Chapter 25

An Urgency for Change in Roles: A Cross Analysis of Digital Teaching and Learning Environments From Students and Faculty Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Student dependence on technology, higher education institution efforts of digitalization in teaching and learning, along with the faculty member hesitancy to adopt innovative technologies all contribute to current challenges in higher education. The focus of this chapter is on exploring the gap between student and faculty perceptions about utilizing technology in teaching and learning, in addition to enlighten institutional roles and strategies to sustain efforts for managing such environments and faculty development. Multiple research methods are used to derive insights. The findings point towards the need to increase knowledge base and to expand faculty development around digital teaching and learning strategies as well as fostering student faculty collaboration to improve learner engagement and performance. As a result of changing roles, the pedagogical methods and technological tools used in digital teaching and learning process should not be a sole decision of the institution, but as a result of a collaborative mindset of institution, faculty, and students.

INTRODUCTION

Present challenges facing higher education embrace efforts for enhancing student engagement via Digital Teaching and Learning (DTL) environments, along with empowering faculty members who have been hesitant to adopt new learning approaches. Researchers are beginning to focus on student engagement as a means of overcoming student dissatisfaction. Delialioğlu (2012) defines student engagement as involving students in meaningful academic activities by designing learning environments and utilizing engaging teaching practices.

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There is an increase in the use of digital technologies for learning purposes (Henderson, Selwyn, & Aston, 2015; Lai, Wang, & Lei, 2012; Poon, 2013). Some study observes a significant relationship between students’ use of technology and their achievements (Al-Hariri & Al-Hattami, 2017). As revealed, by US Public Sector Education Director at Cisco, Renee Patton (2018) “It’s now easier for students to engage on their own terms - whether online, hybrid, or flipped - and no longer having to travel across campus for every single meeting makes it easier for leaders and faculty members to work together, too.” These encourage to review and recognize the changing roles of students in a variety of digital teaching and learning environments that they are comfortable with; which leads to the need of investigating the technology usage perceptions from both students’ and faculty perspectives.

On the other hand, faculty technological competencies are affecting students’ perceptions (Malechwanzi, Lei & Wang, 2016). Collaço (2017) also suggests “teachers need to get students actively involved in their learning experience by incorporating relevant, and enjoyable activities that promote student-teacher interaction, and student teamwork” (p.45). “For both students and teachers, ubiquitous connectivity facilitates greater collaboration, enabling people to develop increasingly connected communities in their chosen fields. Being more available to students can also empower teachers to deliver more innovative, exciting lectures, whether face-to-face or online, while offering more personalised feedback and mentoring.” (Patton, 2018)

Students’ growing unwillingness to learn in traditional classes (Moore, 2007) coupled with faculty reluctance to use educational technologies (Tallvid, 2016) raises the importance of examining the nature of this gap between students and faculty in higher education. From both perspectives, Bond et.al. (2018) suggests hybrid systems to integrate institutional and external technological tools that will enhance teaching and learning processes for better student acceptance.

Motivation for faculty to integrate digital teaching and learning environments can be encouraged through professional development offerings, modeling best and innovative practices of technology usage both inside and outside the classroom. Faculty competency that lacks may strongly have been as a result of the institution’s overall approach to promote the use of technologies for teaching. However, few studies in the literature consider students’ and faculty members’ perceptions at the same time which is important.

The focus of this chapter is exploring the gap between students and faculty about utilizing technology in teaching and learning for enlightening institutional role and strategies to sustain efforts for managing such environments and faculty development. First, digitalization in higher education which, results in an extensive use of innovative information and communication technologies for the support of teaching and learning will be discussed. It will be followed by review of literature of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) environment use by students and faculty. Next, there will be a brief review of faculty development efforts in higher education institutions for technology use in teaching and learning. A case in a private institution will be investigated where multiple research methods are used to derive insights. Finally, the findings of the research will be discussed which point towards the need to increase knowledgebase and to expand faculty development around digital teaching and learning strategies. The chapter concludes with suggestions to narrow this gap between students and faculty members; to adequately emerge potential institutional strategies by identifying their perceptions about the usage of digital technology environments as well as future needs.
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