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Comprehension of Counselor Education Course Materials in Online Versus Face-to-Face Courses

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Comprehension of Counselor Education Course Materials in Online Versus Face-to-Face

Courses

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A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education at

Winona State University

Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

_____

Comprehension of Counselor Education Course Materials in Online Versus Face-to-Face

Courses

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Chelsee J. Ahumada

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

Capstone Project Supervisor: _____

Approval Date: 5/3/16

Abstract

American society has become technology oriented, both inside and outside of the classroom. Some research findings suggest that 31% of students had taken at least one online course in 2012 (Miller & Young-Jones 2012). There are many biases, such as cheating and student biases for both online and traditional face-to-face classes. This review of literature intends to determine if online or traditional courses yield higher comprehension in the course material and how counselor education courses should respond to this research. Research has shown that skills-based courses should be taught in the traditional setting while theories and other content courses may have equal comprehension in online courses, if students are given supplemental materials.

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Courses

It is without a doubt that our society has become technology oriented, both inside and outside the classroom. Bjornsen and Archer (2015) called youth the "wired generation," where cell phones have become an extended art of the self. McCombs (2000) stated that education has made a shift from being a teacher-centered paradigm to a student-centered paradigm. Some schools have made accommodations for student preferences to enhance their learning, such as Winona State University, give students iPads for school, some provide laptops, and they may loan other equipment such as video recorders. Miller and Young-Jones (2012) noted that 31% of college students in the United States have taken at least one online course. Halupa and Caldwell (2015) stated that there are three competing tensions in education: technology, the teacher, and the institution; all of which can impact the success of using technology for online courses. Numerous studies have been conducted on various aspects of online courses including, but not limited to, cheating (Stowell, 2015), motivation for online courses (Xie & Huang, 2014), professor preferences and biases (Miller & Young-Jones 2012), online discussions and whether or not they improve test scores (Lineweaver, 2010), and what age ranges are most likely to take online courses (Divita, 2012). While some professors do not prefer online courses, Gray (2013) found that there was a nine percent (572,512 students) increase in online enrollments between 2010 and 2011 whereas traditional courses had decreased by 22,013 enrollments, in which Pittman (2015) stated that online education no longer requires justification, and is here to stay.

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the definition of comprehension is the act of grasping with intellect. It seems as though there are more online classes every year and according to

Miller and Young-Jones (2012), one third of professors find this type of classroom setting to be

inferior due to lack of course comparability and opportunities to cheat in online courses.

Blackmore, Tantam, and Deurzen (2008) stated that online learning has appeared to greatly

expand, there has been far less research completed on counselor education, perhaps due to biases

that online courses is not suitable for psychotherapy training. This literature review intends to

look at the studies, and other works to determine if taking online courses means that students will

accept a poorer quality alternative to traditional courses. This is an important question for

counselor education because social skills are deemed to be necessary.

Importance of Instructional Platform in Counselor Education

Trepal, Heberstrob, Duffey, and Evans (2007) studied internship students in a counselor

education program. These researchers argued that supervised development of effective

counseling skills is of the highest importance in a master's-level counselor program. They

continue on to say that basic attending and responding skills are the foundation for advanced

practice. Additionally, Trepal, Heberstrob, Duffey, and Evans (2007) look to the Council for

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) for guidance.

According to these authors, CACREP requires that counseling students must understand the

helping relationship in its entirety. The helping relationship include therapeutic conversations,

creating counseling goals and interventions, and terminating the client. The research in this

review of literature as well as CACREP's requirements begs the question, "Can a counselor

education student master the appropriate attending skills necessary in an online class?"

This literature review is important because of the amount of students taking online classes. If

online courses are truly inferior to traditional classes, are schools sending unqualified or

inexperienced people into the field? Are there certain curricula that are acceptable to be in an

online format and some curricula that should only be in a face-to-face class? Another question

this literature review seeks to find an answer for is, can distance learning overcome any potential

barriers to traditional courses for counselor education students?

Literature Review

There are many challenges with this literature review. It has been difficult to find enough

research on traditional courses; perhaps because they have been around for centuries and people

do not see the point in defending them, and even more difficult for counselor education courses.

When the research was broadened to general online courses, more information was readily

available. After an extensive review of models for higher education and counseling literature,

research revealed that the answer for comprehension is not so simple. There are many factors in

education that determine comprehension, not just whether the course was made available in face-

to-face or online interactions. These factors are given their own sections in the literature review

below to make it easier to view and understand.

Cheating

Miller and Young-Jones (2012) acknowledged that there has been a 358% increase in

students taking online courses. Stowell (2015) reported that 74-78% of students admitted that

online courses are easier to cheat. Bedford, Gregg, and Clinton (2011) indicated that in a survey

of 15,000 students, over 50% of those students admitted to cheating on written work and

eighteen percent admitted to cheating on an exam. Miller and Young-Jones (2012) made mention

that 64% of professors feel that it is easier to cheat in online courses. Bedford, Gregg, and

Clinton (2011) stated that social norms have been evolving and there is now more leniency

towards cheating and in some cases, it may be considered normal. Results of Bedford, Gregg,

and Clinton's (2011) research showed that when students believed that there was little chance of

them getting caught they were more likely to believe that there would be no consequences to cheating. Other students in the Clinton's (2011) study rationalized that it is better to cheat on a test than to cheat on a paper. Their study also showed that if a student has cheated once, it felt easier to cheat again.

Bell, Simone, and Whitfield (2015) believed that one weakness in online courses is that the professors cannot observe students while they utilize online tools. Stowell (2015) recommended that if students are taking online tests, they should be open-book tests so that the students are less likely to cheat. Bedford, Gregg, and Clinton (2011) looked at the utility of using a remote proctor for online classes to reduce the amount of cheating that occurred during online tests. Awad and Chinneck (1998) looked at universities who used proctors in their classrooms for tests. They explained that a proctor is a person who watches other people take tests to ensure that cheating is not occurring. They showed that proctors are useful to the exam process because they have been trained to determine when someone is cheating on an exam. Bedford, Gregg, and Clinton (2011) stated that remote proctors might be a useful way to prevent at-home cheating. Some online proctors such as Software Secure Remote Proctor, which is what Awad and Chinneck (1998) used, can be plugged into a computer. These proctors may come with a fingerprint scanner and a 360-degree camera to determine who is taking the test and whether or not the person taking the test is using outside sources to cheat. In a study, they had participants engaging in behaviors that appeared to look like cheating, such as using their phones, shuffling papers, talking to another person, and looking at a book. The purpose of this was to see if the online proctor could pick up on behaviors that looked like cheating. When the behaviors were found, the online proctor would record the behavior and email the professor a clip of the video. The authors conducted another study in which a university agreed to use online proctors for their class to determine the ease of

use. Awad and Chinneck's (1998) results showed that there might have been some positive peer pressure, in that people were less likely to cheat because more people were getting caught. Students found that the online proctor was easy to use, although stated that the online proctors would be very expensive for a student to use (Awad & Chinneck 1998).

Pittman (2015) also stated that online proctors are among one of the best ways to determine academic honesty. Pittman (2015) also stated that online proctors were very expensive. The author mentioned that the Higher Education Opportunity Act led to the creation of a bill in 2008, which urged universities to take action to prevent online cheating. Many of the universities were concerned with the cost of online proctors violating the privacy rights of students, so many stopped using online exams and instead, took a trusting approach, using projects, online discussion boards, and group work.

Others believe that open-book exams may prevent cheating as well as increase exam scores. Stowell (2015) believed that students who took open-book exams online would have higher exam scores than if they took a closed-book exam online. Stowell (2015) had students take closed-book exams in the beginning portion of the semester and then allowed students to utilize their notes and textbook for their exams. Results indicated a 6 to 10% increase in exam scores for the first open-book exam but the grades decreased after the second open-book exam. Stowell (2015) postulated that there may have been the initial increase because students were more likely to practice deeper learning strategies (i.e. studying) for the first exam and then gave less effort in their studying after the first test.

Student Preferences

Some articles mention incorporating online features to face-to-face courses, this is often called a hybrid course. In a hybrid course, the responsibility lies with the students (Haulpa &

Caldwell 2015). Mansour and Mupinga (2007) wanted to describe students' experiences in online and hybrid courses. The researchers asked students to reflect on their experiences in their course. It was found there were both positive and negative experiences for both online and hybrid courses, although there tended to be more negative experiences in online courses. The positive experiences for the hybrid course included the presence of a professor for their input, professor availability, and the students enjoyed scheduling their classes to fit their schedule. The negative experiences for the hybrid course included rigid schedules and computer problems for the online portion of the course. For the online courses, students identified positive experiences such as, convenience, understanding the class expectations, and instructor availability. The negative experiences in the online course included technical difficulties and feeling lost on the Internet. It was important to note however, that students taking either online or hybrid courses felt as though they got what they needed to learn from the course.

Bedford, Gregg, and Clinton (2011) stated that face-to-face learning helps to build rapport and trust between professors and students. Halupa and Caldwell (2015) found that students had a more pleasurable experience with online courses when supplemental materials were given. Wilson and Allen (2011) looked at success rates for college students and found that there was no significant difference between student performance in online and face-to-face courses. They believed that personal contact with the professors were critical. Wilson and Allen (2011) stated that contact could include meetings, emails, testing, and discussion boards.

Lyke and Frank (2012) compared student-learning outcomes in online and traditional classroom environments for a psychology course. These researchers gave weekly quizzes and supplemental materials to online courses while providing lectures and quizzes to the face-to-face

students. The results showed that there was no difference in learning outcomes of students in traditional classrooms compared to students in the online environment.

Blackmore, Tantam, and Deurzen (2008) conducted research on an online course called SEPTIMUS. SEPTIMUS is a one-year online psychotherapy-training course that focuses on theories of counseling. They also created a traditional course to evaluate the differences in these courses. This course was designed to increase access for students who lived in isolated areas, for students with wok and family commitments, and for students who have a disability. Blackmore, Tantam, and Deurzen's (2008) research showed that the online students reported higher satisfaction with course material than the students in the traditional course. Students in this research appeared to enjoy it because it allowed more time for self-reflection than the traditional courses and there was more anonymity. Blackmore, Tantam, and Deurzen (2008) stated that barriers the online students faced included personal choice, learning style, instructions, organization of course materials, content suitability, and technological barriers.

Supplemental Materials

Halupa and Caldwell (2015) mentioned that students are asked to learn a large amount of material in a short period of time, which can result in lower comprehension. They recommended utilizing supplemental materials. Alharbi (2015) looked at how writing could improve students' comprehension. Alharbi (2015) believed that writing is a crucial skill that students need to master in college level work. Halupa and Cadwell (2015) hypothesized that students would perform significantly better on online classes than in traditional classes if the instructor provided supplemental videos. Halupa and Caldwell (2015) took one engineering class and split it into online and traditional settings. In the traditional class, they were given a traditional lecture class, readings, and homework assignments. Those in the online classes received online lecture videos,

videos demonstrating how to solve problems, readings, and homework. Halupa and Caldwell's (2015) results showed that students in the online courses had an overall better experience, as they could watch the videos numerous times when they felt "stuck" and could take the learning at their own pace. The research showed that there was no significant difference between online and traditional test scores. Halupa and Caldwell (2015) stated that online classes might yield higher comprehension when paired with supplemental materials. This research demonstrated the importance of coming from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach.

Conversely, Bell, Simone, and Whitfield (2015) hypothesized that if students completed online homework assignments; the students would perform better on in-class quizzes and exams. Results demonstrated that students did not perform better on exams and quizzes when they completed homework assignments prior to taking in-class quizzes. Halupa and Caldwell (2015) also found that while online students may receive more supplemental material, they were less likely to review the material.

Wolfson, Cavanaugh, and Kraiger (2014) also made suggestions for online courses, agreeing that supplemental materials may be useful for online students. These authors further stated that online courses should be highly structured with clear learning objectives. They stated that discussion boards for students to provide feedback to one another is a useful learning tool.

Celik (2013) looked at the social dynamics in discussion post groups for online courses. Celik (2013) found that there were many positive interactions with their group members, with more than one third of the posts involving emotional catharsis, one fourth of the posts included an encouragement to another peer, and many started with greetings of familiarity with one another. Celik (2013) also found that only eleven percent of the posts included criticisms and three percent made up information giving.

Lineweaver (2010) took a different point of view on discussion posts, and instead, postulated that if he incorporated online discussions, students would read more of the required course material and exam scores would improve. Results from this study indicated that there was no significant difference in grades between students who did not engage in discussion posts and students who did participate in discussion posts.

Blackmore, Tantam, and Deurzen (2008) studied an online counselor education course. The authors discussed how they required their online students to post on discussion boards, and to attend a one-hour chat-room discussion every week. The students were graded based on their discussion board contributions, chat-room contributions, quizzes, and an essay. Students in the study were also provided with tutors for both online and traditional courses. Their research found that these online students did not perform significantly differently than students who attended the traditional counselor education course. The researchers also found that the online students spent more time on course materials than the traditional students, but spent less time with the tutors than the face-to-face students.

Student Diversity

Another important factor to look at in terms of courses, both online and in traditional settings is the age, gender, and ethnicity of the student. This factor was looked at to see if were cultural differences between students could impact comprehension of core material. It is important to know if minority counselor education students are able to complete online course work and utilize the skills necessary for a career in counseling.

In 1991, the US Department of Education (1994) estimated that 14.2 million (45% of the student population) undergraduate students were over the age of 25. Elder (1967) found that older adults in a classroom setting improved learning conditions, gave younger students a

broader perspective, helped younger students to strive to do well, and older adults encouraged adult, rather than childlike behaviors in class. Wladis, Conway, and Hackey (2015) looked at students in a community college setting. These authors wanted to know who succeeded in online courses. Their study of 2,600 participants showed that older students did significantly better in online classes than in traditional classes. This may be due to the fact that they have more flexibility when they are more likely to have full-time careers or family members to look after. Research showed that women performed better in traditional classes than online classes. Men did not have a difference in grades. There were no differences found in ethnicity between online and face-to-face courses.

Divita (2012) completed a qualitative study on students' ages 65 to 76 in a hybrid course on computer technology. Participants explained that they wanted to take the course so that they could communicate with their family and peers. Others expressed feeling curious about cyberspace. Some participants admitted to feeling insecure about using the Internet because they are too old, fearing that they have a decreased mental capacity. A few participants in Divita's (2012) study said that while they felt insecure, peers were also telling them that they weren't up to date with technology. From the students who engaged in the course, findings suggested that students were violating age-related expectations by using the Internet, but also showing that they could complete a hybrid course on computer technology.

Discussion

This literature review has shown that students in online courses learn as much as a student in a traditional course. There are many factors that a student in an online course can get the same amount of information as a student in a face-to-face course. These factors include academic honesty, student preferences, supplemental materials, and student diversity. Miller and

Young-Jones (2012) researched cheating and found that there is a significant increase in online course enrollments and that professors in their study had overall negative views on online courses. Mansour and Mupinga (2007) conducted a qualitative study on students and found that there are many reasons students will prefer either online or traditional courses. Researchers such as Halupa and Caldwell (2015), Bell, Simone, and Whitfield (2015), Wolfson, Cavanaugh, and Kraiger (2014), and Celik (2013) all researched different form of supplemental materials and overall found that students perform better on online courses and assignments when given assignments other than just reading the textbook. Divita (2012) was able to demonstrate that older adults are capable of learning how to use online mediums to complete coursework.

Implications for Professors

Cheating is an important factor in any program, and counselor education is no different. As shown in the research above, it is important for professors to create an online environment for students to display academic honesty. Professors may create this by open-book exams, using online proctors, or other means that they find useful to prevent cheating. Given the amount of information available on discussion posts, it may be beneficial to incorporate them into online classes. Homework assignments may want to be considered to increase course comprehension.

Results from this literature review may be used for professors who are trying to decide whether or not to make their courses an online or face-to-face interaction. A professor teaching an online course may want to consider using a proctor to avoid online cheating, as discussed previously by Bedford, Gregg, and Clinton (2011), or determine if they want their online tests to be open-book, as it reduces the likelihood of cheating (Stowell 2015). A professor teaching a traditional course may want to consider online discussion posts or other online material to help enhance learning, as Celik's (2013) research shows that students felt more positive regarding

their course when discussion boards were implemented, and Halupa and Caldwell (2015) showed that supplemental videos also indicated that students felt as though they understood the content of the course better.

The research provided in this review of literature suggests that counselor education students learn more when supplemental material is provided online, when students have discussion post and the means to build a rapport with their professors, and to reduce the chances of cheating, either by using open-book exams or by utilizing a proctor.

Implications for Students

Divita (2012) looked at the age of the student and found that if the student was motivated, the student, regardless of age, could complete an online course. Students should look at their own preferences and determine if a face-to-face course or an online course would assist them in learning their material better. Information could not be found to determine how online courses affects students with a disability. Students should ask the university for information on how their classes can accommodate for their disability.

Clinton's (2011) research showed that when students believed that there was little chance of them getting caught they were more likely to believe that there would be no consequences to cheating. When deciding whether or not to take an online or traditional course, a student should look at how they will best learn information and what steps will be taken to ensure that they maintain academic honesty.

Wolfson, Cavanaugh, and Kraiger (2014) also made suggestions for online courses, agreeing that supplemental materials may be useful for online students. A student determining which course to take may want to consider what materials are provided for them to ensure academic success.

Future Research

Future research should look at how to reduce cheating in online formats and ways to engage students with their professors. Given the numerous statistics regarding online courses, it appears inevitable that there will be more counselor education courses taught online. Future research should focus on teaching rapport-building skills in online courses to ensure that inexperienced students are not going into the counseling community. Since counselor education relies so heavily on skills building, research should look at how to learn and practice skills, such as microskills and theoretical techniques, on an online format.

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