
Online Education in the USA

Online education has been changing the way students learn and how teachers educate those students. Online education has made a way for students who cannot attend a traditional lecture to be able to obtain their degrees. I personally would not have been able to work on receiving my graduate degree without the option of online classes. However, online education has been met with backlash and some bias. The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of whether or not online education is worth the time and effort of colleges, educators, and students. The article reviews will also discuss the effectiveness of online programs and if they can take the place of traditional classrooms for students who are unable to attend campus classes.

Philosophical

Milana, Webb, Holford, Waller, and Jarvis (2018) wanted to find a connection between adult education, lifelong learning, and online education. They proposed the theory of connectivist learning, which is a combination of chaos, network, complexity, and self-organization. The goal of connectivist learning is to teach students how to learn, how to learn from different opinions and sources, and to create their own connections between the opinions and sources. Connectivist learning can be connected to adult education through three learning metaphors: acquisition, participation, and knowledge creation. Acquisition is to gain knowledge with the intent to share the knowledge, participation is to take notice of changes in the community in order to make changes, and knowledge creation is creating new and improving old knowledge. Knowledge creation is believed to be the most important of the three metaphors with regards to the workplace. Students need to be able to learn and contribute to help advance their workplace in terms of products and production. Online education has helped students become more productive by becoming a tool to increase their understanding and views of the world. Students now have the ability to access the internet anywhere and can find information they would have been unable to find through traditional search methods. An example of this is the Galileo system used by the university. As an online student, Galileo has made it to where I can access journals, articles, and books in the library without ever having to leave home. Educators can also assign reading from online sources without having to waste money on paper copies or concern the library will not have enough copies of a reading for their class. Technology has gone from a supportive role in education to the forefront of how students are taught today.

Social

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Wang (2017) uses the term distributed education to collectively describe online learning with all its different names. “Distributed education is the delivery of postsecondary education degrees, programs and courses that are independent of time and place, and deliver course content online to distant, commuting and residential students alike” (Wang, 2017, p. 184). Students have begun to seek for flexibility learning environment with a focus on skills that will have a direct impact in their current and future careers. As a way to increase their skills in the workforce, adult learners are returning to the classroom. However, these adult learners want to have classes directly related to application in the workforce. The rising generation of adult learners are reliant on technology and use it on a daily basis. The availability of social media, e-mail, online document sharing, phone apps, etc. has made education more readily available to students where ever they are in the world. The increase in technology will change how students learn and how schools recruit their students. Students can work on a group project online without having to be in the same room. Educators can use programs like Blackboard to do weekly lectures and answer questions during the lectures comparable to a traditional classroom. The lectures can also be recorded and uploaded for students who were unable to be online due to their circumstances. The successfulness of the online courses depends on both the students and the educators. The educators need to be willing to learn how to teach an online course and to put in the effort required for the class to be worth the students’ time.

Goodfellow and Lamy (2009) set out to prove that being physically present in a traditional classroom can be just as effective as an online classroom. An effective class, “Permit dynamic interaction between instructors, learners and tasks, and offer learners opportunities to create their own understanding through interaction with others, highlighting the importance of community, culture and context in knowledge construction” Goodfellow and Lamy (2009). It has been argued that without physically being in a classroom and interacting with other students, a learning culture will not develop to make the class successful. However, the authors counter argue that an online class will create a virtual learning culture. Computer-based communication can be as effective as a conversation preformed face-to-face. The authors created a course to examine students in an online setting and how they communicate and interact with the other members in the class. Students from all over the world participated in the online class. The students were presented with topics to respond to on a weekly basis for twelve weeks. Students were given reading assignments, videos, and conversation starters to begin their posts. They were required to post one substantial post in response to the topic and they had to respond to at least one classmate to receive their participation grade. The topics mainly focuses on individual, national, and cultural identities. The first post was an introduction post asking who they were and where they were from. The educator found two consistencies in the first post, the students wanted to prove they belonged in the class and how new they were to online classrooms. As the posts progresses, the students began to make suggestions for their cultures that they wanted to apply after learning from their classmates’ cultures and behaviors. They were able to express their opinions freely and take risks in their posts. They developed trust and

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understanding through their posts and the responses of their peers. The students, by the end of the class, had started use the word we instead of I during their posts. They had been able to form an online community in twelve weeks through discussion posts.

Economic

Marlanda and English (2013) gave a detailed history of how online education has evolved from distance learning in the form of paper correspondence. The earliest examples of distance learning is when teachers were able to send students guided readings and home tests for them to complete. Education has evolved from paper correspondence to using radio, television, audio cassettes, fax machines, etc. to the online classes and degrees available today. However, the subject of cheating and the lack of hands-on practice has brought online education into question. Marlanda and English (2013) also give a warning to be careful when selecting an online program or school. The creation of all online schools has also created diploma mills. Diploma mills issue credits that are questionable and are not recognized by other universities. Diploma mills can also issue fraudulent degrees, which can cause unsuspecting students to face legal action for falsifying records. The text gives an example of a politician who received several degrees from the same diploma mill and cause him to come under investigation for falsifying records. Online education also tries to issue life experience as credits. Employers have begun to look for these credits and can cause someone to be passed over for a job. Overall, online education has caused students to choose online classes over traditional classrooms. In recent studies, online education has had a larger enrollment growth rate than traditional classroom. As more universities create online degree programs, these number will continue rising.

Political

“What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions... By suppressing differences and peculiarities...progress weakens.” Octavio Paz (Mexican poet, writer and diplomat; 1914–1998). Zaidi, Verstegen, Naqvi, Morahan, and Dornan (2016) used the perfect quote to describe the world today. The world today is plagued with cultural assumptions and negative stereotypes. The authors share a concern that educators and students that have those assumptions are hurting their fellow classmates. Online education relies heavily on discussions and a student’s ability to effectively write what they have learned and their opinions. However, how a person is raised culturally can influence how they write and their opinions. The educators and classmates of these students need to be able to look past their assumptions to understand the opinions of those that are culturally different. After a study preformed by the FAIMER Institute (Foundation for the Advancement of Internal Medical Education & Research) on how to improve cross-cultural education, they found four topics that students and educators tended to avoid on online discussion posts: politics, gender, religion,

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and cultural. The four topics were responded to by those of like views and life experiences. However, the topics were never related to health care education, which also made it difficult for other students and the educators to respond. The lack of response was partly contributed to cultural hegemony, which is the dominating of a society that is culturally diverse by one class who controls the culture in that society. Zaidi, Verstegen, Naqvi, Morahan, and Dornan (2016) suggest that the need to keep discussion posts cultural and political free needs to be abandoned. The need to keep them free can stifle a student's opinion and does not help to expose the others in the class to circumstances outside their normal cultural and political backgrounds. The more aware a person is of the world around them, the less prejudice they will have against those that are different.

Demographic

Kidd (2010) set out to define the definition of an adult learner and how online education impacts them. Adult learners are not considered a traditional college student due to their varying life circumstances. Traditional college students have less to balance than an adult learner with a career, spouse, children, and different goals for their education. The article uses the University of Central Florida as an example of the positives of online adult education. The University of Central Florida found that their school was going to meet their capacity of students at their main Orlando campus. The university decided to spearhead an online learning initiative to meet the needs of the local growing region. It has caused a shift from focusing on reaching the school's capacity to meeting the demands of a growing online population. When the online adult learners were questioned regarding their reasons for their satisfaction with online learning, they gave the following answers: reduced ambiguity, enhances student sense of value in courses, reduced ambivalence, clarified rules of engagement, more individually responsive learning environments, improved interaction, augmented learning, and increased freedom. However, online education is not without its own set of challenges. Adult learners have more things to balance and must make time to devote to their studies. They also have to learn how to succeed and interact in their classes without ever meeting face-to-face. The students' primary form of communication would be through discussion posts, which gives everyone a chance to voice their opinions. It can also cause points of views to be misinterpreted and heated debates to dominate the discussion post. However, as the generations and technology changes with a reliance on the internet, the way education is seen will change to help accommodate those with a desire to learn.

Diversity

Wang (2010) used an earlier article to show the effects online education has had on career and technical education. Career and technical education has seen an increase in enrollment in both undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral online programs. Students of all ages have started to

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see the flexibility that comes from taking online courses. Students who would have not enrolled, due to opportunity or circumstances, are now being given the options to complete their programs online. Colleges are now also offering classes for training and re-training programs online. The number of online programs being offered has increased every year to match the demand of students. The learners are able to learn at their own pace and complete their classroom on their schedule. They are not confined to a classroom for so many hours or days a week. They are also able to learn how they learn best whether it be through reading out of a textbook, watching videos, or listening to a lecture. The students in the online programs come from all different areas of life. A student might be across the country who has just finished high school or their undergraduate program, or they could be your neighbor down the street who has decided to go back to school to finish or expand on their education. In an online classroom, each student can learn from the life experiences of their fellow classmates through online discussion posts and group projects. The number of programs offered are unlimited and the type of people taking the classes are also varied which makes online education a great option for so many people.

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