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STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF TEACHING PRESENCE AND FAILURE IN ONLINE
LEARNING

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Approval of Thesis

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STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF TEACHING PRESENCE AND FAILURE IN ONLINE LEARNING

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my son Noah, who is my motivation for pursuing higher education.

Noah, good luck on your learning journey as you begin your post-secondary education.

Acknowledgements

All honour and gratitude to the Creator who guided me along this journey. Without the Creator's blessings I could have not realized my dreams.

To my dear friends Yolanda Douglas, Donna Verity and Gaylyne Archibald who supported me unwaveringly throughout this process. Thank you for always offering help and encouragement when I needed it the most.

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Abstract

Canadian post-secondary institutions have made strides in assessing and evaluating the contributing factors to an effective online learning environment that engenders student success. Central to this effort, is the role of the instructor and the importance of teaching presence in an online learning environment.

This mixed methods study explores the students' perspective of teaching presence and how it impacts their online learning experience, primarily where the student has experienced a failed grade. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) teaching presence instrument was utilized in conducting a survey with a post-secondary level online student population.

The study's results indicated that there was a perceived relationship between teaching presence and failure in online learning and therefore, it is vital for teaching presence to be incorporated into the instructional design and delivery of online learning.

Keywords: community of inquiry (CoI), teaching presence, teacher presence, failure, constructivism, online learning, face-to-face, distance education

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Chapter One: Introduction

Higher education in Ontario, across Canada and around the world is a hotbed of innovation focused on expanding and improving learning opportunities and increasing success for students through online, blended and technology enhanced learning (Johnson, 2019). While the overall interest in online learning varies significantly across the sector, there is widespread agreement that online learning is playing an increasingly important role in Canada's colleges and universities. Online learning is considered the primary delivery modality of distance education and is pervasive in universities and colleges across Canada (Johnson, 2019). As a result, institutions of higher learning continue to increase online course offerings in an effort to satisfy student demand. Although this growth is impressive, it does not occur without consequences. Higher education is struggling with an increase of student withdrawal and failure in online courses.

The characteristics of the online learner has gradually shifted from a typical adult, mostly employed, placed-bound, goal oriented and intrinsically motivated to a younger, dynamic learner who is more responsive to rapid technological innovations (Dabbagh, 2007). According to Kuo et al. (2013) nearly one third of higher education students are enrolled in at least one online course. Nevertheless, students enrolled in asynchronous online learning often have to expend greater energy to manage their time effectively and sustain their motivation in the absence of a live instructor (Ekmekci, 2013). As such, students who are less self-directed require more instructor support in order to successfully complete online courses.

In 2019, more than two thirds of all Canadian post-secondary institutions indicated that online learning is either extremely important or very important to their institution's long-term plans (Johnson, 2019). However, research has indicated that online courses have several social,

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technological and motivational issues existing from both learners' and faculty's perspectives (Bawa, 2016). This challenge is frequently attributed to the nature of online education, an educational delivery model that may be more dependent on instructor behaviour and meaningful interactions between students and instructors when compared to face-to-face learning (Ekmekci, 2013).

In order to improve persistence in online learning programs, institutions need to support students in making the change to learning at a distance by enhancing student engagement, interaction and commitment. Rovai (2002) proposed that instructors who embrace supportive methodologies, may help students feel connected through a strong sense of community which leads to a productive and successful online experience.

Garrison's (2007) Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework explains the concept of interactivity in online learning. The model identifies elements which are fundamental to a successful online learning experience and has received empirical support as a useful framework for understanding the online learning experience (Majeski et al., 2018).

The three interacting components described in the framework that are the foundation to a successful, meaningful online learning experience are: social, cognitive and teaching presence. Social presence has been defined as "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to protect themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people (i.e. their full personality), through the medium of communication being used" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 94). Social presence is integral to the online learning experience because often face-to-face communication is limited or absent. Cognitive presence, is closely associated with critical thinking "which both authenticates existing knowledge and generates new knowledge which makes an intimate connection with education" (Garrison, 2017, p. 50). The adjective "critical" is linked with reasoning, evaluation

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and judgement which is associated with improvement of thinking (Garrison, 2017). Lastly, teaching presence is the design, facilitation and direction of both cognitive and social processes in a manner that supports learning in achieving meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes. The first responsibility of teaching presence is to establish course content, schedule, and assignments; the second is monitoring and managing interaction and reflection, and the third is determining learner needs and providing appropriate guidance and information (Majeski et al., 2018).

The three overlapping elements of the CoI framework, cognitive, social and teaching presence are viewed as multidimensional, interdependent and dynamic. As such, the impact of the CoI framework rests on the overlapping of all three presences which are interconnected and influence each other. The intersecting areas of the CoI presences are supporting discourse, setting climate and regulating learning (Garrison, 2017).

The intersection of social presence and teaching presence help with setting the climate in the learning environment, the intersection of social presence and cognitive presence assist in supporting discourse, while the intersection of cognitive presence and teaching presence contributes to regulating learning (Garrison et al, 2000; Garrison, 2017). Swan et al. (2009) noted that the core elements of the CoI framework are necessary for both development of community and pursuit of inquiry.

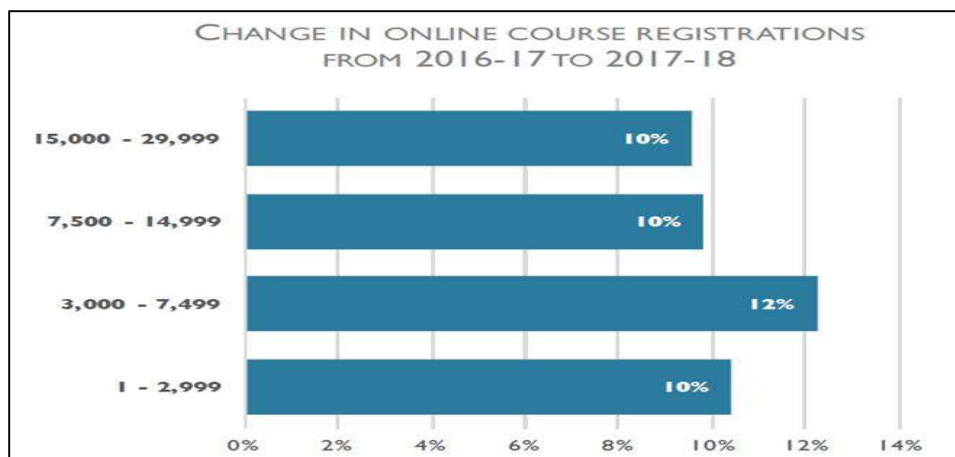
Nevertheless, there is an important need to focus on the teaching presence component of the framework, particularly the influence of teaching presence on online learners' educational experience and whether teaching presence impacts the success of online learners.

Statement of the Problem

Online learning has steadily risen to prominence as an educational delivery model. Results from the 2018 national survey that tracked the development of online and digital learning in Canadian post-secondary education indicated that majority of institutions, 71%, are expecting online enrolments to increase in the coming year (Johnson, 2019). The rapid emergence of online learning in Canada has enabled many post-secondary institutions to expand their target population while raising their profile internationally. A significant online presence is important in attracting new students to institutions, specifically international students. “International education is a significant source of revenues for Canada, with international students contributing \$21.6 billion in tuition and spending to the country’s gross domestic product supporting nearly 170,000 jobs in 2018” (Keung, 2020, para 5). “The maturity of education technology has also enabled online education to become more manageable and accessible than ever before. All a prospective student needs is a computer, an internet connection and some basic IT skills” (Yu & Hu, 2016, para 12).

Figure 1

Change in Online Course Registrations by Enrollment



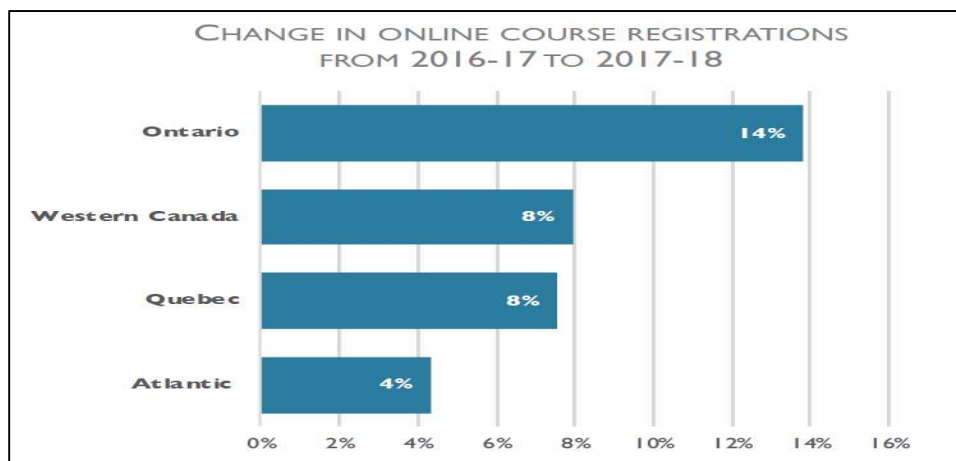
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Online course registration grew in every region of the country. The greatest growth was seen in Ontario (14%), with Western Canada and Québec showing an 8% growth rate. The Atlantic provinces still grew but at a lower (4%) rate.

Note: This figure was produced by Johnson, 2019 and it showed the change in online course registrations from 2016-17 to 2017-2018 by enrollment. From “Tracking Online Education in Canadian Universities and Colleges”, by N. Johnson, 2019, National Survey of Online and Digital Learning 2019 National Report Copyright 2019 by Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, p. 12

Figure 2

Change in Online Course Registrations by Region



Note: This figure was produced by Johnson, 2019 and it showed the change in online course registrations from 2016-17 to 2017-2018 by region. From “Tracking Online Education in Canadian Universities and Colleges”, by N. Johnson, 2019, National Survey of Online and Digital Learning 2019 National Report Copyright 2019 by Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, p. 12

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Nevertheless, the projected growth in online learning has prompted the need for more research that can explore best practices and quality assurance standards to further establish online learning as a viable equivalent to face-to-face learning. Presently, the failure among online learners is one factor that has negatively influenced the credibility of the online delivery model of education when compared to the face-to-face delivery model (Capra, 2014).

As such, the educational merit and academic rigour of online programs are still being scrutinized and often perceived negatively (Watts, 2017). However, the conclusion of “no significant difference” in learning outcomes between online and face-to-face instruction is fairly well established through various meta-analyses studies (Means et al., 2009; Bernard et al., 2009).

The failure among online learners far exceeds that of face-to-face learners. “Online courses have a 10% to 20% higher failed retention rate than traditional classroom environments Bawa (2016 p. 1).” In addition, a total of 40% to 80% of online students drop out of online classes. According to Richardson et al. (2015), online learners have reported that they feel disconnected from their peers and instructor, struggle to understand instructional goals, and miss receiving real-time feedback.

Research findings have indicated that the instructor’s ability to establish a presence in an online course can potentially alleviate the challenges online learners encounter due to lack of instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction (Garrison et al., 2000). Many online instructors are not adequately trained or have the prerequisite knowledge for enacting their presence in online environments (Richardson et al., 2015). The instructor’s role in engendering student success in online learning is considered critical, but instructors engaged in asynchronous online teaching frequently do not have the same degree of clarity in understanding how their

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presence is perceived compared with their colleagues teaching in the face-to-face learning environments (Ekmekci, 2013).

The instructor's ability to exercise effective facilitation strategies in the online learning environment can impact students' satisfaction with their learning experience. Often, during the adjustment period, students are seeking support to bolster self-efficacy and confidence which usually helps determine whether the learning experience is perceived satisfactorily (Kucuk & Richardson, 2019).

In 2018, Canadian institutions reported that the most significant barrier to the adoption of online learning was the additional faculty effort required. In addition, inadequate training for faculty was the second most significant barrier. A majority of institutions also reported that acceptance of online learning by faculty and the perception that students need more discipline to succeed in the environment are barriers to online education (Johnson, 2019).

Nevertheless, many traditional higher education faculty must face the necessity of moving content to a new, and sometimes challenging, teaching environment (Kilgore, 2016). As such, institutions must focus on creating opportunities for faculty development and support in order to engender the development and delivery of effective and engaging online learning that involves new pedagogies and strategies focused on student-centered learning (Johnson, 2019). In order to foster the best possible results, intensive training workshops, one-on-one consultation and other online resources that is centered on teaching and learning in the online environment should be provided for faculty.

The attrition of older faculty members and the hiring of younger faculty members who are more technologically savvy (Contact North, 2012) and are more receptive to the online model of educational delivery will gradually influence the shift towards faculty members who

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are enthusiastic about online learning. Moreover, the “no significant difference” perspective between fully online and traditional face-to-face instruction is fairly well established (Paul & Jefferson, 2019). Research is now exploring what instructional strategies are most effective in order to increase the efficacy of online learning.

Currently, researchers have been exploring teaching presence and the impact it has on factors such as: the student’s learning experience, level of satisfaction, and failure or success rate in the online learning environment. The basis for some of these studies has been grounded in the CoI framework and its research methodology. The teaching presence component of the framework includes three elements: design and organization, facilitation, and direct instruction (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Educationally, the CoI framework focuses on the active and creative engagement of learners to think and learn creatively (Garrison, 2017,) and therefore, creates a significant advantage for grounding the research in a comprehensive theoretical framework to ensure that the learning experience is not defined by the technology.

The relationship between the instructor and student is central to the learning process, and has become even more significant as education continues to rapidly move online. As such, many of the interactions present in face-to-face learning have been displaced by new technologies or have become impractical due to geographic boundaries.

Significant changes in the instructor-student dynamics have created a need for increased research in the emerging roles and responsibilities of instructors. This study examines the instructor’s role in teaching presence as evidenced by the teaching presence instrument’s item indicators that focus on the teacher and highlights the actions of the teacher as a central element in establishing teaching presence (Lynch, 2016).

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In the current situation of rapid change in online learning, it is important to focus on the teacher's role since they are often tasked with responsibilities of teaching that range from the selection of appropriate instructional methods to fostering positive and supportive learning environments. Hence, there is robust evidence that teachers play a critical and influential role in supporting student achievement.

Canadian post-secondary institutions continue to experience rapid growth in the online learning delivery model due to the educational needs of their student population. Therefore, the need to conduct further research that explores the effect of teaching presence on student's failure in online learning is critical, due to the current unfavourable statistics on failure in online learning. For most accredited institutions the student's ability to complete an online course and obtain a final grade that meets or exceeds the institution's established pass mark determines the student's academic success for a particular course.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to explore the student's perception of teaching presence and their failure in an online learning environment.

Research Question

The research question asks, "What is the student's perception of a relationship between teaching presence and their failure in an online learning environment?"

The sub-question is as follows:

Does the student distinguish between the role of the instructor and the function of teaching presence?

A quantitative survey instrument will be used to measure the students' views on the elements of teaching presence based on the CoI survey (design and organization; facilitation and

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direct instruction). Simultaneously, students' perceptions and experiences will be examined through qualitative data collected from the same survey. Participants will elaborate on their ranking for each question by providing additional comments. The rationale for combining both quantitative and qualitative data methods is to provide a unified understanding by making comparison within a discussion, presenting first the quantitative set of findings then the qualitative findings which will either confirm or disconfirm the statistical results (Creswell, 2014).

Significance of Research

An exploration into teaching presence and the CoI framework as it relates to student's perception of their failure in online learning is an important study to undertake. Due to the continued exponential growth in online learning, it is evident that adequate preparation of instructors who venture into this new mode of teaching and learning is vital to its successful implementation (Shea et al., 2010).

Research results would show whether the three elements of teaching presence (design and organization; facilitation and direct instruction) impact instructional design, pedagogical, and managerial roles in asynchronous online courses as well as the student's perception of their learning experience and its impact on their success in online learning. Furthermore, this study will significantly add to the body of research on teaching presence in online learning and contribute to quality assurance standards for instructional design and delivery.

Conducting a study on the student's perception of teaching presence and failure in online learning is a pertinent research exercise. The research findings would shed light on whether, or how, teaching presence impacts online students' failure based on their perception. The findings

would also provide a benchmark for improvement in the quality standard of instructional design and delivery of online course content.

It is important to note that the focus of the study is not to provide a comparison of the perspectives of participants who have either failed or not failed in online learning, but to focus on participants who have failed and to gain an understanding of their perspective on teaching presence in relation to their failure.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

According to Mauch and Park (2003) a limitation is a “factor that may or will affect the study but is not under control of the researcher” (p. 114). This study is conducted using an online survey; however, participation in the study is voluntary and by self-selection. Therefore, the collection of data is dependent on the participants’ willingness to participate in the study. The number of participants ($n = 137$) involved in the study create a limitation for the study in terms of the efficacy of generalizing the results. Another reasonable limitation is that some participants may be overly subjective in their comments in a negative manner because of the failure they have experienced in the online learning environment. In addition, the freedom of expression that is inherent in the qualitative data collection process may allow participants to provide unguided responses that may not always align with the survey questions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that are under the control of the researcher, as a result, participants of the study were limited to undergraduate students who are enrolled at a university in Canada.

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The survey focused on undergraduate participants since they have less experience in the post-secondary online learning environment and may perceive the significance of teaching presence more central to their learning experience.

All participants included in the study had previously completed and failed an online course. However, the sharing of their online learning experience in the survey is not limited to any one particular academic institution and, as such, their views may also encompass their online experience from other academic institutions or organizations.

The study period was planned for mid-semester, a less busy period during the semester selected in order to garner optimal participation.

Definition of Terms

Asynchronous online courses – Courses where students are not required to participate in any sessions at the same time as the instructor or other students. These are online courses facilitated with the use of a Learning Management System (LMS).

Constructivism – Constructivism is a theory of learning based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by the learner based on mental activity. Learners are considered to be active organisms seeking meaning. Constructions of meaning may initially bear little relationship to reality but will become increasingly more complex, differentiated and realistic as time goes on.

Face-to-Face Learning – when the instructor and students meet in a physical place that is devoted to instruction where the teaching and learning takes place at the same time. In this setting all performances and displays of work are allowed.

Synonym: traditional learning

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Failure – when students do not meet an institution’s expected academic performance for a particular course based on required assessments.

Online Learner – a student who participates in an asynchronous or synchronous educational environment that capitalizes on internet communication technologies to access information and create an engaged community of inquiry and discourse (Garrison et al., 2004).

Synonym: distance learner

Online Learning – there are many definitions of online learning; however, for the purpose of this study the definition by Simonson et al. (2012) which defines online learning as courses where least 80% of the content at is delivered online will be used. Typically, these courses have no face-to-face meetings.

Synonyms: distance learning, e-learning, distance education, remote learning, virtual learning

Student Satisfaction – an assessment of an individual learning experience based on an expectation of how the learning outcomes of a curriculum will be achieved.

Synchronous online courses – Courses where students need to participate at the same time as an instructor, but at a separate location other than an institutional campus. These courses may be delivered by video conferencing, web conferencing, audio conferencing, etc.

Teacher – a person who teaches or instructs especially as a profession by helping students to acquire knowledge, competence or virtue

Synonym: instructor

Teaching Presence – is one of three overlapping elements of the CoI framework (a process model of online learning at the core of which is collaborative approach). Garrison (2017)

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described teaching presence as an inherent need for an architect and facilitator to design, direct and inform the transaction to ensure the online learning environment is productive and sustainable.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

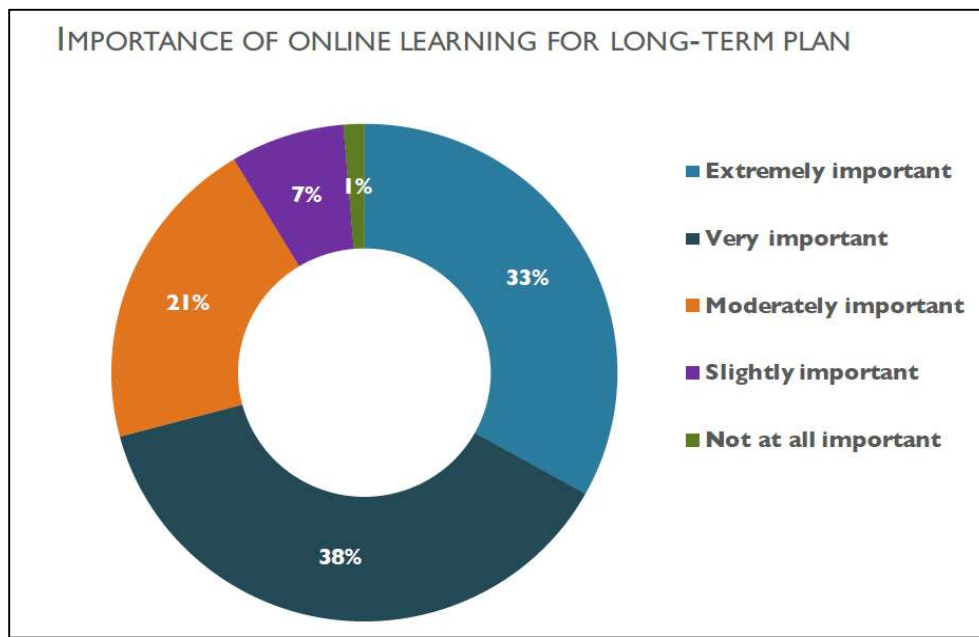
Due to its rapid adoption over the past decade the argument can be made that online learning is no longer considered a novelty. Since the turn of the 21st century, online learning has emerged as the most viable alternative to face-to-face instructions in post-secondary institutions (Garrison, 2017). This is due to its mode of educational delivery that offers convenient access, asynchronous participation and a benefit-cost ratio that both students and institutions find favourable. In addition, an abundance of communication technologies that can sustain the connection of learners and instantly access information has created a significant shift in the conception and acceptance of online learning (Garrison, 2017).

The benefits of online learning are indisputable. The barriers inherent to traditional teaching and learning such as time, space, location, and access are largely eliminated with asynchronous online learning (Capra, 2014). Students now have the opportunity to transcend socio-economic and geographic barriers globally in order to access post-secondary education. This educational delivery model has become a defining element in our social system, as such post-secondary institutions are offering an increased number of online courses each year in order to meet student demand. A recent study by Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, indicated that of the 234 institutions included in their roster, 177 institutions (76%) offered some form of online learning and 57 institutions (24%) did not (Johnson, 2019).

As a result, a growing number of post-secondary institutions are integrating online learning as a strategic component of their organization's vision. In Canada, most post-secondary institutions see online learning as very important for their future plans, and most either have a strategy or plan for online learning or are developing one (Johnson, 2019).

Figure 3

Importance of Online Learning for Long-Term Plan



Note: This figure was produced by Johnson, 2019 and it depicted the importance of online long-term planning to post-secondary institutions in Canada. From “Tracking Online Education in Canadian Universities and Colleges”, by N. Johnson, 2019, National Survey of Online and Digital Learning 2019 National Report Copyright 2019 by Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, p. 32

In 2019, 71% of all Canadian post-secondary institutions included in a national study indicated that online learning is either extremely important or very important to their institution long-term (Johnson, 2019). In addition, a substantial proportion of institutions are moving to expand online teaching.

Online learning has gained significance and acceptance due to its growth in scale and a promising foreseeable future. However, post-secondary institutions offering online courses

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continue to deal simultaneously with increasing demand and higher rates of failure or withdrawal (Ekmecki, 2013). According to McClannon et al. (2018) as online learning continues to become more ubiquitous, it is imperative for researchers to understand factors that influence student success in these environments. The use of traditional systems that reinforces teacher-driven, content delivery methods can often lead to frustration and even attrition on the part of many students. Students enrolled in asynchronous online learning often have to expend greater energy to manage their time effectively and sustain their motivation in the absence of a live instructor (Brophy, 2010). Furthermore, some students struggle with the enormous level of autonomy and time management required to successfully complete online courses. Cole et al. (2017) in their study analyzed data from 190 online undergraduate students which suggested that student predispositions to receiving instructor feedback and student perceptions of teaching presence provided strong prediction of student motivation toward online courses

Some researchers view isolation and disconnectedness as primary causes of attrition in online courses. As such, learners' sense of community is a common theme found in the literature related to online learning. These communities are often referred to in the literature as "learning communities," "virtual communities," and "communities of practice," but all refer to the same general description of learner groups (McClannon et al., 2018) and they are important in heightening students' participation and motivation to learn.

Students also require frequent support from the instructor to alleviate feelings of isolation and insecurity. The lack of visual cues and other interactions that are absent in online learning requires instructors to be present throughout the duration of the course to provide complete and explicit directions and to deliver ongoing feedback (Barton & Maness, 2017). Furthermore, students who are accustomed to learning in a traditional learning environment and thrive on

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instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction, may have difficulty adjusting to the comparably impersonal nature of online learning (Capra, 2014). Due to the feeling of isolation and estrangement from their instructor and other students they are more likely to fall behind (Flannery, 2011) because they become disengaged with the course content.

While some students are successful because of their ability to exercise self-directedness, other students are dependent on instructor support in order to successfully navigate the learning environment. As such, teaching presence is central to the design and delivery of online learning and plays an important role in how students perceive the learning experience and whether they succeed or fail in a particular course.

Teaching presence requires the instructor to provide a balance between social presence and cognitive presence, so the online course does not become a social setting or an inflexible programmed course of instruction. Teaching presence includes how the design and organization of the course has been laid out, how it is facilitated and how much direct instruction takes place. (Garrison, 2017).

Creating teaching presence in the online learning environment is critical. According to Lehman and Conceição (2010) “people are social beings by nature, and today the internet is one of our social spaces” (p. 11). Teaching presence is the voice of the facilitator, which provides the leadership for critical discourse among students, delivers constructive critique and gives formative feedback.

Studies on the correlation between teaching presence and student failure in online learning appear limited at present. However, various research literature does focus on student persistence, satisfaction and interactivity in online learning in relation to withdrawal and attrition rates. For example, Croxton’s (2014) study reviewed empirical literature through the lens of

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Bandura's social cognitive theory, Anderson's interaction equivalency, and Tinto's social integration theory. The study's findings highlighted instructor-to-student interaction as a primary variable of student satisfaction and persistence in online learning.

Sevier and Troja (2014), conducted two studies that both examined the relationship between motivational variables and satisfaction in online learning. College students who were enrolled in face-to-face psychology classes who had taken at least one online course were surveyed. The hypothesis from the two studies were tested and results reported that the need for affiliation may play a significant role in a student's satisfaction with their online experience, but the need for autonomy and mastery are less important.

Finally, Barton and Maness (2017) discussed a study conducted at Wake Technical Community College where the teaching presence survey, which is a part of the CoI framework, was used to determine if there was a correlation between student satisfaction with teaching presence in online learning. The results indicated that student satisfaction with online communication improved with good course design and organization. While facilitation and direct instruction were seen as significant factors, course design and organization were considered as highly significant.

Often students struggle with online courses because they are unaware of the course expectations or they may perceive online courses to be easier than courses taken in the traditional learning environment. In reality, online courses require more discipline and often more work (Simonson et al., 2012). In addition, students often put themselves at a risk of failure by neglecting to consistently engage with the necessary course materials such as required textbooks and online learning modules (Fetzner, 2013). Other students may encounter a learning curve when learning in a virtual environment rather than a traditional classroom due to lack of

familiarity with Learning Management Systems (LMS) and other forms of technology incorporated in the course design and delivery (Revak, 2020).

The CoI Framework

According to Cleveland-Innes et al. (2007), the Community of Inquiry model which was originally proposed by Garrison et al. (2000) provides a conceptual framework around which to study online learning and learner adjustment. The theoretical foundation is based on the work of John Dewey (1938). “At the core of Dewey’s philosophy are collaboration, free intercourse and the juxtaposition of subjective and shared worlds” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 2).

The creation of a community of learners is important in facilitating critical discourse and reflection, and so it is vital that individual knowledge construction is shaped by the social environment. However, the environment should provide choice as well as diversity of thought and perspectives that will encourage critical thinking and reflection. Garrison (2017) noted that Dewey (1938) considered such an environment critical for the reflection and inquiry that is essential for a meaningful educational transaction. Garrison (2017) posited that “the necessity of a community of learners becomes apparent with the demands of an evolving knowledge society that creates expectations for individuals to be independent thinkers and interdependent collaborative learners” (p. 22)

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework is a process model of online learning, the core of which is a collaborative constructive approach (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Garrison et al., 2000). The CoI framework further assumes that effective online learning, especially higher order learning, requires the development of community and that such development is a significant challenge in the online learning environment. “More specifically, the CoI framework establishes procedures for critical inquiry and the collaborative construction of personal meaningful and

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shared understanding. It represents a process of designing and delivering deep meaningful learning experiences through the development of three interdependent elements -social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence” (Garrison, 2017, p. 24).

Figure 4

Community of Inquiry Framework



Note: This figure was produced by Garrison, 2017 and illustrates the community of inquiry framework. From *E-Learning in the 21st Century*, by D. R. Garrison, Copyright 2017 Taylor and Francis, p. 25

Social Presence

Swan et al. (2008) describes “social presence” as the degree to which participants in computer-mediated communication feel affectively connected to one another. Social presence is arguably the most extensively researched of the three presences in the CoI framework. “Social

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presence is the ability of participants to identify with a group, communicate openly in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective relationships progressively by way of projecting their individual personalities” (Garrison, 2017, p. 25).

Establishing social presence in a text-based learning environment is challenging. Furthermore, making the shift from spoken communication to written communication in an online learning environment presents a unique challenge because written communication is void of the sense of immediacy that builds personal relationships.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence is at the core of a community of inquiry and is closely associated with critical thinking (Garrison, 2017; Swan et al., 2008). Garrison (2017) postulated that cognitive presence is a condition of higher order thinking and learning that is focused on critical reflection and discourse. “Cognitive presence is defined in terms of a cycle of practical inquiry where participants move deliberately from understanding the problem or issue through exploration, integration and application” (Garrison, 2007, p. 65).

“Cognitive presence describes the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse (Swan et al., 2008, p. 2). “The development of the cognitive presence construct by Garrison et al. (2000) is grounded in the critical thinking literature and operationalized by the Practical Inquiry (PI) model” (Swan et al., 2008, p. 4). Garrison (2017) explained the PI model as a representation of “a generic structure of critical inquiry that operationalizes the inseparability of reflection and discourse and the multi-phased process designed to collaboratively construct meaning and confirm understanding” (p. 26).

Teaching Presence

The purpose of teaching presence is to bring elements of a community of inquiry together in a balanced and functional relationship that is consistent with the expected learning outcomes while respecting the needs and encouraging active engagement of the learners (Garrison, 2017).

Shea et al. (2005) noted that previous research points to the critical role that community can play in building and sustaining productive learning; and that teaching presence, defined as the core roles of the instructor, is among the most promising mechanism for developing online learning. However, Arbaugh and Hwang (2006) and Garrison (2017) noted that of the three types of presences, teaching presence is the least researched and conceptually developed.

According to Shea et al. (2005), the teaching presence model designed by Anderson and his colleagues have three categories: instructional design and organization, facilitation and direct instruction.

First, the instructional design and organization category of teaching presence deals with the planning issues, before and during the educational experience (Garrison et al., 2000). This category addresses concerns with the setting of the curriculum; designing methods and assessment; establishing time parameters and utilizing the medium. The instructional design and organization category is described by Garrison et al. (2000) as the setting of explicit and implicit structural boundaries and organizational guidelines.

Second, the facilitation category of teaching presence is concerned with ensuring the acquisition of knowledge is done in a productive and valid manner. The process is challenging and stimulating, however, facilitation is crucial to creating and maintaining a community of inquiry (Garrison, 2017). The category focuses on the academic integrity of a collaborative community of learners. “It is a process of creating an effective group consciousness for the

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purpose of sharing meaning, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, and generally seeking to reach consensus and understanding” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 25). The instructor’s role is to actively intervene and engage less active participants by acknowledging individual contributions; reinforcing appropriate contributions; focusing the discussions; and facilitating and fostering the educational transaction.

Third, direct instruction includes indicators that assess the discourse and the effectiveness of the educational process (Garrison, 2017). “The instructor’s responsibility is to facilitate reflection and discourse by presenting content and proactively guiding and summarizing the discussion as well as confirming understanding through various means of assessment and feedback” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 25). The instructor also has an inherent responsibility to directly intervene whenever academic challenges occur however, intervention must be conducted with openness so that the learner is a respected participant in the transaction.

In the following table, Swan et al. (2009) summarized the three presences as well as their respective categories and provided examples of the presences that have been consistently used to test the structure of the framework.

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Table 1

Categories and Indicators

ELEMENTS	CATEGORIES	INDICATORS (examples only)
Social Presence	Open Communication Group Cohesion Affective Expression	Risk-free expression Encourage collaboration Emoticons
Cognitive Presence	Triggering Event Exploration Integration Resolution	Sense of puzzlement Information exchange Connecting ideas Apply new ideas
Teaching Presence	Design & Organization Facilitating Discourse Direct Instruction	Setting curriculum & methods Sharing personal meaning Focusing discussion

Note. This table demonstrates the three elements, categories and indicators of the CoI framework.

The Focus on Teaching Presence

The CoI framework specifically establishes procedures for critical inquiry and collaborative construction of personal meaningful and shared understanding. The development of all three interdependent elements of the framework play an integral role in designing and delivering deep and meaningful learning experiences (Garrison, 2017).

Cognitive and social presences are associated with the learner's ability and effort to engage with course content and the larger social environment present within an online course. However, it is instructor immediacy that is reflected through teaching presence that creates a feeling of closeness or a sense of belonging and also improves both affect and cognitive learning (Nagel & Kotze, 2010); and to an extent, the building of self-efficacy and confidence among learners. The need for effective leadership in online learning environments remains, since there are ongoing difficulties in sustaining participation and critical discourse among learners. Low

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levels of interest and participation can result from lack of structure and focus due to an informal nature and excessively “democratic” approach (Garrison, 2017).

According to Garrison (2017) “teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (p. 27). As such it is more beneficial to focus on the teaching presence element of the model for this particular study rather than the entire CoI model, considering that the emphasis is to determine whether there is a perceived relationship between teaching presence and failure among learners.

While it is evident that the other elements in the CoI model are of equal importance, the teaching presence element is seen as the reinforcing element in the model. Garrison (2017) states that the “function of teaching presence is to bring the elements of a community of inquiry together in a balanced and functional relationship congruent with expected outcomes while respecting the needs and encouraging active engagement of learners” (p. 27).

As such, emphasis is being placed on both researching the teaching presence element of the CoI model to determine if these factors have a perceived influence on students’ failure in online learning, and identifying how the actions of the instructor can influence students’ performance through the execution and delivery of the teaching presence element of the model. Furthermore, research on teaching presence has demonstrated that it is a significant predictor of students’ satisfaction and perceived learning in online courses (Caskurlu, 2018).

Garrison (2017) noted that “the function of teaching presence is to bring the community of inquiry together in a balanced and functional relationship congruent with the intended outcomes while respecting the needs and encouraging active engagement of learners” (p. 27). Garrison further noted that teaching presence is used to reflect the shared roles of responsibilities

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of the community of inquiry. As such it is important for this research to also assess the opportunity for students' to take the lead in teaching presence through a collaborative approach with the instructor.

Garrison (2017) clarifies the responsibility of the student in fostering teaching presence.

In discussing the concept of teaching presence, Garrison (2017) noted:

it should be kept in mind that there is no “learner” presence or “teacher” presence per se. Each participant (teacher and students) assumes varying degrees of teaching presence (notwithstanding that the instructor will generally exhibit greater teaching presence at various times). The goal is always to have students assume more teaching presence and become increasingly responsible to construct meaning and understanding. (p. 29)

According to Garrison (2017) the concept of teachING presence and not teachER presence is used to reflect the shared roles and responsibilities of a community of inquiry. Garrison noted that teacher presence is associated with the early applications of online learning using computer conferencing where the lack of leadership in the learning environment was apparent. The main difficulty with this practice was sustaining participation and discourse in the learning environment. The low levels of interest and participation were rooted in the lack of structure and focus resulting from the informal nature and excessively “democratic” approach of teacher presence.

Teaching presence on the other hand, addresses the need for full and open participation which is essential in a community of inquiry, but also focuses on the inherent need for an architect and facilitator to design, direct and inform the learning transaction in order to ensure learning is productive and sustainable.

The Emotional Aspect of Online Learning

The CoI framework has been fully established as a model with three main elements of presence (social, cognitive and teaching). However, research conducted by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) has indicated that emotional presence, as identified by Garrison et al. (2000) as part of social presence in the CoI framework, should be considered as a possible expanded role beyond the influence found in social presence.

According to Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) “those [who] engage in online learning deal with the effects of emotion on a daily basis, whether in designing instruction, teaching, or learning online” (p. 272). Most importantly, Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) mentioned the work of Damasio and LeDoux which independently suggests that emotion is neither an objective nor outcome of learning yet it is central to cognition” (p. 272-3).

In discussing the emotional aspect of understanding presence, Lehman and Conceição (2010) described emotional presence as the ability to display feeling through words, symbols, and interaction with others in the online environment in an authentic manner. The existence of emotional presence allows learners and instructors to connect with others genuinely during the online learning experience.

Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) cited Cottrell (2005) in explaining that excessive emotion can harm rational thinking and lack of emotion can likewise create flawed thinking. Emotions act as a gatekeeper for our perceptions and functions both with and without the intervention of thought (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Determining how to best integrate and control emotions in an online learning environment is a new and important challenge for educators that requires more consideration.

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Adjusting to online learning can create negative emotions for online learners irrespective of maturity or age and can have a negative impact on the online learning experience. As a result, it is essential that the role of emotion is considered in online learning in order to better recognize the learning environment as the creation of a learning community that fosters online interaction among participants (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). In addition, “thoughtful consideration of emotions and possible facilitation strategies in response to negative emotions during the online adjustment process are both timely and important” (p. 273).

Significance of Study

Conducting a study on the student’s perception of teaching presence and failure in online learning will contribute to the existing literature by determining whether there is a link between teaching presence and the failure of online learners. The ability to access and utilize each instrument within the CoI survey free of cost provides the opportunity to appropriately tailor the research survey to assess participants on the specific element of the framework relevant to the research as well as create opportunities in instructional design and course delivery to match students’ needs (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). The results of the study will further determine the value and importance of the instructor’s role for design and organization, facilitation, and direct instruction (teaching presence) in online learning.

State of Knowledge

Early studies conducted utilizing the CoI survey included: Arbaugh et al. (2008); Arbaugh and Hwang (2006); Swan et al. (2009); Shea et al. (2005); Anderson et al. (2001); Akyol and Garrison (2008); Nagel and Kotzé (2010); Boston et al. (2010); and Shea et al. (2006). Swan et al. (2009) noted:

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with some important exceptions, the research has mostly involved single institutions and often single courses. Inter-institutional and intra-institutional research is needed, both to validate the model as a whole and to make use of the model in a myriad of studies that could move online learning research significantly forward (p. 18).

Arbaugh et al. (2008) noted that “the increasing reliability and validity of CoI measurements carries implications not only for researchers interested in the framework, but also for course designers, degree program administrators, and instructors” (p.136). Anderson et al. (2001) study particularly focused on “developing the conceptual framework to understand, measure and improve the function of “teaching presence” within a computer conference” (p. 15).

Other studies conducted utilizing the CoI framework includes: Watson et al. (2016); Kupezynski et al. (2010); Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016); Zhang et al. (2016) and Skramstad et al. (2012). Zhang et al. (2016) investigated whether teaching presence would impact online learners’ passive, active constructive, and interactive engagement behaviours. Kupezynski et al. (2010) explored student perceptions of the impact of the indicators of teaching presence and their success in online courses. Watts (2017) conducted a pilot study to support the suggestion that the CoI framework can help to communicate the value of online learning to a variety of stakeholders, including prospective and current students’ administrators, instructors, and potential stakeholders. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) in discussing their study on relationships between community of inquiry factors and perceived learning stated that the results of the study clearly supported the foundational constructs of the CoI theory.

Bozkurt (2019) conducted a study that investigated and explored the intellectual networks and dynamics of the distance education field by examining publications cited in sampled journals for more than a century. The articles that the study found to be most cited and bridged the

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intellectual network were considered as pivotal contributions. The CoI framework and its three elements: cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence was considered as one of four pivotal contributions identified by the study and the one with the greatest impact. Bozkurt (2019) further noted that the value of the CoI framework “lies in its potential to provide effective learning experiences in computer-based, online educational spaces” (p. 505).

Presently, the research literature has provided some insight on the role of emotional presence and whether it should be seen as a fourth element of the CoI framework or seen solely in terms of emotional expression, which, in turn is a part of social presence. Majeski et al. (2018) suggested that while the CoI framework provide a holistic approach to teaching and learning, a fuller understanding of emotional presence is needed for its powerful potential to be realized. Cleveland-Innes & Campbell (2012) noted that “the creative innovation that follows the development of online learning provides a unique place for the study of emotional presence and learning” (p. 272). Moreover, research from numerous studies have indicated that emotions are an integral part of the learning environment and influence students’ learning experiences.

The CoI model has received empirical support as a useful framework for understanding the online learning experience (Majeski et al., 2018). However, more research is encouraged to address questions on the refinement of CoI measures and whether they should be used as a course and program assessment tool in addition to research purposes (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) also suggested that despite limitations to their study the CoI framework may provide guidelines for the construction of online courses and recommended that course designers become more knowledgeable about the framework.

Further research is required to conclusively define the components of teaching presence (Swan et al., 2009). Presently, the teaching presence element of the CoI framework consists of

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three components of teaching presence (design and organization, facilitation and direct instruction) however, a study conducted by Shea et al. (2006) concluded that a two-factor solution combining facilitation and direct instruction into a single factor, is also possible. In addition, with emotional presence being discussed theoretically as a fourth element of the CoI framework, there is an opportunity for future research to empirically examine the relationship of different aspects of emotions to teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence. Along with investigating how the three different kinds of presence may be influenced by emotions in the online learning environment (Majeski et al., 2018; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

Summary

The ongoing interest in online education has created a growing and competitive market for online courses, consequently efforts to deliver quality online courses is an important long-term strategy for post-secondary institutions (Kucuk & Richardson, 2019).

Nevertheless, the failure and withdrawal rates are persistent throughout online learning and continue to have a negative impact on the model of educational delivery. As such, it is vital that the CoI framework and particularly teaching presence is considered central in improving the quality of the design and delivery of online learning. Increased teaching presence facilitates instructor-student interaction and encourages students to develop a learning community that engenders active engagement in the learning process (Garrison, 2017; Kucuk & Richardson, 2019).

Ongoing research continues to play a significant role in this effort, therefore it is necessary that further research is conducted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the contributing factors to effectively and successfully advance the state of knowledge in this area. The CoI framework will continue to play a pivotal role in research in this area, as Swan et al.

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(2009) concluded, “while the CoI framework holds great promise for bringing order and a theoretical base to research in online learning, there is obviously much work to be done before it can meet that promise” (p. 51).

In the next chapter, the constructivist learning theory which informs the research approach will be explored as well as the mixed methods research design (convergent parallel mixed methods) will be applied to the research design and data analysis process.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The mixed methods research design applied in this study is discussed in detail in the chapter. However, the chapter begins with a discussion on constructivism which is a learning theory that is learner-centered and one of its goals is to create a learning environment that includes communication and collaboration which is central to the online learning environment.

Philosophical Assumptions: Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory that ascribes the notion that “others hold a different world view” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8) and is an approach that commonly informs qualitative research.

The constructivist ideology asserts that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. According to Carwile (2007) constructivism is founded on the notion that “the only important reality is in the learner’s mind, and the goal of learning is to construct in the learner’s mind its own, unique conception of events” (para 3). Constructivism is based on observation and scientific study about how people learn. The theory describes learning as people constructing their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing and reflecting on those experiences.

Dewey (1938) discussed an experience-based model of education which implied that it is imperative for students learning new material to find a way to ground unfamiliar concepts and ideas within the scope of their ordinary life-experiences. Dewey's progressive learning theory is premised on the notion that people (including young people) are not just blank slates waiting to be filled with knowledge from kindergarten through college. Instead, Dewey suggested that students organize fact-based comprehension through meta-cognition, or by building onto previous experiences, preconceptions, and knowledge, and for that reason, the educator's role should be centered on creating an educative experience.

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According to Yilmaz (2008) constructivism replaces the traditional concept of truth as an accurate representation of an external world based on the concept of validity, meaning that, descriptions of states or events of the world are relative to the observer. Therefore, the constructive perspective theorizes that knowledge is not passively received from the world or from other authoritative sources but is constructed by individuals or groups to make sense of their own experiential worlds.

Swan et al. (2009) discussed the importance of further research of the constructivist approach in online learning; they noted that inquiry and community were at the core of John Dewey's educational philosophy and practice. Dewey held that an educational experience must fuse the interests of the individual development upon community:

For Dewey, inquiry was an essential social activity. Dewey believed that through collaboration that respected the individual, students would assume responsibility to actively construct and confirm meaning. It is this collaborative constructive approach that is worthy of further exploration in online learning. (p. 44)

Constructivism holds that learners are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Instead, learners are actively trying to create meaning and often select and pursue their own learning. Constructivist principles acknowledge the complexity and messiness of real-life learning. However, it is noted that learning environments that emulate the "fuzziness" of this learning will be more effective in preparing learners for lifelong learning (Siemens, 2005).

Creswell (2014, p. 9) highlighted assumptions that have been made in discussions about constructivism:

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1. Human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that participants can share their views.
2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on historical and social perspectives—we are all born into a world of being bestowed upon us by culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and background.
3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive; the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field.

As a theory, constructivism suggests that learning is neither a stimulus response phenomenon nor a passive process of receiving knowledge. Alternatively, it is “an adaptive activity requiring building conceptual structures and self-regulation through reflection and abstraction, learning is an active process of knowledge construction influenced by how one interacts with and interprets new ideas and events” (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 165).

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher’s role in qualitative research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2014). Constructivist researchers frequently address the process of interaction among individuals and “they focus on specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (p. 8).

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Furthermore, researchers are aware that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation. As a result, they position themselves in the research so they can recognize how their interpretation flows from personal, cultural and historical experiences; as such they are expected to interact in the lives of the participants when conducting research. The constructivist researcher generates, or inductively develops, a theory or pattern of meaning instead of starting with theory. The intent is to “make sense of (or interpret) the meanings that others have about the world” (Creswell, 2014).

In contrast, in quantitative research, the positivist researcher’s approach relies specifically on scientific evidence such as experiments and statistics to reveal a true nature of how society operates. To be non-biased, the researcher is expected to keep distance and have minimal or no contact with the participants (Neuman, 2011).

Mixed Methods Research Design

This study utilizes the mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research “is the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches that provide a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007 p. 9). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) offered an example of a mixed methods research question as, “Do participant views from interviews and standardized instruments converge or depart?” (p. 9). Neither qualitative nor quantitative approaches would provide a satisfactory answer to the research question.

Some of the shortcomings of quantitative research include its weakness in understanding the context or settings in which people communicate, and the voices of participants are not directly heard; however, qualitative research addresses these shortcomings because participants’ voices and words are added into the study, which allows for a better understanding of how

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participants think (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). As Creswell (2014) noted “The key assumption of this approach is that qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information-often detailed views of participants qualitatively and scores on instruments quantitatively-and together they yield results that should be the same” (p. 219).

The value and the rationale for selecting mixed methods research occurs at the general, practical and procedural levels (Creswell, 2014). At the general level, mixed methods research is preferred because of its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research and minimizing the limitations of both approaches. At a practical level, mixed methods research provides a sophisticated complex approach to researchers who are at the forefront of new research procedures. At the procedural level, it is an effective strategy that allows for a more complete understanding of research problems and questions. Creswell (2014) continues, mixed methods research has gone through several periods of development which includes the formative stage, the philosophical debates, the procedural developments, and more recently reflective positions (noting controversies and debates) and expansion into different disciplines and into many countries throughout the world.

There are six mixed methods designs: convergent parallel mixed methods, explanatory sequential mixed methods, exploratory sequential mixed methods, embedded mixed methods, transformative mixed methods, and multiphase mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sahin & Öztürk, 2019).

This study utilized the convergent parallel mixed methods design. The convergent parallel mixed methods design was selected from the six types of mixed methods design as the preferred method because it allowed the researcher to converge both the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research

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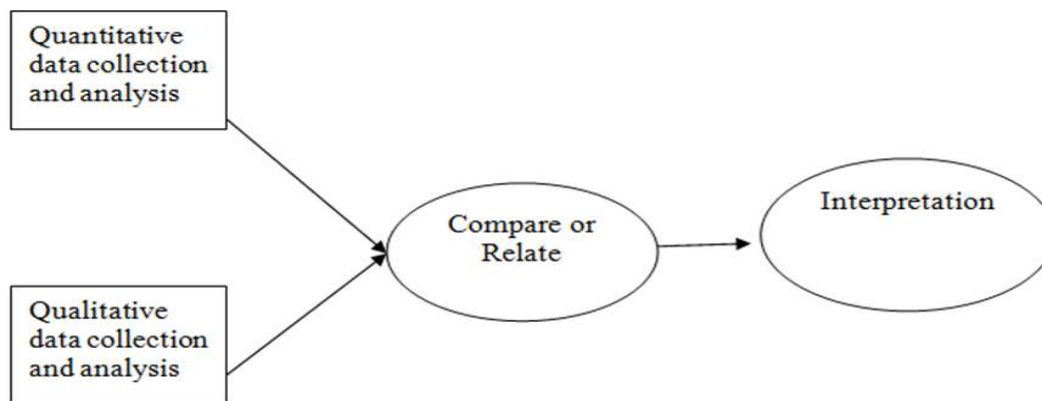
problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The opportunity to collect both forms of data at the same time was advantageous to the researcher due to limited access to the student population and the need to effectively optimize the data collection process.

The design allowed for the simultaneous collection of both forms of data and the opportunity to integrate the information in the interpretation of the overall results. The chance to identify contradictions and incongruent findings and to further probe the findings was also an added benefit of selecting the convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Overall, the convergent parallel mixed methods design was compatible with the type of research being conducted and the simplicity of the data collection, analysis and interpretation process was an added benefit.

The central premise is to ensure that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provide a better understanding of research problem than either approach independently. As Creswell (2014) noted “The key assumption of this approach is that both qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information-often detailed views of participants qualitatively and scores on instruments quantitatively-and together they yield results that should be the same” (p. 219).

Overall, for the purpose of this study, the mixed methods research approach provided an opportunity for both quantitative and qualitative data to be used in combination.

Figure 5*Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods*

Note: This figure was produced by Creswell, 2014 and it depicted the convergent parallel mixed methods design. From “Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches”, by J. W. Creswell, 2014, Copyright 2014 Sage Publications, Inc., p. 220

Instrumentation

Instrumentation refers to the tools or means by which an attempt is made to measure the variables or items of interest in the data collection process. Instrumentation is related to the instrument design, selection, construction and assessment, as well as the conditions under which the instrument will be administered (Creswell, 2014). Some techniques that enhance generalizability of research results include having a clear definition and rationale for inclusion and exclusion criteria, assessment of non-respondent bias, and use of validated instruments. The CoI is a validated instrument (Arbaugh et al., 2008).

The teaching presence component of the CoI was used as the instrument in administering the online *LimeSurvey* for the study. A modification to the survey included a text box with each question to provide an opportunity for participants to add additional comments on their responses to each survey question. The survey also included a number of demographic questions.

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The teaching presence component included 13 Likert scale questions (Garrison, 2017). The Likert scale questions ascribe a quantitative value to qualitative data in order to make the data amenable to statistical analysis. A numerical value was assigned to each potential choice which utilized a scoring range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each of the 13 items in the teaching presence survey.

Various studies such as: Zhang et al. (2016); Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) and Watts (2017), have utilized the CoI framework and the teaching presence element which has increased the validity of CoI framework by supporting the constructs of the CoI theory.

A copy of the survey, including the teaching presence component of the CoI questionnaire is included in appendix D.

The teaching presence component of the CoI questionnaire (see Appendix D) consists of three elements: design and organization; facilitation, and direct instruction. The following tables provide descriptions of each element of teaching presence based on best practices in online learning. A description of each component details actions that should be demonstrated in an online learning environment in order to create teaching presence.

Design and Organization

“Design and organization has to do with macro-level structure and process” (Garrison, 2017). The CoI framework provides the structure in terms of design and organization for a meaningful educational experience. The design focuses on the structural decisions made before the process starts and organization refers to similar decisions that are made to adjust to changes that must occur during the educational transaction.

Table 2*CoI Framework (Teaching Presence) Description of Design and Organization Indicators*

Design and Organisation	Description
The instructor clearly communicated the important course topics.	At the start of the course, the instructor provided clarification on course content and activities that are relevant to achieving the course learning outcomes as well as a successful learning experience for students.
The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.	At the start of the course the instructor outlined the learning objectives in detail and provided a thorough explanation of the performance expectations necessary to meet the course requirements.
The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	At the start and during the course the instructor provided detailed information on learning activities to help students understand performance expectations, learning opportunities and benefits.
The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/times frames for learning activities.	At the start of the course, the instructor provided a critical path/course schedule detailing due dates and times frames for all graded and ungraded learning activities. During the course the instructor provided updates that communicated course deliverables on a weekly basis.

Note. This table outlines descriptions of the questions included in the organization and design component of the teaching presence element of the CoI framework.

Facilitation

Facilitation, which is the second element of teaching presence involves facilitating reflection and discourse for the purpose of building understanding, and it reaches the core of the learning experience. Facilitation embodies the merging of purpose, process, and product and allows for the convergence of interest, engagement and learning (Garrison, 2017).

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Table 3

CoI Framework (Teaching Presence) Description of Facilitation Indicators

Facilitation	Description
The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me learn.	Throughout the course the instructor provided adequate support in the teaching-learning process through instructional directives and self-discovery learning.
The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.	Throughout the course the instructor used various communication channels to effectively communicate important learning objectives and maintain focus on the course learning outcomes.
The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	Throughout the course activities such as synchronized web conferences and asynchronous discussion forums are incorporated into learning activities to encourage student-to-student interaction.
The instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.	Throughout the course the instructor used a variety of strategies such as weekly group discussions, group projects, weekly media surveys and quizzes, web conferences, PowerPoint presentations and video journals to keep students engaged and create multiple representation to meet the needs of different learning styles.
The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course.	The instructor provided learning opportunities that allowed students to collectively and independently discover industry best practices and new concepts relevant to the course's subject matter.
Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.	Throughout the course the instructor regularly encouraged and promoted instructor-to-student and student-to-student interactions to create an online learning environment that help learners feel a sense of presence during their learning experience.

Note. This table outlines descriptions of the questions included in the facilitation component of the teaching presence element of the CoI framework.

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is considered a legitimate and important authoritative influence; however, this necessary teaching responsibility is frequently lacking in informal online learning environments (Garrison, 2017). Direct instruction is associated with specific content issues such as diagnosing misconceptions that often occur in the teaching and learning process.

Table 4

CoI (Teaching Presence) Description of Direct Instruction Indicators

Direction Instruction	Description
The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me learn.	Throughout the course the instructor provided learning activities that links theoretical concepts to real world practices in a manner that encourages problem-solving, critical thinking and promote learning.
The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course’s goals and objectives.	Throughout the course the instructor provided detailed clarification on course content. Feedback is also tailored to support the emotional and instructional needs of students in order to help them the meet course requirements.
The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.	Throughout the course the instructor consistently provided feedback on a scheduled time frame regarding students’ participation, tasks and performance.

Note. This table outlines descriptions of the questions included in the direct instruction component of the teaching presence element of the CoI framework.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, the CoI framework and its research methodology was utilized to conduct research in a Canadian post-secondary institution online learning environment. The study was conducted across multiple online courses at the undergraduate level to validate whether the CoI three-factor component of teaching presence (design and organization, facilitating and direct

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instruction) can be substantiated as having a perceived effect on students' failure in the online learning environment.

This survey was conducted for a one month period in the fall 2019 academic semester, October 1 – 31, 2019. The justification for survey scheduling and timing was to optimize participation by avoiding the beginning of semester course start up and end of semester activities such as final exam preparation and scheduling. The survey recruited participants who had failed one or more online courses and all participants for the study were self-selected.

Participants of various undergraduate programs within the institution participated in the study. This was to ensure the study gained multiple perspectives on the issue of teaching presence and failure in online learning. Specifically, the study's data collection process focused on intra-institutional data collection in order to validate the model and ascertain transferability.

Transferability may occur across contexts because of shared characteristics and it implies that knowledge gained from one context will have relevance for other contexts or for the same context in another frame (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, in order to ascertain transferability, the study was conducted across different courses and programs as previous studies were mostly involved in single courses (Swan et al., 2009).

Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data from the survey was exported into SPSS Statistics for analysis and the descriptive statistics output from the Likert scale produced measures of central tendency (mean, mode, and median) and variability (frequencies and standard deviation).

The qualitative data was collected from additional comments provided in the survey by participants. The data was prepared by transcribing the text verbatim from the survey comments

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into a word processing document for analysis. Several thorough read throughs of the data were completed to ensure that a general understanding of the data was developed.

The data was analyzed manually utilizing the thematic networks analysis process which identified patterns or themes salient in the text at different levels (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This approach provided a technique for breaking up the text and identifying explicit rationalizations and their implicit significance by ordering the text in basic theme, organizing theme and global theme. In analyzing the qualitative component of the data, keen attention was placed on ensuring that multiple perspectives of the participants' views were presented.

An inductive approach was applied to the thematic networks analysis process which involved allowing the data to determine the themes, as well as a latent approach which involved reading into the subtext assumptions underlying the data to understand what the assumptions and social context revealed. From this process derived the participants' stories of their lived experiences as online learners and their view of how the instructional design and facilitation of the learning experience impacted their failure.

A six-step process which included: familiarization with the data; coding the data; generating themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming the themes, as well as conducting the write-up was completed.

The convergent parallel mixed methods design was utilized to develop the results and interpretations of the research question and to expand an understanding that was comprehensive, validated and confirmed. As such, the quantitative and qualitative data sets results were compared and merged to facilitate a more direct and nuanced comparison of the results, and to answer the mixed methods research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Therefore, both the quantitative and qualitative data sets were analyzed to determine whether the result of the

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SPSS generated descriptive data output analyzed aligned with the qualitative themes from the thematic networks analysis. The objective was to determine if the relationship between the two datasets were more congruent or incongruent (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

Participants in the study were individuals who have experienced failure in their online academic career. They were full time, part time and continuing education students enrolled at the undergraduate level at a university in Canada in various courses and programs. One hundred and thirty-seven participants took part in the study through voluntary participation and by self-selection. The sample included individuals at different stages of their post-secondary career, working professionals in diverse careers, as well as mature individuals who have embarked on second careers or were experiencing career transitions. Students were separated geographically; as a result, learning and instructor interaction largely occurred asynchronously in the online learning environment.

Scientific Rigour

Assessing issues of quality or scientific rigour in mixed methods research is important for evaluating the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research. Rigour refers to the extent to which the researcher worked to enhance the quality of the studies. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) there are aspects of scientific investigation that are essentially analogous for qualitative and quantitative research, although they manifest differently in the research process. In quantitative research, rigour is achieved through measurement of the validity and reliability and in qualitative research rigour is achieved through assessment of the authenticity and verifiability.

Validity and Reliability

For the quantitative portion of this research, concerns about validity and reliability are of paramount importance. Quantitative validity means that scores received from participants are meaningful indicators of the construct being measured while quantitative reliability means that the scores received from participants are consistent and stable over time (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The reliability and validity of scores received from participants was established by selecting a quality instrument and analyzing the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The CoI questionnaire (teaching presence component), was selected by the researcher as the survey instrument of choice in order to ensure reliability and validity of the study. The instrument which is widely accepted was developed and validated by a collaborative research team and has been used in multiple studies over time. Furthermore, studies conducted by Caskurlu (2018) and Stenbom (2018) provided powerful evidence in support of the validity of the conceptualization of the CoI framework and its corresponding survey questionnaire (Garrison, 2018).

Authenticity and Verifiability

In qualitative research the authenticity of the research process is a common standard which refers to the credibility or the veracity of the findings. Moreover, the credibility or veracity emphasizes the degree to which the results accurately and precisely represent the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). “Authenticity means offering a fair, honest, and balanced account of the social life from the viewpoint of the people who live it every day” (Neuman, 2011, p. 214). Capturing an inside view and providing a detailed account of how the participants understand events is imperative to the authenticity of the research.

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Verifiability of qualitative research involves checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the strategies used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and therefore, rigor of the study.

For this study, the researcher sought to ensure that the following questions were properly addressed:

Are the findings plausible?

Do the findings cohere with what is known?

Do the findings represent the respondents' experience accurately?

Did the researcher deliberately consider alternative explanations?

Clarification of the bias that the researcher brings to the study is achieved through self-reflection and creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate with readers. Reflectivity is a core characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The researcher was able to achieve this strategy by documenting self-reflections in a journal throughout the research. The researcher's self-reflections were shaped by her own professional and academic career in online learning and guided by weekly discussions with the Faculty Supervisor Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin.

Peer debriefing was also used as a strategy to enhance the accuracy of the study through dialogue with a colleague and faculty member who acted as (a peer debriefer). The peer debriefer reviewed and asked the researcher questions about the qualitative data to ensure the account would resonate with individuals other than the researcher. This strategy allowed for an interpretation beyond that of the researcher and took into account another individual's

perspective which provided an independent and salient perspective and added validity to the research (Creswell, 2014).

Triangulation of data strategy was used to help in establishing the themes for the qualitative data. The themes were first established by converging the participants' perspectives (Creswell 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and applying the inductive approach to qualitative data analysis. The researcher then built further support and consensus for the themes by delivering a presentation about the research and the established themes to her cohorts who are currently pursuing either a Masters or Doctorate in Distance Education. This process helped in adding credibility to the research.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability emphasizes that given research findings from one context will have relevance for other contexts or for the same context in another frame (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 2014). The concept of transferability is of critical importance in advancing a body of knowledge. Transferability invites the readers to make connections between elements of the study and their own experience, therefore, the research result must provide a highly detailed description of the research situation and methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Generalizability

In quantitative research generalizability is the degree to which the research results hold true for a population beyond the participants in the study or in other settings (Creswell, 2014).

In research, concepts are “linked into generalizations that in turn form a logically consistent set of propositions providing a general explanation of a phenomenon (a theory)” (Hoy, 2010, p. 14). The research results provide the data for accepting, rejecting, reformulating, or

refining and clarifying the basic generalizations of the theory. Over time generalizations develop into principles that explain the phenomenon; however, sustained empirical support and evidence is required to validate generalizations (Hoy, 2010).

Ethics

Approval was granted from the Research Ethics Board of the post-secondary institution where the research was conducted. The goal of the review board is to ensure that all research complies with the ethical standards required by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The intent of this policy is to ensure, in short, respect for human dignity and that no harm will be brought to the participant by the researcher or the research process.

This researcher also successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics (CORE), as required for all researchers at the university where the research was conducted.

Participants were required to provide an electronic consent by accessing a participant consent form embedded by hyperlink in the survey questionnaire. The consent form outlined truthful representation of the nature and purpose of the study and ensured that all data would be kept anonymous.

Summary

This chapter discussed the constructivist learning theory which is an important aspect of the study. The role of the researcher was explained and the mixed methods research approach was discussed in detail. The selection and modification of the survey instrument was also explained. Finally, the data collection analysis procedures, participants' details and the scientific rigour applied to the study were outlined.

Chapter Four: Findings

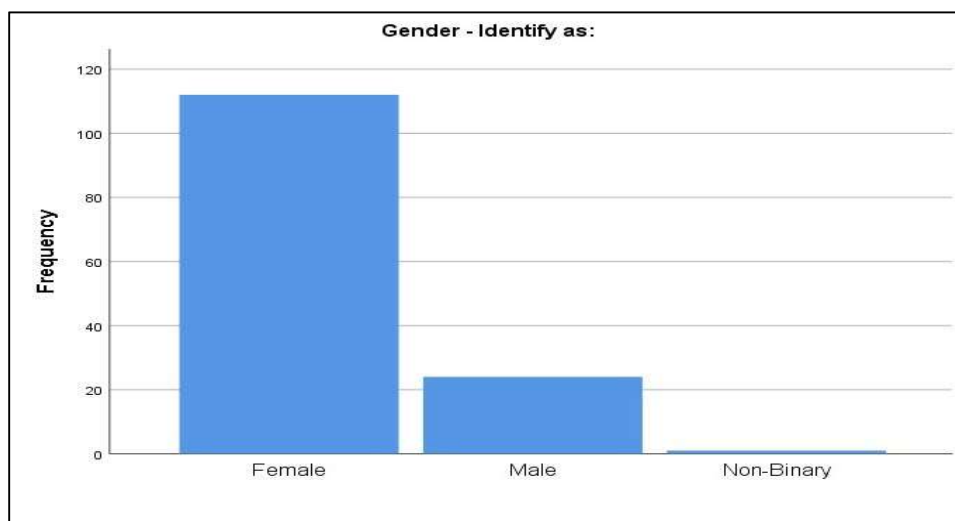
This study surveyed a total of 137 participants from a university in Canada that specializes in online distance education.

Demographics

The study’s sample was comprised largely of female participants and they accounted for 81.8% of the respondents, while male participants accounted for 17.5%, and non-binary participants comprised of .7% of the total sample.

Figure 6

Percentage of Respondents by Gender



Participants from the age ranges 18-28 and 29-40 were the two dominant age ranges observed in the study. Both groups together accounted for 73% of the study’s participants while the age range from 41-50 consisted of 20.4% of the total participants. The range of ages over 50 years old consisted of 6.6% of the total participants.

Of the total participants, 91.2% stated that English was their first language. The student status of all participants varied mostly between full time and part time. Participants with full time

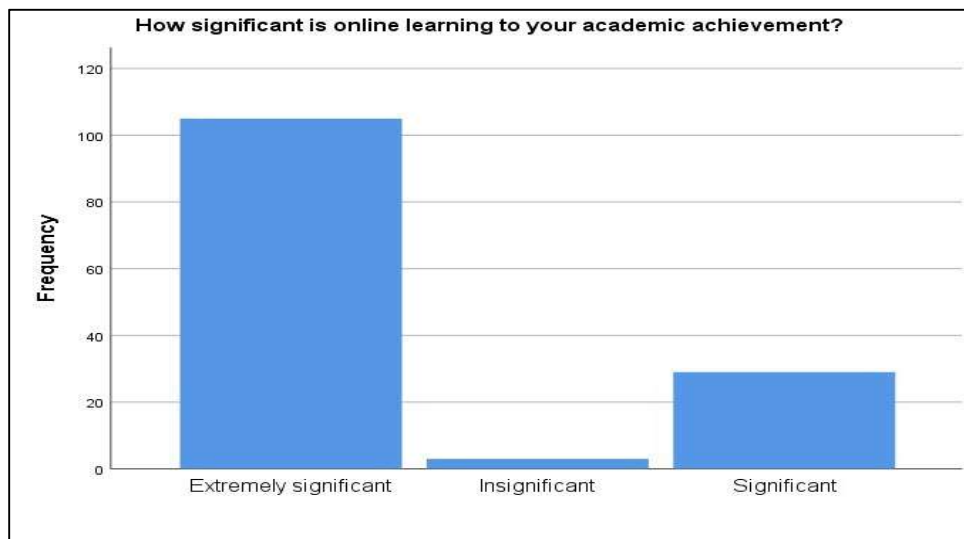
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status accounted for 51.8% of the respondents while the percentage of participants with part time status was 40.1%. Eight percent of the participants held continuing education status.

All participants had failed an online course in the past, but 76.6% stated that online learning is extremely significant to their academic achievement, 21.2% stated that it is significant and 2.2% stated that it is insignificant. All participants indicated that they have had both positive and negative experience with online learning in the past.

Figure 7

Significance of Online Learning to Participants' Academic Achievement by Percentage



Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis section of this study utilized the thematic networks analysis process which identified patterns or themes salient in the text at different levels (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This approach provided a technique for deconstructing the text and identifying within it explicit rationalizations and their implicit significance by ordering the text in basic, organizing, and global themes.

Thematic Networks Analysis Definitions

The following eight thematic networks analysis definitions for the qualitative data were derived through a process of inductive analysis.

Feedback – information provided by the instructor that directly related to assessments. This included accuracy of information provided as well as how the information sufficiently supported the learning objectives and goals, such as the timeliness of information provided when responding to students (based on the institution’s guidelines).

Instructional Design – the systematic development of an educational program that incorporated concepts about how people learn and how best to present instruction which included the structuring of the course within the LMS to ensure the learning activities, assessments and resources available effectively supported the course learning outcomes as well as the learning needs and goals of the students.

Communication – the transmission of messages from the sender and the receiver (instructor and student) through a particular channel or medium. The process of encoding the outgoing message and decoding the incoming message in a manner that ensured a clear understanding of the message is created.

This included the quality of the senders’ and the receiver’s interpersonal skills such as whether the tone of the delivery was positive or negative and the information shared was articulated with clarity.

Engagement – verbal and non-verbal, synchronized and asynchronous instructor-oriented activities that fostered instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction while creating a learning community.

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Student Expectation – the students' views on the quality of educational instruction and support they should receive from the academic institution regarding their learning experience, that is in alignment with the financial commitment and confidence entrusted in the institution.

Responsiveness – accessibility to the instructor as well as the instructor's ability to promptly respond to students on issues that are unrelated to assessments but are relevant and important to their academic progress.

Instructor Support – the instructor's ability to address students' questions and concerns in a prompt and timely manner to ensure that students are able to obtain the necessary knowledge, expertise, understanding and empathy that is required (from the instructor) in order to guide their learning experience to a successful outcome.

Student Accountability – the students' onus in acknowledging how the actions they have taken may influence the outcome of their learning experience. The degree of self-responsibility and self-regulation that is exercised in determining the factors that contributed to their learning experience. As well as the ability to become increasingly responsible in constructing meaning and understanding in order to assume more teaching presence in the learning environment.

Thematic Networks Analysis

Feedback

This theme encapsulated participants' perspective on the importance of receiving effective feedback in order to improve their academic development and progress in an online learning environment.

Many participants described the deep level of anxiety and desperation they experienced when trying to obtain in-depth quality, timely and useful feedback from instructors to aid with their academic productivity.

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One of the main reasons identified by participants for wanting verbal and written feedback is that there is an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the instructor on issues that may be difficult to capture in a text-based format. Quite frequently the feedback provided by instructors lacked clarity and required participants to follow-up with instructors for subsequent clarification. This presented an added challenge for participants as a second or third follow-up with the instructor may go unanswered. In some instances, the participants were advised to re-read the content in order to gain a better understanding. Participants described the feeling of frustration they experienced as the feedback they desperately sought to gain clarification and understanding of the course content was not forthcoming. Participants explained that they often felt the only choice they had was to seek alternative assistance from other entities outside of the academic institution.

“Clearly if I got it wrong after doing the assigned reading and repeatedly made the same mistakes it's because I didn't understand the book. However they continually refused to give any more detail other than "see page ____".”

“At times I approached this instructor (economics course) with concrete questions and all she did was refer back to the text instructions. I ended up having to hire a tutor.”

Participants reported that one of the most critical opportunities that required qualitative and quantitative feedback were times when they were assigned a very low grade on assessments. The lack of qualitative feedback provided on low graded assessments made it challenging for participants to determine how to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the course content in order to improve their learning outcomes and course grades. Participants also

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highlighted the opinion that specific, concrete suggestions for improvement provided by instructors would have been useful in future academic work as well as help them to evaluate their current course work.

“The lack of feedback on low scoring exams in all courses makes it impossible to determine what you need to work on before you can retake the exam”

“Feedback was so vague and because evaluation criteria were not provided in the course site, assessment was so subjective it was ludicrous”

Participants expressed that receiving feedback from instructors in a timely manner is essential to their academic growth and development. Participants are of the view that the instructor should be able to provide feedback in a time period that is consistent with their progression throughout the course and as well as with the institution’s established guidelines regarding turnaround time for providing feedback. The lack of providing timely feedback to participants had an adverse impact on the participants’ ability to conduct their own evaluation of their academic work through reflection and further exploration of the course content in a guided manner. Delayed feedback also deprived participants of their ability to utilize the instructors’ feedback to make the necessary corrections and learn from their mistakes.

“Feedback was lumped together way after the point it was beneficial. If feedback could have been presented for each unit assignment, it would have offered the benefit of learning from mistakes”

“This happening on a repetitive basis caused me to almost not graduate on time”

Participants commented on the struggle they experienced when limited feedback was offered by instructors (whether the feedback was solicited or unsolicited) a recurring theme that they highlighted was that the feedback was often meaningless and did not help them to gain a better understanding of the course content.

“The instructor simply answered questions related to due dates and course requirements but did not answer discussion questions about course content”

“He never provided any useful tips or instructions on how to improve”

Instructional Design

This theme captured the participant’s views regarding a mediocre standard of the instructional design that they believed was consistent in their online learning experience. They were of the opinion that the importance of quality instructional design was often overlooked and became a determinant factor as they struggled to progress with the course.

Participants expressed frustration and disappointment with the lack of access to external resources that were designed as a central part of the course curriculum and assessment evaluations. The lack of access impeded the participants’ ability to engage with the course content in a meaningful manner that could have had a positive impact on their learning experience. Participants were directed to sites outside of the course without being provided

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access. As such, they felt that gaps were created within the learning process and that valuable time was often spent following-up with instructors to address the issue and then experiencing lengthy turnaround times for the issues to be corrected.

Participants expressed concern with the negative impact that the broken links along with missing course content often created in the learning process. The objective of including such resources in the course is to create better ease of use with the learning platform in a manner that enriched the participants' learning experience; however, participants asserted that this aspect of the courses' instructional design required major improvement.

“The instructor had broken links to additional (instructional information and took too long to respond to questions through email, also some of the questions on the assignments when sent to the students were missing from the PDF files”

“The instructor linked to materials and sites that did not work, were inactive or that passwords/access was denied”

A majority of participants stated that one of the most important aspects of their learning experience (which was the introductory component) was not properly designed and structured within the course. This aspect of the course design was extremely critical to participants as they affirmed that it would have ensured they had the opportunity to establish rapport with the instructor at the beginning of the course, which would have further facilitated the process of obtaining clarification on relevant course requirements and expectations early on. In addition,

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activities that would have effectively supported their introduction to the course were often overlooked by instructors and in some cases were non-existent.

“The course was designed for me to figure out when to complete assignments and make sure I had them in myself. We generally receive 1, generic email from the instructor on the first day of class with their specific information about the way they want assignment submitted.”

Introductory information was often generic and inaccurate. Opportunities for participants to create dialogue with the instructor if they were uncertain how to proceed with the course requirements and expectations were lacking. One reason is that instructors did not initiate any personalized form of instructor introduction with participants. As such, instructors did not effectively set the pace at the beginning of the course in order to guide participants through their learning experience.

“Didn't hear from my teachers until I had to set up a online quiz; and the generic welcome letter at the beginning of the course.”

“The due dates in the online course content were from a previous iteration of the course and did not apply to the cohort I was in”

Participants expressed their views on the significance of learning in an online environment where a discussion forum is incorporated into the instructional design of the course

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and where the instructors were actively interacting with learners throughout the course.

Participants described how the absence of a discussion forum and instructor interaction within the discussion forum impeded their efforts to learn from each other as well as from the instructor, which would have allowed them to share challenges, clarify assumptions and to experiment and acquire new skills and ideas.

“Forums were never updated, we never saw posts from the instructor, and concerns were never handled by the instructor or other department faculty.”

In instances where a discussion forum was incorporated in the instructional design of the course, participants stressed that the forum was underutilized and added limited, if any, value to their learning experience because information posted in the forum was not very useful.

“Comments provided in the forum were generic.”

Participants emphasized that the instructional design of online courses did not provide multiple means of representation of the course content. They were unable to learn with the limited means of representation presented within the course and as such struggled to learn. Also, multiple representations of knowledge support the transfer of learning and would have allowed participants to make connections both within and between important course concepts.

“The entire course was strictly reading a dry textbook and the quizzes and exam were strictly multiple choice. I found it incredibly dry and difficult to learn that way.”

“The course also lacked any sort of commentary to assist in retention.”

“There were no instruction videos, or no discussion panels”

Communication

This theme encapsulated the participants’ thoughts on how the barriers that existed in the communication process impacted their online learning experience.

Effective communication is an essential element of online learning and participants relied heavily on the instructor’s ability to communicate effectively on a consistent basis in order to help them navigate their learning experience.

Most participants commented on the instructor’s inability to demonstrate proper interpersonal skills in the communication process. Participants emphasized that the tone and delivery of communication received from instructors lacked courtesy and empathy. Messages often did not come across as respectful or as professional as they would have anticipated and expected.

“The only other interaction I had with the instructor was when he insulted me for asking for clarification on his poorly worded instructions”

Some participants reported that they never felt encouraged to engage in dialogue with instructors where there was an opportunity to explore the course content in a manner that would have engendered diversity of thought and discovered new ways of thinking. The lack of

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encouragement demonstrated by instructors is frequently received by participants in a manner that made them feel humiliated. One participant explained that the tone of the communication and vocabulary used were sometimes condescending and did not show empathy.

“I was only ever demeaned or insulted when I tried new ideas and was told not to stray from the instructions or think for myself”

Participants also found it extremely challenging to deal with the inaccuracies that were present in the communication process. As online learners, participants are dependent on the instructor’s ability to communicate with accuracy and clarity when delivering information. The benefit of receiving accurate and complete information guided participants through the learning process effectively and helped them to create a sense of understanding of the course content that would lead them to successfully achieve the course learning outcomes.

Participants explained that their ability to navigate the online learning environment was made more difficult due to the inaccuracies that were consistently demonstrated throughout the communication process.

“The two courses I failed were because I had missed my final dates due to the institution, instructor, and class materials all having either different dates from each other or all simply stating wrong dates”

Participants’ access to complete information on course requirements and expectations as well as learning resources is vital to their academic progress. Online learning is mainly dependent on text-based methods of communication which must be disseminated at important

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times throughout the course in order to attract the learners' attention and direct their focus to relevant and valuable information at the appropriate times. As such, the instructor's ability to ensure communication is managed with completeness required that special attention be given to communication with multiple parts to ensure that all the necessary components were being addressed.

Participants indicated that while some information was communicated accurately and clearly, the absence of completeness in the communication process either delayed or inhibited their efforts to access important resources that were relevant to the course. Participants believed that more attention to detail is required on the instructors' part to ensure that pertinent course information is communicated in its entirety.

“While the instructor did communicate the course content, she did not communicate all the additional learning with websites, apps, etc. that would be required”

“There was a minimal effort on the instructor's part to give clear instruction on participation in course learning activities”

The instructor's inability to communicate with concreteness had an unfavourable impact on the participants' ability to fully understand the course content and assessment requirements. Information was often structured and communicated in imprecise and unclear terms. This approach resulted in participants feeling more confused because the information did not make sense to them.

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“While the instructions were present, they were vague and sometimes challenging to follow or out of date”

“Many of the courses I took provided instructions but failed to lay out the precise way and when to participate. When should the readings be completed? When do I start discussion? How many students do I reply to? Sometimes it became very overwhelming thinking that I had to respond to everyone.”

Engagement

This theme captured the participants’ experiences and perspectives regarding instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction in their online learning experience. Participants viewed efforts on the part of the instructor to facilitate an environment that fostered engagement in online learning as an important factor because online learning lacks the kind of interaction that is readily accessible in face-to-face learning.

Most participants explained that their interactions with the instructor were only limited to feedback on assignments. There were no efforts on the part of the instructor to foster further interaction unless prompted by participants.

“Again, the instructors are really detached from students when taking online courses. They don't engage us unless we request help.”

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“I heard from the course assistants only when I initiated a query. Reminders or corrections were posted on the course site or forums to encourage students to stay on track but that was the extent of it.”

Other participants were unsure as to whether the format of their online course warranted any type of engagement with the instructor or other students. The instructors’ inability to provide participants with any type of engagement whether synchronous or asynchronous, structured or unstructured, permeated the utter sense of disengagement that participants experienced.

“NO idea there was no class engagement it was an independent study design”

“He was awful by his absolute absence”

Participants mentioned that there was often little or no interaction among learners within the online learning environment. This was either as a result of the course not having been designed to encourage and foster student-to-student interaction or the instructor did not make the necessary effort to promote a sense of learning community.

“There was a class list of people who were also registered in the course, but I did not experience any sense of community.”

“I’ve never really felt a sense of community in any of the online classes I’ve taken”

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“I sat in my apartment and did the course. We did not even have an active discussion forum. Zero sense of community”

Participants also added that in instances where engagement existed within the online learning environment through mediums such as discussion forums, the instructor rarely participated in the discussion forums. As a result, participants were left to develop and foster a sense of engagement among themselves without any instructor interaction or guidance.

“There was a forum for student discussion, but it was really mostly students asking questions and trying to connect. Few times did I see instructors engage, and when I did it was always go back and read what the student probably read before reaching out for help, which is a really ineffective result from a student's perspective”.

“The instructor did not communicate with students at all, expected us to read his mind, gave negative marks when we misunderstood his ambiguous questions, and only negatively interacted with students.”

Student Expectation

This theme captured the participants' expectation of the role and responsibilities of the instructor in the online learning environment, as well as the participants' views on the importance of instructor accountability and how it should influence the instructors' performance. The participants' view was that the instructors' accountability and performance should be governed by institutional standards and guidelines.

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Participants expressed that the instructors' unwillingness to act as a guide or knowledge expert adversely impacted their learning experience. The practical guidance that allowed participants to connect with course concepts applicable to learning objectives and goals was lacking. There was also no direction to help them with the struggles they encountered managing learning curves.

“Personally, I think that the teachers are only there to help facilitate the course and not really provide tutorial expertise”

An important point that created a sense of helplessness for participants was the unwillingness of instructors to engage and capture their interest by demonstrating expertise and experience in the particular subject and or field. Participants stated that this effort, if demonstrated, would have supplemented the course's basic content in order to help reveal core concepts in a manner that could be applied in real world settings.

“The instructor used his published manual and expected us to understand it immediately.”

“so I never had time to learn from my mistakes or adjust to his teaching style.”

Participants' perspective also demonstrated that their expectation of online learning does not meet the reality of online learning nor that of the institutions in general. Some participants' expectations were unrealistic and did not indicate that they had a good understanding of online learning as a model of education delivery.

“Getting feedback 7 days after submitting is not really timely.”

Responsiveness

This theme captured the participants’ expectation of the role of the instructor in being responsive to their needs that related to the overall student experience but not necessarily to feedback on assessments or clarification of course content.

Participants perceived lack of instructor accessibility as a major influence on their ability to succeed in their online learning experience. Their expectation of being able to initiate contact with the instructor and receive a response in a timely manner was often not fulfilled. As such, participants often accepted that there were no opportunities to communicate with the instructor to address any questions or concerns that were unrelated to assessments.

“It was a series of tutors, I never heard back from them when I reached out for assistance”

“I had minimal contact with my instructor. Emails sent to the instructor often went unread.”

Participants also expressed concern about feelings of neglect in the online learning environment where instructor accessibility was limited or non-existent due to time zone differences, or stated office hours not being kept by instructors. As such, initiatives made to establish contact with the instructor were unsuccessful.

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“Despite multiple emails and calls to try to help or messages I left on voicemail or email. Office hours were not kept.”

“The tutor hours didn't work with my time zone”

Instructor Support

This theme captured the participants' perspectives on the role they believed instructor support should play in their online learning experience. Participants explained that they relied on the instructor in an online learning environment for guidance, direction, expertise and empathy in order to minimize the isolation they felt as they try to navigate the learning experience.

Participants reported that the absence of guidance impeded their ability to develop a strong understanding of the course requirements and expectations. As such, it was often difficult to successfully complete assessments and participate in learning activities with confidence.

“No. The instructor of the philosophy course put some online material out, and for the most part, left students to their own devices”

“There were no prompts for keeping me on schedule for this course. For me, the lack of guidance left me without direction in my studies and eroded my confidence in how I was absorbing information and applying what I learned”

Participants also described the lonesomeness they experienced due to the instructor's failure to provide a sense of reinforcement to engender their understanding of the learning

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material. They subsequently experienced a sense of loss that led to hopelessness and feelings of isolation and despair and ultimately academic failure.

“I felt very alone and at a loss in this one course that I failed because of his lack of reinforcement in any type of development or support”

“Not at all. He kept referring to his book which did not help as I did not understand the content. How can you learn if you do not understand the content and are asked to read it over again without any assistance or clarification? He was very distant and not helpful at all”.

Participants needed reassurance that the instructor empathized with the bewilderment and confusion that they often felt as they try to develop knowledge and acquire an understanding of their learning goals and objectives. It was important to them that the instructor was cognizant of their anxieties and often the fear they have of the unknown and the challenges that accompanied the learning process.

The absence of empathy on the part of the instructor created no opportunity for encouragement or support as participants struggled to achieve their academic aspirations.

“The instructor/academic expert actually insulted me when I asked for clarification and treated me like an idiot for not understanding his directions”

“There was lack of empathy on the instructors’ part”

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Participants explained that they had expectations as learners that the instructor would have the ability to deliver the kind of expertise knowledge required to guide their learning journey and equip them with industry best practices that could be beneficial in a real world environment.

However, they often felt that the instructor was unwilling or unable to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the course content in a manner that could influence transformative learning.

“Instructors often just gave other resources if understanding was unclear rather than answering the question themselves”

“The instructor did not assist or was helpful during my course to help clarify my thinking. He did practically nothing to assist me in learning and clarifying my thinking processes”

Participants thought that there was a need for the instructors to provide guidance and direction as well as subject matter expertise to engender a more enriching and fulfilling online learning experience. When that need was unmet over time, the role of the instructor became inconsequential from their perspective and the notion of viewing the instructor as a source of knowledge, support and expertise diminished significantly.

“There is no instructor in many classes. There's a tutor to turn to for help but they are sometimes hard to reach. In many classes, it's just read the text and hope you get it”

“Personally I think that the teachers are only there to help facilitate the course and not really provide tutorial expertise. Not a teacher but an interactor if necessary. In summary, like a Siri!”

Student Accountability

This theme captured the participants taking full accountability for their personal shortcomings that adversely impacted their learning experience.

Participants admitted that in some instances they were responsible for the actions that created an unsuccessful learning outcome. Specifically, they neglected to pay attention to course due dates that were significant to their performance.

“The [...] course I failed had due dates, unlike any of the other [...] courses I'd taken. While I read the emails saying there were due dates I didn't take them seriously because all of the course had "recommended" timelines and I figured this one wouldn't be different. I was wrong!”

Procrastination was also an issue that participants openly admitted played a role in the unsuccessful outcome of their learning experience. They expressed the need for more structure in their online learning environment to keep them on task.

“would prefer more strict due times - I find myself leaving assignments to the last moment, as there's no other date then end of contract”

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Other issues participants acknowledged as their responsibility was the lack of opportunity or failure to prioritize their academic endeavors as they struggled to manage other family and professional commitments.

“I didn't actually do any work in the course and should have withdrawn. I failed the course in 2007 when I was working full-time with a toddler at home and taking care of my husband who had been critically injured at work. I was overwhelmed and basically just ignored the course and received the F”

“I think I failed this course because I was stressed out and didn't do the work.”

The student accountability theme highlighted personal stories of participants that may have contributed to their failure, these are considered as external influences and are unrelated to the teacher or teaching presence. One such factor is the participants' own perception of the course quality that did not align with the instructional design and the required performance expectations of the course. Moreover, the participants' inability to effectively manage their learning in an online environment that required them to exercise more autonomy in order to engender a successful academic outcome is also a contributing factor.

Family responsibility, particularly for female learners, is another contributing factor that impeded participants' ability to succeed in online learning. Participants who manage multiple roles and deal with role conflict in their personal lives often experienced failure because they are forced to forego their academic pursuits for family responsibility and commitments.

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Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis section of this study utilized SPSS Statistics, the data analysis procedures applied to the process included variability (frequencies and standard deviation) and central tendency (mean, mode and median).

Table 5

Frequency Table for Teaching Presence Design and Organization Questions

Design and Organization	1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree	4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree	3 = Neutral
The instructor clearly communicated the important course topics.	50 (36.5%)	58 (42.3%)	29 (21.2%)
The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.	38 (27.7%)	64 (46.8%)	35 (25.5%)
The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	42 (30.7%)	64 (46.7%)	31 (22.6%)
The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/times frames for learning activities.	38 (27.7%)	72 (52.6%)	27 (19.7%)

Note. The table provide the quantitative results of the study based on frequency and percentages of the number of participants' responses to each question. Results are grouped as strongly disagree and disagree (negative results) and agree and strongly agree (positive results) and neutral.

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Table 6

Frequency Table for Teaching Presence Facilitation Questions

Facilitation	1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree	4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree	3 = Neutral
The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me learn.	71 (51.8%)	18(13.1%)	48 (35.0%)
The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.	83 (60.6%)	20 (14.5%)	34 (24.8%)
The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	98 (71.6%)	15 (11%)	24 (17.5%)
The instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.	87 (63.5%)	17 (12.4%)	33 (24.1%)
The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course.	78 (56.9%)	27(19.7%)	32 (23.4%)
Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.	107 (78.1%)	11 (8%)	19 (13.9%)

Note. The table provide the quantitative results of the study based on frequency and percentages of the number of participants’ responses to each question. Results are grouped as strongly disagree and disagree (negative results) and agree and strongly agree (positive results) and neutral.

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Table 7

Frequency Table for Teaching Presence Direct Instruction Questions

Direct Instruction	1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree	4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree	3 = Neutral
The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me learn.	78 (57.0%)	19 (13.9%)	40 (29.2%)
The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.	75 (54.8%)	32 (23.3%)	30 (21.9%)
The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.	36 (26.3%)	67 (48.9%)	34 (24.8%)

Note. The table provide the quantitative results of the study based on frequency and percentages of the number of participants' responses to each question. Results are grouped as strongly disagree and disagree (negative results) and agree and strongly agree (positive results) and neutral.

Table 8

Measures of Frequency for Teaching Presence Component

Teaching Presence Components	1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree	4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree	3 = Neutral
Design and Organization	(30.7%)	(47.1%)	(22.2%)
Facilitation	(63.8%)	(13.1%)	(23.1%)
Direct Instruction	(46.0%)	(28.7%)	(25.3%)

Note. This table provides a breakdown of participants' responses by percentage based on the three components of the teaching presence element. Results are grouped as strongly disagree and disagree (negative results) and agree and strongly agree (positive) and neutral.

Mixed Methods Analysis

An important part of this study is to utilize the convergent parallel mixed methods design which focuses on converging both the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Both the quantitative and qualitative data is converged and then compared in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the problem and to validate one set of findings with the other. The comparison also determines if participants respond in a similar way to the quantitative predetermined scales and the open-ended qualitative questions.

Q1. The instructor clearly communicated the important course topics.

Participants either mostly agreed or disagreed that the instructor communicated important course topics with (36.5%) agreeing and (28.5%) disagreeing followed by (21.2%) of participants who responded neutral, (5.8%) strongly agreed and (8.0%) strongly disagreed. Overall, participants' responses on whether important course topics were clearly communicated appeared rather more positive than negative; however, the neutral responses accounted for a substantial percentage of the responses. With respect to the communication of the important course topics the following replies were representative:

Yes, the course topics were in an outline.

The learning objectives of the course were clear.

I am not sure it was the instructor who communicated the topics, but the online course content did.

The instructor was not involved in this element. The course information is all provided online from a website - not from an instructor. My tutor or professor may or may not have had any input in developing the material that was available to me on that website

Left up to me to "read the student orientation" section

There was no instructor communication

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The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q2. The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.

Participants mostly agreed that important course goals were communicated (38.8%), followed by (25.5%) of participants who remained neutral. A lesser percentage of (22.6%) disagreed that important course goals were clearly communicated, while (5.1%) strongly disagreed and (8.8%) strongly agreed. Largely participants' responses were positive on the instructor communicating important course goals, however, a very substantial percentage of participants' responses remained neutral. With regards to the instructor clearly communicating important course goals, the following replies were representative:

Course goals are easily understood from the description of the course and the description of each unit. There is no need for the instructor to elaborate on these goals.

I was aware of what the course required

The goals may have been outlined but as the course was in motion it was never related to me if I was meeting those goals.

For the vast majority of the courses I've taken online, the instructors simply posted a course outline and didn't touch on anything else that would be focused on throughout. I often was left to find out what we were studying once I searched the required readings.

The instructor did not offer any communications regarding important course goals. There was little or any communication between us

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q3. The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.

Participants agreed (38.7%) that the instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities, (21.2%), disagreed and an almost equal number of participants

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(22.6%) provided a neutral response. However, (8.0%) strongly agreed while (9.5%) strongly disagreed. Again, participants' responses were very positive on the instructor providing clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities, however, neutral responses were also very high. The following replies were representative of the instructor and provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities:

The quality of instructions exceeds my expectations.

Instructions were typically fairly thorough but if you had any questions about the assignments you had to wait a fairly large amount of time for an answer which would usually put the rest of the course work on hold.

At a previous online college I had attended, the instructors said if we had any questions at all about coursework, don't hesitate to email. I understand they can't help in a middle of a test but even when I was starting a unit and was confused, their answers were so vague I was more confused after getting help than I was before

Very few details were provided

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q4. The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/times frames for learning activities.

Again, (38.0%) of participants agreed that the instructor clearly communicated important due dates/times frames for learning activities. Followed by (20.4%) that disagreed and almost a similar percentage (19.7%) were neutral. In addition, 14.6% strongly agreed and 7.3% strongly disagreed. Almost twice as many participants provided positive responses as those who did not. Neutral responses continued to account for a significant percentage of the responses. With respect to the instructor communicating important due dates/times frames for learning activities, the following replies were representative:

My instructor (course I failed), always sends out an email every month for a reminder of the coursework that needs to be submitted.

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Yes, they are posted

Again there was barely any communication between the instructor and student to achieve a clear understanding of any requirements for the students learning, activities, and due dates

The due dates in the online course content were from a previous iteration of the course and did not apply to the cohort I was in.

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q5. The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me learn.

A large percentage of participants disagreed (32.8%) that the instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped them learn while only 9.5% agreed. Notably, 35.0% of participants indicated a neutral response. In addition, a percentage of 19.0% strongly disagreed but only 3.6% strongly agreed. Participants' responses were very negative while the neutral responses still accounted for a large percentage of the responses. With respect to whether the instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped students learn, the following replies were representative:

Instructors rarely did this, they pretty much let the participants teach the course. At times I never knew if what we were learning was correct.

My instructor weren't usually present in most of my courses. My most valuable resources were often the textbook, the internet, or my peers.

The instructor referred back to his manual and simply asked to read it again without any other references or assistance.

I felt like the answers I got when I asked for clarification did not help, and the problem I was having remained an issue.

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q6. The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.

A plurality of participants disagreed (39.4%) that the instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped them clarify their thinking. Another 21.2% strongly disagreed, 24.8% remained neutral and a lesser percentage (10.9%) agreed while 3.6% strongly agreed. A very high number of participants' responses were negative on whether the instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped them clarify their thinking, followed by a lesser percentage of participants who indicated a neutral response. With regards to whether the instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped them clarify their thinking, the following replies were representative:

This was rarely done and it would have been very helpful. Even if the instructor sent 'private' comments to me and stated apart from the class clarification of my thinking

My instructor was absent from discussions.

I received no feedback or answers to questions I asked, or messages I left on voicemail or email. Office hours were not kept.

The online course did not provide any teacher support. I think it was needed, guidance from the teacher, I think it was the reason of my failure, that I was not ready for the online world and I did not have any support. I think your first courses should be completely guided by the teacher.

My women's studies course was much different - the instructor reached out in different ways, she did not just rely on online formats. We had phone calls. Emails. Etc.

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q7. The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.

Participants' responses on whether the instructor helped keep course participants' engaged and participating in productive dialogue indicated that 40.9% disagreed while 30.7% strongly disagreed, and 17.5% provided a neutral response. However, a smaller percentage of 8.8% agreed and 2.2% strongly agreed. A high percentage of participants' responses were negative while a lower percentage provided neutral responses. With respect to whether the instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue, the following replies were representative:

The online course did not provide any teacher support.

Students only ever talked to each other when complaining about the class.

Except for one math course I took, the instructors stay out of the chat/discussion completely.

She tried! But again, my own procrastination hindered me

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q8. The instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.

A plurality of participants (39.4%) disagreed that the instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped them learn, 24.1% of participants strongly disagreed while 24.1% provided a neutral response. Only 10.2% agreed and small a percentage of 2.2% strongly agreed. Again, participants' responses were very negative followed by neutral responses which also accounted for a substantially high percentage. The following replies were representative of whether the instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped them learn:

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I was left to my own work and only received the canned tutor letter

I had no motivation or connection to my teacher/tutor.

The tutor hours didn't work with my time zone. I felt completely alone in my learning.

The course was designed for me to figure out when to complete assignments and make sure I had them in myself. There were no prompts for keeping me on schedule for this course.

For me, the lack of guidance left me without direction in my studies and eroded my confidence in how I was absorbing information and applying what I learned

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q9. The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course.

Most participants (37.2%) disagreed that the instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course; in addition 19.7% strongly disagreed and 23.4% provided a neutral response. Participants agreed by (15.3%) and strongly agreed by (4.4%). Participants' responses were significantly negative, in addition there were a large percentage of neutral responses. With respect to whether the instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course, the following replies were representative:

The entire course was strictly reading a dry textbook and the quizzes and exam were strictly multiple choice.

I found it incredibly dry and difficult to learn that way.

The course also lacked any sort of commentary to assist in retention.

New concepts were not at all wanted in this course. We were to stick with what is known and not to determine our own meanings or interpretations

I feel he sat back and let me try to figure it out by myself which was impossible to do without any feedback from him.

Yes, there were some links provided to related external resources that students may find helpful.

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q10. Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.

A large number of participants (38.0%) disagreed that the instructor's action reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants. However, even more participants (40.1%) strongly disagreed on this issue, while 13.9% indicated a neutral response. Only 0.7% strongly agreed and 7.3% agreed. Participants' responses were very negative while the neutral responses accounted for a lesser percentage. The following replies were representative of whether the instructor's actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants:

I do not feel there is a sense in community in online learning. It is very isolating.

I think there was a message board type application available. But it was not encouraged in a way that felt welcoming, or helpful - nor did I see many posts there.

Again, the instructors are really detached from students when taking online courses, they don't engage us unless we request help.

I felt very alone and at a loss in this one course that I failed because of his lack of reinforcement in any type of development or support

Yes, the related links and encouragement to help out other students in the forum did create a sense or community in this synchronous learning course.

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q11. The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me learn.

A large number of participants (35.8%) disagreed that the instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped them learn, while 21.2% strongly disagreed and 29.2% provided a neutral response, 12.4% of participants agreed, and 1.5% strongly agreed. Again, participants' negative responses were substantial; the neutral responses, while of lesser

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percentage were also significant. With respect to whether the instructor helped focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped students learn, the replies were representative of the following:

There was never any discussion because the instructor would not engage with the students.

I have had zero interaction.

There was a forum for student discussion, but it was really mostly students asking questions and trying to connect. Few times did I see instructors engage, and when I did it was always go back and read what the student probably read before reaching out for help, which is a really ineffective result from a student's perspective.

There was no ongoing discussion that the instructor participated in

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q12. The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.

A plurality of participants (28.5%) disagreed that the instructor provided feedback that helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives. Similarly, 26.3% strongly agreed while 21.9% remained neutral, 19.7% agreed and 3.6% strongly agreed. Participants' responses were mostly negative, while the neutral responses accounted for a lesser percentage. The following replies were representative of whether the instructor provided feedback that helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives:

*I found the feedback was not explanatory of expectations or strengths
Just pointed out weaknesses.*

The instructor did not respond to questions sent via email with enough time to understand the lessons

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The instructor cared more about docking marks than helping students learn from mistakes.

On assignment good feedback was provided, on every phone call I had good feedback. Feedback On the forum nothing. Not always easy to reach someone on the phone when you work full time and in a different time zone

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Q13. The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.

A plurality of participants (43.1%) agreed that the instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion while 5.8% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 13.9% disagreed and 12.4% strongly disagreed while 24.8% indicated a neutral response. Participants' positive responses were significantly high and the neutral responses were also substantial. With respect to whether the instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion the following replies were representative:

Once marked the feedback was provided in a timely fashion as per Athabasca standards.

Questions were answered quickly

Assignments took weeks to receive back, so I never had time to learn from my mistakes or adjust to his teaching style.

I had to seek assistance from my program head to get a simple assignment marked. It was more than a month long process and left me frustrated and upset

The survey results and student statements both reflected a wide range of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The objective of the mixed methods design is to analyze whether the qualitative and quantitative data align on a component basis. Overall, the design and organization component of the teaching presence survey yielded quantitative results that neither confirmed nor disconfirmed the results gathered from participants' qualitative comments. Responses to survey questions for

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both the facilitation and direct instruction components yielded very negative results, the results showed that (63.8%) strongly disagree or disagree for facilitation and (46.0%) strongly disagree or disagree for direct instructions. These results suggested that the instructor behaviours indicated in the questions contributed to participants' failure, which confirmed the results gathered from participants' qualitative comments.

Overall, the comparison of the results provided a satisfactory answer to the research question that neither approaches could have independently provided (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The next chapter will discuss an analysis of the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data as well address the thesis' research question. The themes derived from the qualitative data and the results from the quantitative data guided by the three components of the teaching presence element will structure the discussion.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The following section provides a discussion and analysis of the major themes of this study based on the qualitative and quantitative research results. Connections are made to indicators for each of the three components of the teaching presence element (design and organization, facilitation and direct instruction) that could have improved teaching presence in the online learning environment if effectively applied. The research question asked, “What is the student’s perception of a relationship between teaching presence and their failure in an online learning environment?” As well as the sub-question “Does the student distinguish between the role of the instructor and the function of teaching presence? are answered.

General Discussion

Several observations can be made of the demographics. First, there was a substantial gap between the females and other participants. Female participants accounted for (81.8%) of the study’s participants while males accounted for 17.5% and participants identifying as non-binary .7%. At present it is unclear if the sample is reflective of the current population of distance education students which are predominantly female or whether females are just more inclined to participate in research surveys.

Almost all participants indicated that online learning was extremely important to their academic achievement. This response is possibly linked to the dominance of females in distance education because of the flexibility it provides in order for them to pursue academic advancement while managing career and family commitments. An article published in the Globe and Mail (Lewington, 2018) highlighted that at Athabasca University, 65 percent of undergraduates and 74 percent of those in graduate programs are women, with a majority of them caring for dependents, according to a university spokesman. In addition, females living in

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remote communities or those who travel excessively for work are able to pursue higher education without the concerns of geographic barriers. Experts say the flexibility of online learning is especially attractive to women juggling work, family and personal demands (Lewington, 2018).

Although some situational, affective and demographic characteristics may traverse the online learner population, the changing nature of the online learner was reflected in the age range of the individuals who participated in the study. Results showed that 33.6% of the participants were between the ages of 18 - 24 and 39.4% were between the ages of 29 - 40. Increasingly, students within close proximity to traditional educational institutions are choosing distance education not because it is considered as their only alternative, but rather because they consider it as a preferred alternative.

Currently, as society struggles to manage the many implications of a global pandemic, the importance of distance education has never been more relevant and necessary to the way in which learners of all demographic pursue academic advancement. The sudden transition and adjustment to distance education as a central model of educational delivery by institutions due to the pandemic has now emphasized the notion that in the near future, distance education may not be a student's preferred alternative but in many cases it be the only option available to them.

As such, the CoI framework and particularly the teaching presence element carries great import as a benchmark that guides the instructional design and delivery of quality distance education. The effective application and practice of the framework ultimately engenders a positive learning experience for online learners and successfully facilitates their academic growth and development.

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In this study, participants' views on the existence of or lack thereof of teaching presence in their lived experience as online learners solidifies the central role that teaching presence plays in the online learning experience.

The themes derived from the qualitative data presented indicated that areas such as: feedback; communication; engagement; instructional design; student expectation; responsiveness; instructor support and student accountability were of major concern to participants.

Fewer than half of the participants 44.5% provided full or partial comments to each of the 13 questions included under the three components of the teaching presence questionnaire as well as an additional open ended question that sought to solicit their views on what input they would like to provide to the instructor in effectively delivering their online course.

Qualitative Discussion

In this section, the themes feedback; communication; engagement; instructional design; student expectation; responsiveness; instructor support and student accountability which are derived from the qualitative data is discussed. Most of the themes portrayed the participants' lived experiences and focused primarily on whether the participants perceived the instructor's behaviours to have either contributed or not contributed to their failure. One theme in particular, student accountability, identified the participants' acknowledgement of how their own behavior or personal circumstances contributed to their academic failure.

Feedback

Participants were clear and consistent in their comments about what constitutes effective feedback. They emphasized the importance of obtaining feedback from instructors because they believed the benefits gained from instructor feedback could potentially influence the difference

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between their failure and success in an online learning environment. Al-Bashir, Kabir and Rahman (2016) report that feedback is considered a vital approach to facilitate student's development as independent learners in order to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning.

An element that is essential to the effectiveness of feedback delivery is timing. For these participants, the timing of feedback was extremely vital to the relevance and meaningfulness of the feedback. Participants' stressed that their need for feedback occurred at various stages throughout their online journeys and varied for each participant. However, most participants preferred to receive regular feedback and at specific times throughout the course in order to help with their academic development.

Participants relied on feedback throughout the duration of a course to help remain engaged and motivated. They sought performance indicators to remain focused and on track as well as to create opportunities for correction and performance improvement. Throughout this process, reflection was fostered and participants gained a good understanding of how they were progressing throughout the course. When feedback was provided on a regular basis it provided opportunities to close the gap between their current and desired performance. Therefore, participants sought feedback that was more than a letter grade. They specifically needed meaningful feedback on assignments that was instrumental in enhancing critical thinking, reflective practice, and developing instructor-student relationships, information that is very important in online learning. In order to motivate participants to utilize the feedback they received, these participants expressed the need to have a positive feeling about the feedback they received. Al-Bashir, Kabir and Rahman (2016) report that while it is vital to draw students' attention to less successful parts of the assignment, caution is necessary when providing

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“negative feedback” as the learning environment can be improved by presenting feedback in a positive manner.

Communication

Effective communication within the online learning environment is a core element that participants agreed was vital to their academic success.

Participants relied on the instructor to help them successfully navigate any concerns with the institution that could potentially have a negative impact on their learning experience. According to Betts (2009) most students’ opinion is that their main contact with the institution is through communication with their instructor and they often see the instructor as a representation of the institution.

Participants valued various forms of communication with their instructor in order to facilitate knowledge acquisition, creation and transmission. However, participants depended heavily on the instructor’s judgement to select the best methods to communicate with them effectively since effective communication can often make a difference in their success or failure in the online learning experience. Kilgore (2016) posited that effective communication in online learning should aim to do more than retain students but should provide a sense of community in order to avoid the sense of isolation that some online students may experience. The objective of online communication is to achieve the same outcome as in face-to-face communications: to bond; to share information; to be heard, and to be understood. Fostering a sense of community in online learning through effective communication will ensure the learning experience is more meaningful for online students and help them stay connected during the life of the course.

Nevertheless, participants also played an important role in the communication process and were responsible for decoding messages transmitted by the instructor. As a result, they

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formed their own understanding of the instructor's messages and took into consideration the tone and clarity of the message. In some instances, participants were offended or even humiliated by the tone of the instructor's message. Such experience diminished participants' self-efficacy and self-confidence and also increased opportunities for participants to retreat into isolation, which makes the online learning experience even more challenging. Kilgore (2016) writes that when communicating online, tone will be communicated to students through choice of words, sentence structure, punctuation and the order in which the information is presented. As such it is important to remember that students may be ethnically diverse and of varying ages, and these factors affect how they perceive communication.

Participants also expressed that lack of clarity in the communication process with instructors often caused confusion or limited their understanding of the course content. As a result, the acquisition of knowledge, which is guided by the instructor, became less accessible to participants and created a lack of confidence in both the learning process and the academic institution. Effective communication is also a two-way street, therefore careful consideration must be given to how the message is conveyed so that it is received and understood by the student in exactly the way it is intended. It is also important to listen to gain the full meaning of what is being said in order to ensure the student feels heard and understood (Kilgore, 2016).

Engagement

Engagement (instructor-to-student and student-to-student) is essential in creating an online learning environment that promotes a sense of community that cultivates self-efficacy and enhances learner motivation. Participants conveyed the feeling of disengagement and isolation they developed when they were unable to interact with the instructor and their peers. They often

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did not feel a sense of community in their online learning experience nor did they feel that the instructor had created initiatives that would foster a sense of community among participants.

Instructors can create opportunities for both instructor-to-student and student-to-student engagement by utilizing various synchronous and asynchronous methods that are available in the online learning environment either via the LMS or other types of technologies that are available within the industry. Communicating with students is now possible “24/7-anytime, anywhere.” Technologies like email, texts, websites, electronic portfolios, online surveys and video chat applications have made communication between instructor and students more timely, efficient, productive, and satisfying for both parties (Kilgore, 2016). However, participants often felt that these tools were either not used at all or they were underutilized as instructors often did not participate in the discussion forums nor provided other types of synchronized activities to foster student engagement.

Participants’ desire for student-to-student interaction was communicated in their views on engagement, they believed that opportunities to participate in group work activities are effective in engendering engagement among students. As such, participants felt that they would have benefitted from learning activities, such as group work, that they felt would create interaction and opportunities that would motivate each other as well as support development of critical-thinking, communication, and decision-making skills. Lieberman (2018) noted that students learn valuable skills in communication and group dynamics that will serve them well beyond their online courses as it is plausible that students will find that their professional field of choice will likely require group work. Most participants valued a sense of community and looked to the instructor to create an environment that built cohesiveness and the chance for them to share

knowledge with each other while they develop collaborative skills that can be applicable within a real-world environment.

Instructional Design

The effectiveness of the instructional design in online learning can have a significant influence on participants' ability to engage in a rewarding learning experience. Participants expressed the importance of the credibility of the course content and the negative impact that inaccurate course content had on their aptitude to develop understanding and knowledge in the online learning environment. They felt that inaccurate course content deteriorated the quality of instructional design and increased the confusion and ambiguity that they experienced during the learning process.

The objective of effective instructional design is to simplify the learning experience for learners; a well-designed online course nurtures both learning and retention. The influence is direct and impacts participants' engagement level with the course content. It can even determine whether participants will successfully complete the course. As such, quality instructional design is paramount in the online learning strategy. Moreover, extensive research points to the necessity of certain key components to ensure effectiveness in designing educational programs that achieve specific learning goals and outcomes (Booth, 2018).

Ease of access to externally sourced information utilized in the instructional design of the course was also a major concern for participants. They encountered challenges accessing information that was central to the learning process but was located on external websites that required password access. Other issues such as inactive hyperlinks inhibited the ease with which participants were able to engage with the course content.

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Poor information design and layout within the LMS also created confusion for participants. They struggled to locate course information that they felt should have been more visible in the LMS. In addition, instructions for course activities and assessments were not clearly written and at times outdated instructions that were intended for a previous section of the course were overlooked and as a result remained in the existing section of the course that was being currently delivered. Participants explained that clarification is often sought from instructors in these instances due to the bewilderment and confusion they have experienced.

Participants also stated that in some of their online experiences, the instructional design of the course did not provide for instructor activity, engagement, or communication and did not occur unless the instructor was prompted to do so by participants. In addition, some courses were designed with pre-recorded lectures and as such provided no opportunity for participants to initiate contact with the instructor.

Student Expectation

Participants viewed the relationship with their academic institutions (and their instructors) primarily as a transactional exchange that required both parties to play a role in a fair and equitable delivery and acquisition of quality education. A relationship that is akin to one that exists with their service providers, where their bills are paid in a timely manner and there is an expectation they will consistently receive quality and reliable products and services.

Participants largely viewed their academic experience as a financial investment that is tied to an opportunity cost. Therefore, they were intent on achieving those academic goals, whether it was for personal or professional gain. They sought rewarding learning experience in the online learning environment that could adequately translate into real world application of knowledge and skills. As noted by Roddy et al. (2017) it is vital to ensure a positive and

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rewarding experience for online students, particularly those enrolled within intensive online courses. Therefore, it is contingent upon the institutional provider to offer equitable support structures that can be appropriately transitioned into the online environment.

Participants believed they had a responsibility to uphold their financial commitment and performance expectations as part of the transaction, and in turn the institution was responsible for delivering quality education that meets established academic standards. Teaching presence is a fundamental factor in this exchange as the participants' primary contact with an institution is through their communication with faculty. As such, the absence of teaching presence signalled a shortcoming in the transactional exchange and a decline in the expectations and trust students have in the institution. Being already prone to higher attrition rates, fully online students adopting study via intensive modes have increased expectations of their instructors, and the course learning environment more broadly, to provide the necessary infrastructure required to manage the increased workload (Roddy et al., 2017).

Participants expected the institution and instructors to demonstrate accountability by ensuring that systems and structures were implemented to support the delivery of quality education. Performance management measures and other mechanisms were expected to be properly positioned to alleviate any unfavourable impact on their learning experience.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness on the part of the instructor played an important role in optimizing participants' success in online learning. Instructor access that was reliable and dependable allowed participants to have a high sense of confidence in their ability to navigate challenging situations as they learned. Participants required instructors to communicate their availability by providing scheduled virtual office hours that managed participants' expectations regarding

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instructor accessibility in real time. Ely (2011) suggested that online instructors should be responsive to students' inquiries, as many colleges and degree programs require online instructors to respond to all student questions within 48 hours excluding holidays and weekends. Office and calling hours should also be published in a readily accessible location within the LMS.

An instructor's ability to be adaptable and flexible to the needs of participants on issues that have real value to their learning experience but are unrelated to assessments was seen by participants as a value add. These issues often include things such as advice on career aspirations, industry best practices in their related fields, or academic direction on future program and course selections. Participants described the lack of response from instructors on communication initiated through various channels as an issue that increased their frustration and discouraged learning.

Online learners are representative of various demographics, educational background and career orientations, and as such they have different needs and expectations regarding instructor accessibility. Some participants may have required minimal access to the instructor because they are more self-directed in their online learning approach such as being able to monitor their own learning progress and identify learning goals. Conversely, other participants required more frequent access to the instructor because they were less self-directed, thus they generally experience a more difficult time navigating online learning.

Instructor Support

Instructor support is a central element in online learning and its presence creates an anchor for participants to navigate the learning experience in a rewarding manner. A majority of participants reported that they had a strong sense of dependency on instructor support. However,

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trying to cope with the absence of instructor support during their online learning experience impacted their learning experience negatively. Online learning environments are often void of the physical human and social interaction that participants generally enjoy in the face-to-face learning environment. As such, participants relied on various forms of activities on the part of the instructor to help them develop an effective support structure during their learning journey.

The instructor's efforts and reliability help to build confidence in the participants' ability to trust the knowledge; expertise; understanding and empathy that is demonstrated throughout the learning experience. Activities such as providing weekly or regular updates to participants, proactively offering additional clarification and guidance on course topics and assessments, as well as being understanding and empathic to participants, influences the participants' learning experience in a positive manner. Ely (2011) suggested that students should always know how much time weekly readings, activities, and assignments will take to complete. In addition, objectives of the lesson as well as lesson assignments expectations should be communicated and a calendar posted with the syllabus, so that students may clearly identify assignment due dates.

Participants appreciated instructor support that helped them to stay on task with their learning activities. They found regular reminders and updates from the instructor regarding important due dates extremely valuable. In addition, they also valued instructor expertise that helped them to engage with the course content in a manner that introduced them to expert knowledge in their field. The opportunity to add context to the learning activities would have provided a real-world application of the learning process they found beneficial to their academic and professional goals. According to Ely (2011) a good way to keep students engaged and to display instructor experience in the field is to supplement the course's basic content with current and external resources such as articles, websites, and videos. These resources are helpful in

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revealing core concepts in real world settings, and in demonstrating the importance of the instructor's work.

The instructor's ability to demonstrate a sense of humanity through understanding and empathy is reassuring to participants. Often participants struggled to become familiar and comfortable with online learning. As such, they were looking to the instructor to convey warmth and humanize the interaction when providing support. Overall, participants consistently communicated that they tried to gain the type of support that they felt would have helped them to succeed. However, lack of instructor support was one of the most significant challenges that hindered their ability to achieve success in their online learning experience. Roddy et al. (2017) noted that the faster pace of the learning environment usually inherent in intensive courses often means both students and instructors have less time to address any key concerns, provide remedial support, or rectify any unintended technical or learning delays. Thus, the process of monitoring student progress and potential barriers is paramount in intensive online learning environments.

Student Accountability

Some participants regarded student accountability to be an important trait they needed to develop as online learners. They felt that learning to be accountable would help them to take responsibility for their actions and their learning, as well as improve their academic performance. They acknowledged that they had an important role to play in their academic success in the online learning environment. In many instances they lacked the ability to keep up with the requirements and expectations of online learning which contributed to their failure.

Many participants faced challenges in terms of meeting all their professional, family and study commitments. The effort required to manage these factors often placed an emotional strain on participants as they try to successfully navigate online learning while managing parental

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responsibilities and other family emergencies. As such, they often faced the difficult choice of accepting failure in their academic pursuit in order to prioritize family and professional commitments. While students welcome the flexibility of online learning, a requirement for that flexibility also carries with it additional complications: factors such as age, gender, educational history, work obligations, and family commitments have all been found, in turn, to have an impact on completion rates in post-secondary education settings (Roddy et al., 2017)

The difficulty of adapting to online learning from the traditional face-to-face learning is also an issue that participants highlighted and acknowledged. Some participants struggled to successfully adjust to the online learning environment. Lack of instructor interaction in the instructional design of the course they failed was not ideal for participants whose learning style was dependent on a teaching approach that provided more instructional guidance and direction common to face-to-face learning. Therefore, some felt that they did not necessarily make the correct choice in selecting a model of educational delivery that was compatible with their learning style and could engender their academic success. Roddy et al. (2017) suggested that beyond the need to overcome technological obstacles, students also face the pressures of academic achievement, transitioning to post-secondary life, and time management, and as a result these factors often create increased stress among students and ultimately contributed to their failure in online learning.

Procrastination also played a negative role in the participants' ability to effectively manage their workload which is a critical success factor in online learning. Some participants candidly expressed that they struggled to keep pace because they lacked the necessary self-governance and self-directedness to succeed in online learning.

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Even with access to instructor support some participants were unable to request help when they needed it due to their lack of self-confidence and inability to self-advocate. In addition, financial challenges and the stress and pressure that is often associated with securing funding for educational expenses is also one fundamental factor that impacted their outcome in online learning.

Quantitative Discussion

In this section, answers to the CoI questions are further examined individually with discussion of possible implications for contribution to student success or failure. It is important to note that as participants answered the survey questions, they were directed to consider each question in relation to causes for having failed a course. Thus, answers that disagreed or strongly disagreed indicated that the instructor's behaviour listed in the question contributed to their failure whilst answers that agreed or strongly agreed indicated that the instructor's behaviour did not contribute to their failure.

Design and Organization

Garrison (2017) noted that the CoI framework provides the structure in terms of design and organization for a worthwhile educational experience. While the design emphasizes the structural decisions made before the process begins, the organization refers to similar decisions that are made to adjust to changes during the educational transaction. However, the uncertain nature of the development of knowledge creates a degree of ambiguity in the design process which results in a need for flexibility (Garrison, 2017).

Table 9 reports the measures of central tendency and standard deviations for the Design and Organization questions of the CoI survey. The means for each question are primarily neutral; however, the mode, median, and standard deviation suggest that although most responses were in

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the “agree” range, the medians and standard deviations suggest that participants reported a range of answers rather than a consistent statement of agree or disagree. The single exception is question 4 that reports participants agreeing that the instructor clearly communicated important dates; however, the median is still in the neutral range and the standard deviation indicates that answers ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Table 9

Measures of Central Tendency for Teaching Presence Design and Organization Questions

Design and Organization	Mean	Mode	Median	STD
The instructor clearly communicated the important course topics.	3.00	4	3.04	1.101
The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.	3.00	4	3.23	1.057
The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	3.00	4	3.15	1.135
The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/times frames for learning activities.	4.00	4	3.32	1.169

Range: 1 & 2 = 0 – 2.5; 3 = 2.5 – 3.5; 4 & 5 = 3.5 - 5

While participants’ responses were overall neutral for the design and organization component, the data suggests that certain instructional design and organization indicators such as: setting curriculum; designing methods; establishing netiquette, and utilizing the medium effectively, were not effectively and consistently applied to the design and organization process for the learning experience encountered by many participants. The broad range of responses to the questions also suggest that for these questions some participants felt the instructors met their

needs while other participants did not. The median scores indicate that nearly half of the participants felt that lack of these instructor's behaviour contributed to their failure.

Facilitation

In contrast to the design and organization component of the teaching presence element, participants provided very negative quantitative responses for the facilitation component.

According to Garrison (2017), teaching presence plays an essential role in facilitating discourse in a learning experience and is a necessary requirement of an online learning environment. In order to sustain this commitment and encourage quality contribution to the learning environment, the discourse needs to be focused and constructive. Based on the results of the Teaching Presence questions for Facilitation, a conclusion can be drawn that the absence of facilitation inherently deprived participants of an important part of their online learning experience which played a fundamental role in the failure that they experienced.

Garrison (2017) further noted that interest, engagement, and learning converges at the facilitation component of teaching presence. Therefore, the assumption can be made that the lack of meaningful engagement experienced by participants hindered the level of interest that was necessary to engender learning among participants and could have contributed to their perception of their experience with failure.

Facilitating discourse indicators such as: setting the climate for learning, assessing the efficacy of the process; seeking to reach consensus/understanding, and drawing in participants by prompting discussion requires thoughtful consideration and effort by instructors in order to promote a "guide on the side" approach rather than a "sage on the stage". This approach is vital in helping students to take responsibility to collaboratively construct and confirm understanding and create an opportunity for teaching presence to have the right balance of control.

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Table 10 illustrates the measures of central tendency and standard deviation for each of the six questions in the Facilitation component. The means for all six questions are in the “disagree” range. The modes range from neutral to strongly disagree. The medians indicate that half of the scores are in the disagree range of 1.5 – 2.5; however, the standard deviation sets the participant responses to questions about their instructor’s facilitation behaviours in the disagree range, suggesting that lack of satisfactory facilitation on the part of the instructor contributed to course failure.

Table 10

Measures of Central Tendency for Teaching Presence Facilitation Questions

Facilitation	Mean	Mode	Median	STD
The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me learn.	2.00	3	2.46	1.022
The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.	2.00	2	2.36	1.049
The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	2.00	2	2.11	1.012
The instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.	2.00	2	2.27	1.011
The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course.	2.00	2	2.47	1.105
Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.	2.00	1	1.91	.946

Range: 1 & 2 = 0 – 2.5; 3 = 2.5 – 3.5; 4 & 5 = 3.5 – 5

Direct Instruction

Garrison (2017) noted that although direct instruction is a legitimate and authoritative influence, this essential teaching responsibility is often lacking in formal online learning environments. Direct instruction indicators such as: present content/questions; summarize the discussion; diagnose misconceptions, and respond to technical issues, are necessary to support an effective and efficient learning experience in the online learning environment (Garrison, 2017).

Table 11 illustrates the measures of central tendency and standard deviation for the three questions that comprise the Direct Instruction component for Teaching Presence. Of the three questions, only one question was not situated in the “disagree” or neutral ranges. Survey results indicated that participants responded in the neutral range when asked if instructor behaviour provided feedback in a timely fashion. The mean is 3, in the center of the neutral range; however, the mode of 4 suggests that either disagree or strongly disagree outliers pulled the mean down to 3. The standard deviation also suggests that “strongly disagree” answers contributed to the skew, suggesting that some participants did not receive feedback in a timely manner which contributed to their failure.

Table 11*Measures of Central Tendency for Teaching Presence Direct Instruction Questions*

Direct Instruction	Mean	Mode	Median	STD
The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me learn.	2.00	2	2.37	1.000
The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.	2.00	2	2.46	1.182
The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.	3.00	4	3.16	1.133

Range: 1 & 2 = 0 – 2.5; 3 = 2.5 – 3.5; 4 & 5 = 3.5 – 5

Without sufficient direct instruction, most participants were unable to benefit from the experience of being guided through the learning process with the use of constructive feedback. Moreover, participants were unable to benefit from opportunities that allowed them to identify with a larger community of learners in order to work collaboratively with other learners and develop subject matter understanding. The lack of sufficient direct instruction in the online learning environment played an inherent role in participants' inability to progress at their own pace. Participants' ability to gain instruction that would have helped them identify their strengths and weaknesses in order to address particular challenges were diminished.

Discussion

The objective of the research is to contribute new understanding and knowledge to the field. This study offers a unique inquiry into teaching presence and student failure, two concepts that, when combined into a single inquiry, provide a forum for students who have experienced failure to be heard.

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This section will address the research question and sub-question with conclusions and observations presented by the findings. It is important to reiterate that the focus of the study was not to compare the perspectives of participants who have either failed or not failed in online learning, but to focus on participants who have failed and to understand their perspective on teaching presence in relation to their failure.

Research Question

“What is the student’s perception of a relationship between teaching presence and their failure in an online learning environment?”

For this study, a total of 137 participants who completed the survey indicated that they have experienced failure in an online learning environment, and 44.5% of those participants (61) provided comments that yielded qualitative analysis results that indicated that they have an unfavourable perception of the instructor’s behaviours. All 137 participants provided responses for the Likert scale questions.

A further analysis of the 61 participants’ qualitative comments yielded the following:

1. The data indicated that participants’ perception of the instructional design of the online courses and the model of educational delivery were not in alignment with the Teaching Presence component of the CoI framework. Many participants offered strong statements to that effect.
2. Some online courses were also not designed with an instructor to facilitate communication and interaction with participants. As a result, some participants indicated that they had no interaction with the instructor in their online learning experience, and attributed this absence as contributing to their failure. Furthermore, they had no clear expectation or understanding whether instructor facilitation and communication was

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central to their online learning experience. Participants also offered many statements to the effect that the instructor had a role and responsibility to deliver these requirements.

3. Participants did not understand the survey questions or they were not conversant on the relevance of the question as it related to their online learning experience. Participants' inability to understand the questions could have been influenced by the limited understanding of the differences between teacher presence and teaching presence as contributors to their failure.
4. Participants also had difficulty assessing what level of feedback was provided and whether the feedback they received could have been considered sufficient.

Research Sub-question

Does the student distinguish between the role of the instructor and the function of teaching presence?

As previously mentioned Garrison (2017) clarified the responsibility of the student in fostering teaching presence. In discussing the concept of teaching presence Garrison (2017) noted that there is no "learner" presence or "teacher" presence per se, because teacher and students assume varying degrees of teaching presence although the instructor will generally demonstrate greater teaching presence at various times. However, the objective is to ensure students assume more teaching presence and to gradually become more responsible in order to construct meaning and understanding.

Nonetheless, participants in this study may not have understood the difference between "teacher" and "teaching" presence, resulting in the possibility that their responses to the survey could have been influenced by the questions that ask directly about the actions of the instructor.

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Participants were instructed to answer with their course failure in mind. Both the quantitative and qualitative results of the study showed trends that indicated that participants perceived that there is an association between teaching presence and their failure in an online learning environment. Participants' responses indicated that their perception of teaching presence lies solely with the efforts of the instructor and, as such, the language they used to describe teaching presence consistently focused on the roles and responsibilities of the instructor.

Comparing the measures of central tendency and standard deviation for the quantitative data with the qualitative data for the design and organization component were not consistent, indicating that the survey questions were not consistent with what the participants reported. Additionally, data for the facilitation and direct instruction components reported negative (disagree and strongly disagree) findings in terms of the instructor behaviours indicated in the respective questions, meaning that the qualitative findings aligned with the results of the quantitative findings.

Overall, both the qualitative and quantitative sets of data provided a unified understanding of the results to the research question, that is, low percentages reported by the survey were consistent with the qualitative statements that were highly critical of the topics of the questions.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a discussion and analysis of the results of this study. Connections were made to indicators for each of the three components of the teaching presence element (design and organization, facilitation and direct instruction) that could have improved teaching presence in the online learning environment if effectively applied.

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A discussion of the themes for the qualitative data highlighted the participants' lived experiences within the online learning environment and allowed for the participants' voices to be heard directly. The next chapter will discuss implications for future research, recommendations, and reflections on the topic of teaching presence and failure in online learning.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The existence of teaching presence is not possible within an online learning environment without a pedagogically experienced and knowledgeable instructor who can identify worthwhile content; organize learning activities; guide the discourse; offer additional sources of information; diagnose misconceptions and provide conceptual order when required. These are direct and proactive interventions that are essential in supporting an effective and efficient learning environment (Garrison, 2017).

The objective of this study was to analyze research data from participants who had experienced failure in online learning; and to understand their perspective about failure and teaching presence to further provide insights from the student's viewpoint that can influence the thoughtful consideration of teaching presence during the instructional design and delivery of online learning. An intended outcome is to create awareness on how failure impacts the student's learning experience and the need for the proactive development of strategies and resources to help students avoid failure in online learning.

Implications for Further Research

While there is an emerging trend with the use of the CoI theoretical framework to design and improve online learning and blended courses and programs, the research data from this study suggested that the teaching presence element of the framework is still not widely applied in the instructional design process. The results of the research data indicated that the instructional design of the online courses taken by participants did not align with the theories and practices of the teaching presence element of CoI framework based on a majority of the participants' online learning experiences.

Understanding Teaching Presence

The absence of a universal approach to instructional design that is predicated on the CoI framework, particularly the teaching presence element, has created a need for further clarity to help participants distinguish between the instructional design attributes of the course, and the instructor-oriented activities within the course. As noted by Skramstad et al. (2012), the students' perceptions of teaching presence can ultimately impact this element of the CoI model, as implementing teaching presence is viewed by students as the instructor's responsibility. However, there are aspects of the course design and delivery that are influenced by the instructional design attributes of the course and not the instructor-oriented activities within the course. Therefore, it is possible that if a course is not designed with meaningful learning activities to create a sense of community among participants, the instructor may not initiate, augment, or create those opportunities in order to engender a sense of community. Further, the instructor may not be included in the instructional design of the course at all.

Moreover, the study's participants appeared unable to distinguish between the role of the instructor and some key indicators of the teaching presence element that are integral to the instructional design process. The absence of an established standard for what is considered quality online learning limited the opportunity for participants to properly assess what should be perceived as an acceptable standard in areas such as the instructor providing timely feedback or the instructor facilitating regular occurrence of communication in the online learning environment. Exploring heightened communication within a course with students regarding combined roles of the teacher and student to foster learning may result in a shift in understanding the nature of teaching presence.

Defining Who is the Teacher

The results of this study indicated the participants' definition of the instructor versus a definition of the teacher's assistant had an impact on how participants perceive teaching presence. Some participants' only interaction occurred with the teaching assistant as there was no contact with the instructor, as such some participants did not perceive that teaching presence existed in the online learning environment. On the other hand, other participants perceive the teacher's assistant to be the instructor since the teacher's assistant was their only contact within the online learning environment.

The teacher's assistant is an individual who assists a teacher with instructional responsibilities. Teacher's assistants include graduate teaching assistants who are graduate students and undergraduate teaching assistants who are undergraduate students. In most post-secondary institutions, teacher's assistants play an important role in the student's learning experience; however, the instructor is the teacher or professor not the teacher's assistant. Therefore, for future research the question of participants' understanding of the role of the instructor in the post-secondary online learning environment versus the role of the teacher's assistant is valid as it relates to teaching presence in the online learning environment. Such an inquiry could be taken a step further to investigate student failure in this scenario.

Teacher Presence or Teaching Presence

In addition, participants did not have a proper understanding or awareness of the concept of teaching presence and how it related to their online learning experience. They were unable to distinguish the actions of the instructor from the concept of teaching presence, as such, they did not know how to assess the level of teaching presence they had experienced in instances where teaching presence may have occurred. As a result, it does appear that the participants' perception

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of failure in their online learning experience was linked more directly to teacher presence which focuses on the efforts of the instructor rather than teaching presence which is a more collaborative approach to learning that includes both the efforts of the instructor and the learner.

Teaching presence is of central importance to the instructional design process, therefore research needs to be conducted on how emphasis can be placed on utilizing the teaching presence element of the CoI framework as an established standard in the instructional design process where the indicators of all three components of teaching presence are intentionally incorporated into the instructional design and delivery of online education.

Unrelated Factors

Participants' personal experiences that are unrelated to instructional design and course quality also have a potential impact on failure in online learning. The participants' limited expectation of their own role in the online learning experience potentially impacted their failure. Moreover, the challenge of managing multiple roles, as student, parent, caregiver, and income earner often created barriers to learning, especially for female participants. Factors unrelated to course quality and instructional design that can be considered as potential external influences to failure in online learning should be explored in further research, possibly as exploration of personal stories of students during their academic journeys, or following students who had failed a course to understand changes they may undertake to avoid repeating their academic failure.

Reflections

I became interested in my thesis topic because I wanted to understand the student's perception of teaching presence and their failure in an online learning environment as well as how the student views the role of the instructor in teaching presence.

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Online learning has had a fundamental impact on both my professional and academic careers. My experience as both an online student and instructor has provided me with a unique perspective on the research topic.

A few years ago, I decided to pursue a MEd in Distance Education and chose Athabasca University because I had previously completed an undergraduate degree with the institution. More importantly, a colleague who was currently in the program informed me that he was also advised that Athabasca University is the best choice in Canada for a MEd degree.

At the time I was an experienced professional with a degree in Human Resources and Labour Relations, a Certified Human Resources Leadership designation, as well as other business management and adult education teaching credentials. I had also been a part time post-secondary online instructor for many years.

I had become disenchanted with human resources management as a practitioner. Even though I enjoyed the recruitment, employee development and training aspect of human resources, I did not enjoy the employee discipline, terminations and downsizing activities. As a result, I decided to pursue a second career in distance education.

I completed my first semester in the MEd program and was assigned a letter grade B for the final course grade. Shortly thereafter, I contacted the instructor to arrange a phone call to discuss my performance and gain feedback, from his perspective, on my cognitive ability to further pursue the program. After agreeing to the phone call, the instructor cancelled and provided the feedback via email. The written feedback indicated that there were more academically experienced students in the course which was the reason for the letter grade B that I was assigned.

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In contrast, to the instructor-student experience described above, I met Dr. Blodgett-Griffin in my second semester while I was enrolled in the second course of the program. I was concerned about my ability to successfully complete the course, I lacked confidence in my ability and the subject matter. Dr. Blodgett-Griffin was kind, patient, encouraging, respectful, responsive, motivating, empathic, non-judgemental and knowledgeable. Her guidance and support helped improve my confidence. I successfully completed the course, and subsequently all the remaining courses in the program.

I never encountered Dr. Blodgett-Griffin again until the MDDE 700 courses and neither did I encounter another instructor of her calibre. I decided to pursue the thesis route of the MEd program when I learned that Dr. Blodgett-Griffin was teaching some of the MDDE 700 courses. Thankfully, she agreed to become my thesis supervisor! I wouldn't be here today had it not been for her. She supported me as I took time away from the thesis development process and underwent an emergency medical surgery as well grieved the tragic and sudden loss of a family member.

I have often found myself providing support to students that are unrelated to academic requirements, whether it's a male student battling a degenerative disease; or a female student experiencing domestic abuse; another being denied the right to education by her spouse due to cultural ideologies and traditions or others dealing with the sudden and tragic loss of family members. However, in spite of all these challenges, they were committed to their academic careers, and I had the privilege of partnering with them and supporting them on their journeys as they strived for success.

I have been privileged to learn about teaching presence in both theory and practice from Dr. Blodgett-Griffin which has shaped my perspective on teaching presence in online learning.

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Most importantly, I have had the opportunity to emulate many of those traits in my own teaching practice.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

- Nelson Mandela

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Student's Perception of Teaching Presence and Failure in Online Learning

December 21, 2018

Principal Researcher: Lorraine Simpson-Spence (lrrnsimpson@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin (cynthiablodgettau@gmail.com)

My name is Lorraine Simpson-Spence, and I am a Master's of Education student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research study on the relationship between teaching presence and student's failure in online learning. Specifically, the study will seek to determine whether teaching presence in online learning has an effect on students' learning experience and most importantly their final course grade. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin.

I am inviting you to participate in this research because you have had previous experiences with online learning and you are currently a student pursuing one or more courses online. Participating in this research will allow you the opportunity to share your experiences as an online learner and contribute to ongoing efforts by post-secondary institutions to customize resources towards improving the quality of online learning.

As a participant, you are asked to participate in this study by completing a short online self-administered questionnaire about how you understand the role of the teacher in regards to your own success or failure while enrolled in an online course. The survey consists of two sections. Section one is a demographic questionnaire and section two is a questionnaire about teaching presence. Participation will take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

TEACHING PRESENCE AND FAILURE IN ONLINE LEARNING

Please note that all data gathered during the tenure of this research study will be stored for at least five years as per university policy. All electronic data will be kept in a password-protected computer at my office and encrypted. However, as data will contain no identifying features, it will not be possible to link information back to participants.

Results of this study may be disseminated in one or more of the following:

- 1) Final research report to be provided to AU. The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room and the final research paper will be publicly available.
- 2) Article(s) to be submitted to academic and professional journals.
- 3) Presentation(s) at academic/professional conferences.

Please be assured that your involvement in this research is completely voluntary. The data collected will include no identifying information and your name will not be presented on any document. There will be no consequences from deciding to withdraw your participation and no need to explain your withdrawal. You have the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any time during this research, without prejudice. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

You may withdraw from the study at any time by simply closing out of your browser. Once you submit your completed survey, however, the data cannot be withdrawn as the survey is completely anonymous. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact me, (the principal investigator) by email at lrrnsimpson@gmail.com or my supervisor cynthiablodgettau@gmail.com.

Thank you,

TEACHING PRESENCE AND FAILURE IN ONLINE LEARNING

Lorraine Simpson-Spence

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you would like to participate in this study, please proceed to the Survey Questionnaire and the Participant Consent Form by clicking on the link below.

[SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND PARTICIPANT CONSENT](#)

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the Athabasca Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718 or by email to rebsec@athabascau.ca

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Student's Perception of Teaching Presence and Failure in Online Learning

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project.

This survey questionnaire captures information on student's perception of the relationship between teaching presence and failure in online learning. This Master's thesis research study will seek to determine whether teaching presence in online learning has an effect on students' learning experience and most importantly their final course grade.

Please type in your responses to the following questions and return the completed questionnaire as an email attachment to: lrrnsimpson@gmail.com

Note: The completion of this survey questionnaire and its submission is viewed as your consent to participate.

Appendix C: Ethics Approval



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 23436

Principal Investigator:

Miss. Lorraine Simpson-Spence, Graduate Student
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Master of Education in Distance Education (MEd)

Supervisor:

Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin (Supervisor)

Project Title:

Student's Perception of Teaching Presence and Failure in Online Learning

Effective Date: May 25, 2020

Expiry Date: May 24, 2021

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

Approved by:

Date: May 25, 2020

Carolyn Greene, Chair
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
University Research Services, Research Centre
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3
E-mail rebsec@athabascau.ca
Telephone: 780.675.6718

Appendix D: Survey

SECTION I:

Demographic Questionnaire

The following section aims to gather some profile data. Please put an “x” in the appropriate box.

1. English is my first language

Yes

No

2. Age

18 to 28

29 to 40

41 to 50

Over 50

3. Gender – Identify as:

Male

Female

Non-binary

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4. How would you describe your online learning experience to date?

- I have only had positive experiences with online learning
- I have had both positive and negative experiences with online learning
- I have only had negative experiences with online learning.

5. How significant is online learning to your academic advancement?

- Extremely significant
- Significant
- Insignificant

6. What is your student status?

- Full time
- Part time
- Continuing Education

SECTION II:

The CoI Survey is an open resource under Creative Commons license. As a result, permission is hereby granted, free of charge, to any person obtaining a copy of the CoI survey to use, share, copy, adapt, merge, publish or distribute the document in any medium or format for any purpose, provided that appropriate credit is given, and any modified material is distributed under the same Creative Commons license. <https://CoI.athabascau.ca/CoI-model/CoI-survey/>.

TEACHING PRESENCE AND FAILURE IN ONLINE LEARNING

Teaching Presence Questionnaire

Questions adapted from *Arbaugh et al., (2008) Community of Inquiry (CoI) questionnaire on teaching presence which focuses on the viewpoint of the student on the importance of the instructor's role in their online learning experience.*

Each statement below describes an element of teaching presence that is relative to online learning. The Likert scale questions represents numbers that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Based on the scale, select the number that best indicates your response to the particular statement.

Use the comments section below each statement to elaborate on your response as necessary.

Design and Organisation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
The instructor clearly communicated the important course topics.					
Comments:					
The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.					
Comments:					
The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.					
Comments:					
The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/times frames for learning activities.					
Comments:					

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Facilitation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me learn.					
Comments:					
The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.					
Comments:					
The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.					
Comments:					
The instructor helped to keep course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.					
Comments:					
The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in the course.					
Comments:					
Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.					
Comments:					

TEACHING PRESENCE AND FAILURE IN ONLINE LEARNING

Direct Instruction	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me learn.					
Comments:					
The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.					
Comments:					
The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.					
Comments:					

<p>Please answer the following question: If you had an opportunity to participate in how the course was taught by the instructor, do you think that approach would have helped you to achieve a better final course grade?</p>
<p>Comments:</p>

SUBMIT

Thank you for your participation in this survey!