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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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The Perceptions of Faculty and Instructional Designers Regarding the Impact of Professional
Development to Teach Online Courses

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Scott Mitchell January

February 2023

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Freida January for walking with me through this journey, making sacrifices, loving me unconditionally, and making me believe I could finish this endeavor. My daughters Felicia King and Jessica January, son Joel January, and son-in-law Spencer King for all their love and support. My mom Jean Feagins and my brother Steven January for their love and support. This dissertation is also dedicated to my father Jim January. This one's for you dad.

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Thank you, God, for giving me the strength and determination to undertake and complete this journey. Without you I am nothing. It is my sincerest hope the tools I have acquired from this journey will give me more opportunities to serve and help others and make the impossible possible.

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Abstract

Leadership at a mid-sized 4-year university in the western region of Texas asserted a problem with the low amount of faculty training impacting online courses' creation and quality. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to investigate the elements needed to design quality online courses, determine how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development provided by the university to develop online courses, and find out how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development impacted faculty skills as an online instructor. Three research questions were created which generated two interview protocols. The following research questions were used and were answered via the emerged themes reported in the Analysis Overview section: RQ1: What attributes do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas believe are needed to design a quality online course? RQ2: What professional development do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive is needed to create a quality online course? RQ3: How do faculty and instructional designers at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive professional development impacts faculty's skills as an online instructor at a mid-sized university in west Texas? Data were collected from 18 participants who consisted of full-time online faculty, adjunct online faculty, and instructional designers, using semistructured open-ended interview questions and thematic analysis. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) positive/negative faculty training, (b) positive/negative institutional support, (c) use/non-use of an instructional designer, and (d) use/non-use of online best practices and strategies. Recommendations for practice and future study were also recommended.

Keywords: faculty, instructional designers, faculty training, online courses, single-case study, thematic analysis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Online learning is now a well-known fixture in higher education, requiring institutional leaders to prepare instructors for teaching in an online environment (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Santelli et al., 2020). Over the past decade, online courses have dramatically expanded to 31% of undergrad students taking at least one online course (Lee et al., 2020). The U.S. number of online courses continues to grow despite decreasing enrollments at universities and colleges over the past few years (Piña & Harris, 2019). Institutions are implementing more online programs to combat diminishing enrollment numbers (Brown et al., 2018). Moreover, since 2014, over 74% of institutional leaders acknowledge online learning's positive outcomes (Lenert & Janes, 2017).

Furthermore, it is asserted that over 71.4% of institutional leaders believe that e-learning outcomes are just as good, if not better, than face-to-face learning environments (Eom & Ashill, 2018). Because of online courses' positive attributes, it does not come as a shock that over 70% of institutional leaders envision online learning as an integral part of their long-term learning strategy (Lenert & Janes, 2017). The use of online technology in a course allows learners to interact with their instructor and other students and access learning materials (Sadaf et al., 2019).

Online Course Quality

Online learning along with the advancement of learning technologies continues to increase in size and popularity, motivating educational institutions to address the concept of course quality and standards for online course delivery (Piña & Harris, 2019). Institutional leaders are also faced with providing quality online experiences to students (Schmidt & Stowell, 2017). Online course quality is significant to students, as their perceptions regarding course quality foster intrinsic motivation and impact learning (Sadaf et al., 2019). Furthermore, course

design and quality influences communication between students and faculty, foster teaching presence, and impact student satisfaction (Gregory et al., 2020). Moreover, it is asserted institutions that lack online course quality jeopardize their ability to implement an online program that is successful (Baldwin & Ching, 2019). Additional assertions by Bigatel and Edel-Malizia (2018) stated online courses of higher quality implement an assortment of technology tools that foster student engagement and relevant and challenging activities for students.

Online courses of good quality also support multiple pathways for student success and a way for continuous improvement (Kwon et al., 2016). It is further asserted some of the components that comprise a quality online course are items such as course design, institutional support, student achievement, and content delivery (Gregory et al., 2020). Moreover, it is claimed that for online courses to have comparable retention rates as those of face-to-face classes, online course quality must be at least as good as traditional on-ground courses (Hixon et al., 2016). Further claims suggest good course design skills are essential for quality online courses (Lenert & Janes, 2017). Higher education institutions must recognize that online courses' design and quality affect both students and faculty (Santelli et al., 2020).

Faculty Training for Online Courses

The professional development of faculty has been a continuous and essential element of higher education (Dooley et al., 2019). Because technology has become so integrated into everyday life, it is increasingly difficult not to use it in the classroom; thus, teachers face the challenge of utilizing technology to facilitate new teaching and learning levels (Seifert & Feliks, 2021). Moreover, it is claimed that society lives in the era of network technology, and instructors are being encouraged to better use technology in traditional and online classrooms (Dooley et al., 2019). Despite the advancement in online learning technologies, many instructors did not take

online classes when they were students and thus teach how they were introduced and do not have a standard for online instruction (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). It is also asserted that the measurement of a quality course is student satisfaction, which places a greater demand on faculty to learn and perfect the needed skills to achieve high online instruction and delivery (Santelli et al., 2020). Online teaching requires understanding digital learning philosophies and shows the importance of learning technologies and how they promote learning (Seifert & Feliks, 2021).

Many institutions have little or no requirements to teach online, and thus little is known regarding the number of professional development hours instructors take regarding online instruction (Zweig & Stafford, 2016). Furthermore, online instructor training and professional development have inconsistent standards and are underdeveloped, thus not adequately preparing faculty to succeed in online teaching environments (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). It is further claimed there is a substantial difference between students who were instructed by teachers who received professional development training versus students who were taught by faculty without this essential training (Bigatel & Edel-Malizia, 2018). The professional development of faculty also plays a vital role in the sustainability and transformation of educational institutions in creating high-quality teaching and learning (Dooley et al., 2019). Faculty struggle with making decisions regarding how online learning is delivered to students in a best effort to provide a learning experience that is of high quality to students (Lenert & Janes, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Sanga (2017) asserted online learning evolves with technologies from correspondence to TV teleconferencing and online web delivery. As online offerings increase, the demand for course quality is growing (Joosten & Cusatis, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Sanga, 2017) and

improvements in online courses (Kwon et al., 2016). Furthermore, authors claimed that due to the rapid growth of online courses, faculty's professional development is becoming a significant concern as it affects course quality (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Lee et al., 2020; Lenert & Janes, 2017). Online offerings are being produced faster than faculty are trained to deliver online courses (Lenert & Janes, 2017). Researchers argue institutions that ignore online course quality control put themselves at risk of losing students (Baldwin, 2018) because student perception of course quality affects enrollments (Hinck et al., 2018). Further investigation implies quality online courses demand extra effort and time because additional faculty training is necessary to adapt the needed skills to create quality online courses (Bussmann et al., 2017). Scholars acknowledge that additional faculty training for online courses is essential to help faculty acquire needed skills to create online courses that are consistent, equitable, and of high quality.

Faculty training is crucial for online course creation because, in 2015, over six million students enrolled in at least one online course (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). A study by Marshall et al. (2020) found education is not operating under regular teaching and learning conditions due to the global pandemic that began in March of 2020 and were still present at the time of this study in 2022. More research and training are needed to determine what elements are most influential to students and online best practices (Joosten & Cusatis, 2019). Leadership at a mid-sized 4-year university in the western region of Texas asserts a problem with the low amount of faculty training impacting online courses' creation and quality. There are claims the lack of faculty training causes course development inconsistencies and technical tool challenges due to lack of understanding, thus causing student frustration in unstable learning environments (J. Smith, personal communication, March 5, 2021). It is not known how faculty and instructional designers at a mid-sized 4-year university located in the western region of Texas

perceive the elements needed to design a quality online course, how faculty and instructional designers perceive professional development provided by the university to develop online courses, and how faculty and instructional designers perceive professional development impacts their skills as an online instructor.

Purpose of the Study

The choices of available technologies for use in online instruction continue to grow, and faculty need institutional support in training that supports faculty professional development and the transition to teaching quality online courses (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). The purpose of this study was to investigate the elements needed to design quality online courses, determine how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development provided by the university to develop online courses, and find out how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development impacts faculty skills as an online instructor. I hoped to gather and present data that supports the need for increased professional development training for faculty teaching online courses, and to identify elements/standards that are needed to design quality online courses.

Research Questions

The following questions were the catalyst for the research design, collection of data, and analysis:

RQ1: What attributes do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas believe are needed to design a quality online course?

RQ2: What professional development do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive is needed to create a quality online course?

RQ3: How do faculty and instructional designers at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive professional development impacts faculty's skills as an online instructor at a mid-sized university in west Texas?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are provided for the reader to use and clarify as they are employed throughout this study.

Course design. Course design is the process of creating a course for students that incorporates and confirms various attributes of quality such as clarification of context, consistency in the course framework, and pedagogy (Lenert & Janes, 2017). Course design incorporates course activities fostering instructor presence, student interactivity, and positive learner outcomes. Course design also strives to provide elements of feedback and engagement that are present in traditional face-to-face courses.

Course quality standards. Course quality standards help to ensure unilateral standards inside a course but also throughout an entire institutional program (Samuel et al., 2020). Course quality standards help institutions' chances of increased enrollments as it is asserted that the success of institutional programs is related to the quality of their courses. Course quality standards also satisfy regulatory mandates from state and federal accrediting agencies.

Online best practices. Online best practices are comprised of institutional strategies and vital professional development for faculty to keep up with the rapid advancement of online learning technologies (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). Online best practices guide faculty to utilize technology tools and resources better to foster learning in an online environment. Online best practices also help faculty better understand when to use technology tools and to what extent.

Online learning. Online learning is also referred to as distance learning which gives students the ability to attend a class via the use of a computer connected to the internet (Dhawan, 2020). Online learning also allows students to participate in class from any location with an internet connection. Moreover, online learning provides students with flexibility in the ability to attend classes asynchronously yet still interact with their instructors and other students.

Summary

The overview presented in Chapter 1 explored the background of the study, which included the statement of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, and a definition of critical terms. The authors of various sections explored in Chapter 1 suggested learning technologies are advancing relentlessly, which creates challenges for faculty in their preparation to teach in an online environment. Online course standards vary between institutions and the criteria for training online faculty, which is claimed to cause inconsistencies in how faculty use learning technologies to create and teach online courses. Moreover, institutions of higher education have expectations of expanding their online programs to accommodate their students. The expectations of developing online programs are suggested to exert additional time and effort from instructors that may only have a traditional face-to-face understanding of teaching. This study examined how to accommodate faculty better to teach in an online environment. Chapter 2 shows the theoretical framework used for this study and present relevant and current literature with the problem expressed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research study utilized current and relevant literature to clarify concepts and terms surrounding this study. An initial literature review was conducted to examine specific search terms: online course quality, instructional design, faculty professional development, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. An additional search was conducted using combinations of the initial search terms to produce more peer-reviewed findings relevant to this study. The results were presented by themes, starting with faculty training.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I sought to reveal the perceptions of faculty and instructional designers regarding how professional development impacts faculty skills to create and teach online courses. The theoretical framework in this study was based on a study by Coswatte Mohr and Shelton (2017) that centered around the best practices framework for online faculty professional development, which produced 41 best practices for professional development, 16 institutional best practices, and 11 online classrooms best practices. Coswatte Mohr and Shelton further asserted a one-size-fits-all ideology regarding professional development for online instruction does not meet faculty needs. More custom professional development for faculty is required to facilitate better online effectiveness. These theories shaped my methodology, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of how faculty perceptions of professional development affect online students' course quality.

Review of Literature

The review of this literature spans many sources. Covered topics include the quality of online courses, the use of quality standards for online classes, online teaching, faculty technology training, and general information regarding the growth of online courses. This review highlights

online course quality and aspects of faculty professional development. This review aims to provide good information regarding faculty training to teach online and the importance of course quality.

Online Course Quality

Continuous efforts are being made to improve the creation and delivery of online education. In research conducted by Baldwin and Ching (2019), a new course evaluation checklist tool was used in the Canvas learning management system. The researchers of this article compared the new canvas evaluation tool to other core standard evaluation tools. This review was a qualitative follow-up study to review six national evaluation tools that were previously evaluated. Baldwin and Ching identified 12 universal principles included in all six evaluation tools. The authors claimed nine out of 10 faculty teach online or hybrid courses and need course standards. The authors compared the new Canvas online course evaluation tool to the previously reviewed national and statewide review instruments. All review instruments were compared and encoded. Baldwin and Ching found 22 standard criteria from the comparison of the course review instruments. It was concluded the Canvas tool would only be beneficial to Canvas users.

Other efforts to improve online course quality are being realized using framework tools to evaluate online course quality. Bigatel and Edel-Malizia (2018) investigated if an online engagement framework tool could evaluate online courses' quality. The authors claimed this is a topic of interest because of the positive impact on student retention and persistence. The researchers further asserted course evaluation standards such as quality matters are excellent for evaluating course design but do not measure student engagement. Four instructional designers conducted a quantitative evaluation method on participants with 10 years of experience. Six

business courses were analyzed using a course evaluation tool point scale. The final scores were plotted from low engagement to high engagement. The six evaluated courses' resulting scores ranged from 20.5 to 70 out of a possible rating of 90. Additional findings were that courses designed with engaging components might not be delivered engagingly. The conclusions further supported teacher-student interaction in an online course.

Authors also utilized course standards for online course improvements. The study by Gregory et al. (2020) investigated the application of the quality matters rubric (APPQMR), the impact on community college faculty professional development, and their perceptions of the rubric on their course design skills. The authors claimed course design affects faculty satisfaction, student learning, and influences teacher-to-student communication. Researchers maintained most community colleges (85%) have adopted internal standards concerning course design. The methodology used in this article was a mixed-methods study. Surveys (quantitative) were sent to 470 full-time and adjunct faculty who completed the APPQMR training. Forty-six respondents took the survey, and 39 respondents completed the survey. Eight respondents were selected for video interviews that lasted 30–45 minutes. Qualitative findings showed no difference in faculty perceptions of the APPQMR workshop. Qualitative results showed significant influence regarding the perspectives of faculty regarding the APPQMR. The faculty found the APPQMR training helpful regarding their behavior and skills.

Some authors utilized quality standards to improve communication in an online course as well as course quality. Eom and Ashill (2018) conducted a study to confirm the interdependency of six critical success factors for a valuable online learning model. The authors claimed distance learning enrollments have increased at a more robust rate of 3.9% than regular education. The report asserted academic leaders (63.3%) believe online learning is critical for their long-term

expansion strategy. A quantitative survey (Likert-scale) was deployed, covering the six areas considered essential for online success. The survey had 41 questions and was sent out to 3,285 students. The response rate was 11.63% from 382 unduplicated responses. The study's findings were statistically significant, which confirmed that course design, dialogue (teacher-to-student, student-to-student), motivation, instructor, and self-regulated learning are interdependent for successful online learning. The university where the study was conducted requires all courses to pass a quality matters standards review.

Some researchers contend the quality of an online course can impact instructors. Taylor et al. (2018) examined if poorly constructed online courses cause decision fatigue for online course reviewers and thus lead to lower evaluation scores for online faculty. The researchers claimed decision fatigue can have a negative perception regarding instructor performance. The article discussed institutions are being more competitive and are trying to increase productivity. Thus, poorly designed courses are causing challenges for course evaluation teams. Taylor et al. set out to prove two hypotheses: faculty evaluations can be impacted by decision fatigue from evaluators, and instructors using quality matters (QM) courses receive better teaching evaluations. Summative data were used from 59 online instructor evaluations. The data were only gathered from adjunct faculty. Only experienced online faculty (in teams of six) were utilized for reviewers. Findings showed decision fatigue caused by poorly built courses caused lower evaluations. Results further confirmed QM online courses received higher evaluation ratings.

Other authors asserted learning technologies can impact the quality of online courses. A study conducted by Sanga (2017) examined courses made with course standards to identify common elements and issues. This researcher asserted distance learning has been around since

the 1700s and has continued to evolve with learning technologies' evolution. The author further stated as online learning offerings increase, so does the need to provide high-quality courses. The study took place at a university in the southern United States. One hundred online courses were analyzed for issues. Data were gathered from course evaluations by course developers. Findings showed one problem a common issue related to course technology. Results showed significant time and effort are required to maintain core standards. Sanga's findings show it is essential to select appropriate technologies to work with pedagogy. Findings indicated better results were achieved in online courses when faculty work with instructional designers.

Authors even contend learning technologies can also affect higher order thinking in students. A study conducted by Lee and Choi (2017) asserted the way digital technologies are integrated into an online course impacts student in how they utilize their higher-level problem-solving skills regarding tasks such as using the correct online tools, solving problems, making knowledgeable decisions, managing projects, and conducting research. The authors also suggested the learner's attitudes towards technology used in an online course can impact how the learner engages course materials, their performance, and utilization of their higher-level thinking. Study results revealed learner attitudes towards learning technologies were indirectly linked to students' higher-level thinking and varied depending on the deep learning approaches used in the course. Lee and Choi concluded future research was needed to focus on the areas of assessment, the use of backward design to better craft learning outcomes, and further investigation of the implementation of learning technologies in the form of simulations.

Some authors stressed the need for instructor presence in an online environment. Research conducted by Seifert and Feliks (2021) asserted online courses lack instructor physical presence and need various technical tools to facilitate learning and a sense of digital community.

Instructors also face the task of integrating learning technologies into their online course environments as it has been deemed unreasonable to exclude 21st-century learning technologies from the classroom. A qualitative questionnaire was conducted at a teacher education institution with 256 participants. Seifert and Feliks' findings showed using learning technologies in an online course positively contributed to the students' learning experiences. Additional results were that technology used correctly in online environments contributed to student motivation to learn and collaborate with peers. Instructors and students also indicated technology in online courses enriched their personal development. Study results showed course design and presence were essential to achieve learner success and consistency in classes created in the future.

Other researchers indicated the importance of faculty satisfaction in teaching online courses. In research conducted by Blundell et al. (2020), faculty satisfaction was crucial in an online teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, online faculty is claimed to have frustration working with online technology tools and the worry of student access to needed technologies. Moreover, it is indicated that faculty satisfaction coincides with structure, design, and student satisfaction in an online course. Measurement was achieved using the Online Faculty Satisfaction Survey and was deployed to full-time faculty at 10 educational institutions, both public and private, with 427 responses. The study results indicated institutional support, instructor-student interaction, and technology's role influenced faculty perceived satisfaction of online courses. Additional findings indicated faculty satisfaction regarding online courses was not tied to performance or student achievement. Other results suggested institutional leaders must allocate added resources to the infrastructure of online learning.

Instructional Design

Another crucial component of course design includes the use of instructional designers. A study conducted by Debattista (2018) suggested successful learning in this new era requires more than taking a traditional model and adding new technology. Learning in this new digital age requires new thinking regarding teaching and learning. The researcher indicated faculty are challenged with time and digital literacy, which cause stress. Findings suggested even though many digital learning technologies are available to faculty, instructional designers are needed to assist faculty in closing gaps regarding the implementation of digital tools and building competence in applying digital tools to online pedagogy.

Other research suggests the use of instructional designers improves cost quality and strengthens collaborative relationships with faculty. Sanga (2019) indicated online learning is starkly different from a traditional learning model. Instructors require more time planning to be successful in this digital modality, and the adjustment is not easy. Faculty require support to design digital instruction and to use digital learning tools. The study results indicated faculty need the help of instructional designers so more time can be spent creating course content instead of fighting with technology tools. The research results further suggested faculty proficiency in using technology tools does not equal online competence in teaching, as pedagogy should prioritize technology. The study involved 120 faculty members and investigated various design and technology problems. Findings suggested a successful strategy for faculty was to work in conjunction with instructional designers to create and deliver online courses. Results further revealed instructors who worked with instructional designers were better able to solve future problems independently due to the working relationship with instructional designers.

A key element in utilizing instructional designers is a better understanding of the role from a faculty perspective. A study by Richardson et al. (2018) implied collaboration between faculty and instructional designers is essential. Their research suggested successful collaboration between instructional designers and faculty depends on mutual trust and viewing one another as equal partners in the course design process. Instructional designers are in higher demand due to the rapid increase of online programs and technologies. Findings from Richardson et al. revealed that in addition to trust-based relationships between faculty and instructional designers, faculty buy-in is crucial to achieving collaborative relationships successfully. Additional findings from Richardson et al. suggested institutional leaders need to educate faculty on the role of instructional designers in their institutions because of the misconceptions regarding instructional designers by faculty that can hamper the course design process. The authors concluded a better understanding of the roles of instructional designers would increase collaboration with faculty and position instructional designers to be sought after for assistance with course design projects.

Instructional designers are an essential asset in the course design process. A study conducted by Morgan (2019) contended instructional designers hold a unique position in higher education in how they support faculty to create online courses, and it is imperative to bring a better understanding of their roles in educational practices. The author asserted the role of an instructional designer is only sometimes understood by their institutions or colleagues due to the complexity of their roles, causing faculty to resist working with instructional designers so their roles are not perceived as devalued. The findings by Morgan suggested agency, function, influence, and clarity of directions and expectations all influence the negotiation that instructional designers participate in, whether working on course creation or with the faculty process. Additional findings revealed instructional designers leveraged their roles, when

possible, to be supporters of faculty as coaches and to assist in navigating challenges associated with building courses.

Instructional designers are valuable in helping institutions and online faculty transform traditional courses into online delivery models. A study on instructional designers conducted by Moore (2019) asserted instructional designers can provide crucial help in developing online coursework and project management, which is beneficial to faculty and cost-saving to the institution. The researcher found instructional designers are essential in creating effective asynchronous communication for learners challenged by distance. Moore stated instructional designers are necessary due to their ability to assist faculty in meeting the challenges of rapidly evolving technology and online learning environments. Institutions see the value of instructional designers in creating online courses via student satisfaction, which directly impacts enrollments. The author's findings suggested the importance of instructional designers due to their ability to manage projects and cultivate collaborative relationships among faculty. Additional results indicate institutions appreciate the ability of instructional designers to embed institutional principles into the foundation of online programs.

Instructional designers are also vital in providing faculty with opportunities for professional learning experiences. A study conducted by Xie et al. (2021) asserted that many of the learning opportunities provided to faculty in institutions of higher learning are delivered by instructional designers who support and assist faculty in creating, implementing, and evaluating online courses through the application of design principles which support course improvement and student success. The authors contend instructional designers hold an essential role in advocating for digital accessibility and compliance, and educational institutions benefit from their expertise. Findings from the study revealed instructional designers believe online courses

need to do more than meet the minimal requirements regarding digital materials but be designed so learners can holistically utilize, view, and adapt their materials for learning and self-improvement. Findings also revealed the importance to accommodate various learning styles with various instructional modes.

The Pandemic

In March 2020, the United States was stricken with the COVID-19 virus, which closed many businesses and forced educators to move to online and virtual modalities. A study conducted by Kristmanson et al. (2020) investigated what it was like being a teacher in a COVID-19 environment. The researchers declared faculty were in uncharted territory and had to deal with an educational setting that has been altered in changing from a traditional virtual way of meeting and instruction. Furthermore, institutional changes occurred in the form of budget cuts and new faculty procedures. The authors further suggested many faculty had difficulty transitioning due to the social impact of being isolated, which put a strain on collaboration, quality, and motivation. Another challenge revealed in this study was how faculty spent more time acclimating to new technology than preparing their lessons, which caused mistakes and misconceptions. The authors' findings produced many questions, such as how faculty can build relationships in a virtual environment? Can active learning occur online? How can faculty keep their students engaged and motivated? Kristmanson et al.'s findings further suggested participants in the study all agreed they were forever changed because of the pandemic and were uncertain whether their new teaching methods would ever go away completely. Additional takeaways from the research revealed faculty see the value in content that is active and engaging. The authors contended faculty claimed there is no consensus regarding the best way to meet the needs of learners and the use of learning technologies.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses had to close indefinitely. A study conducted by Mahyoob (2020) claimed education was one of the few industries during the pandemic that completely shifted to an online delivery on a global scale, as it was believed to be the most appropriate measure during COVID-19. The author further indicated that although many institutions shifted to an online modality, many educators were oblivious to the challenges regarding e-learning. It was further suggested education would play a vital role in how society moved forward, as other businesses would look to education as a model. The author's findings recommended technological support be given to faculty to help them be more successful in an online setting. Additional results revealed mobile devices were valuable to students and faculty as alternate ways of communicating and receiving instruction.

The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for educators. Research conducted by Webster and Clark (2020) showed adopting a new course delivery for higher education was one of the most complex parts of the pandemic. Furthermore, the author indicated many institutions had a slight idea of what needed to be done in the event of a global emergency. Still, few had come up with a contingency plan before the pandemic. The authors suggested faculty were concerned with how to reconfigure their educational materials for online delivery. Other faculty concerns were centered around identifying resources and knowing where to find them. The authors' findings also indicated educators recognize that modifying the traditional curriculum for online delivery is crucial. Additional claims by the authors asserted educators were unsure if educational operations would return to a typical operating environment. The authors concluded educators were concerned about securing resources and working with instructional designers and support staff to ensure quality online learning.

Among the faculty community, adjunct faculty were some of the hardest impacted regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the transition to online instruction. A study conducted by Bosley and Custer (2021) established the rate of which adjunct instructors were hired increased over 104% from 1993 to 2013. The authors also claimed adjunct faculty differ from full-time faculty in they struggle with lower pay, lack collegial relationships with their peers, have almost no access to university office space or equipment, and lack knowledge regarding university resources and services. Moreover, the researchers contended adjunct faculty lack full-time positions and thus teach at multiple institutions which created additional challenges in having to learn multiple learning platforms and various technology tools. Findings revealed all faculty, specifically adjunct faculty, expressed being overwhelmed, physically and mentally exhausted, and having feelings of inadequacy regarding the pandemic and having to teach online for the same pay prior to the pandemic. Additional findings suggested the need for improvement in an equitable way to help improve teaching and learning.

Even K–12 educators experienced the impact of COVID-19 in their work. A study by Marshall et al. (2020) showed how educators' work shifted radically overnight. Furthermore, it was suggested that many faculty had to reduce their workloads due to learning to use new technologies to cope with the changes directly caused by COVID-19. The researchers asserted problems could be frequent and usually occurred even with regular online teaching. Marshall et al. further suggested many educators referred to this time as emergency remote teaching instead of online teaching due to all the challenges created by the pandemic. Many teachers indicated they had never taught online before, which only added to the stress of this unusual situation. Findings by the researchers also noted that many faculty had only taught in a traditional classroom, and this was their first-time teaching online or virtually. Additional results revealed

that faculty claimed technical support was limited, and technical resources made interacting with students difficult. Researchers showed faculty who taught younger students were even more challenged in student engagement and retention. Other findings from researchers suggested faculty need more training to prepare for future emergency events and teaching in a virtual environment.

Faculty Professional Development

Many online instructors need updated training that encompasses online best practices. A study by Perrotta and Bohan (2020) suggested faculty find it challenging to teach online in adjusting to a different pedagogical structure. Many faculty members did not take online courses when they were students, so they find it challenging to transition to another teaching modality. The authors conducted a study utilizing two or more cases. The authors' results indicated instructional design, professional development, and web-based communication tools increased faculty social presence in an online setting. Additional findings were training to teach online and rigor varied by institution. Perrotta and Bohan concluded faculty with ongoing professional development opportunities, consistent evaluations, and maintained academic control had a more positive online teaching experience. Future recommendations included a study regarding the benefits of faculty mentoring for online teaching.

Other authors contend online faculty need training that reflects an online delivery. A study by Cutri and Mena (2020) claimed online courses are now a permanent part of education, which has increased due to the recent pandemic. Numerous tenure-track faculty are traditional and do not have the formal training to teach online successfully. A mixed-methods study was used to study 44 academic and peer-reviewed sources. Cutri and Mena concluded one basis for faculty resistance in transitioning to online learning was the lack of professional development

caused distress regarding the unknown factor of teaching online. The researchers indicated many faculty members thrust into online teaching because of the pandemic were uncomfortable with teaching online and preferred to return to their traditional teaching environment. Further results indicated some instructors received inadequate evaluations due to rapidly transitioning into an online environment. Cutri and Mena recommended future research to understand faculty preparation efforts to teach online to ensure online teaching success.

Additional researchers emphasize that faculty who teach online need other preparation to support their students. A study conducted by Zweig and Stafford (2016) indicated instructors who teach online need additional instructional practices to help their students better. Students are looking to their online instructors to receive more support and practical instruction in their online learning environments. Online faculty are tasked with not only supporting students but also engagingly teaching subject matter. A survey was deployed to 522 faculty at three different institutions in the Midwest. The results indicated a lack of requirements for instructors to teach online, which affected engagement levels for teaching students. Zweig and Stafford suggested online instructors need additional technology training as different educational institutions do not require faculty professional development. Moreover, it was recommended that further research may be necessary to test the effectiveness of professional development and online best practices for faculty to teach online.

Other researchers stress the importance of preparing faculty to teach in an online environment. A study by Dooley et al. (2019) indicated faculty professional development had been a long-standing pillar in higher education. Since the early 1970s, many improvements in education were focused on the professional development of faculty. Dooley et al.'s qualitative inquiry study included nine faculty members from three different universities and evaluation

methods to clarify faculty's professional development. The authors suggested assessments and programs for faculty development played a critical role in high-quality instruction and learning. Survey results further reiterated that online courses are not created the same as face-to-face instruction and require special skills and time to develop. The results also showed the participants agreed that figuring out the right amount of content for an online course was challenging and required extra training, which is difficult due to pressing teaching schedules. Participants overall agreed online skills were worth learning.

The availability of institutional training is not always equal and has been found to cause problems among groups of faculty, specifically adjunct faculty. Barnes and Fredericks (2021) asserted the retention of adjunct faculty is essential to institutions of higher education as they are vital to their operations. The researchers remarked the retention of adjunct instructors not only contributes to the effectiveness of the institution but also their reputation. As of 2019, adjunct faculty represent approximately 76% of the faculty population at institutions of higher education, which increased 73% from 2018 (Barnes & Fredericks, 2021). The researchers stated to retain adjunct faculty, some universities are increasing the amount of professional development available to adjunct faculty in an attempt to make them feel more respected, valued, and better equipped to carry out their jobs as well as the mission of the institution. Findings of the semistructured open-ended qualitative interviews revealed offering adjunct faculty more career pathways increased their satisfaction with their current position and the institution. Additional findings revealed adjunct faculty appreciated interactions from full-time faculty and administrators that were respectful and inclusive, and being included in institutional initiatives. Barnes and Fredericks also claimed other findings suggested the satisfaction of adjunct faculty

may vary based on institutional inclusion, professional development, career pathways, and course loads.

Many institutions use adjunct faculty to offset funding issues and rapid institutional growth but lack correct training. Wanjohi (2020) claimed many institutions of higher education are becoming more dependent on the use of adjunct faculty who may or may not be properly trained or equipped for teaching challenges associated with the classroom. The use of adjunct faculty for teaching is a worldwide practice and adjunct faculty in Australia teach 70% of first-year classes. The researcher further claimed higher education institutions (especially in the United States) often hire adjunct faculty because they cannot afford large numbers of tenure-track faculty. The problem with adjunct faculty is the level of experience and training vary per individual and many institutions blindly assume they are ready to teach in the classroom. Conclusions from the study assert adjunct faculty roles at institutions of higher learning are long-term and it is essential for adjunct faculty to be viewed and treated as partners in the teaching and learning community, and to assist them to be their best in the classroom (Wanjohi, 2020). Wanjohi further concluded adjunct faculty should be given professional development opportunities to teach students better so they can be an effective part of the future workforce.

Some institutions ignore the need to train adjunct faculty. Sadlier (2021) claimed adjunct faculty do not have voices in higher education or proper advocates. The researcher also claimed that in 2015, adjunct faculty were two-thirds of the higher educational teaching workforce. The majority of adjunct faculty are challenged to exist within institutions that do not provide adequate materials or resources and try to convince adjunct faculty the practice is acceptable. Many full-time tenured faculty and institutions do not recognize the needs of adjunct faculty. Sadlier's conclusions revealed adjunct faculty were often disregarded by university leaders in the

areas of social justice and equity which affected opportunities for professional development and promotion. Study results showed adjunct faculty were in need of more support and should not exist to be exploited nor controlled by full-time faculty institutional leadership. Additional findings from the study concluded adjunct faculty were often forced to seek out professional development via other avenues than depending on their educational institution or colleagues.

Other institutions view adjunct faculty as expendable which impacts the availability and value of professional development. Schlaerth (2021) acknowledged many institutions of higher education are hiring more adjunct instructors to lower institutional costs associated with full-time tenured faculty. The use of adjunct faculty in higher education can often cause instruction to suffer due to their need to prepare multiple classes at multiple institutions which creates a time deficit. Adjunct instructors are at a disadvantage because they do not have time for professional development or to publish articles which almost guarantees they will fade away into obscurity. The researcher equated adjunct instructors to musicians implying their classes are like “gigs” to supplement their income. Findings of the study revealed many adjunct instructors are reluctant to voice their concerns regarding career advancement and training for fear of not being invited back for another semester and thus losing the opportunity to teach and the potential income (Schlaerth, 2021).

Constant advances in technology, availability of global and general resources, not to mention social climate are making online faculty, specifically adjunct faculty, more essential in institutions of higher education. Norman et al. (2020) asserted as of 2018, adjunct faculty in the United States made up half of the teaching community in higher education. The author claimed some institutions, who are in financial turmoil, have departments made up entirely of adjunct faculty. Approximately 50% of the adjunct faculty at the location of the research study did not

fully complete training before teaching classes, which caused challenges for adjunct faculty to utilize institutional resources fully to be more prepared to teach courses. Additional findings revealed adjunct faculty needed greater access to feedback and essential course materials to be prepared to teach courses (Norman et al., 2020).

In addition to learning technologies, some authors emphasized the need for faculty training for online courses. Coswatte Mohr and Shelton (2017) indicated online learning is more commonplace in higher education. Higher education institutions must prepare their faculty to address teaching online and use the technical tools required to deliver quality online courses. Faculty need resources, tools, and help to facilitate successful online learning. In Coswatte Mohr and Shelton's study an eight-member panel comprised of educational leaders deployed a qualitative survey to 33 participants. Results indicated faculty support needs to be provided for online teaching success. Still, a one-size-fits-all professional development model does not meet all the faculty's needs to teach online or existing faculty currently teaching online. Best practices that were suggested for faculty professional development centered around pedagogy, technology, and course design. It was recommended that faculty professional development be tailored to faculty needs, thus making them more effective.

Summary

In this literature review, I explored four main topics: online course quality, instructional design, the pandemic, and faculty professional development. Each topic encompassed various subtopics reviewed regarding the study. Although considerable research exists on the topics mentioned in this literature review, no specific writing could be located that illustrates the intersection of the above topics. The alleged gap in the literature helped to facilitate the research questions and situate this study to investigate the perceptions of faculty and instructional

designers regarding the professional development needed to teach online courses. Chapter 3 provides a research methodology outline for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study necessitated the use of a single qualitative case study. Using a case study assisted me in evaluating the operations, context, and faculty training/professional development evolution to be examined. Using a qualitative approach enabled gathering data that had depth and was descriptive, thus understanding better faculty and instructional designer perceptions related to professional development for online courses (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Further, a qualitative study created the opportunity to gather data in surveys, interviews, video recordings, field observations, and documents (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022; Thelwall & Nevill, 2021).

Design and Method

During the process of defining my research questions for this study, I concluded the best approach would be using a qualitative single case study. According to Yin (2018), the use of a case study will give me the ability to address a wide array of data in the form of interviews, documents, artifacts, and even direct observations. The use of a case study is believed to be more applicable to my study than quantitative tools due to the ability to study participants' perceptions and behaviors relative to the study (Yin, 2018). Further, qualitative interviews used as additional methods of data collection can be more profound and obtain powerful insight into issues relevant to my study (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). A qualitative single case study also allowed participants to have a voice in this study and captured their viewpoint, thus reducing the chance of participants' answers being misinterpreted when the data were reported. I further believe using a qualitative single case study provides beneficial results for the institutional leadership, online faculty, and instructional designers.

Population and Setting

The population for this study was at a mid-sized 4-year university in the western region of Texas. This university is comprised of multiple academic colleges and currently offers associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degree programs. This university is accredited by the South Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges and has a current student enrollment of over 14,000 students. This institution is an appropriate setting for this study as it includes a relevant structure of online undergraduate and graduate programs, full-time and adjunct faculty who teach online courses, and instructional designers. Consideration was given to a 2-year institution for the study but was later changed due to the limited online programs and degree offerings.

Sample Method

There are different options regarding how a qualitative study is conducted, and much of the interpretation is at the researcher's discretion regarding a qualitative study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022; Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). For this study, I used a qualitative single-case study approach. I also used convenience sampling in finding available and willing participants, snowball sampling in enlisting help finding participants, and purposive sampling in selecting participants relevant to the study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022; Shantikumar, 2018). Furthermore, participants will be given the ability to participate in interviews either in-person or via a Zoom session to provide flexibility to participants in the study and alleviate any COVID-19 concerns that would prevent a potential participant from participating in an interview. An additional step was taken to substantiate interviews by creating an interview transcript as an added measure to ensure interview data were accurate.

Several institutions were initially evaluated for the study within the north Texas and west Texas region. Ultimately, the decision was made to select a public mid-sized 4-year university in the western region of Texas due to its ease of access to participants and the ability to manage a reasonable timeline for the study. Full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and instructional designers were selected from the institution mentioned above that were relative to the study's parameters. The identified parameters were teaching online courses as a full-time or adjunct faculty member or being an instructional designer for online courses. Faculty participants were selected from at least three colleges (more will be chosen if available) within the university. The sample size was eight to 10 full-time faculty, two to four adjunct faculty, and two to four instructional designers that are individually assigned to different colleges within the university.

Materials and Instruments

Two interview protocols containing approximately 21 interview questions were developed based on seven principles for best practices in education developed by Chickering and Gamson (1987) and reviewed by an expert panel made up of individuals with knowledge and experience in online teaching and instructional design, but they were not used as participants in the study. Additional input was provided by my dissertation committee and from relevant institutional leaders at the site where the study took place. A review of existing artifacts including professional development resources and a faculty professional development survey that was collected by the University Resource Center (URC) to determine faculty perceptions regarding professional development.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

To uphold ethics and trustworthiness in my study, I adopted the well-established practices of Shenton (2004) which is built on the research of Guba and Lincoln (1981) to analyze

and collect data for this study. Moreover, I also endeavored to avoid prolonged engagement with participants as a safeguard to avoid professional judgments being manipulated and strived to ensure all participants had freely consented to participate in the study working with any gatekeepers to access the study (Shenton, 2004).

To ensure the transferability of this study, I provided thick descriptions and details regarding background data and the context of the study so comparisons could be made (Shenton, 2004). I also provided detailed data on transferability items such as the number of organizations participating in the study, constraints regarding participants taking part in the study, the number of fieldwork participants, data collection methods utilized, the number and duration of any data collection sessions, the time frame regarding when the data were collected, and conveyed any boundaries and considerations that may impact transference (Shenton, 2004).

To ensure the study contained dependability, I provided copious details regarding research design, data collection, and the study context to enable future researchers to repeat my work (Shenton, 2004). The details of my collected data will give future readers better information regarding my research to understand the study's effectiveness. I also utilized overlapping methods such as individual interviews, observations, and questionnaires to increase the study's dependability.

To provide confirmability in this study, I employed triangulation via the use of interviews, and the review of any current and previous faculty training materials to diminish the influence of investigator bias (Shenton, 2004). I offered transparency in disclosing any predisposed beliefs or assumptions regarding the study, and provided detailed procedural descriptions regarding the study so the reader could decide how far the data and concepts emerging from it may be acknowledged (Shenton, 2004).

Data Collection

In this study, I gathered data using semistructured interviews with full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and instructional designers. Interview questions were generated based on the research questions and covered subjects relevant to my study such as faculty professional development and online course quality. Further, I reviewed relevant instructional artifacts such as existing or previous faculty training materials developed by the university as a method to collect my initial data (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). I also followed an interview protocol to ensure the interviews were conducted orderly and were not mis-interrupted or added bias to the process (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). The study sample consisted of instructional designers and faculty participants from various disciplines.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the study data, I examined interviews from instructional designers, full-time faculty, and adjunct faculty. I also examined any existing faculty training materials and processes developed by instructional designers, faculty mentors, and relevant institutional leadership that focused on training faculty to teach online courses. Using the multiple sources of data such as interviews, existing training materials and processes, I hoped to increase the credibility of this study.

I utilized the six steps of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006), which began by becoming more familiar with the collected data by reading and rereading the data to make notes of initial ideas and selecting future coding concepts. The next phase of my data analysis generated the preliminary codes after becoming more familiar with the data and producing a list of ideas about what the data contained and the aspects of the data that I found interesting. The next step of my data analysis consisted of searching for themes within the data,

sorting all my codes into prospective themes, and collecting relevant data. The fourth phase of my data analysis was reviewing and refining the themes, which consisted of assessing at the level of coded extracts (level 1) and assessing the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I then generated the analysis as a thematic map, defined and named the themes, and refined definitions and looked for sub-themes to support all theme structures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The last phase of my data analysis was producing a report highlighting selected extract instances related to the initial literature and research questions.

Researcher's Role

For this study, I assumed the role of an interviewer using a semistructured framework that allowed for guided conversations with participants and explored participant answers further using relevant follow-up questioning (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Further, I am relatively new to this institution, which helped to control bias, as I had no prior relationships with potential participants in the study. The processes and conditions previously mentioned allowed me to accumulate, analyze, and report the data from this study in a fair manner (Yin, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Abilene Christian University and the IRB at the study site for approval. Transparency and honesty were used to educate participants for the study to uphold ethical practices. Furthermore, I conducted the study in a way that adheres to the rules and regulations outlined by the Belmont Report and the National Institute of Health to ensure all phases of the study were conducted ethically. I also sought out the appropriate IRB representative if I had any questions regarding my study procedures or challenges.

Limitations

Despite the many universities in Texas, this study focused only on one institution of higher education to have greater access to potential participants and manage a reasonable study timeline. This study was limited to faculty who teach online courses as part of their educational load and instructional designers within the institution of the study. Other possible limitations may present themselves in the form of changes in institutional leadership and new developments regarding COVID-19 and its effects on the study regarding access to participants, the timeline for conducting interviews, and gathering data for the study.

Delimitations

This study did not cover the perceptions of faculty who only teach on-ground or hybrid courses. The study did not include the perceptions of academic leadership regarding preparing faculty to teach online courses. Moreover, it was decided to only focus on higher education and not have a K–12 setting due to potential challenges in gaining access to participants and differences in organizational structures.

Assumptions

I assumed that I would be able to find an appropriate sample of participants for this study. It was further assumed participants would be forthcoming in using honesty regarding the participation criteria for the study, which was being a full-time or an adjunct faculty or holding the position of an instructional designer at the chosen institution for the study. Participants in the study agreed to participate of their own free will, not receiving personal gain or being coerced.

Summary

Chapter 3 emphasized various factors for the study, including the design method, population, setting, sample method, materials and instruments, ethics and trustworthiness, data

collection, data analysis, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. The study utilized a qualitative single-case survey that took place at a 4-year public university located in the western region of Texas. The university contains multiple online degree programs. Participants for the study consisted of full-time online faculty, adjunct online faculty, and instructional designers.

After appropriate IRB approval was received (see Appendix A), data collection consisted of semistructured interviews and the review of any relevant documents, which assisted in the triangulation of collected data to avoid any bias in the study and further to find emerging themes in the data. Collected data were transcribed, coded, and thoroughly reviewed to remove any identifiers as a reasonable faith effort to maintain the privacy of the study participants.

A single case study at a 4-year public university is provided in Chapter 4 to examine study participants deeper. Chapter 5 will share the findings of the Chapter 4 study and make any recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

Western Hills University (pseudonym) was the institution selected to participate in this study and is in the western region of Texas. Originally the university was founded because of a philanthropic endowment of land for educational purposes in the late 1890s. A five-member board of directors was appointed to oversee the endowment. The board of directors used funds from the sale of some of the land to purchase an existing building in the town that was intended to be a college but was unsuccessful. In the following years after its opening, the university began to experience growth in its enrollment and had its first graduating class in the early 1900s, which was marked by a local celebration by the community. In the following years, the town and community also began to grow to see an increase in population and new businesses. The university eventually became part of the Western Hills University system in the early-mid 1900s, with other campuses throughout Texas.

Western Hills University currently has an enrollment of more than 14,000 students. There are over 11,000 undergraduates and over 1,800 postgraduates. Approximately 14% of the students are residents of the community. The undergraduate population at Western Hills University is comprised of 63% women and 34% men. Nearly 64% of the student population at Western Hills University is Caucasian, 21.1% Hispanic, 8.5% African American, 4% multi-ethnic, 1.5% Asian, and 1.4% unknown. Throughout its seven colleges, Western Hills University offers over 100 degree programs that are accessible at six different campuses across Texas and offers over 30 fully online undergraduate and postgraduate programs. At the time of this study, Western Hills University employed approximately 1,297 faculty and staff, with a student-to-faculty ratio of 22:1 for undergraduate students. Western Hills University holds a classification by the Carnegie Foundation for Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity. The university is

accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges and has other accreditations that are program-specific, including the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education, the Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the Council for Business Schools and Programs, the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences, the National Association of Music, the Texas State Board of Nursing, the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, the Council on Social Work Education, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Western Hills University is ranked in the top 25% of institutions for graduation rate and is ranked in the lower 25% for tuition and related costs. The university has one of the top three most extensive agricultural programs among institutions with non-land grants, nearly 100% job placement for graduates in Computer Information Systems, a 98% teacher certification pass rate, holds one of the largest Criminal Justice career days for criminal justice majors in Texas, and has one of the largest undergraduate observatories in the nation.

I initially spoke with leadership team members at the Western Hills URC to determine if the university met the sampling criteria and structure for the study. After receiving a favorable response for site participation from members of the leadership team at the Western Hills URC, it was recommended by the Dean of the URC that I contact the Assistant Provost at Western Hills University regarding the study. I was able to obtain support from the Assistant Provost at the university and was given a letter of support for the study, which I then presented, along with my existing IRB approval documents from Abilene Christian University to the Western Hills University IRB. After reviewing my letter of support from the Western Hills University Assistant Provost and reviewing my existing IRB approval documents, the IRB of Western Hills

University determined that the study could begin without any need for additional review or documentation outside the existing IRB approval.

Interviews

The Dean of the Western Hills URC and the Director of Instructional Design for the URC provided a list of potential participants and helped recruit potential study participants using the snowball technique for one-on-one semistructured interviews. Solicitations were sent to full-time online faculty, adjunct online faculty, and Western Hills University instructional design team members. All potential interview participants were individually contacted via email and provided a summary of the research study and a consent form. Nine full-time faculty, five adjunct faculty, and four instructional designers responded, indicated their willingness to participate in the study, and provided signed consent forms. I scheduled 60-minute interviews with each of the 18 confirmed study participants from Western Hills University.

Full-time online faculty that participated in the study represent four of the seven colleges from Western Hills University, including the colleges of Business, Math, Agriculture, and Education. Male participants made up 33.3% of full-time online faculty participants, while female participants made up 66.6% of full-time online faculty participants. Eight interviews were conducted via Google Meet video conferencing, and one was conducted in person. In this study, each online faculty participant is identified via codes for their corresponding roles (see Table 1).

Table 1*Western Hills University Participants–Full-time Online Faculty*

Participant role/pseudonym	Years of teaching experience
Fulltime online faculty	
John	29
Marsha	9
Mandy	18
Frank	33
Andrew	13
Heather	5
Christy	25
Nancy	17
Linda	3

Adjunct online faculty that participated in this study represent three of the seven colleges at Western Hills University, including Business, Education, and Arts. Male participants made up 40% of online adjunct faculty participants, while female participants made up 60% of online adjunct faculty participants. Four of these interviews were conducted via Google Meet video conferencing, and one interview was conducted in person. In this study, each online adjunct faculty participant is identified via codes for their corresponding roles (see Table 2).

Table 2*Western Hills University Participants–Adjunct Online Faculty*

Participant role/pseudonym	Years of teaching experience
Adjunct online faculty	
Donald	40
Brian	6
Cathy	3
Sabrina	20
Andrea	25

Instructional designers who participated in the study are strategically embedded in four of the seven colleges at Western Hills University to be readily visible and available for full-time and adjunct online faculty but fall under the purview of the Western Hills URC and report to the Director of Instructional Design Services. All the instructional designers that participated in this study were female and had over 5 years of teaching experience in addition to their instructional design experience. In this study, each instructional design participant is identified via codes for their corresponding roles (see Table 3).

Table 3*Western Hills University Participants–Instructional Designer*

Participant role/pseudonym	Years as an instructional designer
Instructional designer	
Misty	0–5
Kendra	0–5
Sandra	0–5
Shelly	5–10

The interview protocol used for the participant role description of full-time online faculty and adjunct online faculty is included in Appendix B. The interview protocol used for the dedicated instructional designers is included in Appendix C.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the elements needed to design quality online courses, determine how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development provided by the university to develop online courses, and find out how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development impacts faculty skills as an online instructor. The following research questions were used in this study and were answered via the emerged themes reported in the Analysis Overview section:

RQ1: What attributes do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas believe are needed to design a quality online course?

RQ2: What professional development do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive is needed to create a quality online course?

RQ3: How do faculty and instructional designers at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive professional development impacts faculty's skills as an online instructor at a mid-sized university in west Texas?

Analysis Overview

I analyzed responses to participant questions from both interview protocols multiple times to ensure presented responses were significant to the study and that emerging themes among participants were confirmed. I was also given access to a couple of faculty surveys to review in hopes of including that information in my study. Upon review of the surveys, I determined the information contained was not significant enough to be included in this study. I

concentrated on identifying participant values, beliefs, and attitudes in each review of participant responses and noted positive and negative responses. As I reviewed participant responses, I made the determination not to use the NVivo analysis software and to use a manual coding process as I believed it would be more successful in revealing focused and meaningful participant themes. During my final review of participant responses, I concentrated on participant beliefs, attitudes, and actions that were common across all participant groups. Participant responses revealed shared categories, which led to the emergence of common respondent themes. Themes from Western Hills University included (a) positive/negative faculty training, (b) positive/negative institutional support, (c) use/non-use of an instructional designer, and (d) use/non-use of online best practices.

Positive or Negative Faculty Training

The theme of positive/negative faculty training was related to the perceptions of faculty and instructional designers regarding available training, inclusiveness of training, faculty buy-in regarding training, faculty motivation for training, who faculty seek out for training, and where faculty go for training. Faculty participants' years of experience are notated in parentheses throughout to show potential differences between newer and senior faculty responses.

Full-Time Faculty. When full-time online faculty participants were asked what steps they have taken to equip themselves to teach online courses, over 60% of respondents indicated they had utilized university training, while the remaining 40% used other various methods. John (29), a full-time faculty member with 29 years of teaching experience, stated he conducted a lot of research in his early years of teaching online and had a background as an instructional designer. John also said he completed the faculty improvement course offered by the university. Marsha's (9) response to the question was like John's in that she completed the faculty

improvement course provided by the university. Mandy (18) stated she gained experience as a course evaluator and completed the faculty improvement course offered by the university. Mandy made a positive indication that she is trying to create new videos in different locations to use in her course for her students. Andrew (13) commented positively that he had taken every single professional development the university offers and likes taking advantage of those opportunities. Andrew further commented that when the university provided the faculty improvement course, he also “jumped at the chance for training” because he appreciates the things he learns and refers to them as “little nuggets of information.” Heather (5) responded positively, indicating she tried to take advantage of the university training center and what they offer. Heather further revealed her goal was to attend one training at least once a month and university conferences when available. Heather also stated she would sometimes utilize information she found on the Internet and found that information helpful. Christy (25) responded differently by not using university resources but instead doing it herself and just figuring it out. Christy mentioned she would collaborate with other educators in trying different things she believed were helpful. Linda’s (3) response was similar to other faculty who were asked what steps they had taken to teach online courses in seeking out training by the URC.

When full-time online faculty participants were asked how the training they received for professional development to teach online courses contributed to the improvement of their online teaching, 50% of responses were of a positive attitude, while the remaining 50% of responses were different. John (29) stated he believed going through the faculty improvement course was very helpful but was unsure how much of what he learned would be incorporated into his online course. Marsha (9) commented positively that the training she has received gives her new ways of viewing the presented content and providing insight into how educational information is

delivered and received. Marsha said, “how great it has been to have an instructional designer available,” and she would utilize that resource when she got stuck or wanted to try new things in her course. Mandy (18) indicated when she first taught courses, there were no online courses or computers. Mandy further said the training she has received has led to the current course she is teaching, which is average. Mandy also said she has much to do with her online teaching skills and meets with faculty mentors to learn different applications and programs to better serve students. Frank (33) mentioned he had never taken an online course and his path was traditional teaching when he was a student. Frank further stated since those early days, he has shifted gears in his thinking but still does not think online courses are perfect for everybody; however, he believes online courses can be helpful for many students. Heather (5) responded positively by saying her professional development training helped tremendously and did not know how she would have set up all her classes without the training. Christy (25) stated she did not utilize university training but learned what she knows through conversations “with other faculty and what they are doing.” Nancy (17) commented the training she has received gives her new ideas, and she would even like to form a community of practice to help others. Nancy made a positive comment by saying she attended the training. It gave her new information and reminders as well as resources and where she could go to ask questions on other topics and meet people to reach out to later. Linda (3) provided a positive comment regarding university training, saying it helped her so much and she considers herself a lifelong learner. Linda always wants to know new tricks of the trade or new technologies and wants to keep up so her students may benefit from them. Linda further stated she wanted to model things in her classroom that she saw students using.

When full-time online faculty participants were asked what training they would like to see the institution offer faculty who are preparing to teach online, the responses were more

varied, both positive, negative, and different. John (29) stated he believed the university should offer to help faculty learn more about student outcomes as it would be helpful to new faculty. John mentioned any textbooks used might not directly align with learning outcomes. Marsha (9) stated teaching more about technology tools available for teaching. Marsha further commented, “it would be nice to have the opportunity for our staff development to be more focused on tools and how they are used in the classroom to teach.” Mandy (18) presented a different idea of putting faculty in cohorts and letting them work together across disciplines. These faculty should be paid a stipend due to the exertion of extra time and energy. Mandy further commented positively about how quality online instruction is essential. Andrew (13) commented he is a proponent of QM but said, “it might be too much for a new faculty person to ingest.” Andrew said he wished he could snap his fingers and everyone would be certified to teach online, but that sentiment is unrealistic. Heather (5) mentioned she would like to see her institution offer an introductory learning management system course and an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training course for instructors who are teaching online and they cannot teach until they have taken those courses. Christy (25) responded negatively by saying she knows the university offers training and chooses not to go because “she is too independent of a person to avail herself of those resources.” Nancy (17) commented she would like to see different levels of training made available, something fundamental, intermediate, and advanced. Nancy further articulated she was not sure what training was offered, and it would be fantastic if training could be recorded to watch later. Linda (3) commented positively, saying the URC provides excellent training. Linda further stated she did not get access to any of her modules in the learning management system until two nights before classes started, which caused some challenges in last-minute changes and frustration. Linda stated she had to either sink or swim.

Adjunct Faculty. When adjunct online faculty participants were asked what steps they had taken to equip themselves to teach online courses, 22% of responses referred to utilizing training, while the remaining responses were varied. Donald (40) remarked in the early days of his teaching, he went through various trainings, and since the early days, most of what he has learned has been through multiple vendors. Donald claimed he is more self-taught regarding what to do, not to do, and how to accomplish things in an online course. Brian (6) commented he likes to be organized and has all his assignments ready to go from the first day of class as a way to prepare for his online course delivery. Brian further stated he uses the same practices in his face-to-face courses. Cathy (3) commented she rereads her course textbook every semester to stay familiar with the material as well as utilizing the core functions in Canvas. Cathy also stated how she frequently communicates with other colleagues in her discipline to see “what they are doing” and what works well for them. Sabrina (20) stated she has always been a training connoisseur and enjoys learning. Sabrina further said she strives to go to all different types of training and has gained multiple certifications, many times out of her personal budget.

When adjunct online faculty participants were asked how the training they received for professional development to teach online courses contributed to the improvement of their online teaching, 60% of online adjunct faculty found professional development useful, while the remaining 40% of adjunct online faculty responses were more varied. Donald (40) stated even though he does not use current professional development training offered by the university, he still finds value in learning management system training videos from third-party sources. Donald further stated he did not like to be “caught off guard by student questions” that he did not know the answer to; however, he does not stress about it because his course is asynchronous, which he believes gives him plenty of time to respond to an issue. Brian (6) commented the training has

been helpful even though he is not required to take them because he is an adjunct faculty member. Brian also remarked professional development training had given him new information. Cathy (3) noted the training she has received has been significant as she learned different kinds of software and things about accessibility that she could use in her learning management system. Sabrina (20) remarked training made her more aware of “available resources and how she could use those resources to help students.”

When adjunct online faculty participants were asked what training they would like to see their institution offer faculty who are preparing to teach online, all adjunct online faculty responses gave an indication they would like a training path or course to help improve online instruction. Donald (40) commented he would like to see short tutorials that created a pathway for adjunct online faculty and even be assigned to a faculty mentor. Donald further stated he believes conversations with a department chair would be helpful for adjunct online faculty. Brian commented, “there needed to be a course for adjunct online faculty only containing recommendations and practices that are tested and work.” Brian (6) also stated that creating and using online courses can be very complicated due to all the third-party add-ons such as McGraw-Hill, Cengage, and Pearson and how things would be simpler if they were limited to the learning management system. Sabrina (20) remarked the best place to start would be offering a class about how teaching online is different than teaching face-to-face because the needs of the online student are different than the face-to-face student.

Instructional Designers. When instructional designers were asked the steps they had taken to equip faculty to teach online courses, 75% referred to the creation of online training and 25% to other methods. Misty commented her instructional design team has self-paced courses for teaching online. Misty also commented on how she works with online faculty to help them

identify the appropriate tools to use in their online courses because different disciplines may require various tools. Misty further stated she likes to speak with faculty to understand their goals better, enabling her to identify better learning tools to foster faculty success. Kendra said the instructional design team has a training portal available for faculty use. Kendra also commented that the instructional design team created a public-facing faculty training portal so new faculty can begin training before they receive university network credentials. Sandra commented she liked to analyze faculty needs and develop training or materials that support them. Sandra further articulated she has many one-on-one appointments with faculty that gives her the “ability to collaborate with faculty to come up with new ideas and solve problems.”

When instructional designers were asked how the training they provided in the form of professional development contributed to the improvement of online faculty teaching, the responses were varied. Misty commented the instructional designers providing faculty training sometimes help to “provide inspiration and new ideas for their online courses regarding the use of technology or teaching best practices.” Sandra stated she believes the contribution from instructional designers fosters a positive result; whether it is providing group training or one-on-one teachings, the result is student success in the online classroom. Shelly remarked the training instructional designers provide faculty helps to “better equip faculty to create online content that is more engaging and better aligns with best practices and accessibility.” Kendra commented how faculty buy-in for instructional design training is slowly changing to a more positive acceptance but still believes 80% of the training offered by instructional designers falls by the wayside because they are unable to follow due to the culture of the university and perceived challenges of inconsistencies regarding faculty accountability.

When instructional designers were asked what changes they would make to improve faculty preparedness to teach online based on their current professional development environment, 75% of instructional designer responses indicated a need for a “more substantial commitment from the institution” regarding faculty being accountable to receive institutional training before they can teach an online course, and the remainder of responses were varied. Misty stated she would like to utilize more one-on-one walk-throughs with faculty because only self-paced instruction does not guarantee faculty engagement with new ideas regarding online best practices for teaching and course creation. Misty further remarked that utilizing one-on-one training gives instructional designers the ability to assist faculty with concepts that are not understood, which she believes helps the training process by not wasting faculty time. Kendra commented she would start by ensuring that every single online faculty first takes a class as a student to better understand the online environment. Kendra elaborated, saying before a course for faculty can take place, “the things faculty are taught need to be at the exemplar level so that students receive exemplar-level courses.” Sandra commented the university already has some introductory training courses for faculty, which is better than the faculty not having the training. Sandra further articulated she would like to see the policy changed at the university regarding faculty training to mandate it with no exceptions to ensure better faculty preparedness to teach online courses. Shelley said the URC has developed a well-rounded training program for faculty use but would like to see the administration mandate the training for all faculty to better ensure their success in online instruction.

Positive/Negative Institutional Support

The theme of positive/negative institutional support was related to the perceptions of faculty and instructional designers on if online faculty are adequately trained to teach online

courses, positive or negative, and the meaningfulness or validity of available training. Faculty participants' years of experience are notated in parentheses throughout to show potential differences between newer and senior faculty responses.

Full-time Faculty. When full-time online faculty participants were asked what avenues were available to them at their institution to receive constructive feedback to improve the quality of their online courses, 66% of those responses were similar, while 34% of responses were varied. John (29) indicated he believed there was or had been a formal course review process to help faculty improve. John commented talking to his colleagues who taught the same course as him was helpful because they could discuss what each of them was doing. John further commented that he likes to talk to his colleagues regularly and the integrated instructional designer at his college, who he regularly visits regarding formal and informal things. John mentioned a course review process but "was unsure if it still existed." Marsha (9) stated she works closely with the university training center to have them evaluate her courses and make recommendations on how they can be improved. Mandy (18) also mentioned she could submit her classes to have a review to make sure the course flows correctly and it is easy to understand. Mandy further stated a peer review is also available in her discipline. Frank (33) made a statement that gave a negative indication he is no longer connected or collaborating with the institutional resources or support staff:

Five years ago, the university, in my opinion, was doing a good job of getting people to go in and do an evaluation of online courses that were here. I'm not sure we're doing that anymore. And I know that nobody has evaluated my course, and I haven't brought it up.

Frank further commented that he was open to someone looking at his online course from a student perspective and giving him some constructive feedback. Andrew (13) made a similar

statement to his colleagues, indicating course reviews for online courses are available. Andrew further commented he took a third-party faculty professional improvement course for online best practices that was extremely well-made. Heather (5) remarked there are course reviews available and she has gone through the process several times. Heather commented she uses the university resource center to review her courses and it has been helpful being able to work with a technology peer who can reveal her technology shortcomings and provide training to improve her technology skills. Christy (25) indicated she worked with her faculty colleagues, who give each other feedback which helps with her online instruction. Christy further commented she had recently completed the university-sponsored faculty improvement course, which she believed improved her online skills. Nancy (17) remarked her classes could be evaluated, which is carried out via her department chair and teaching peers. Nancy did not mention the URC and what they offer. Linda (3) made mention of course evaluations and that she recently attended training provided by the university. Linda further indicated the training offered great tips for incorporating new things into her course to obtain better student feedback.

When full-time online faculty participants were asked if they believe online faculty at their institution were adequately trained to teach online (yes or no) and why, 50% of full-time faculty responded positively, 11% of full-time online faculty responded negatively, and 39% of online full-time faculty responses were varied. John (29) stated he believes “the university has given the opportunity for faculty to learn to teach online effectively and that some faculty take advantage of it and some do not.” John further commented he is unsure if the university still requires faculty to take training before they can teach online. Marsha (9) reported she believes the university is improving as they are providing the new faculty improvement course for all faculty members and believes the opportunity is there for everyone if they take advantage of it.

Marsha further commented the university wants all faculty certified to teach online. Mandy (18) remarked how she believes “professors have the opportunity to be well-equipped but, as a whole, do not take advantage of the opportunity.” Frank (33) stated he does not believe the university is doing nearly what it could do because “there are people who are not good at change or having to change, which presents a challenge in the online arena.” Frank further commented he believes his institution is below average in offering quality courses for online instruction, saying, “as a whole, they are not where they need to be tomorrow or next week.” Andrew (13) stated some faculty are prepared, but the majority are not. Andrew further commented he spoke with other deans at the university and believes the institutional policy for training faculty to teach online is not being followed very closely, which he views as unfortunate. Heather (5) remarked the institution needs to ensure it puts its best foot forward. Anyone who teaches online courses “should undergo minimal training to ensure students are engaged.” Heather stated she believes online faculty who taught before the pandemic and love instruction seek out resources as opposed to those who were forced into teaching online who, in her opinion, “do not seek out the proper resources to be successful.” Christy (25) reflected on herself in her comment and said when she first started, she did seek out training, but now she does not use the training the way she should. Nancy (17) stated she does not believe faculty are adequately trained to teach online courses. Nancy further said when she first started, there was nobody to review her classes, and it was only evaluated at the end of the semester. Nancy also commented how her leadership never asked to look at her online courses. At this point, because she has been teaching for quite some time, she would be “irritated for her classes to go into a review.” Linda (3) remarked there are many opportunities to receive training and the university offers many choices. Linda further

stated she believed more senior professors would benefit from the training but did not want to go.

When full-time online faculty participants were asked for recommendations they would make to improve faculty training to teach online courses based on their current experience and knowledge of teaching online, 50% of online faculty participants recommended mandatory training, and 40% of online faculty participants made varied recommendations. John (29) suggested all faculty go through training but stated he understood why it does not happen but did not explain his statement further. John noted, “most faculty teach the way they were taught,” alluding to a traditional face-to-face setting versus an online environment. John further commented the faculty who went through bad online courses where it was electronic correspondence would probably teach electronic correspondence courses because it is how they were trained. Marsha (9) responded positively by saying she believes her institution does a great job in training, “but it is up to the instructor to initiate the training.” Marsha further stated when new people are coming in, they may not know their training options, and classes are just thrown at them with very little time to prepare. Marsha remarked how the institution should consider giving new faculty a mentor. Mandy (18) recommended the university should provide the opportunity for faculty to submit their courses to be evaluated by instructional designers and peer reviewers and be given stipends for this process. Frank (33) believed the institution should provide faculty training as part of the specific contact points and be part of regular meetings, or faculty spend at least 15 minutes with an instructional designer. Frank articulated, “the faculty who want to be better online teachers will seek out the training and find it; however, that is not a significant percentage of the faculty at his institution.” Frank also commented faculty need to undergo basic learning management system training, so they are not banging their heads against

the wall. Andrew (13) stated there needs to be more emphasis on the importance of training, and faculty are not technology savvy; the institution has a fantastic staff to provide support. Andrew recommended the university highlight essential staff members and resources and “make it less of a stigma for faculty to reach out for help.” Heather (5) stated rather than trying to do an excellent significant training in the beginning, there should be someone in training for faculty to get into what they are doing and not try to do the whole thing at once. Christy (25) responded similarly to Heather, saying that faculty should have a monthly schedule where they come in the morning when they are not teaching and have 30-minute training sessions. Christy also stated positively how the institution needs to assure faculty that they do not need all the answers right up front when getting started, and things may be unsteady. Nancy (17) stated there should be expectations on how present instructors must be in an online course. Nancy further commented, “instructors do not need to be micromanaged, just informed of the upfront expectations.” Linda (3) stated the URC is supportive and very helpful whenever she reached out to them. Linda further says she has never felt afraid to ask questions and knows the support is there, which makes her happy to access the resource.

Adjunct Faculty. When adjunct online faculty participants were asked what avenues were available to them at their institution to receive constructive feedback to improve the quality of their online courses, 33% of adjunct online faculty participants indicated course evaluations would be helpful, 22% recommended focusing on student feedback, and the remainder of responses varied. Donald (40) commented on how feedback could be beneficial through evaluations at the end of an 8-week course. Brian (6) stated he believes “it would be helpful for other professors to look at what he is doing because he believes their feedback is experienced.” Brian also commented student feedback is valuable as it enables him to address concerns and

criticisms. Cathy (3) commented she usually has another instructor look at her course and provide feedback on what they would do differently. Cathy mentioned sometimes she would poll her students and allow them to provide anonymous feedback. Sabrina (20) commented there is an opportunity to have online courses evaluated by the university instructional designers with the URC, which is a beneficial service. Andrea (25) gave a negative indication regarding her view of avenues available to her at the university to receive feedback and improvement of her online courses:

Not one time in my experience as an adjunct has anyone offered constructive feedback, looked at my course or asked if I was teaching at all. They want me to turn in a grade, and they do not even teach you how to do that. Unless I do the research on my own, I would not know how to get any feedback. And to be honest, when I do ask for things, I am told that it is not for adjuncts, faculty training, and those things. Those are for full-time faculty. So, I am like, ok, you don't pay me that much anyway, so why should I even try?

When adjunct online faculty participants were asked if they believe online faculty at their institution were adequately trained to teach online (yes or no) and why, 75% of adjunct online faculty said yes, and the remaining responses were varied. Brian (6) commented he believed faculty at his institution who teach online courses were (or could be) adequately trained, but it depended upon how much training they wanted. Brian further stated, "they could be successful if faculty are willing to work and use the resources available, such as an instructional designer and university resources." Cathy's (3) response was like Brian's in saying faculty have many opportunities to receive training but have to "take advantage of those trainings." Sabrina (20) commented faculty are adequately trained to teach online if they choose to be, and the faculty

who are not trained is because they have decided not to utilize the resources. Andrea (25) provided a more disconnected response in saying she hopes full-time faculty would be required to have training, and they would have to build courses that could be used as exemplars for adjuncts. Andrea stated, “if the university is not going to let adjuncts go through training, then it should be full-time faculty receiving the training.”

When adjunct online faculty participants were asked what recommendations they would make to their institution to improve faculty training to teach online courses based on their current experience and knowledge of teaching online, 75% of adjunct online faculty indicated requiring faculty who are going to teach online to have mandatory training, the remaining 25% of responses were varied. Donald (40) stated in his response the need for specific training for what faculty are teaching. Donald further commented how consistency, structure, and being deliberate regarding training are critical. Brian (6) commented how he appreciates the training offered by the URC but sounded concerned, saying, “if faculty leadership does not support and reinforce the need for training with their faculty, I do not see it as successful as it could be.” Cathy (3) remarked she would like to learn new ways to communicate with her students outside of announcements and emails because she believes it does not reach most students. Sabrina (20) commented she recommends faculty reach out to instructional designers as she thinks they are an excellent avenue for a new faculty person to get started before teaching online. Sabrina further remarked how utilizing these resources would give faculty ideas for online best practices. Still, they would have to take some of the responsibility for themselves and go out and look for these resources within the university.

Instructional Designers. When instructional designers were asked what avenues are available to faculty at their institution to receive constructive feedback to improve the quality of

their online courses, 100% of instructional designer participants indicated the availability of a university course review as a resource to online faculty, and 75% of instructional design participants mentioned the opportunity for faculty to work one-on-one with an instructional designer to receive feedback and recommendations for their online courses. Misty commented the instructional design team offers a course review, or faculty can go through it with a group of people and one of their peers and review a course. Misty further commented even though instructional designers offer faculty the opportunity for a course review, “faculty interest in the process has varied over the years by department and college.” Kendra stated faculty can contact the URC and request a course review or contact an instructional designer directly and ask for a course review. Kendra further stated, “many faculty are not even aware this opportunity exists at the university due to the low numbers of participants who attend the free university professional development training” for online instruction. Sandra commented the same way as the other instructional designers, saying faculty can request a course review anytime to receive feedback regarding their online courses. Sandra further remarked faculty could also have their department chairs reach out to the URC or an instructional designer to request an online course review and be provided with the rubric used to review courses along with a final report to keep for their records. Shelly resonated with the responses of the other instructional designers in saying faculty who desired feedback regarding their online courses could reach out to an instructional designer to receive a course evaluation.

When instructional designers were asked if they believe online faculty at their institution are adequately trained to teach online (yes and no) and why, 75% of instructional design participants implied many faculty are not adequately trained because of extrinsic circumstances, and the remaining 25% of responses were varied. Misty stated she believed the “faculty who

took the initiative” to seek instructional design help and available university professional development opportunities had a much higher chance of successfully creating and teaching online courses. Misty further remarked many faculty choose not to attend training or seek help, believing those individuals are not as successful. Kendra commented she does not believe faculty are adequately trained at all to teach online courses at the university:

Faculty here are set up for failure. We have an institution that is continually putting more and more things online, yet there is no support. There is no teaching for faculty, so faculty are set up for failure, and then students are set up for failure as well. Faculty don't know how to build courses that are created for online purposes, and the students don't do well. So, then faculty get poor ratings, and students have to retake the course. It's a vicious cycle that's not ever going to change until faculty are required to actually go to some sort of training and learn how to build online courses.

Sandra stated she feels the university could do better in enforcing faculty training, and if anyone is going to teach online courses, they should have to undergo training. Sandra further stated she is unsure if the university has a policy in place at the current moment regarding online faculty training being mandatory.

Use/Non-Use of an Instructional Designer

The theme of use/non-use of an instructional designer was related to the perceptions of faculty and instructional designers regarding how instructional designers are utilized to support faculty, faculty perceptions of the value of instructional designers, the delineation between instructional designers and information technology, faculty willingness to ask for help or collaborate with instructional designers, and the institutional support of instructional designers and institutional visibility of instructional designers. Faculty participants' years of experience are

notated in parentheses throughout to show potential differences between newer and senior faculty responses.

Full-Time Faculty. When full-time online faculty participants were asked how involved they are in the design of their online courses and who else they collaborate with on the design of their online courses, 100% of online faculty participants stated they predominantly create their own courses, 22% of full-time online faculty respondents claimed they utilized the help of an instructional designer in the design of their online courses, and 50% of full-time online faculty respondents stated they work with each other in the creation of their online courses. John (29) remarked he designed his own courses because that is what he does. John further explained he regularly collaborates with his colleagues about what he is doing and what they are doing. John went on to say he often utilizes an instructional designer for formal and informal things. Marsha (9) stated she collaborates with all her faculty because she must keep up with changes and incorporate them into all of their courses, and “they like to do that as a group.” Mandy (18) commented she is given a great deal of freedom regarding the design of her courses, “so she creates them on her own.” Frank (33) remarked he is 100% the designer of all his online courses, and he never knew there was another way to do that process. Frank continued by saying, “I have never had any collaboration and seldom asks for advice on putting a course together.” Still, he is starting to realize the ramifications of that mindset. Andrew (13) stated he is the one that does it all, but when he first started, he utilized the help of an instructional designer and took professional development training. Andrew further commented, in the present time, “he speaks mostly with his faculty colleagues of his same discipline.” Heather (5) commented she had designed all her courses, and when she collaborates, “it is only with faculty.” Christy (25) remarked she was relatively new to online classes before the pandemic. When she collaborates in

the design of her online courses, it is with the faculty of her discipline. Nancy (17) remarked that even before Covid, all her classes went online, and she already had experience creating her courses. Linda (3) stated she is primarily responsible for the design of her online courses.

When full-time online faculty participants were asked how instructional designers support them in their role as an online instructor, 44% of full-time online faculty participants indicated they are more inclined to do things independently, and the remainder of responses were varied. John (29) remarked, “instructional designers are a beneficial avenue for new faculty to get started regarding the process of creating an online course.” Marsha (9) commented instructional designers help evaluate courses and recommend how they can be improved. Mandy (18) expressed her appreciation and how “instructional designers stay up with current technologies and can point me in the right direction regarding the use of tools that will assist me.” Frank (33) remarked that he “rarely uses instructional designers and only calls them for technical issues.” Frank further stated he has a lot of work to do and realizes he does not contact his instructional designer nearly enough despite knowing that his instructional designer is very talented and capable of assisting him. Andrew (13) stated he is more inclined to reach out for the support of an instructional designer when it is an issue he cannot achieve, such as limited administrative access within his learning management system. Andrew further commented he “uses instructional designers’ knowledge of locating resources and knowing how to apply them.” Heather (5) remarked she felt terrible because most of the time when she runs into an issue, “I would rather solve it on my own before trying to call or email an instructional designer because I am afraid I will annoy them.” Heather stated she would try to see if the answers to her instructional design questions are available on the Internet or try to figure it out independently. Christy (25) commented how she would reach out to an instructional designer when she has

specific questions, but for the most part, she will figure out issues on her own but does not take advantage of the one-on-one sessions offered by the instructional designers. Nancy (17) replied, “I was unaware the university even had an instructional designer and believe the fault lies with the university regarding the provision of resources for new faculty during new faculty orientation.” Linda (3) commented she is very independent when working on her courses and is not afraid to work on her classes alone. Linda further stated she looks to information sources such as Google and YouTube to find answers to issues regarding her online courses.

Adjunct Faculty. When adjunct online faculty participants were asked how involved they are in the design of their online courses and who else they collaborate with in the design of their online courses, 80% of adjunct online faculty participants indicated they solely designed their classes, and 20% of adjunct online faculty collaborate with other faculty members in the creation of their courses. Donald (40) remarked he has worked with other faculty members in the past to learn good habits when building an online course; however, in this day and time, he refers to himself as a “lone wolf,” expressing he is solely responsible for the success of his online class. Brian stated he often receives a course shell that is ready to go from his department and does not modify the shell because he is not an educator. Cathy (3) stated she collaborates with other faculty that teach the same course as her regarding the design of her online courses. Sabrina (20) commented she designs her courses; however, she uses a QM type of criteria and other best practices to ensure the success of the course. Andrea (25) remarked no one helps her design her classes, and there is no collaboration due to her role as an adjunct faculty member. Andrea further stated, “I have very little institutional or departmental oversight and could read a Dr. Seuss book in class if I felt like it.”

When adjunct online faculty participants were asked how instructional designers support them in their role as an online instructor, Donald (40) commented when he came to the university, he was given a course shell and believes the fundamentals of design are in place. Donald also stated, “if I have any problems, I reach out to information technology [IT].” Brian (6) expressed how “it would have been impossible for me to do mine in the learning management system without the assistance of the instructional designers at the university.” Brian went on to say that he was clueless about how the learning technologies even worked, and without the assistance of the instructional designers, he would have been completely lost. Cathy (3) stated she does not have much contact with the instructional designers but knows she could reach out to them if she ever has an issue that requires their assistance. Sabrina (20) remarked that “instructional designers are a resource” to assist with ADA compliance, new technologies, best practice in pedagogy or adult learning principles, and course design. Andrea (25) stated she “does not know how an instructional designer supports my role as an online instructor because I do not know what an instructional designer does.” Andrea further commented when the university sends out offerings for training, adjuncts are not included, and as a result, she is unsure of the role of an instructional designer or how they can assist her.

Instructional Designers. When instructional design participants were asked how involved they are in the design of online courses and who they collaborate with, 100% of instructional design respondents indicated they collaborate with their team in the creation of online courses, and 75% of instructional design respondents indicated they work with other faculty department heads in the design of online courses. Misty stated she works with departments on course design and with her instructional design team. Misty further commented that she works with individual professors to design online courses. Kendra stated her

involvement in creating online courses “is more limited than she would like it to be.” Kendra further commented faculty she knows personally are more inclined to reach out to her for assistance in creating online courses. Still, most of the faculty do not take advantage of her presence and usually ask her questions “limited to problems in their learning management system.” Sandra remarked she is there for faculty to assist them as they build their courses, and she works with faculty members individually and sometimes in groups. Sandra stated she works with the instructional design team on various projects when creating courses. Shelly remarked the instructional design team had created online courses for the university faculty and staff. Shelly also stated she has personally assisted professors in creating online courses and will typically collaborate with subject matter experts.

Use/Non-Use of Online Best Practices

The theme of use/non-use of online best practices was related to attitudes and viewpoints of faculty and instructional designers regarding the use of teaching and learning best practices and learning tools inside the learning management system. Faculty participants’ years of experience are notated in parentheses throughout to show potential differences between newer and senior faculty responses.

Full-Time Faculty. When full-time online faculty participants were asked what features in their learning management system they found most helpful when building an online course and why, 11% of full-time online faculty participants reported they use groups, 22% utilize the feedback tool, 11% utilized discussions, 33% appreciate videos, 44% use modules, and 33% of online faculty respondents utilize Canvas Studio. John (29) stated he found Zoom sessions helpful and uses discussion boards even though he is not always a fan of using discussion boards. John also remarked he “enjoys using modules in his learning management system.” Marsha (9)

gave a short response stating she liked using groups and the feedback tool in her learning management system. Mandy (18) commented the most helpful tool in her learning management system is Canvas Studio because she can make videos easily and share them with students. Mandy further remarked she had received positive feedback from students who appreciated using the feedback tool when grading student papers. Frank (33) commented he enjoys using the modules feature inside his learning management system. Andrew (13) stated he likes using Canvas Studio because it is a built-in tool. Andrew also commented “I enjoy using the feedback tool for grading homework because I can leave text and audio feedback for students.” Heather (5) remarked she appreciates using the ADA checker inside her learning management system to ensure the things she creates are compliant. Heather commented she enjoys using Canvas Studio because of the ease of creating videos for her students in her courses. Christy (25) stated she enjoys creating overview videos and providing custom links to external videos from other resources for her students. Christy further commented she likes to create module pages. Nancy (17) stated she uses modules because they make the content less overwhelming for her students, and she enjoys using videos. Linda (17) commented how she enjoys using the calendar feature inside her learning management system and seeing a to-do reminder on the main page.

When full-time faculty were asked for their definition of course quality regarding an online course, responses from participants were varied. John (29) stated course quality ultimately meets instructional objectives for student learning outcomes of the course. John further expressed, “I do not want my courses ever to be considered as correspondence courses, and therefore it is imperative to have interaction between students and myself, and between the students themselves to foster a community of learning.” Marsha (9) believes the integration of learning technology is significant in an online course because she, as an instructor, is asking her

students to incorporate technology into their presentations and wants to ensure as a faculty member, she is doing the same thing in her courses. Frank (33) remarked it is essential to write objectives and to teach according to mastering the objectives. Andrew (13) believed “student satisfaction plays into my definition of course quality.” Andrew further expressed how students in an online course should be able to have the same comfort as face-to-face courses, ask questions, and receive the answers they need to learn the material even if it is difficult. Heather (5) defined course quality as one which maintains the integrity of the material she is trying to teach while helping students who need the online format. Christy (25) remarked a high-quality online course would have multiple ways of engaging learners, so “it needs to have high engagement and be accessible for all students.” Nancy (17) defined a high-quality course as one which contains a clear format, so students know exactly where information is and how to access it. Nancy commented students also need to understand how to use the tools in their online course and gave an example of submitting assignments. Linda (3) gave a more disconnected response, saying, “I guess I measure that through how students perform on tests, and if they’re scoring well on that, I think ok, I am doing my job.”

When full-time online faculty were asked what strategies for student engagement they believed are effective in an online course, 60% of full-time faculty respondents indicated using videos, while 40% were more focused on discussion activities. John (29) expressed how he has been experimenting with video feedback as a new practice for engagement in his course. John further elaborated, saying, “some of my students like it, and some don’t because, obviously, it’s very different.” Marsha (9) mentioned having her students work in groups to become experts in that section. Marsha further commented, “Students communicate, present to one another, and get involved in their learning,” which she indicated fosters student ownership of projects and

encourages student discussions. Mandy's (18) response was like Marsha's in expressing how discussion boards are helpful, but with the caveat of being used correctly. Mandy said, "I give them many different ways of submitting information in the discussion board, such as an infographic, a video, or it could be a PowerPoint." Mandy further mentioned she would give students different ways to communicate (such as videos or regular text), guidelines for how to respond to each other, and examples of how to comment to their peers. Andrew (13) stated he believes in learning styles or learning preferences regarding students. Andrew further commented, "I think giving them feedback and interacting with them in different ways allows you to reach a wider variety of students." Andrew also expressed the importance of variety in giving his students written, audio, and video feedback. Heather (5) stated her strategies for student engagement have been a lot of "trial and error," and she tries new things every semester. Heather further commented she would use in-person opportunities (campus events) in addition to her online format for students to earn extra credit. Heather also commented she uses Zoom regularly to communicate with her students but still utilizes discussion boards as a means for her students to have communication in her course. Christy (25) stated in a less confident tone that "sometimes discussions work" but, unfortunately, has experienced other instances where discussion activities were not successful in her online course. Christy further commented that she has had more success utilizing videos in her course, which she believes "really helps students find their voice." Christy also remarked the use of discussion activities supported her in building community within her course in terms of forging a relationship between her and her students. Nancy (17) commented, "I believe in discussion boards, but I don't always like the answers I get in discussion boards." Nancy further remarked that some of the discussion answers she does not like might be attributed to her not setting up the activity correctly or students who sometimes

will not provide good answers to the discussion activity. Nancy also commented she is looking into having students utilize videos in her discussions to encourage deeper interactions.

When full-time online faculty were asked what kind of resources they make available to their students in their online courses, 44% of full-time online faculty participants indicated the use of supplemental materials such as journal articles, 33% revealed the use of self-created and third-party educational videos, and the remainder of responses were varied. John (29) commented he provides such materials as technical white papers, podcasts, and instructional videos. John further stated, "I'm a great believer that a lot of people out there are a lot smarter than me, and I am a curator of information. Let me go find somebody else that has done this and get their perspective." Marsha (9) mentioned she provides students with instructional videos and articles as a resource in her course. Marsha further stated she likes to provide students with exemplary examples of projects her students are assigned. Mandy (18) commented she provides open educational resources for students and finds them extremely helpful. Mandy also stated she provides her students with "quality literature that is research-based." Frank (33) remarked he likes to provide students with his teaching notes and recordings from his lectures. Andrew (13) remarked he likes to give students access to his PowerPoints and publisher documents. Andrew further stated, "I usually provide two or three different alternatives for the same resource on the syllabus." Heather (5) commented her students only read their books for a short time. Hence, she strives to provide them with additional articles which relate to the topics covered in her course. Christy (25) responded similarly to John and Marsha in saying she offers videos to her students as a resource in her course. Christy mentioned she provides other resources such as various web resources and articles. Nancy (17) stated she uses the "start here" area in her online course to provide links to university resources such as the IT helpdesk, writing center, library, general

university information, student disability services, and student counseling. Linda (3) commented she provides “anything I can” for students in her courses. Linda further commented that education is constantly changing, so she uses YouTube videos, Zoom sessions, and even guest speakers.

When full-time online faculty were asked what their definition of ADA compliance was in an online course and what steps they believed were necessary to make an online course ADA compliant, participant responses were varied. John (29) stated an ADA course “meets university standards” regarding the use of videos, images, and the use of text. John further remarked he tries to stay informed and reviews accessibility guidelines every semester and whenever he tries something new in his course. Marsha (9) commented she relies on the use of Canvas Studio to ensure her videos are closed captioned, which she believes has proven effective in her courses. Mandy (18) stated her definition of ADA compliance is “if we are going to meet the needs of students, we meet the needs of all students regardless of what the needs are.” Mandy further commented if faculty want students to meet learning objectives, they must ensure they are doing everything they can regarding accessibility. Hence, students have the best chance to master course learning objectives. Andrew (13) remarked how “it’s being mindful” regarding things created in an online course such as videos, images, headings, and the order in which they are placed in a course. Andrew further commented he believes he adheres to ADA rules better than many of his faculty colleagues, but he “certainly has room for improvement.” Heather (5) defined ADA compliance as providing a “best faith effort” but believes faculty must understand the basics, which only comes from attending training. Heather also stated she regularly checks the videos she creates to ensure they are closed captioned and reviews images for alternative texts. Christy (25) remarked her understanding of ADA compliance “is that it is accessible for

our students, and it provides equitable educational access for all students.” Nancy (17) commented accessibility means students can “access the material the way they need to.” Nancy also confided she has not received formal training yet but believes it is essential to be aware of the needs of students because they will not always come forward to express their needs. Linda (3) could not define ADA compliance but understands how “accessibility is extremely important” but has not received any requests for accommodation at this point in her career.

Adjunct Faculty. When adjunct online faculty participants were asked what features in their learning management system they found most helpful when building an online course and why all adjunct online faculty participant responses varied. Donald (40) remarked he enjoys built-in rubrics because it gives him the best of both worlds in making standardized comments, especially when grading over 50 papers; there may be a commonality between them. Brian (6) stated he finds the syllabus tool helpful and announcements and pages in his learning management system. Cathy (3) remarked she likes using the calendar function, assignments, and announcements. Sabrina (20) noted when building an online course in her learning management system, she highlighted how modules are the most helpful for her and being able to break up the material. Andrea (25) stated how she enjoys using multiple-choice quizzes because they can grade themselves.

When adjunct online faculty were asked for their definition of course quality regarding an online course, 40% of adjunct faculty participants emphasized student engagement, and the remainder of the responses were varied. Donald (40) remarked how engagement is essential in an online course because “students who are often looking for the path of least resistance sometimes choose an online course because they perceive that it is going to be simpler, easier, and faster.” Donald stated he, as a faculty member, must work at engaging his students and must do things

differently while making sure experiences in his course are meaningful. Brian (6) defined quality in an online course as focusing on learning outcomes. Brian remarked, “some people do better in an online environment.” Brian also expressed a quality online course has feedback and interaction between the instructor and the students and would provide the same information as a face-to-face course. Cathy (3) noted a quality online course must be “like you are still teaching.” Cathy further expressed that she does not like an online course where students only read books, take tests, and complete assignments. Cathy believes there needs to be another layer of instructor presence such as an audio clip or video. Sabrina (20) stated navigation is vital in an online course so students can easily access the materials. Sabrina further noted students do not have face-to-face interaction and “you have to adapt them and find different ways to do things online.” Andrea (25) defined online course quality differently than the rest of the adjunct respondents by saying “that it is passable.”

When adjunct online faculty were asked what strategies for student engagement they believed are effective in an online course, the responses were varied. Donald (40) expressed how he is becoming less enamored with the use of discussion boards and believes student responses are insubstantial. Donald further commented, “I am much more inclined to give them written assignments as I would in a face-to-face context.” Brian (6) remarked he had no idea other than making things mandatory and for a grade in his course. Cathy (3) noted she uses discussion activities to encourage student interactions and utilizes an icebreaker activity at the beginning of the course. Cathy further commented she assigns students to give presentations and comment on each other’s work. Sabrina (20) believed assignments should not be static but have some sort of interactive component. Sabrina further stated, “you want to be sure that you have things for students, so they are not just sitting there and going through the motions. They need to be an

active learner and participating in the course.” Sabrina also stated she likes the back-and-forth collaboration with her students and likes to find ways they can collaborate with each other because it helps them to have social learning, like in a face-to-face environment. Andrea (25) mentioned she utilizes short videos and announcements and will even use video quizzes created in Canvas Studio. Andrea further commented, “I had to teach myself how to do these things, and it was hard, and it was a beat down, but I did it.”

When adjunct online faculty were asked what kinds of resources they make available to their students in their online courses, 50% of adjunct respondents indicated using video resources, and the remainder of the responses were varied. Brian (6) remarked he likes to use professional organization websites because of the exposure it provides his students. Cathy (3) commented she likes to use PowerPoint slides and record herself so students can see her lecturing. Cathy expressed she likes using YouTube videos and textbooks that students can read. Sabrina (20) stated, “I will usually try to make videos available.” Sabrina further noted she tries to give her students resources for studying, writing, and promotes university resources she believes would be helpful for them. Andrea (25) stated, “I provide anything that is not a craft item.” Andrea further commented she uses open educational resources or items that fall into public domain.

When adjunct online faculty were asked what their definition of ADA compliance was in an online course and what steps they believed were necessary to make an online course ADA compliant, adjunct faculty participants’ responses were varied. Donald (40) commented, “I take it on faith that when I’m given the courses here, the course shells are fully ADA compliant.” Donald further noted he feels terrible however revealing he knows very little regarding ADA and only knows how to deal with specific requests for accommodations. Brian (6) defined ADA

compliance as students being able to access the information, and the goal needs to be delivery of the content in a form they can use. Cathy (3) briefly commented she “tries to make everything in her course available to numerous people.” Sabrina (20) defined ADA compliance as material being accessible for those who have visual and hearing or other learning differences or impairments. Sabrina also commented that faculty should ensure material is accessible in various ways. Andrea (25) showed intense frustration when asked for her definition of ADA compliance by stating:

I have not one iota of knowledge because at no point has anyone asked or communicated that with me. I guess I haven't worried about it because I have a really good pass rate. So in my mind, I'm thinking they must be doing just fine, which I realize is not the accessible response. I guess I thought that if something was not compliant that maybe the university would tell me. I guess I thought someone would look at it at some point and be like, “hey, you didn't make sure your videos are compliant.” Nobody's ever asked me.

Instructional Designers. When instructional designers were asked what features in their learning management system they found most helpful when building an online course. All instructional design participants indicated the usefulness of the module tool and the availability of Canvas Studio. Misty remarked how the utilization of the module tool is excellent for the structure and presentation of information inside the university learning management system. Misty also stated she appreciates the discussion tool, third-party programs, and how they can provide new opportunities for student engagement. Sandra commented that she also “loves the module tool and that it is a great way to organize and control the flow of classroom materials.” Sandra further mentioned how the module tool allows the faculty person to articulate where a student needs to go in the online classroom and what a student is supposed to do. Shelly stated

she enjoys using Canvas Studio because it allows faculty and students to immediately record video clips that can be used in assignments or the modules area.

When instructional designers were asked for their definition of course quality regarding an online course, 50% of instructional designer participants included accessibility as part their definition of course quality. The remaining responses were varied. Misty noted it is crucial to move easily through the course and find course materials. Misty further noted course materials should be accessible for all learners stating, “you don’t want that to be a barrier to their academic success.” Kendra defined course quality as being structured to promote student success. Sabrina stated she puts herself in the student’s shoes logging on for the first time. Sabrina further commented,

It has to be evident of where to begin, what to do and be well organized so that I know, as a student, exactly what I’m expected to do every single week of the course, and how to do it.

Shelly remarked that quality online courses would follow ADA guidelines, be very easy to see, read, and have material chunked into organized sections utilizing consistency.

When instructional designers were asked what strategies for student engagement they believed are effective in an online course, all instructional design respondents indicated the need for variety in engagement. Of those respondents, 50% pointed specifically to utilizing instructional videos. Misty noted there are many different tools that faculty can use to engage students. Misty commented, “students just don’t want to read through the material, especially online.” Misty remarked faculty must be more interactive using tools such as videos, images, or third-party interactive tools. Kendra mentioned she observes many faculty who seem stuck in the mindset that every module must be precisely the same. She noted providing variety in online

courses keeps things from becoming boring. Kendra stated, “so I think if you employ all of the different possible scenarios that you have available within a learning management system, there are enough options inside it that you can have enough variety to keep students engaged.” Sandra believes course engagement varies depending on the level of the course. Sandra further noted students enjoy courses where faculty incorporate videos, discussion boards, or even third-party programs and believes the courses are “more engaging to them.” Shelly remarked, “the more opportunities you get them to interact with the professor and the other students, the better off, the more engaged they’ll be.”

When instructional designers were asked what their definition of ADA compliance was in an online course and what steps they believed were necessary to make an online course ADA compliant, all instructional design respondents’ answers were varied. Misty remarked how every day she is learning and there is much more to accessibility. She expressed how the university’s learning management system helps by using an accessibility checker tool. Misty also remarked how having awareness is essential in helping faculty engage with the tools available within the learning management system. Kendra defined an ADA-compliant course as one that all students enrolled in the course can be successful, and they do not have to continually ask for extra steps to be taken because they have already happened. Kendra gave some additional examples of compliance, including captioned videos, graphics with alternative text, and fonts that are readable. Sandra believes the end goal of any ADA complaint course is it can be easily accessed. Sandra further noted how the response regarding ADA compliance at the university “seems to be more reactive than proactive when someone is in need of accommodations,” and more support is needed from university administration for mandates. Shelly gave a brief example of ADA

compliance in an online course by using proper text formatting so screen readers can assist students and identify different sections within a course.

Summary

I interviewed 18 participants from Western Hills University: nine full-time online faculty (John, Marsha, Mandy, Frank, Andrew, Heather, Christy, Nancy, and Linda), five adjunct online faculty (Donald, Brian, Cathy, Sabrina, and Andrea), and four instructional designers (Misty, Kendra, Sandra, and Shelly). The data were examined through thematic analysis, which produced four themes that answered the three research questions for the study. The themes that emerged were (a) positive/negative faculty training, (b) positive/negative institutional support, (c) use/non-use of an instructional designer, and (d) use/non-use of online best practices and strategies. In Chapter 5, I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for implementation and further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this study, I sought to discover the problem experienced by leadership at a mid-sized 4-year university in the western region of Texas, which asserted a problem with the low amount of faculty training that impacted online course creation and quality. The purpose of this study was to investigate the elements needed to design quality online courses, determine how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development provided by the university to develop online courses, and find out how faculty and instructional designers perceived professional development impacts faculty skills as an online instructor. I conducted a single case study at an institution of higher education that corresponded with my study parameters based on the literature review and defined sampling criteria. I interviewed three groups of university participants using two semistructured interview protocols, one for the role type of full-time online faculty and adjunct online adjunct faculty and one for the role type of instructional designers. A case analysis of the university that participated in this study was presented in Chapter 4. This final chapter includes a discussion, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research based on the findings of the study.

Discussion

Online education development and delivery are constantly evolving (Baldwin & Ching, 2019), and institutional leaders must equip instructors for teaching in an online environment (Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Santelli et al., 2020). The satisfaction of faculty corresponds with student satisfaction regarding the design and structure of an online course (Blundell et al., 2020). Faculty professional development has been a long-standing pillar in higher education (Dooley et al., 2019), and higher education institutions must prepare their faculty for the challenges of online teaching and the use of technical tools to deliver quality online courses

(Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). Failure to equip instructors to create quality online courses can lead to decision fatigue for instructors and course reviewers and result in lower evaluation scores for faculty who teach online courses (Taylor et al., 2018). Debattista (2018) claimed faculty who teach online courses are stressed due to the challenges of digital literacy and time and need instructional designers' assistance to help close gaps in online pedagogy with the implementation and application of digital tools. Richardson et al. (2018) asserted it is essential for faculty and instructional designers to collaborate as equal partners, so the course design process is not hampered. The COVID pandemic added additional challenges to online teaching because many faculty were forced to teach online and were in uncharted territory because of having to change from a traditional teaching environment to a virtual teaching environment (Kristmanson et al., 2020). Perrotta and Bohan (2020) added instructors needed updated training because of having to adjust to a different pedagogical structure due to not ever taking an online course when they were students themselves. Online courses have only increased due to the pandemic and are now a more permanent part of education (Cutri et al., 2020).

The findings of the thematic analysis were shared in Chapter 4, which revealed faculty training at the university is available; however, it is not enforced and thus not utilized by the entire faculty community. Adjunct online faculty were revealed to be overlooked as a group at the university and excluded from being members and having a voice in the faculty community. It was further revealed adjunct faculty are so disconnected from university information that many are unaware of existing university resources and unfamiliar with university guidelines regarding the creation and teaching of online courses. I also discovered instructional designers are highly underutilized nor promoted to faculty and college departments by the university and thus miss significant opportunities to help faculty create and teach online courses. Moreover, I discovered

that many faculty go to each other for course help or reach out to IT, which hampers the abilities of instructional designers to train faculty on pedagogical best practices regarding online courses.

Conclusions

Conclusions are founded on the results of the study, both from the review of participant data within the case study and the themes that emerged from thematic analysis. After thoroughly reviewing the themes from Chapter 4, I concluded Research Question 1 (What attributes do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized four-year university in west Texas believe are needed to design a quality online course?) was answered by theme (d) use/non-use of online best practices. The use of online best practices and strategies at Western Hills University appears to be improving but has challenges. I have concluded both full-time and adjunct online faculty perceptions vary significantly regarding the identification of essential components needed to create quality online courses due to underprovided support from the university in supplying departments with resource information regarding instructional designers, university-created training, and few opportunities from university departments for instructional designers to collaborate with faculty. Similar findings in a study by Morgan (2019) revealed a lack of understanding regarding the role of instructional designers by an institution or faculty can cause opposition from faculty in working with instructional designers and a lack of awareness of the contributions that instructional designers provide.

I have further concluded full-time online faculty, adjunct online faculty, and instructional designers appreciate and mainly utilize video creation tools and communication tools inside the learning management system with the caveat of faculty knowing the tools exist and being trained on how to use them. As a result of gaps in faculty awareness of available university training and tools, many faculty have limited knowledge of essential online best practices such as the use of

tools in the learning management system, accessibility rules and practices for online courses, and some faculty are not concerned with teacher and student interaction in their online courses.

Findings by Perrotta and Bohan (2020) assert that gaps in faculty understanding regarding online courses stem from adjusting to a new pedagogical structure and only having training in traditional face-to-face courses when they were students. Moreover, Cutri et al. (2020) stated numerous tenure-track faculty are traditional and do not have the formal training to teach online successfully.

I concluded Research Question 2 (What professional development do instructional designers and faculty at a mid-sized 4-year university in west Texas perceive is needed to create a quality online course?) was answered from themes (b) positive/negative institutional support, and (c) use/non-use of an instructional designer. Institutional support provided by Western Hills University was confirmed to exist through such avenues as the URC, which offers faculty the ability to meet with an instructional designer, self-service training in the form of a self-paced faculty training course, various training videos and tip sheets, and opportunities to attend numerous live training events throughout the year. A study by Dooley et al. (2019) contended that many advances in higher education were focused on faculty professional development as it has been a pillar in higher education that has been long-standing.

I further discovered even though the university offers a wide variety of training for faculty, promoting the availability of the services was not perceived as a high priority by the university, which led to some confusion and misinformation among the faculty community regarding what is available to them regarding professional development. A study by Coswatte Mohr and Shelton (2017) stated higher education institutions must prepare their faculty to deliver

online courses and that faculty need tools, resources, and help to facilitate successful online learning.

I also uncovered a strong negative undercurrent regarding adjunct online faculty claiming they are not included in training opportunities and not allowed to be a part of the faculty learning community. Many online adjunct faculty further assert they do not know what to ask for because they do not even know what opportunities exist for them at the university. Wanjohi (2020) asserted the professional development of adjunct faculty should not begin and end with an orientation but should be a long-term continuous commitment. Additional findings by Sadlier (2021) suggested adjunct instructors work and endure a deficit of materials for institutions that make the deficiencies appear satisfactory, even desirable.

I also discovered Western Hills University had taken a positive step in paying for a faculty training program offered by a third-party entity. Despite the usefulness of this third-party training, it has created negative reactions from the instructional designers at the university as not being included in the new training, and they are concerned about how to support faculty moving forward as they continue to create future online courses using this new curriculum. The instructional designers are discouraged in feeling the leadership and faculty of Western Hills University are ignoring the training they have created. Findings by Debattista (2018) asserted faculty are stressed because of time constraints and the challenges regarding digital literacy and further contend that instructional designers are essential to assist with closing gaps associated with the implementation of online courses. In another study, Sanga (2019) claimed instructors who included instructional designers in the course-building process did not struggle as much with technology tools and were more able to focus on course creation and solve future problems independently.

I have concluded Research Question 3 (How do faculty and instructional designers at a mid-sized four-year university in west Texas perceive professional development impacts faculty's skills as an online instructor at a mid-sized university in west Texas?) was answered by themes (a) positive/negative faculty training and (c) use/non-use of an instructional designer. It is concluded many full-time online faculty who are aware and choose to take advantage of university-offered training reflect positively on the training experience and have a firm understanding regarding the use of the learning management system and best practices for online teaching. A negative aspect revealed is not all faculty are aware that training exists, which causes many problems with the creation and operation of their online courses due to the lack of understanding and the use of learning management system tools. Furthermore, due to poor exposure by departments and the university, full-time online faculty underutilize instructional designers for professional development and as an online resource. The implementation of instructional designers at Western Hills University by online faculty was further concluded to be underutilized. I further discovered many faculty do not use instructional design services when initially creating their courses but instead reach out to their department heads and other faculty to receive copies of existing courses. Instructional designers at Western Hills University are concerned about not having the opportunity to work with faculty to establish the fundamentals of course creation, online best practices, and ensure the correct use of the learning management system. Adjunct online faculty were found to have a more negative outlook regarding training, either being unaware of the existence of training (including the availability of instructional designers) or claiming not to be included in training opportunities, thus negatively impacting their understanding regarding online course quality. Instructional designers were revealed as having positive views in the aspect of being confident in the materials they have created to assist

and support faculty in the creation of online courses but had more negative perceptions regarding not always being included in the initial faculty training phase, or fully supported or advertised by university departments and leadership to effectively assist faculty when they are in the initial stages of online course creation. Studies reveal that successful relationships between faculty and instructional designers require trust (Richardson et al., 2018) and instructional designers are valuable in transforming traditional courses into successful online courses (Moore, 2019). It is also imperative for institutions of higher learning to properly retain adjunct instructors (Barnes & Fredericks, 2021) due to their experience, flexibility, and being able to accommodate gaps in teaching schedules that full-time faculty are unable to undertake (Wanjohi, 2020).

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study, I advise several recommendations for further practice. My first recommendation for practice is for the URC at Western Hills University to endeavor to improve its communications with the university deans and department chairs to forge stronger relationships and look for collaborative opportunities to utilize instructional designers in faculty onboarding and online course creation. Another recommendation for practice is for the administrative leadership at Western Hills University to consider creating new policies regarding professional development for faculty in making it more continuous where faculty are required to take a certain amount of professional development every semester, and faculty receive a stipend for training. An additional recommendation is for the leadership at Western Hills University to invest more funding and resources into the URC to better equip and support faculty and instructional designers to create quality online courses. A final recommendation for practice is for institutional leaders at Western Hills University to invest more in their adjunct faculty in providing areas to have student meetings, make phone calls, print

and grade papers, pathways to full-time employment, and a representative on the university faculty senate.

Recommendations for Further Research

I advise the following recommendations for further study based on the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This single case study examined the perceptions of faculty and instructional designers regarding the impact of professional development to teach online courses in a 4-year institution that contained a structure that was appropriate for online undergraduate and graduate programs, full-time and adjunct instructors that taught online courses, and instructional designers. One recommendation for further research is to replicate the study at a larger 4-year state institution to determine if more significant faculty and staff numbers and institutional budget would produce different results. Additionally, an opportunity to replicate the study at a 4-year private institution to determine if the organizational infrastructure, policies regarding online courses, staff, and budget produced any different results. Another opportunity for further research would be to replicate the study at a 2-year higher education institution that has a different infrastructure regarding faculty, instructional designers, and online course policies.

Adjunct online faculty expressed a deep interest in being more connected to the university's learning community. I recommend a study that focuses on improving online adjunct instructors' roles and how they are onboarded at the university, trained to teach online courses, and their opportunities to be more involved in the university learning community.

Summary

I investigated the perceptions of faculty and instructional designers regarding the impact of professional development to teach online courses. Using a single case study and thematic

analysis, I interviewed three different groups of participants. The study revealed the importance of institutional support for full-time adjunct online faculty, instructional designers, and internal university training. The study also revealed the URC and instruction designers offer high-quality custom training for full-time and adjunct online faculty but are underutilized due to being underpromoted by university leadership and low faculty interest. I found many challenges for adjunct online faculty regarding inclusiveness in the faculty learning community, the availability of facilities for adjunct faculty to meet with students and conduct university business, and the proper conveyance of departmental information regarding training and other vital faculty resources.

Online learning has grown larger and become more commonplace, especially after the COVID pandemic in 2020. Learning technologies are evolving at a staggering rate, along with the evolution of online education. In order for online faculty and online courses to improve, they both need the support of university leadership, and the knowledge and skills of instructional designers. Many instructional designers possess backgrounds in classroom instruction, pedagogy, and learning technologies. Despite all the skills and abilities that instructional designers possess, they are often miscategorized or misunderstood by online faculty and educational institutions, causing a divide between instructional designers, online faculty, and institutional leadership. It is essential that online faculty and instructional designers be considered colleagues and more collaborative relationships be developed for the creation of quality online courses. It is also crucial for institutional leadership to support their online faculty and instructional designers to foster innovation in the creation of online courses in hopes of increasing student satisfaction and retention.

As an instructional designer and instructor, I personally understand many of the perceptions, attitudes, and challenges shared by participants in the study. I have had the pleasure of working with some of the most innovative and inspiring instructors who have a passion for helping students learn at a deeper level and for being involved in a community of learning and collaboration with their colleagues. I have also worked with instructors who did not have a passion for learning or improving and thus experienced many unnecessary struggles in creating courses due to not knowing how to use learning technology tools because they were unwilling to go to training and even more unwilling to ask for help. I have been left out of essential processes and conversations due to not being understood in my role and my abilities to contribute, which caused problems that I was later called on to help solve. I hope this research will inspire future researchers to expand this study to explore opportunities to strengthen collaborative relationships in the arena of online learning environments.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

March 9, 2022

Scott January
Department of Graduate and Professional Studies
Abilene Christian University



Dear Scott,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "The Perceptions of Faculty and Instructional Designers regarding the Impact of Professional Development to Teach Online Courses",

(IRB# 22-022) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Faculty Interview Protocol

1. How long have you worked as an instructor?
2. What was the motivation that caused you to pursue a career in teaching?
3. What was the impetus that caused you to work in higher education?
4. How involved are you in the design of your online courses? Who else do you collaborate with in the design of your online courses?
5. What is your definition of course quality regarding an online course?
6. When building an online course, what features in your learning management system do you find the most helpful? Why?
7. What strategies for student engagement do you believe are effective in an online course? Of the strategies mentioned, which do you use and why?
8. Other than text, what other teaching mediums do you believe are essential in an online course? Do you use any of the named mediums inside your courses and why?
9. What kinds of resources do you make available to students in your online courses?
10. What ways do you foster communication with your students in your online courses?
11. What avenues are available to you at your institution to receive constructive feedback to improve the quality of your online courses? If available, how do you utilize these avenues?
12. What ways do you promote student to student interactions in your online courses?
13. What steps have you taken to equip yourself to teach online courses?
14. What is your definition of ADA compliance in an online course? What steps do you believe are necessary to make an online course ADA compliant?

15. How has the training you received from professional development to teach online courses contributed to the improvement of your online teaching?
16. How does an instructional designer support your role as an online instructor?
17. Do you believe online faculty at your institution are adequately trained to teach online?
If so, why? If not, why?
18. What trainings would you like to see your institution offer faculty who are preparing to teach online?
19. What resources would you recommend to a new faculty member that is going to teach online?
20. Based on your current experience and knowledge of teaching online, what recommendations would you make to your institution to improve faculty training to teach online courses?
21. Based on the questions asked during this interview, is there anything that you would like to share? If so, what?

Appendix C: Instructional Designer Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been an instructional designer?
2. Why did you choose to pursue a career in instructional design?
3. Why did you choose to work in higher education?
4. How involved are you in the design of online courses? Who else do you collaborate with when designing online courses?
5. What is your definition of course quality regarding an online course?
6. When building an online course, what features in your learning management system do you find the most helpful? Why?
7. What types of professional development are provided to faculty? What are your biggest challenges in providing training for online faculty?
8. What are some of the basic skills you believe online faculty need to be successful in an online course?
9. In what ways do you believe you can help online faculty prepare to teach online courses?
10. What strategies for student engagement do you believe are effective in an online course?
Of the strategies mentioned, which do you use and why?
11. What ways do you believe faculty should foster communication with students in online courses?
12. Other than text, what other teaching mediums do you believe are essential in an online course? Do educate and train faculty to use any of the named mediums in online courses and why?

13. What avenues are available to faculty at your institution to receive constructive feedback to improve the quality of their online courses? If available, how can they utilize these avenues?
14. What ways can faculty promote student to student interactions in their online courses?
15. What steps have you taken to equip faculty to teach online courses?
16. What is your definition of ADA compliance in an online course? What steps do you believe are necessary to make an online course ADA compliant?
17. Describe how you feel supported by your institution to equip faculty to teach online? If so, in what ways? If not, why?
18. Do you believe online faculty at your institution are adequately trained to teach online? If so, why? If not, why?
19. What kinds of resources do you believe that students need in an online course?
20. Based on your current professional development environment for online faculty, what changes would you make to improve faculty preparedness to teach online?
21. How has the training you have provided in the form of professional development contributed to the improvement of faculty online teaching?
22. Based on the questions asked during this interview, is there anything that you would like to share? If so, what?