

Evaluating student learning gain: What is the impact upon student learning resulting from the move to online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic?

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Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resulting enforced national lockdowns, universities across Europe and Asia have had to replace face-to-face teaching with online alternatives. With the ongoing marketisation of Higher Education, students are now seeking assurances regarding the value for money of their course given the changes in delivery methods. Understanding the learning that students perceive that they have received from their course is now of great significance.

This paper used a model for evaluating student learning gain which considered student learning in two distinct dimensions, 1) explicit knowledge gained (distance travelled) which relates to codifiable models and theories, and 2) tacit understanding (journey travelled) relating to practical skills and know-how taught.

This mono-method research used self-reflective surveys to collect ordinal (ranked) data from student participants. The students themselves were in their final year, and studied an Organisational Leadership module as part of an undergraduate business studies degree course at a UK university.

The research in this study collected data in 2019 (before the Covid-19 pandemic) and again in 2021 (during the Covid-19 pandemic) for a subsequent cohort of students. Through the application of both sets of data, a comparison has been possible between how students perceived their learning to have changed due to the alternative educational delivery method being offered.

Students were selected using a non-probability volunteer-based sampling method, and the study was completed with ethical approval from Bournemouth University (Ref 30119). Students in both cohorts were asked to respond to a series of questions, with their responses being ranked using the following linguistic labels 1) No Change; 2) Minor Improvement; 3)

Moderate Improvement; 4) Significant Improvement; and 5) Exceptional Improvement. Using these options, students were asked to consider how their understanding of the Organisational Leadership subject area had changed from studying the module.

Analysis of the data was undertaken using a frequency analysis method to determine the number of students who considered that their learning had improve significantly or exceptionally. By undertaking a comparison of these frequency results across the two cohorts of students, it was possible to review how the perceived student learning had changed due to the introduction of the online teaching.

The results from this study are quite revealing, and the lessons that can be learnt have much wider implications for the Higher Education sector across the globe, and address the value for money question being asked currently being asked by university students.