

The Shifting Landscape: Exploring the Change in B-School Faculty Attitudes towards Online Teaching

***Dr. Ankush Sharma, **Mr. Ashish Sood,**

*Professor, Jagran Lakecity Business School, Jagran Lakecity University, Bhopal.

**Research Scholar, Jagran Lakecity Business School, Jagran Lakecity University, Bhopal.

Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a major shift in higher education, catapulting B-schools into the realm of online delivery. While initial reluctance was evident, this study delves into the changing attitudes of B-school faculty towards online teaching. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from surveys and interviews, the paper unpacks the initial skepticism, adaptation process, and emergent perspectives on the potential and challenges of online education. It analyses factors influencing attitude change, explores the perceived benefits and drawbacks, and identifies key concerns for future development. The research concludes by highlighting the need for ongoing support, pedagogical training, and technological advancements to foster a sustainable and effective online learning ecosystem for B-schools.

The once-monolithic landscape of business education has been irrevocably fractured by the tectonic shift towards online learning. In the epicentre of this transformation, B-school faculty – initially clinging to the familiar shores of classroom interactions – have embarked on a fascinating journey of evolving perspectives. This paper delves into the intricate dance between resistance and acceptance, charting the factors that fueled the initial skepticism, the catalysts that propelled change, and the current climate of cautious embrace and active reinvention. Through a kaleidoscope of literature, case studies, and surveys, we illuminate the pedagogical challenges and opportunities unique to the digital realm, the impact on faculty workload and development, and the potential for reshaping the future of business education.

Keywords: B-Schools, Online Learning, Faculty Attitudes, Adaptation, Pedagogy, Technology

Introduction:

For decades, traditional classrooms were the cornerstone of B-school education. The interactive environment, case study discussions, and faculty-student engagement were considered inseparable from the learning experience. However, the global pandemic disrupted this familiar landscape, propelling B-schools into the uncharted territory of online delivery. While the initial reaction was one of apprehension and resistance from many faculty members, over time, their attitudes began to evolve. This research delves into the intricate journey of this attitudinal change, exploring the factors that influenced it, the perceived benefits and drawbacks of online teaching, and the emerging perspectives on its potential and challenges.

Methodology:

To garner a comprehensive understanding of faculty attitudes, the research employed a mixed-methods approach. A quantitative survey was distributed to B-school faculty across various countries, collecting data on their initial perceptions, adaptation experiences, and current views on online learning. The survey was followed by in-depth interviews with a smaller group of faculty members, enabling a deeper exploration of their individual experiences and concerns. The combined data allowed for triangulation and a nuanced understanding of the evolving narrative.

Initial Skepticism and the Journey of Adaptation:

The initial phase was marked by significant skepticism towards online teaching. Concerns regarding the loss of classroom interaction, difficulty in facilitating discussions, and potential technical glitches were prevalent. The traditional lecture format seemed ill-suited for the digital space, raising anxieties about student engagement and the overall effectiveness of the learning process. The transition was further accentuated by the need to acquire new technological skills and adapt existing pedagogies to the online environment.

From Skepticism to Skeptical Acceptance:

The initial dissonance towards online teaching resonated with concerns deeply rooted in the core of B-school pedagogy. The perceived difficulty of replicating the vibrant tapestry of case-based learning and interactive discussions in a virtual space triggered anxieties about engagement and effectiveness. Looming anxieties around technology, from mastering complex platforms to managing an unforeseen workload, painted the digital landscape with shades of apprehension.

Institutional hurdles, characterized by inadequate support structures and uncertainties about academic integrity, further solidified the resistance.

Yet, amidst the chorus of skepticism, whispers of opportunity began to rise. The burgeoning demand for flexible learning options from an increasingly global and career-driven student body nudged B-schools towards the digital frontier. Technological advancements, from the intuitive navigation of learning management systems to the immersive engagement of video conferencing, unveiled the potential for a dynamic and enriching online experience. Pedagogical pioneers paved the way, showcasing ingenious techniques for fostering online discussions, collaborative learning, and even replicating the iconic case-study method in the virtual realm. Recognizing the potential for expanded reach and impact, B-schools started investing in faculty development, nurturing confidence and competence through training programs and peer support networks.

Emerging Perspectives and Perceived Benefits:

Despite the initial challenges, the study revealed a gradual shift in attitudes as faculty members navigated the complexities of online teaching. The interviews highlighted several perceived benefits, including:

- **Flexibility and accessibility:** Online delivery eliminated geographical barriers, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to access quality B-school education. This opened doors for working professionals and individuals located in remote areas, broadening the reach of B-schools. The education landscape is undergoing a fascinating transformation, driven by the soaring popularity of online learning. Gone are the days when education was confined to physical classrooms and rigid schedules. Today, flexible and accessible online education is empowering individuals worldwide to pursue their academic goals without sacrificing other commitments. Let's dive into the key benefits of this dynamic learning approach:
- **Unmatched Flexibility:** Imagine attending a lecture from your cozy living room, catching up on missed classes during your lunch break, or even squeezing in a study session while traveling. Online education transcends geographical and temporal barriers, allowing you to learn at your own pace and convenience. Whether you're a working professional juggling multiple responsibilities or a student seeking a personalized learning experience, online platforms cater to diverse needs and schedules.
- **Accessibility for All:** Online education breaks down traditional barriers by offering equal opportunities to individuals with disabilities, those living in remote areas, or those facing financial constraints. The virtual platform removes obstacles like transportation challenges, physical limitations, and socioeconomic disparities, making quality education truly accessible to a wider global audience. Additionally, online courses often come at a lower cost compared to traditional programs, further democratizing access to knowledge.
- **Diverse Learning Resources:** Online platforms offer a treasure trove of learning resources beyond the confines of textbooks and lectures. Interactive multimedia content, engaging video tutorials, and collaborative online communities enrich the learning experience. Students can access a vast library of materials anytime, allowing them to delve deeper into specific topics, revisit challenging concepts, and personalize their learning journey.
- **Enhanced Engagement and Interaction:** Contrary to popular misconceptions, online learning can foster vibrant and engaging interactions. Discussion forums, collaborative projects, and real-time video conferencing tools facilitate active participation and peer-to-peer learning. Students can connect with classmates from diverse backgrounds, share ideas, and learn from each other's perspectives, creating a dynamic and enriching learning environment.
- **Scalability and Sustainability:** Online education platforms have the potential to reach a global audience without geographical limitations. This scalability is not only beneficial for learners but also for educators and institutions. Online courses can be readily adapted to cater to various learning styles and needs, promoting inclusivity and catering to diverse student populations. Furthermore, online platforms offer a more sustainable solution compared to traditional classrooms, reducing the environmental impact associated with physical infrastructure and transportation.

Thus, flexible and accessible online education is revolutionizing the learning landscape by offering a plethora of benefits. From unmatched flexibility and accessibility to diverse learning resources and enhanced engagement, online platforms empower individuals to take control of their educational journey and unlock a world of knowledge from anywhere, anytime. As technology continues to evolve, the future of education promises to be increasingly personalized, interactive, and accessible, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

- **Personalized learning:** Technology enabled the incorporation of interactive elements, quizzes, and personalized feedback mechanisms, enhancing student engagement and catering to individual learning styles.

- **Data-driven insights:** Online platforms facilitated the collection of real-time data on student performance and engagement, providing valuable insights that could be used to tailor the learning experience.
- **Global collaborations:** The virtual classroom fostered new avenues for international collaborations and guest lectures, exposing students to diverse perspectives and enriching the learning environment.

Challenges and Ongoing Concerns: While acknowledging the potential benefits, faculty members also identified several challenges associated with online teaching. While online education offers undeniable benefits, there are also challenges and ongoing concerns worth considering. Here are some key points to ponder:

- **Digital Divide:** Despite its democratizing potential, online education isn't entirely accessible to everyone. Unequal access to reliable internet, hardware, and software can still create a digital divide, excluding individuals from marginalized communities or those with limited resources. Bridging this gap requires concerted efforts on the part of institutions, governments, and technology providers to ensure equitable access to digital learning tools.
- **Technological Challenges:** Technical difficulties can disrupt the learning process and lead to frustration for both students and educators. Glitches, lagging connections, and platform inefficiencies can impede engagement and hinder effective delivery of instruction. Investing in robust infrastructure, providing technical support, and training both faculty and students in using online platforms are crucial to creating a seamless learning experience.
- **Social Isolation and Motivation:** The lack of physical interaction inherent in online learning can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. This can be particularly challenging for students who thrive on peer-to-peer interaction and require a strong sense of community. Strategies like fostering online communities, incorporating collaborative activities, and promoting regular communication can help mitigate these challenges and enhance social engagement.
- **Quality Control and Accreditation:** The rapid growth of online education has raised concerns about quality control and accreditation. Ensuring the rigor and academic standards of online programs is crucial to maintaining the reputation of institutions and safeguarding the value of online degrees. Robust evaluation frameworks, transparent accreditation processes, and continuous quality improvement measures are essential to address these concerns.
- **Pedagogical Challenges:** Effective online teaching requires a specific set of skills and pedagogies that differ from traditional classroom approaches. Adapting materials for the online environment, designing engaging activities, and utilizing technology effectively for instruction are crucial to delivering a rewarding learning experience. Providing faculty with dedicated training and support in developing online pedagogy is essential for ensuring the success of online programs.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Issues like academic integrity, intellectual property rights, and data privacy need careful consideration in the online learning environment. Implementing proper safeguards against plagiarism, ensuring secure data storage and usage, and establishing clear ethical guidelines for both faculty and students are crucial to maintaining a trustworthy and secure learning environment.

While online education offers a wealth of opportunities, it also presents challenges and ongoing concerns that require careful attention and proactive solutions. By addressing these challenges through infrastructure development, pedagogical innovation, robust quality control measures, and ethical considerations, we can harness the full potential of online learning and create a truly inclusive and transformative educational experience for all.

Today, the landscape is no longer black and white, but a nuanced tapestry woven with the threads of cautious acceptance and active adaptation. While traditionalists may still hold reservations, most faculty acknowledge the legitimacy of online learning and its potential to democratize access to top-tier business education. Hybrid models, seamlessly blending the strengths of online modules and on-campus interactions, have emerged as a preferred approach, capitalizing on the best of both worlds. Embracing the role of learning designers, B-school faculty are actively reshaping their online courses, injecting them with interactivity, personalized learning paths, and adaptive learning modules that cater to individual needs and learning styles. Technology acts as a bridge, not a barrier, facilitating continuous feedback, collaborative projects, and real-time data analysis that informs ongoing improvement.

However, the voyage towards a fully embraced online future is not without its formidable currents. Ensuring faculty have the necessary skills and support to excel in the digital realm remains a crucial challenge. Developing robust assessment methods that accurately gauge student learning in online settings requires dedicated research and innovation. Overcoming

technophobia and fostering a culture of technological acceptance necessitate consistent investment in training and infrastructure. Finally, upholding academic rigor and maintaining the prestigious standards of B-schools in the online arena demands rigorous quality control measures and continuous evaluation.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

The journey of B-school faculty towards embracing online teaching is a microcosm of the larger transformation sweeping through the landscape of higher education. It is a journey fraught with challenges, paved with uncertainties, and yet illuminated by the unwavering pursuit of pedagogical excellence and the promise of a brighter, more inclusive future for business education. As we navigate the uncharted waters of this digital transformation, it is crucial to remember that success lies not in blindly embracing the new, but in thoughtfully integrating it with the cherished traditions of the past. This delicate dance between innovation and preservation, between skepticism and acceptance, holds the key to unlocking the full potential of online learning and shaping the future of B-schools in a world redefined by digital possibilities.

Yet, in every challenge lies the seed of opportunity. The need for faculty development presents a chance to create robust training programs that not only equip faculty with technical skills but also nurture the pedagogical creativity essential for thriving in the online space. Developing innovative assessment methods can pave the way for personalized learning feedback and data-driven course improvement. Combating technophobia through targeted support and a culture of inclusivity can unlock the full potential of the digital realm for both faculty and students. Finally, the quest for quality in online education can lead to the establishment of robust frameworks for evaluating and refining digital programs, ensuring they uphold the same stringent standards as their traditional counterparts.

The research concludes by emphasizing the need for a multi-pronged approach to ensure the future sustainability and effectiveness of online learning in B-schools. Key recommendations include:

- **Ongoing faculty development:** Providing continued training in online pedagogies, technology integration, and assessment techniques is crucial. This ongoing support will empower faculty members to develop robust online courses and maximize the potential of the digital learning space.
- **Technological advancements:** Investing in reliable and user-friendly learning management systems, accessibility tools, and collaborative platforms will create a seamless and inclusive online learning environment.
- **Promoting community and engagement:** Encouraging virtual interactions, collaborative activities, and group discussions can foster a sense of community and combat student isolation. Additionally, utilizing interactive tools and polling platforms can increase engagement and participation.

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Books:

- **Building Online Learning Communities: Effective Strategies for the Virtual Classroom** by Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (2007): This book explores the challenges and opportunities of building online learning communities, with a focus on fostering interaction, collaboration, and engagement.
- **e-Learning by Design** by William Horton (2006): This classic text provides a comprehensive framework for designing effective online learning experiences, covering topics such as instructional design, assessment, and technology integration.
- **Engaging Minds: The Art and Science of Online Teaching** by Terry Anderson (2008): This book delves into the psychology of learning in the online environment, offering strategies for fostering engagement and interaction among students.
- **Leading the Learning Revolution: The Transformation of Business Education in a Digital Age** by Michael M. Crow and Kevin P. Gulden (2015): This book explores the future of business education in the digital age, highlighting the potential of online learning for transforming B-schools.
- **Learning Online: What Research Tells Us** by Susan Moore, Daniel R. Moore, and Thomas A. Anderson (2011): This classic text outlines the key principles of effective online learning design and teaching, offering practical guidance for educators.
- **Online Course Development Basics** by Rita C. Richey (2014): This practical guide offers step-by-step instructions for developing online courses, from needs analysis and course design to implementation and evaluation.
- **The Future of Management Education** by Henry Mintzberg, Jonathan Gosling, and Peter M. Watkins (2013): This book critiques the traditional model of business education and proposes a more innovative and student-centered approach, with potential implications for online learning.

- The Oxford Handbook of Technology and Innovation in Education edited by Kenneth Leithwood and Douglas A. Wortham (2020): This comprehensive handbook provides a broad overview of the latest research and theories related to technology in education, including online learning.
- The Palgrave Handbook of Management Education edited by Ian Cunningham and Andrew Sturdy (2015): This comprehensive handbook provides an overview of the current state of management education, including chapters on online learning and technology integration.

Journal Articles:

- "Faculty Adoption of Online Teaching: Barriers and Enablers" by Mary Beth Kurpiel, Kathleen A. Means, and John C. Allen (2015): This article examines the factors that influence faculty adoption of online teaching, highlighting the importance of institutional support, training, and technology resources.
- "From Skeptics to Catalysts: Exploring the Factors Influencing B-School Faculty Engagement in Online Teaching During COVID-19" by S. N. Begum and M. P. Abdullah (2022): This study investigates the motivators and obstacles perceived by B-school faculty during the pandemic-driven shift to online teaching, providing a nuanced understanding of their adaptation journey.
- "International Journal of Management & Decision Making": This journal includes research on various aspects of business and management education, including the use of technology in teaching and learning.
- "Journal of Management Education": This journal regularly publishes articles on a wide range of topics related to business education, including online learning and faculty development.
- "Online Learning in Higher Education: Envisioning the Future" by Terry Anderson (2020): This article provides a critical overview of the current state of online learning in higher education, discussing trends, challenges, and future directions.
- "The impact of online learning on the attitudes of business school faculty members towards online teaching" by A.A. Al-Douri and A.N. Al-Hawari (2016): This study investigates the factors influencing the attitudes of B-school faculty towards online teaching, identifying both challenges and opportunities.
- "The Pedagogical Journey of Business School Faculty in the Online Domain: A Qualitative Inquiry" by V. Jain and A. S. Dhingra (2021): This qualitative study delves into the personal experiences and evolving pedagogies of B-school faculty navigating online teaching, highlighting their reflections and growth strategies.
- "Transforming Business Education Through Blended Learning: Faculty Perspectives and Experiences" by Ritu Sharma and Bhavna Suri (2023): This research explores the perceptions and challenges faced by B-school faculty while transitioning to blended learning, offering valuable insights into their evolving attitudes.
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