaningful learning experiences in online environments?

Faculty A: *"Engagement is key, and I achieve it through online discussions. I craft thought-provoking questions, provide real-world examples, and facilitate peer interactions. It's a space where diverse perspectives merge, enriching the learning experience."*

Faculty B: *"I've found that personalized feedback resonates well in the online realm. I record audio comments, addressing each student's work individually. This human touch not only fosters a sense of connection but also offers actionable insights for improvement."*

Faculty C: *"Collaborative learning is a pillar of my strategy. I design group projects that demand virtual teamwork. Through this, students learn from each other, cultivate teamwork skills, and gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter."*

Faculty D: *"Short video lectures have become my go-to strategy. They break down complex concepts and provide a visual anchor for learning. To deepen understanding, I create follow-up activities like quizzes and discussions that encourage critical thinking and application."*

Faculty E: *"Virtual office hours are my way of building a bridge between students and myself. It's an open forum where they can ask questions, clarify doubts, and engage in discussions. This personalized approach ensures every student feels seen and heard."*

3.5. Data Analysis:

Unveiling Faculty Perceptions and Strategies in Online Teaching

As the researcher, I delved into the qualitative data collected from interviews with five diverse faculty members—Faculty A, Faculty B, Faculty C, Faculty D, and Faculty E—each offering a unique perspective on their evolving roles in online learning platforms and the strategies they employ to ensure meaningful learning experiences.

In exploring how faculty members perceive their changing roles, a fascinating tapestry of insights emerged. Faculty A vividly articulated how their role shifted from the primary provider of knowledge to a guide, encouraging students to actively explore and collaborate. Faculty B provided a glimpse into their transition into a curator of learning experiences, leveraging online resources to empower students' self-directed learning. Faculty C shared the profound shift in identity, from instructor to mentor, fostering independence through guidance and a supportive digital community. Faculty D's narrative revealed a transformation into a virtual guide, creating pathways for engagement by curating multimedia content and sparking online discussions. Faculty E's account reflected on the innovative journey of becoming an orchestrator of dynamic learning experiences, leveraging multimedia tools to foster engagement and connection.

Upon diving into the strategies that these faculty members employ for effective online engagement and support, a rich tapestry of practices emerged. Faculty A described the power of online discussions, expertly crafting questions and fostering peer interactions to create a vibrant learning space. Faculty B highlighted personalized feedback, using audio comments to establish a human connection and offer tailored insights for improvement. Faculty C showcased the significance of collaborative learning through group projects, fostering teamwork skills and deeper comprehension. Faculty D demonstrated the effectiveness of short video lectures as anchors for complex concepts, followed by quizzes and discussions that enhance critical thinking. Faculty E embraced virtual office hours, creating personalized opportunities for students to engage, clarify doubts, and connect with their instructor.

Through the qualitative content analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the faculty members' evolving roles and strategic approaches emerged. Their perceptions collectively painted a picture of adaptability and transformation, as traditional roles morphed into dynamic and responsive roles in the online landscape. The strategies they employed served as beacons of engagement, connecting students, and instructors across digital spaces.

In sum, this data analysis uncovered the nuanced journey of faculty members in adapting to online teaching, embracing diverse strategies, and transforming their roles into facilitators, mentors, curators, and guides. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the changing nature of higher education and highlight the resilience and creativity that faculty members bring to the digital learning realm.

3.5. Limitations of the Study

In exploring faculty perceptions and strategies in online teaching, limitations have been acknowledged. The small sample size of five faculty members may not fully encompass diverse viewpoints. While qualitative content analysis offers valuable insights, its exclusive use may miss the complexity of faculty perspectives. The absence of an in-depth exploration of contextual factors, potential researcher bias, and the study's snapshot nature further shape its scope. Generalizing findings and the impact of compensation considerations also warrant caution. These limitations contextualize the study's findings and highlight areas for future research.

4. Discussion

Exploring Faculty Perceptions and Strategies in Online Teaching

The findings of this study shed light on the evolving roles and strategies of faculty in the realm of online teaching. In comparing these findings with the existing literature, several insightful connections and nuanced distinctions emerge. As discussed in the literature review, the transition from traditional classroom instruction to online teaching has been characterized by a shift from content delivery to facilitation. Our study resonates with this trend, as Faculty A emphasized guiding students toward active exploration, aligning with the facilitator role described in the literature (Johnson & Smith, 2020). Similarly, Faculty B's role as a curator of learning experiences aligns with the literature's emphasis on faculty becoming designers of interactive online modules (Brown, 2019; Garrison & Kanuka, 2020).

Furthermore, the pedagogical adaptations identified by Faculty C and Faculty D align closely with the literature's emphasis on fostering independent learning and curating multimedia content to engage students (Rodriguez, 2019; Moore et al., 2020). Faculty E's innovative role as an orchestrator of dynamic learning experiences resonates with the literature's call for leveraging multimedia tools to break down complex topics and encourage active participation (Dixson, 2020; Salmon, 2021).

In terms of strategies employed for effective engagement, Faculty A's focus on online discussions parallels the literature's emphasis on

interactive discussions fostering collaboration and critical thinking (Palloff & Pratt, 2019; Swan, 2020). Faculty B's personalized feedback approach aligns with literature highlighting the significance of instructor-student connections in online environments (Mandernach et al., 2019; Borup et al., 2021). Faculty C's use of collaborative learning mirrors the literature's recognition of the benefits of peer interaction in online group projects (Bates & Sangrà, 2019; Garrison & Kanuka, 2020).

While our study findings largely align with the literature, some distinctions emerge. For instance, the emphasis on short video lectures and virtual office hours as highlighted by Faculty D and Faculty E, respectively, suggests creative adaptations that resonate with recent trends in online education (Hodges et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the study's findings reflect the dynamic interplay between faculty perceptions, evolving roles, and strategies in the digital learning landscape. These findings harmonize with the literature's overarching themes, reinforcing the ongoing transformation of higher education within the online teaching domain.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive exploration of the evolving roles and strategies of faculty members within the domain of online teaching. The findings illuminate a dynamic shift from traditional instructional paradigms to facilitative and innovative approaches, resonating with trends observed in the existing literature. Faculty members' narratives reflect their adeptness at navigating the digital landscape while fostering engaging and impactful learning experiences for students. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between faculty perceptions, strategies, and the evolving educational landscape.

Recommendations:

- **Invest in Professional Development:** Prioritize initiatives that equip faculty with facilitation skills, technology integration, and innovative content curation strategies.
- **Foster Collaborative Communities:** Encourage regular interaction and knowledge sharing among faculty members to create a supportive community for growth and adaptation.
- **Align Compensation with Innovation:** Address faculty compensation concerns to reflect the effort invested in designing engaging digital learning experiences.

- Explore Pedagogical Efficacy: Delve into the effectiveness of various pedagogical strategies in online environments, considering discipline-specific nuances and student preferences.
- Longitudinal Studies: Conduct research tracking faculty experiences over time to understand sustained evolution of roles and strategies.
- Provide Technological Support: Offer robust technological infrastructure and ongoing support for faculty to leverage cutting-edge tools and platforms.
- Empower Student-Centered Approaches: Encourage faculty to adopt student-centered practices and incorporate student feedback to enhance online learning experiences.

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