HOW TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF ONLINE EDUCATION FROM ONLINE EDUCATION DIRECTORS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic showed once again the need for quality in online education all over the world. The aim of this research is to solicit how to improve the quality of online education from online education program directors' perspectives. The research was designed as a qualitative case study. Eight participants who were responsible for directing, managing, supervising and organizing online education programs participated to this study. The data were collected through interviews and were analyzed through content analysis. Eight dimensions were found to improve the quality of online education. These dimensions were focusing on students' needs; focusing on change in education; focusing on system as a whole; focusing on leadership; focusing on continuous improvement of online education; focusing on integrating learning and teaching theories into online education; focusing on research about online education; and focusing on quality of instructors.

Keywords: Online education, quality, quality of online education, qualitative case study.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for higher education is increasing significantly more than ever. Distance education programs along with blended programs worldwide are provided to meet such demand (La Rotta, Usuga and Clavijo, 2020; Nazneen, Alsulimani and Sharma, 2020). It is especially important to note that those demands should be met utilizing accessible and inexpensive tools and platforms. Likewise, lifelong learning policies and the usefulness of certificates at the job market opened a new window for e-learning to emerge faster. Universities such as MIT, Harvard and many others initiated consortiums to meet such demands and offered courses for lifelong learners. However, such supply did not guarantee to decrease the demand-supply inequality, and stop the significant amount of drop-out rates. The reasons could be speculative and have been studied by researchers from different angles; yet, the issue of quality remains a salient fact each program tackles with and emphasizes in their mottos.

In a recent survey by The WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET), it was found that quality is one of the most important factors to be improved by the institutions which offer online courses. The dimension of quality of online education programs have been raised by many researchers (e.g., Du, Li & Wang, 2018; Littlefield, Rubinstein & Brown Laveist, 2019; Marciniak, 2018; Nazneen, Alsulimani, & Sharma, 2020; Shraim, 2020; Todos, Virlan & Ghencea, 2017). Some researchers developed an online education quality assessment tool (Marciniak, 2018) and some others proposed standards to determine the

quality of online education (Todos, Virlan & Ghencea, 2017). Researchers from different fields also bring the issue/raise the awareness, draw the administrators' attention (Littlefield, Rubinstein & Brown Laveist, 2019; Marciniak, 2018; McFarlane, 2011; Shelton, 2011) to improve the quality of online education.

After reviewing 72 current Quality Online Education frameworks, guidelines and benchmarking published between 2000-2019, Shraim (2020) concluded that ISO/IEC 40180 is an international and scalable standard that could be adaptable for any online program context. Todos, Virlan and Ghencea (2017) mainly reviewed USA and European Higher Education contexts and they developed eight standards and tested them to assess the quality of online courses.

Marciniak (2018) developed an interactive assessment model to measure the quality of online higher education programs. Her model consisted of two dimensions. The first dimension was related to program components (program justification, program objectives, student profile, thematic contents, learning activities, online teacher profile, didactic material, learning strategies, learning assessment, tutorial, online classroom) and the second dimension was related to the assessment process which are assessment planning, application, and the final stage. She also mentioned that her model is addressed to the persons in charge of implementing online programs, and to program directors/coordinators.

Du, Li and Wang (2018) studied the perspectives of customers' perceptions and proposed an online education service quality evaluation model with three dimensions including 1) Service capability, 2) Service process, and 3) Service performance. Those dimensions are expanded by the authors as basic requirements, service resources, service process, service performance and characteristic innovation.

La Rotta, Usuga and Clavijo (2020) conducted a research to determine what higher education students expect from the quality dimensions of online education. After reviewing the related literature and a field work with students, an instrument was developed and applied to 120 students enrolled at a public university in Columbia (South America). Five factors were identified. Those are (1) Teachers, (2) Support academic resources, (3) Administrative support, (4) User interface and (5) Course enrollment.

Nazneen, Alsulimani and Sharma (2020) explored the factors involved in leading to student satisfaction in order to make the program a successful online program. Findings showed that high student satisfaction was associated with user-friendly interfaces and quality instructors. The content of the course was not found significant for student satisfaction. The other factors contributing to perceived online program effectiveness respectively were Course Content, Online Assignments, Interaction with Peers, Quality Instructors and User Interface.

After reviewing the literature between the years 2000-2020, the quality dimensions have been determined and given below in Table 1.

Table 1. Quality dimensions of online education mentioned in literature between 2000-2020

Online Education Quality Dimensions		
1. Access and flexibility	1. Institutional	1. Institutional and executive commitment
2. Costs	2. Managerial	2. Technological infrastructure
3. Teaching and learning	3. Technological	3. Student services
4. Interactivity and User friendliness	4. Pedagogical	4. Instructional design and course development
5. Organizational issues	5. Ethical	5. Instruction and instructors
6. Novelty	6. Interface Design	6. Program delivery
7. Speed (Bates, 2000)	7. Resource support	7. Financial health
	8. Evaluations (Khan, 2001)	8. Legal and regulatory compliance
		9. Program evaluations (Frydenberg, 2002)

1. Administrative, leadership and support
2. Ongoing program concerns and needs
3. Web Course development
4. Students' Concerns and Needs
5. Faculty Concerns and Needs (Lee & Dziuban, 2002)

1. Learning effectiveness
2. Student satisfaction
3. Faculty satisfaction
4. Scale
5. Access (Bourne & Moore, 2003)

1. Institutional readiness/ administration
2. Faculty services
3. Instructional desing/course usability
4. Student readiness
5. Student services
6. Learning outcomes
7. Retention (Lockhard & Lacy, 2002)

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1. Institutional mission
2. Institutional organizational structure
3. Institutional resources
4. Curriculum and Instruction
5. Faculty support
6. Student support
7. Student learning outcomes (CHEA, 2002)

1. Faculty support
2. Student support
3. Content support
4. Course management system support
5. Technology support
6. Program support
7. Community support (Osika, 2006)

1. The number and quality of applications and enrolments
2. Student achievement
3. Student satisfaction
4. Faculty satisfaction
5. Program or institutional reputation
6. The quality of course materials (Moore & Kearsley, 2005)

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1. Quality of instruction
2. Quality of administrative recognition
3. Quality of advisement
4. Quality of technical support
5. Quality of advance information
6. Quality of course materials (Haroff & Valentine, 2006)

1. Integrity and mission;
2. Governance and management;
3. Human resources;
4. Learning resources and infrastructure;
5. Financial management;
6. Student profile and support services;
7. Curricular aspects;
8. Teaching-learning and evaluation;
9. Research, consultancy and extension,
10. Quality assurance (UNESCO, 2006)

1. Material/content
2. Structure/virtual environment
3. Communication, cooperation and interactivity
4. Student assessment
5. Flexibility and adaptability
6. Support (student and staff)
7. Staff qualifications and experience
8. Vision and institutional leadership
9. Resource allocation
10. The holistic and process aspect (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2008)

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1. Organizational/Institutional impact
2. Course development/ Instructional design
3. Teaching and learning
4. Technology
5. Student support
6. Faculty support
7. Evaluation and assessment (Chaney et al., 2009)

1. STE 1 – Policies for quality assurance,
2. STE 2 - Course design,
3. STE 3 – Teaching-learning -student-centered assessment,
4. STE 4 - Admission, course, certification,
5. STE 5 –Academic staff,
6. STE 6 - Learning Resources and Students' Support,
7. STE 7 -Information Management,
8. STE 8 - Continuous Monitoring and Periodic Evaluation of the Course. (Todos, Virlan & Ghencea, 2017)

1. Program Justification,
2. Program Objectives,
3. Student Profile,
4. Thematic Contents,
5. Learning Activities,
6. Online Teacher Profile,
7. Didactic Material,
8. Learning Strategies,
9. Learning Assessment,
10. Tutorial,
11. Online Classroom (Marciniak, 2018)

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1. Basic requirements,
2. Service resources,
3. Service process,
4. Service performance
5. Characteristic innovation (Du, Li & Wang, 2018)

1. Teachers,
2. Support academic resources,
3. Administrative support,
4. User interface
5. Course enrollment (La Rotta, Usuga & Clavijo, 2020)

As presented in Table 1, it was obvious that administrative and institutional dimensions are stated more frequently than the other dimensions as for the quality of online education. After reviewing 13 articles and reports about what should be done to improve the quality of online education, Shelton (2011) concluded that since program administrators were responsible for identifying online education domain, they were also responsible for improving the quality of online education. In the report prepared by The WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) based on a survey, quality issue is paramount and distance education programs should address the needs of students with different talents, prevent plagiarism, and offer orientation for incoming students.

Leadership is mainly defined as an act of influencing followers to realize certain goals. According to Bennis and Nanus (1997), leaders create passion to follow their vision, to reach long term goals, take risks to accomplish common goals, and challenge the current status quo. Irlbeck (2002) and Latchem and Hanna (2002) suggested higher education leaders to display transformational leadership in order to understand and be part of the change and transform the higher education programs and systems. The importance of leader's role in improving the quality of online education is emphasized by various researchers and organizations (Lee & Dziuban, 2002; Littlefield, Rubinstein & Brown Laveist, 2019; Marciniak, 2018; Shelton, 2011; UNESCO, 2006) since they are responsible for administrating, managing, maintaining and monitoring online programs. It is assumed that online education administrators'/directors' experiences and knowledge may contribute to determining dimensions of how to improve the quality of online education. It is expected that the findings of this study would be beneficial for higher education leaders, policy makers and researchers. The findings can also provide an informative base for those institutions which consider providing e-learning as well as to those who will administer e-learning programs.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As online education program directors or administrators are in charge of developing, implementing, mentoring, improving the quality assurance of online programs, research results should address them (Littlefield, Rubinstein & Brown Laveist, 2019; Marciniak, 2018; McFarlane, 2011; Shelton, 2011). COVID-19 pandemic also showed the need for the quality of online education all over the world. According to Beaudoin (2003), the digital age had a tremendous effect on learning and learning environments as well as our understanding of teaching. COVID-19 conditions make the education institutions consider online learning, e-learning or blended learning as future reality. Many higher education online programs are already under accreditation process to assure the quality. The future of online education will depend on the quality of how online education is provided. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to shed light upon how to improve the quality of online education by taking online education directors' perspectives into account. The research question of this study is "what are the opinions of online education directors on improving the quality of online education?"

METHOD

This research was designed as a case within a case study. According to Gondo, Amis and Vardaman (2010) case within a case is "a specific research strategy that can be used when employing the case study methodology. This research design involves dividing a larger case into subcases. These subcases can then be used to compare both similarities and differences within and across the subcases in order to get clear insight into the larger phenomenon of interest" (p.4). Starting a case within-a-case study, it is suggested to start with identifying a bounded system. The researchers selected the quality of online education as a case and they conducted the research at a university where online education is provided. Then, four different faculties were selected based on their online education experiences, and their volunteer participation to share their experiences with the researcher of the study. It is usual to have between 4 to 10 subcases to be selected in a case within a case study research (Gondo, Amis & Vardaman, 2010).

The Site

The site in this study was an online education unit of faculties in a university. The nickname "Leylak University" will be used in the research. Leylak University is a private university located in a downtown in New England Region in the US. Leylak University started online education in 1998. Since then, many programs have been offered online. There are different online education units within each faculty at Leylak University. Each team/unit has different tasks to be achieved.

The Participants

The data were collected from online education directors who work at online education units at Leylak University. The selection of the directors was based on purposeful – criterion sampling. The criteria for selecting the participants were based on their administrative or leadership positions of at least for a year. According to Patton (1990) "nothing better captures the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logic that undergrid sampling approaching" (p. 169). Thus, Leylak University was chosen because it has tremendous experience and understanding about the online education system.

The directors were asked individually to participate in this study. They were introduced the purpose of the research in detail. They were reminded that they could refuse to participate or discontinue at any time without any further questions. In addition, they were also assured that their confidentiality would be kept and no real names would be used.

Eight participants responsible for directing, managing, supervising and organizing online education programs were asked to participate in this study. Three of the participants are female and five of them are male. The roles and responsibilities of online directors are given below in Table 2.

Table 2. Roles and responsibilities of online education directors

Participants CODE (Alphabetic Order and Gender)	Roles & Responsibilities
Dr. AM	Executive director of graduate education initiative at the faculty
	Oversees enrollment of the graduate engineering students
	Oversees student services
	Oversees online programs
	Supporting all those online programs
Dr. BF	Associate Dean for Research for graduate studies.
Dr. CF	Director of online education for the college of science
	Directing the development and growth of online education at master's level. In development process responsible for coordinating, marketing, enrolment management, course development and faculty sourcing.
Dr. DM	Executive director to oversee the online system, responsible for online experiential learning group, primary investigator of STEM Project.
Dr.EM	Responsible for distance learning, manager of online unit, responsible for finding people who use technology, instructional designs, creating online program, marketing online program, selecting online program.
Dr. FM	Associate dean of graduate school. Managing the operations for the graduate school, enrolment admission, working with the faculty, students, making sure that all classes are scheduled, all facilities are correct, all online materials are in place.
Dr. GF	Director of Online program. Controls, supervises, make sure that eveything is done properly.
Dr. HM	Online program specialist. Supervises and directs all recordings of the lectures. Posts on blackboard.

Participants were pseudo-coded by initial letters. First letters represent the given name and the second letters represent gender.

Data Collection

As mentioned above the university is well known and experienced about online education and online education directors were volunteer to participate to this research. After reviewing literature and spending some time in the field, the research question of this study was determined as "what are the opinions of online education directors on improving the quality of online education". Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and through documentation. After selecting the case and sub cases, data collection steps were determined. Data were collected mainly through interviews from eight online education directors who are working at different faculties with different responsibilities (See, Table 2). The interviews with the directors were semi-structured ones. This interview technique is also called a standardized open-ended interview by Patton (1990). The basic characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that questions are prepared beforehand (Berg, 1998). Eight online education directors were interviewed. All participants were asked the following questions: *"In general, what should be done to improve the quality of online education?"* and *"From a leadership perspective, what should be done to improve the quality of online education?"* The interviews were conducted in their offices. Each interview was regularly transcribed, typed, and indexed.

Official documents like strategic planning and the websites of the university and faculties were used as document data. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), documents can be personal (intimate diaries, personal letters, and autobiographies), and official (internal documents, external communication, student records and personal files). Yin (1994) goes further to add that documentation sources can also include memoranda, announcements and minutes of meetings, proposals, progress reports, internal documents, newspaper clips and articles. The university website was used to figure out the current trends, vision and mission statements.

Data Analysis

Interviews were audio taped, then transcribed, and written down regularly. Data were indexed, labeled, and coded according to the major topics. Collected data were analyzed by using the technique of content analysis. First, the data were read many times to understand and see the patterns. In order to understand the general category, open coding was used. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Then, axial coding was used in order to see the subcategories of the data. Straus & Corbin (1990) describe axial coding as a set of procedures that data are put back together in new ways after open coding by making connections between subcategories. Since this study is a case within a case study, firstly, each subcase is analyzed separately, then similarities and differences are worked out. Opinions and suggestions on how to improve the quality of online education were diverse. So, researchers decided to combine those opinions and get the big picture and reflect it to the audience.

Yin (1994) discusses that triangulation for case studies is maintained by comparing and contrasting the collected information from different sources that were used during the data collection procedure. In this study, triangulation was accomplished through using source and method triangulation. The data sources collected with different techniques were compared and contrasted. Interview transcripts and documents were then compared.

Limitations of the Study

A case study research is not generalizable to any other individuals or situations. Rather, this research design assumes that each case is unique. One of the researchers who conducted this study is a professor of Educational Administration. Her research interests are diverse. They include supervision, organizational behavior, organizational health of schools, chaos theory, leadership, change, peace education, and ICT integration. In this research, her position was a visiting scholar as an outsider researcher. The other researcher who took part in this study works in the field of Instructional Technology and online education. His position can be considered as insider. The overall aim of the researchers was to find out how the quality of online education is improved from online education directors' perspectives.

FINDINGS

The following themes and subthemes have emerged about improving the quality of online education.

1. Focusing on students' needs
2. Focusing on change in education
   a. Change the mindset about online education
   b. Change the value of online education
   c. Change the philosophy of online education
3. Focusing on system as a whole
   a. Education level matters
   b. Transferring knowledge and skills between online and offline education
   c. Providing support for online education within the system
4. Focusing on leadership
   a. Keep your excitement as a leader
   b. Be a role model – show your skills
5. Focusing on continuous improvement of online education
   a. Pay attention to legal foundation
   b. Provide constant proof
   c. Make quality a strategic issue and determine metrics
   d. Create a culture of quality and support it.
   e. Protect your brand name
6. Focusing on integrating learning and teaching theories into online education
7. Focusing on research about online education
8. Focusing on the quality of instructors
   a. Motivate academics about online teaching
   b. Provide appropriate resources

In the following sections, these themes will be described and narrated along with the analyzed data.

Focusing on Students' Needs

Online education directors claim that in order to improve the quality of online education, first you need to pay attention to students' needs. One of the participants told that "*Dr. GF- I would say look at it less about economics and more about the students*" and another participant also mentioned focusing on students' needs with the following statements:

> Dr. AM. --*Yes if you don't, if the students don't see the relevance for what you're doing ... it was prior knowledge or prior experience, if you're not showing them how to use the knowledge their gain or the skills or gaining, if they're not practicing it. If you're not helping them see how in their day to day life, you know I can learn to like everything to do so I think those components.*

Participant Dr. DM complained that academics do not pay attention to students' needs. They pay attention to the materials more than students, who can find or create their own material. That is not the issue. He said "*They excite the students a little bit. The students can google and they can find other materials. I think materials are always conceived as the big issue for quality. And I personally don't think they are. I think you could put a sign post, and say hey this week we're going to learn about water. Go and find stuff on the web about water. And student would find really great resources.*". Dr. EM also added that we should consider when students select the program how they are making decisions.

Focusing on Change in Education

Online education directors told that *"something is changing"*. So we need to be aware of those changes, what the online education is, how it should be, whom should pay attention more. One of the participants shared his opinion with the following statements. "*Dr. HM- Well. More people, administrators, leaders, instructors need to learn what online education is. It's not just one thing, it's not a narrow channel, it's a broad spectrum. And then, they need to work with whomever is doing it to define what their definition of online education is going to be.*"

Participants also mentioned that in order to improve the quality of online education you need support and put value on the online education, change the mindset about online education and continue to reinvent the online education and reinvent the philosophy of online education.

Change the Mindset about Online Education

Based on participants' statements, educators are expected to change their mindset about online education and are expected to be positive. One of the participants complained that online education was seen as a step child, or step sister of traditional programs", and he said that it was not true.

Value the Online Education

Administrators/leaders or directors of online education are expected to value the online education and value what online educators or instructors are doing. Participant CF narrates the following:

> They know the faculty need to be reminded of their value in their environment. So I always tell the faculty. You know, you're not any less important in the online class than you were in the face to face class. Yes, you've already recorded the material and yes you've already written the PowerPoint slides but, now all the students are working through this. They're not all together in one place, they're working through it kind of over the course of a week. And they have a question for you on Wednesday night and you take the time to answer that quick this is your teaching time. This is how. You just teach differently but you're still teaching. So I think helping the faculty understand the teaching piece. And why it's important. And, how it's different helps. Every. Help. You know, a rising tide floats all boats you know I think it's kind of like if we bring it all come back to the faculty …

Continue to Reinvent the Online Education and Philosophy of Online Education

Participants argued that the philosophy of online education needs to be revisited since online education is related with reuse and scaled up with the online education products. There is a change in understanding of education and delivery of instruction and the medium of instruction philosophy of education is also changing. Participant Dr. FM reflected his thought by the following statement;

> In general, I think the internal there's got to be a willingness to continue to reinvent I mean there's too much of that too much of the notion that online there's once something goes online that it's just there, and that it's a product that you can reuse, and scale and just tinker with and interesting to with I think the philosophy of online education will continue to evolve and in gamification. This is obviously one of the next things that you've got some buzzwords but chilled you'll hear changing educate here changing online education. I know you could get engage in especially. So, they're willing this to incorporate sort of a new philosophy in online education is essential …

Focusing on System as a Whole

The participants mentioned that scholars at higher education institutes might think about the system as a whole. Since the education system is affected as a whole, scholars should conduct researches and explain how, at what level, at what degree online education can be used.

> *Higher education. Support that how can higher education leaders take that message, and support online education through all levels. I think it's easier to do again on a college scholarship basis but when we could have affected the educational system as a whole. (Dr. FM)*

Education Level Matters

Online education is expensive, and leaders claim that online education is more appropriate for college level, it might be better used as supplementary material for secondary education, move to lesser extend primary education.

> *I think online leaders have a large role to play into in communicating. The role of online education, and, you know, it's still very expensive. Which I think is a huge huge hurdle. This is and it's and it's expensive but colleges are more in a better place to get an online education and to use it to teach at this level. But it might be better used as a supplementary material, material for secondary and move to a lesser extent primary education. But getting teachers at those levels to who already spend an enormous amount of time on their classes and engaging with their students. I think is really that the next school endeavor and health outcomes (Dr. FM).*

Transferring Knowledge and Skills between Online and Offline Education

With the online education experience, faculty will think about their field and review their teaching practice. One of the participants Dr. CF told that, they will understand that teaching and learning are separate things in their fields and they will think about how to teach their discipline.

> *I think maybe just helping faculty understand what teaching and learning is as a separate thing from their discipline. It's you know, it's one thing to know your discipline and it's another thing to understand how to teach your discipline. (Dr. CF)*

Another participant, Dr. AM, also mentioned that online education also brought the knowledge and skill transfer between online and face to face education.

> *So online learning needs to think. You know, we do this modality because of the constraints of the learner or vice versa. On the ground (face to face) maybe we have these constrains when the online doing that is better on the ground. we have these labs, we have the simulations in class on the ground, so you will bring in on the ground class, what is the constrain for the program, and what are we doing to get the best out there for all includes to meet those constraints. So that's how I see this improving the quality. Please clarify "on the ground"*

Focusing on Leadership

Online education directors as the leaders influence the instructors, curriculum developers, video recorders and academic staff in order to deliver quality online courses and continue improvement. How do those online education directors influence all those shareholders? Participants told that online education directors should keep their excitement as leaders and they should be role models by using their skills.

Keep Your Excitement as Leader

Leaders are expected to keep their excitement throughout the online education processes to motive the others.

> *I could think of I think I've said more. Now I just think that. I think this basis, is very exciting and I just I think that. And I think that patients?? patience?? with this basis. This will be interesting to see how that develops and. I'm just excited to be a part of it, and. I just want to continue to try to do it a little bit better (Dr. FM).*

Be A Role Model – Show Your Skill

Online education directors as leaders they should advocate of online education at the faculty or program meetings, show /exposure the online classes, best models to get their curious, start holding meetings in online environment, try to monitor online education, be a guest speaker, ask questions, use your skill to facilitate online courses, integrate online concepts into more day to day get the faculty used to that and be model for everybody in short.

> *I would probably say If I were in the position which I kind of him but not really I would advocate for. More ways to do what I just said. So. At a faculty meeting showed an online class. Just kind of exposure. To get to get them curious. I would probably start holding some meetings in an online environment. So that, they have to come in, and see what is that oh you can do this you can have a guest speaker come in on blackboard collaborate and you can watch it at home on your computer, and ask questions, and. So I would probably try to integrate the online concept into more of the day to day to get the faculty used to that in the chair is used to kind of thinking in that way. Be a model …. (Dr. CF)*

Focusing on Continuous Improvement of Online Education

Online education directors told that in order to improve the quality of online education you have constantly practicing KAIZEN. You constantly have to keep working on improving what you are doing. One of the online directors, Dr. EM told that;

> *I think it's. It's a constant. … . I think that you have to constantly be practising KAIZEN. You know. Constant movement of product is very easy to create something, and be successful in it, and then stop. You know, just keep doing the same thing over and over again. You know, there's an old saying. A person is leaving retiring from a company and they say look at that. That's thirty years' experience leaving this company. And somebody else said. Well. Is it thirty years' experience or is that one year's experience repeated for thirty years. So, you constantly have to keep working on improving what you're doing. And you've got to be careful though that you're not just changing for the sake of change. Here. You know you've got to improve work makes sense.*

Pay Attention to Legal Foundation

Online education directors mentioned searching the legal base for quality online education especially they mentioned about "Consumer Protection Laws and Regulations" and Federal Government Regulations in US. They are also expected to find out if there is a need for new regulations for quality online education.

> *I think. My feeling is because of, sort of consumer protection regulations, and then federal government regulations there is a lot more focus on the quality of online education, and there is on the quality of on ground – face to face-education. Faculty have to jump through a lot more hoops. (Dr. CF)*

Provide Constant Proofs

Online education directors claim that you need to constantly prove your instruction quality. Because when you improve the quality of the instructional design process, not only online courses but also face-to-face courses get better. What's more, the faculty interaction gets better. Dr. CF's statement is given below.

> *There are you know the whole instructional design process is nobody does that with a face to face course they just say I can teach it. Yeah. You know so you know right so I think. I think the quality is there. But you're constantly proving it. You know, her personally having to prove it so I think. More than improving the quality of online education.*
>
> *And I think when you get that piece in there. You improve the quality of everything because the on ground class gets better. The online class gets better; the faculty interaction gets better.*

Make Quality A Strategic Issue and Determine Metrics

After COVID-19 pandemic, most of the higher education institutes try to find answer to how to improve the quality of online education. Online director Dr. AM said, *"It is simple. Prepare a strategic plan for online education and determine the metrics and technical aspects and then prove the quality of online education"*.

Create the Culture of Quality and Support It

Online education directors mentioned that in order to improve the quality of online education you need to create culture of quality and support that culture. Online director Dr. AM remarked, *"setting a culture of quality is probably the first thing to do, so people buy into or is valued".* He also mentioned about supporting the quality culture by using incentives."

Protect Your Brand Name

Participants mentioned that institutions where online education or teaching is provided think less about economics and more about quality. After serving quality online education, they should maintain that quality. One of the participants Dr. BF says that they should understand *"how best to infuse our values on earth? and understand the constraints and the possibilities. Before, we begin going down our road"*

Focusing on Integrating Learning and Teaching Theories into Online Education

Online education directors reported that the fundamental principles of teaching and learning need to be integrated into courses. Dr. AM and Dr. DM statements were given below:

> *From my perspective the fundamental principles of learning need to be integrated in the courses… No matter how cool I work or how good the sound quality is or whatever. It doesn't matter, what matters is fundamental (Dr. AM).*

> *I do have kind of strong thoughts on this. I think the focus should absolutely be on the teaching and my team have here, and other institutions are around the content. And honestly my feeling is the content is important obviously. …So, although we spend all our time focused on content and is that the right graphic and is this text correct, is this type of, and to be honest, I think the content is not the big concern for quality. One of my institutions we track student complaints, and consistently we would see instructor presence, expectations. The number of students who complained about the materials were always less than three four percent. …. (Dr. DM)*

Focusing on Research about Online Education

Online education directors talked about the reviewing/following literature and conducting research over time to see the difference between online and traditional teaching, to learn different experiences in order to improve the quality of online education.

> *And we're seeing more and more evidence over time for research and also from experience that cultural perspective is being challenged. That's fine, we are not still there. If you look at the research and studies traditional versus online, there is no really crucial difference, but kind of a blend or a hybrid delivery where an instructor is connecting with the students, not computer or through not so distant, but those connections, interaction actually improve overall performance in courses. (Dr. DM)*

Focusing on the Quality of Instructors

Participants claimed that in online education you need to focus on instructors because teaching is done by them. You need to train instructors about how to facilitate online discussion, create fun activities, bring one's personality into online classes, and be creative rather than investing only on technology. Show the academic it is all possible. As institution, bring your philosophy into online classes. Online education director Dr. DM said;

It is all about the instructor. Both the instructor presence, and then how the instructor teaches… Then how you get that into the class. So, I think, there's a lot of training there around how to facilitate discussions, and faculty often say to me you know in class I'm funny or in class I miss and then, I can't do that over here. And I think you can actually be quite witty, and intelligent in an online discussion area. But we never talk about that. It's just assumed that because we don't have eye contact with, because I'm not here. We're not going to have any fun. We're not going to have any creativity even. And I think all those things are possible. … But let's spend six hours talking about how we can do instructor--things online that are interesting and fun. You know how your personality can go online. And what else you want to bring in. How can you personalize it? … but again without that instructor presence, and without thoughtful instructor presence. It doesn't matter what the content, the technology is like, it's going to be a bad online class.

Motivate Academics about Online Teaching

Since teaching is done by instructors, participants mentioned that instructors must be motivated and guided during the whole process. Online education director Dr. CF stated;

You know, ignite their passion in it and help them understand what's good and what's not good. Will help do that anyway?? Because I think there's already so much regulation. That's driving quality and asking for metrics and… I think so. Really just help the faculty a little bit more.

Provide Appropriate Resources

After training, motivating and helping instructors, it is also suggested that the appropriate resources should be provided. Dr. BF put forth *"We need a space with resources to experiment to identify new approaches and things"*.

Supporting Instructors

Creating the quality of online education is based on how administrators value it, support it and provide appropriate resources. Administrators were expected to support and involve every aspect and every step of online education. Participant Dr. HM claimed that administrators were fully supported through administrative means along with their involvement, adoptions of the necessary skills providing the teachers and developers with necessary resources when they needed. He said, *"Fully supported through administrative means through their involvement, and their adaptation, adaptation of these skills, and given the teachers and the developers the resources, and the support that they need to get it right"*.

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research was to find out how the quality of online education could be improved from online education directors' perspectives. Online education directors claim that in order to improve the quality of online education you need to focus on students' needs which were also mentioned in different researchers' findings (Lee & Dziuban, 2002; Bourne & Moore, 2002; CHEA, 2002; Osika, 2004; Moore & Kearsley, 2005; Chaney et al., 2009; Todos, Virlan & Ghencea, 2017; Marciniak, 2018; UNESCO, 2006). Research about the students have focused mostly on students' concerns and needs (Lee & Dziuban, 2002), student satisfaction (Bourne & Moore, 2002; Moore & Kearsley, 2005), student support (CHEA, 2002; Osika, 2004; Todos, Virlan & Ghencea, 2017;), student readiness and student services (Lockhard & Lacy, 2002; UNESCO, 2006).

Online education directors emphasized the roles of leadership for the improvement of quality of online education. Online education program directors are expected to keep their excitement as leaders and to be a role model. The importance of administrators and leaders' role in improving the quality of online education is also stated by other researchers (see, Lee & Dziuban, 2002; Littlefield, Rubinstein & Brown Laveist, 2019; Marciniak, 2018; Shelton, 2011; UNESCO, 2006)

Focusing on KAIZEN of online education was explained with paying attention to legal foundations (Frydenberg, 2002), providing constant proofs about quality, making quality a strategic issue (Todos, Virlan & Ghencea, 2017; UNESCO, 2006) and determining metrics, creating culture of quality and supporting it, and protecting your brand name.

Improving the quality of online education requires us to focus on integrating learning and teaching theories into online education (Bates, 2000; Chaney et al., 2009; Khan, 2001). In addition, as to improve the quality of online education, online education directors suggest we focus on the quality of instructors. Instructors are needed to be motivated about online teaching and should be provided appropriate resources and support (Bourne & Moore, 2002; CHEA, 2002; Chaney et al., 2009; Frydenberg, 2002; La Rotta, Usuga & Clavijo, 2020; Lee & Dziuban, 2002; Lockhard & Lacy, 2002; Moore & Kearsley, 2005; Osika, 2004).

Online education directors also advise educators to review and/or follow the related literature and to conduct research over time to see the differences between online and traditional teaching. Secondly, they urge educators to learn different experiences in order to improve the quality of online education, which is also suggested in UNESCO (2006) report.

Online education directors emphasize the need for motivating and guiding academics during the whole process of online teaching. They specifically stress on training the instructors on how to facilitate online discussions, how to create fun activities, how to bring their personality into online classes, and how to be creative. In addition, they also suggested that appropriate resources should be provided at all levels. This finding has been supported in Frydenberg's (2002) online education quality dimension and Marciniak's (2018) online teacher profile findings.

This research has yielded different dimensions than other research findings in terms of quality. The first one is the focus on change in education. In this dimension, online education program directors put emphasis on the need to support for online education, change the mindset about online education, value the online education and reinvent it. Finally, they urged a change in the philosophy of online education. The second dimension is focusing on the system. In order to improve the quality, when educators imply online education, they may start from higher education, use online education as a supplementary and use it less at elementary school levels. In addition, in order to improve the quality of online education, educators need to transfer knowledge and skills between online and offline education.

University administration and leadership is facing a new reality nowadays which is now expanding at all levels online. First of all, such administrative skills and knowledge should be provided in educational administrator training programs. Secondly, at instructional level, faculty training programs should be expanded to include online professional skills towards ensuring quality in teaching. This program could include integrating learning and teaching theories into online education, providing a mindset which covers transferring knowledge and skills between online and offline education, and focusing on determining students' needs in online environments.

Changes such as risk taking, having a vision, and transferring the system are all related to leadership. Therefore, what kind of leadership is needed to ensure the quality of online education in different contexts should be explored. Secondly, measuring the quality of instruction and assurance is both multidimensional and difficult to operationalize. Therefore, how to create a culture of quality in organizations should be explored from online education perspective.

Finally, some suggestions should be made for administrators based on the findings of this study. First, administrators should be a role model, have at least basic understanding of how online education works, and provide the necessary resources to maintain the quality of education in their organizations. Secondly, they need to motivate and support the teaching staff at all levels. Last but not the least, they need to pay attention to continuous improvement of online education both at personal, instructional, and institution levels.

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