Understanding Distance Education Challenges of Educational Psychology During the Pandemic: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

❏ While distance learning becomes more prevalent in higher education (Croft et al., 2010; Yuan & Kim, 2014; Duvall et al., 2020), teacher educators also seek an "innovative way of teaching educational psychology, via online instruction" (Hanich & Deemer, 2005, p.190).

❏ The outbreak of COVID-19 unsettled the norm of instruction as it forced some faculty to transition from their traditional face-to-face instruction to remote, hybrid, or online teaching abruptly (Olsen et al., 2020; Fujita, 2020; Karakaya, 2020; Herald & Chen, 2021). Such transition posited major barriers for instructors and learners (Trust & Whalen, 2021; Scherer et al., 2021; Herold & Chen, 2021; Yuan & Kim, 2014; Shih et al., 2021; Fathema et al., 2015; Vaughan et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

❏ Through a qualitative exploratory case study, this research strives to learn and understand the teaching practice, course design, challenges and opportunities resulting from the transition of instructional modalities during the pandemic from educational psychology faculty members who serve at land-grant institutions. From their experiences, this study aims to identify design and delivery strategies to address learner differences, needs, engagement, and accessibility, for moving forward in a setting that faculty can be proficient and flexible in both face-to-face and distance teaching modalities.

Research Questions

❑ What were the instructional challenges and opportunities that educational psychology faculty had faced during the height of the pandemic?

❑ What adaptations were implemented to address the abrupt transition from in-person to distance instruction?

❑ How do the teaching experiences during the pandemic shape educational psychology faculty's current teaching practices?

Method

❏ This study employs a qualitative exploratory case study approach that intends to enhance the "understanding of complex social phenomena" (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). The exploratory case study approach is ideal for this study due to its nature to explore a phenomenon "when the available literature or existing knowledge base is poor" (Yin, 1998, p. 236; Zainal, 2007). In this case, a deeper understanding of instructional challenges, adaptation, and practices during the pandemic is needed.

Participants and Data Collection Methods

❏ We employed convenience and random purposeful sampling methods.

❏ 10 educational psychology faculty members from 4 land-grant universities

❏ One Zoom or in-person interview per participant

❏ Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Data Analysis

❏ Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo (Mac version).
❏ We adopted thematic analysis for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). The themes resulted from the analysis "capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

Research Question 1 and Themes

❏ What were the instructional challenges and opportunities that educational psychology faculty had faced during the height of the pandemic?

    ❏ Themes

        ❏ Instructional Approaches and Ways to Address Community

            ❏ Instructional Approach

            ❏ Instructional Tool

            ❏ Community

            ❏ Instructional Challenges

Findings

Top 3 Mentioned Instructional Approaches

Instructional Approaches	
Approach	Participant
Flipped Learning	Participant 1, Participant 5
Group-based Learning	Participant 1, Participant 9
Project-Based Learning	Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 8

Findings

Sample Quotes of The Topic 3 Instructional Approaches

Flipped Learning:

"So I would say that I probably use a lot of my recorded lectures and maybe go to like a flipped classroom type of scenario where there is an expectation that they're listening to lectures outside of class, and that we're doing group work in class and practical application." (Participant 1)

Findings

Sample Quotes of The Topic 3 Instructional Approaches

Group-based Learning:

"So and with my undergraduate classes, I lecture maybe an hour, an hour and a half at most per week. And then I would usually have some type of group discussion or group activities for the remainder of our time. And if I had if I had a mixture of, of primary, or sorry, early childhood education, or secondary and secondary education, oftentimes, I would try to figure out, Okay, should I mix them up? Or should I group them with with similar interests? And so and I would also mix those groups up once or twice across the semester." (Participant 9)

Findings

Sample Quotes of The Topic 3 Instructional Approaches

Project-based Learning:

"So yeah, definitely that lots of project based learning, I don't give any multiple choice tests whatsoever. Everything that I do in class is a performance assessment. So, for example, in my classroom assessment course, students were creating assessments that they would give to their students. In my research methods, courses, a lot of times we're actually doing research. So students are collecting data, analyzing their data, building, research proposals, all of that." (Participant 8)

Findings

Top 3 Mentioned Instructional Design Models

- ❏ ADDIE
- ❏ Backward Design
- ❏ Understanding by design

Findings

Instructional Approaches (that address community)

❑ "I often play music before classes; people would start musicians from their culture. People were so happy, it's music from home. Music from Africa, Chinese music, music from Guam. It was just a little effort to energize it, maybe this effort turned into engagement." (Participant 2)

❑ "I tried to see all of my students as complete human beings, and I want them to think of me as a complete human being to instead of just a professor, like in this computer box. So I do that. I also, I start off every single class period with like, what are we celebrating this week. I found that by doing that, not only do I get to know the students a little bit more because I know what they value, what they what they go after. But it also really helped my online class community because they are so got to know that about each other." (Participant 8)

Findings

Instructional Challenges	
Adaptability	Motivation
Community	Software Accessibility
Engagement	Struggling with presence
Institutional	Technology
Interaction	Unsettled Norm
Virtual Classroom	

Findings

Snips of Instructional Challenges

❏ Engagement
  ❏ "Well, the biggest word is what I'm talking about is the challenge of getting students engaged in the activities." (Participant 4)

❏ Institutional
  ❏ There were some issues in terms of students and other faculty across the University, who are having difficulty making that shift from in person to online. Having all the courses move to online, I think was a challenge for the university because you had to increase, you have to increase storage of recorded lectures, students, you know, you had to increase, what do you call it? bandwidth for the entire campus. And so I do recall those challenges." (Participant 9)

❏ Virtual classroom
  ❏ "With the pre-service teacher population, much harder to get to know them well, because you don't see them, literally like if they have camera off like you don't see them. You don't have those, again, those in person, the eye contact, the nods, those kind of things. Much harder to really catch students who are struggling or why, biggest challenge not knowing your students as a whole, missing out on the little relationship building, the casual conversations. It's a more formal thing to go. I am going to breakout Room 1, 2, 3, that is more formal than circulating the desks. We were very challenging in Zoom." (Participant 2)

Findings

Instructional Tool

❑ Prior to the pandemic, faculty have utilized a variety of instructional tools within the courses. A couple of examples include Kahoot, Flipgrid, Google Suite, and Zoom.

❑ During the pandemic, faculty took advantage of Zoom's full capacity by creating breakout rooms, utilizing its whiteboard feature. Faculty also utilized Panopto to pre-record lectures, VoiceThread to provide feedback, Perusall for annotation, Kaltura to share visual content, and Jamboard to exchange ideas.

Research Question 2 and Themes

❏ What adaptations were implemented to address the abrupt transition from in-person to distance instruction?
   ❏ Themes
      ❏ Address Learner
         ❏ Address learner accessibility
         ❏ Address Learner Needs
         ❏ ELLs
         ❏ Learner Challenges

Findings

Learner Challenges (Sample Quotations)

❑ Distraction
  ❑ "So I could tell, for instance, some of the students on the screen would go off camera, or they would get distracted because of whatever was happening in their home environment. You know, some, some students have children that they're trying to care for, and also be a teacher for during that time." (Participant 10)

❑ Fatigue
  ❑ "I think the biggest challenges were just that the students were so exhausted. I know that they were juggling, a lot of them have kids, mainly teacher. So they were juggling having their kids at home all the time. And then them trying to work all the time and support their kids doing schoolwork." (Participant 8)

❑ Isolation
  ❑ "Isolation, family obligation, we cannot rank which person encountered harder than other person." (Participant 1)

❑ Sustainability
  ❑ "I know behind the scenes, some of the students were having things like financial and food issues. And so that wasn't directly a part of the class, but it certainly impacted the class." (Participant 5)

❑ Self-regulatory skills
  ❑ "I wish I could have done something to enhance student's self-regulatory skills." (Participant 9)

Findings

Sharing strategies to address learner needs

❏ Access to class and materials:

    ❏ "International students accessing the courses from different time zones, so I recorded both classes and posted both of them, so students in both sessions can watch." (Participant 1)

    ❏ One student has trouble reading black print on white paper. So all my handouts, I have two versions, I have a black and white, and I have a white black." (Participant 5)

Findings

Sharing strategies to address learner needs

- ❏ Checking in:
    - ❏ "I always checked in with them at the beginning of the course, and just asked how people were doing, trying to judge energy level and where they were that day and trying to adjust anything I could to try to try to keep the energy high, knowing everyone was dealing with different things." (Participant 10)

Findings

Sharing strategies to address learner needs

- ❏ Offering Flexibility:
  - ❏ "So I adapt by encouraging them to communicate. And I've always done that, but I'm seeing more of it. And providing those allowances telling them, you know, important for you to take care of yourself, your family member. Come back to class and worry about the deadline later. So providing extensions providing allowances is one way that I've adapted, providing the recordings." (Participant 7)

Findings

Sharing strategies to address learner needs

- ❏ Humanizing Teaching:
  - ❏ "Humanizing teaching. Students needed to see me as a human as someone who is struggling with them who is you know, missing deadlines. We are not always perfect. I tried to meet with them individually as a group, set up those professional learning committees, and then open each lecture with something silly." (Participant 1)

Findings

Sharing strategies to address learner needs

- Providing Support for the ELLs:
  - "I was trying to turn on captioning during advisee meetings, beneficial for students whose first language is not English. For students with language needs, being able to access course content one than one time [through Panopto and recorded Zoom sessions], that is an unintentional accommodation, which benefited them." (Participant 2)

Research Question 3 and Themes

❏ How do the teaching experiences during the pandemic shape educational psychology
   faculty's current teaching practices?
   ❏ Themes
      ❏ Changes and Advice
            ❏ Changes after the pandemic teaching
            ❏ Advice

Findings

Participant's Insight (changes & advice)

❏ Intentionally evaluate:

    ❏ "I would say don't be afraid to completely go into your class and try something different. Evaluate that and see what worked, what didn't work and adapt from there. And to me, that's part of flexibility. But that's part of what most people might call growth mindset of how do I over time become better? What I do even know what I do works? How do I continue to to modify that, given where students might be now compared to that those cohorts that came in 10 or 20 years ago?" (Participant 10)

    ❏ "In remote learning, do not try to recreate everything that you were doing in-person. Step back and think, what are the important things about my course? What are the essential experiences that people need? Evaluate if you need to do it remotely." (Participant 2)

Findings

Participant's Insight (changes & advice)

❏ Being Flexible:

  ❏ "You know, it's, I think that we are living in an era where you have to be flexible and understanding that there are going to be times where you might have to teach in a way that's uncomfortable." (Participant 9)

  ❏ "So flexibility in being available to students personalizing, and I'm not saying sharing every detail about your life, but personal enough that they feel like they know you that helps them with their comfort, even in distance situations." (Participant 7)

  ❏ "It was rough, rough on faculty, rough and students but I think we've learned some lessons plan then to be flexible. I thought again, this flexibility boost is a systemic challenge are charged and I give university systems have to be flexible, to allow flexible type of instruction. Okay, there could be some face to face, but there could also be some online and students that we are training today must know how to teach and learn in both formats. So, exposing to them even post pandemic. I would like the university system as to embrace as well as future additional psychology faculty to embrace the ability to teach." (Participant 3)

Findings

Participant's Insight (changes & advice)

❏ Getting to know your students:

    ❏ "My advice for transitioning from traditional to distance is to get to know your students as much as you can. And that can be done through I mean, whether it's a synchronous online course or asynchronous, you know, you can set up office hours. And one thing I've learned is, in this, this isn't really pandemic related is that evening office hours are pretty essential, because a lot of students have pretty packed days." (Participant 7)

Findings

Participant's Insight (changes & advice)

❏ Training Development:

  ❏ "I guess, exposure to learning theories would be good, exposure to motivational theories. You know, making sure that other instructors know that information so that they can be informed and how they design their courses." (Participant 1)

  ❏ "So I think more training, both in terms of faculty and grad students in their programs of how to how to use the technology, what's actually available, would be would be a good movement forward." (Participant 10)

  ❏ "I see professional development as a key piece that we need to embrace this will make to implement in order to prepare faculty to be able to face the challenges of teaching online, as well as developing the says in the practices of teaching online." (Participant 3)

Findings

Participant's Insight (changes & advice)

❏ Seeking resources:

    ❏ "I would tell them to not be afraid of technology." (Participant 8)

    ❏ "So go to your, your educational technology group, Instructional Design Group, go to your counseling center and get those resources and make them available to yourself and to students proactively." (Participant 5)

Discussions

- ❏ Notable instructional approaches

- ❏ Advice for moving forward

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