

# Online Course Success: Adapting Course Design to Focus on Learning

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# Study Introduction

This study consists of the initial findings from a small-scale survey completed by graduate students in online courses focused on education. The primary intent of the study is to offer insight into the evolving accomplishments and roadblocks of online learning. The results of the study will rapidly expand as additional graduate students in the education field complete it. Questions were modeled, adapted, and written based on the specific needs of the College of Education but can easily be adapted to have a broader focus. Specific areas of interest were student motivation, course structure/effectiveness, content application, and instructor expertise.



# Methodology and Results

The survey was conducted for graduate education courses that were fully online. Students submitted the Likert scale survey as part of the course requirements through a Google Survey. The survey consisted of 30 questions with an opportunity for additional comments at the end. Approximately half of the survey questions related to specifics of course design. The remaining survey questions varied but were related to instructor expertise and motivation. Results were compiled and coded, then imported into SPSS software. For all survey question results, SPSS was used to analyze data. Frequency tables were generated for all responses and analyzed for patterns. Using the statistical software, bivariate correlations were completed, analyzing all results.



# Hypotheses

This study's purpose was multifaceted, and although other studies have found mixed relationships, the analysis revealed many positive correlations. This study sought to find answers to several specific research questions:

1. What characteristics of online graduate courses are the most effective?
2. What influences the motivation of graduate students in an online course?
3. Is the effectiveness and expertise of the instructor related to success in the online course?



# Results

Several areas of the survey had significant relationships. The survey was designed with feedback from students and instructors. Specific survey questions associated with these relationships were:

- The course offered opportunities for self-paced exercises and the application of one's knowledge.
- The addition of external web-based learning tools was beneficial. (For example, Google docs, Krunchd, Voicethread, etc)
- I found it difficult to motivate myself and to maintain my learning motivation in the course
- The course offered flexibility in choice of learning strategies and pace of learning.

The bivariate correlation analysis found a significant relationship [ $r(29)=.371, p=.048$ ] between female students and the course flexibility, choice of learning strategies, and pace of learning. The statistical analysis found a highly significant correlation [ $r(29)=.605, p=.001$ ] between male students and their levels of motivation for the course. The statistical analysis found a significant correlation [ $r(29)= -.338, p=.043$ ] between elementary teachers and the opportunities in the online courses for self-paced activities. The analysis also found a significant correlation [ $r(29) = .400, p=.032$ ] between high school teachers and the positive benefits of additional web tools used throughout the course.



# Discussion

The statistical analysis found a significant correlation [ $r(29)=.371, p=.048$ ] between female students and the course flexibility, choice of learning strategies, and pace of learning.

>Flexible learning environment

>More complex assignments are open to work/submission longer

The statistical analysis found a highly significant correlation [ $r(29)=.605, p=.001$ ] between male students and their levels of motivation for the course.

>Males have a more difficult time staying motivated in online courses

>Models exist to aid with motivation in online courses

>Community building in the course can help

The statistical analysis found a significant correlation [ $r(29)= -.338, p=.043$ ] between elementary teachers and the opportunities in the online courses for self-paced activities.

>Elementary teachers prefer maximum flexibility due to less accommodating schedules

The bivariate correlation found a significant relationship [ $r(29) =.400, p=.032$ ] between high school teachers and the positive benefits of additional web tools used throughout the course.

>High school teachers benefit more from web-based teaching tools, since the tools often can be applied in their classrooms easier than elementary teachers



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