



Seven Principles of Effective Online Course Design

What is this Research About?

This study compared the use of the online course design elements with the skills and strategies deemed important by the students in an online course. The researchers used the seven principles of good practice to design an online course (Chickering & Gamson, 1991). The seven principles were formulated for good practice in face-to-face (F2F) teaching and are applicable and effective in online learning environments. The researchers applied the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education (encouraging contact between students and faculty, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning, giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, respecting diverse talents and ways of learning) to online course design and surveyed students about their experiences in the online course.

What did the Researchers Do?

The researchers used an online survey including 36 questions pertaining to the seven principles and the students' perception of their skills used in the course (e.g., proficiency in MS Excel, computer skills, time management, etc.). A total of 179 students taking an online computer application in business course completed the survey. Using a Likert scale, students indicated their agreement with statements about the usefulness of several aspects of the course related to the seven principles, and about their skills prior to taking the course. The researchers also analyzed written comments from students who received an A or B in the course (60% of the students).

What did the Researchers Find?

The results of the survey show that students rated all seven principles to be important in online course design. The students indicated high levels of agreement that the course embodied the seven principles. Student encouragement by the faculty, active learning, prompt feedback, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning received the highest scores from the students, suggesting that these are the most important components in designing an online course. The principles of reciprocity and cooperation among students and emphasizing time on task received lower scores from students, meaning that these principles need more attention when designing an online course.

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A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

➔ How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom

Online courses can be somewhat limited compared to F2F learning. A lack of communication and cooperation among students can be detrimental for learning. However, the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate teaching can help educators design online courses which can be as effective as in-class teaching. Students agree that skills needed to be successful in an online course align with the seven principles of good practice. Students also provided examples from the delivery of the online course used in the study which also match with the seven principles. The study shows there are teaching practices which can be transferred into online environment and can help students be successful in online courses.

➔ Citation

Crews, T. B., Wilkinson, K., & Neill, J. K. (2015). Principles for good practice in undergraduate education: Effective online course design to assist students' success. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 11(1), 87-103.

➔ Keywords

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