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# **Enhancing Distance Learning Education in Higher Institution: A Literature Review on Fundamental Skills for Educators**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This literature review explores the fundamental skills required by educators to enhance distance learning education in higher institutions. The study examines various research articles and identifies key skills in the areas of pedagogy, technology, design, management, and communication. The findings highlight the importance of these skills in creating a superior learning experience for students in the online environment. By understanding and developing these skills, educators can effectively navigate the transition to distance learning and ensure successful outcomes for students in higher education institutions.

Keywords: distance education, teaching skills, online teaching, Covid-19, higher institution

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## **1. Introduction**

Enhancing distance learning education on a global scale has become an urgent priority accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the fact that the digitalization idea has evolved and been adopted in a variety of areas in recent years, the pandemic has made it more obvious and compulsive for practically all companies to make the shift from physical to virtual (Hizam et al., 2021). In response to the COVID-19 concern, numerous nations across the globe stopped schools, colleges, and universities to stop the virus's spread. Around 1.6 billion students across 194 countries, or more than 90% of the students who were enrolled, were affected by educational institutions closing at their peak at the beginning of April 2020, according to research data (UNESCO, 2020). This further supports the facts that, educators are to transform their teaching method from the usual traditional method to a conventional method that able to suit online teaching. A research by Li & Lalani (2020), support the statement where the education industry underwent a complete change in terms of their teaching and learning process from physical to totally virtual.

A study by (OECD, 2020) state that the effectiveness of online learning might be hindered by the lack of basic digital skills making teachers unprepared to adapt to the new situation so abruptly. Educators work tirelessly to bridge the gaps in access, engagement, and quality of online education. In contrary, past study revealed that there is more fear than excitement within educators on offering of online teaching (Allen et al., 2012). However, as the current pandemic situation emphasized on the transaction as most countries implement movement control order (MCO) discouraging physical classes, it is necessary for the adaptation. An analysis by UNESCO (2020) supports the peak in school closures was seen around the beginning of April 2020, when about 1.6 billion students across 194 countries were impacted, accounting for more than 90% of all students enrolled. Therewith, educators need to hone their ability to create engaging and interactive virtual lessons, provide personalized support to students, and foster a sense of connection and community in the online classroom. Further worries raised by a research centre on the possibility that, in some situations, a lack of fundamental digital literacy among some students and teachers may have made it difficult for them to quickly adapt to the new environment.

Educators are required to be up to date on teaching tactics, teaching skills, using modern teaching strategies, and being current on topic knowledge improvements (Ibrahim et al., 2020). By empowering educators with these essential skills, they can confidently deliver high-quality distance education to students worldwide. In light of the impending change from a physical to a virtual teaching and learning environment, it is evident that only those willing to enhance their abilities will be able to provide excellent results from students and maintain student enthusiasm in learning (Gray & Diloreto, 2016). This enables for the development of a study goal, which is to uncover the core abilities required of educators in order to provide students with a superior learning experience via distant learning.

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## **2. Data Collection and Analysis**

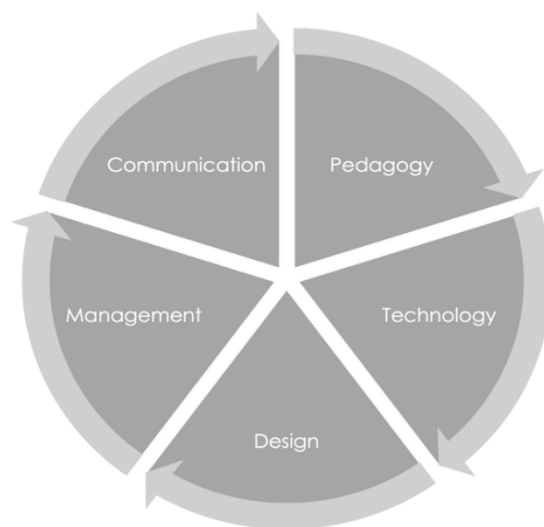
An organized literature review was done to study the abilities of educators in online instruction. Using web-based search engines, the search was restricted to the subject. The titles, abstracts, and author keywords of publications that include abilities for online teaching were found using a topic search. The search was further limited to oldest to recent English-language journals and articles to identify the trend in lack of skills for educators in online teaching. The sole results of the search were journal articles, books, and theses. Important online resources like Science Direct, Academic Search Complete, Google

Scholar, Wiley Online Library, Business Source Complete, and Emerald, ResearchGate, and Elsevier were utilized. To acquire a deeper grasp of several factors already acknowledged by other academics, fourteen primary papers were found to address the abilities needed for educators to teach online (see Figure 1). The methodology for the literature review in this qualitative study entails a systematic and thorough approach to gathering, analysing, and synthesizing pertinent academic literature relating to the core competencies required of educators in delivering a superior learning experience via distance learning.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Distance learning idea had expanded considerably over the course of the year and with the expansion of the internet, the development was even more fast and ever-growing (Sarkar & Das, 2020). It was first designed just to provide lessons, but by the early 1920s, it had evolved from a one-way interactive learning and teaching experience to a two-way interactive learning and teaching experience (Kentnor, 2015). Despite the fact that online learning was invented many years ago, its adoption was limited due to the learning institution's accessibility and progress. Past research has consistently emphasized the importance of certain knowledge and abilities for effective online teaching. In which, it is highlighted that there are certain knowledge and abilities needed to teach online. According to a research by Palloff & Pratt (2011), faculty members are said to receive little training and preparation for online learning as it was not given priority to. In addition, a proficient online instructor should possess a comprehensive understanding of both face-to-face and online learning modalities, recognizing and leveraging the distinctions among them (Williamson & Redish, 2009). This knowledge should be effectively applied to implement and facilitate online classes, ensuring a seamless and impactful learning experience for students.

By adapting instructional strategies, leveraging appropriate technologies, and addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of online learning, instructors can create engaging and effective online courses that meet the needs of diverse learners. The fact that certain institutions does not provide online courses is undeniable. However, all learning institutions were obliged to choose for online teaching and learning when the pandemic occurred in the middle of 2019 (Wieland & Kollias, 2020). In order to meet the new standard in teaching and learning, educators must adapt to fresh and innovative methods for involving students in online and remote instruction (Mazlan et al., 2021). This requires educators to learn to adapt to properly deliver teachings as the need for teachers to develop online skills is undeniable. Based on past research, top five highlighted skills that focus on online teaching for educators are communication, technology, pedagogy, design, and management as shown in Figure 1 (Salter and Hansen, (1999); Salmon, (2003); Smith, (2008); Compton, (2009); Dubins and Graham (2009); Guasch et al., (2010); Abdous (2011); Palloff and Prat (2011); Bigatel et al., (2012); Schmidt et al., 2013; Baran and Correia (2014); COAT (2014)).



*Figure 1: Skills for educators to enhance online teaching*

The purpose of organizing the competencies into categories is to facilitate an in-depth examination of the main five categories that is given attention and focus on a greater number of studies. These categories have emerged as the ones that have received more emphasis in the literature. This implies that a significant number of studies have explored and discussed the competencies related to these categories when it comes to skills for educators in distance learning indicating their perceived importance in the field of distance learning education.

#### 3.1 Pedagogy

A solid understanding of pedagogical skills is essential in online teaching. Pedagogy can be summarized as preparation of lesson plan and implementation of lesson (Masnan & Hashmi, 2014). In a layman's term it means how teachers make learning fun and interesting for students using different strategies and methods. According to Palloff & Pratt (2011), online teaching offers a different approach than face to face teaching. The statement emphasizes that educators must revamp traditional teaching methods to suit the online environment and employ effective instructional strategies to promote active

learning. Pedagogical expertise helps instructors to create engaging learning activities, involve students in critical thinking and problem-solving, and vary teaching to meet the various learning requirements of students in an online context. However, many higher institution educators lack pedagogy training for online education. (Gabriel & Kaulfield, 2008). This highlights how important it is for online educators to comprehend the principles and tactics of online teaching.

According to Bawane & Spector (2009) educators are required to take on multiple responsibilities and need to incorporate a variety of strengths and numerous competencies. This means that educators should build a sense of community and create opportunities for peer interaction to contribute student engagement in the online learning environment. Additionally, a study by (Pelz, 2019) fostering learners' self-assessment and reflection is the best approach for sustainable education. Let the student do most of the works allows them to work together with the peers as well the opportunity to grade their own homework with reference from the answer key provides students with an in depth understanding on their work and allow them to fix themselves up to promote better learning. Finally, another pedagogy strategies that can be used by educators are encouraging knowledge construction based upon learners' prior knowledge and life experience (Oliver, 2001). Educators can begin a lesson or unit by activating students' prior knowledge on the topic. This helps students make connections between their existing knowledge and the new concepts being introduced. By tapping into what students already know, teachers can build upon their foundation and facilitate meaningful learning experiences.

### **3.2 Technology**

Proficiency in educational technology is vital for online teaching. The educator must use technology to enhance the course content as well to provide quality teaching and learning experience. Educators must be familiar with various digital tools and platforms used for content delivery, collaboration, assessment, and student engagement (Albrahim, 2020). Educators need to be familiar with the functionalities and potential of these digital tools and platforms to effectively integrate them into their teaching practices. By leveraging these tools, educators can deliver content in engaging ways, facilitate collaboration and interaction among students, assess learning outcomes effectively, and promote active student engagement in the online learning environment. Additionally, developing online courses requires mastery of technologies that many faculty are not familiar with, and that some actually fear (Schmidt et al., 2013).

By leveraging technology effectively, instructors can create interactive learning experiences, facilitate online discussions, provide multimedia resources, and offer timely feedback, enhancing student learning outcomes and engagement. Additionally, it is essential to have access to a variety of technology resources and tools, including email, web browsers, learning management systems, text and video chat programs, software, and apps (Abdulrahman et al., 2020). Thus, understanding the learning and teaching capabilities and limitations of these tools is another important aspect. Regularly, online classes are conducted through zoom, google meet and such. The literacy to conduct the classes through those platforms are essential to keep the class going without disruption as well synchronous interactions with students. Nevertheless, the use of a delivery mechanism, such as the Internet does not define pedagogical practice, however the educators must use technology to enhance the course content (Simonson et al., 2019).

### **3.3 Design**

Designing and developing online courses is a demanding task (Albrahim, 2020). It requires careful organization of content and effective integration of technology tools and multimedia elements to create an engaging and interactive learning experience for students. A successful online educator should create a cohesive online classroom learning experiences and does not include features that do not provide value (Craddock & Gunzelman, 2013). This means that the instructor should design the online course in a way that ensures all elements, such as content, activities, assessments, and communication, are well-integrated and connected. The online classroom should provide a structured and seamless learning environment where students can navigate easily and find all the necessary resources.

According to Palloff & Pratt (2011, in teaching online what is most important is good, solid online course design. Skilful course design is crucial for creating engaging and effective online learning experiences. Online instructors need to structure their courses in a logical and organized manner, ensuring clear learning objectives, appropriate sequencing of content, and alignment between assessments and desired outcomes. Well-designed courses incorporate multimedia elements, interactive exercises, and opportunities for student interaction, promoting learner engagement and motivation. Additionally, utilizing prior student comments to develop and design new courses and evaluating the quality of course design by utilizing techniques and instruments for quality assurance, such as the Quality Matters Rubric (Eagleson & Pfander, 2014). This provides an opportunity to keep the teaching outline design up to date and constantly improvise with ongoing feedbacks as well manage the overall lesson.

### **3.4 Management**

Effective management skills are vital for maintaining an organized and productive online learning environment. Educators must establish clear guidelines and expectations, manage discussions and activities, as well provide timely support and feedback to students. According to (Bawane & Spector, 2009), demonstrating leadership, management, mentoring, and coaching skills, as well as knowledge of administrative qualities and procedure facilitates smooth online education. Strong management skills help ensure a smooth flow of instruction, accountability, and address any technical or logistical challenges that may arise during online teaching. Through this research-based approach, educators can continually refine their teaching practices and contribute to the advancement of the field of education. Next, conducting research on classroom teaching then interpreting and integrating research findings and results

(Craddock & Gunzelman, 2013). By engaging in research, educators gain valuable insights into effective instructional strategies, student learning outcomes, and factors that influence classroom dynamics.

Interpreting research findings allows educators to critically evaluate their teaching methods, make informed decisions, and adapt their instructional practices based on evidence-based insights. Finally, complying with legal, ethical, and copyright issues and standards (Muñoz Carril et al., 2013). Online educators must also uphold ethical considerations by respecting student privacy, fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment, and promoting academic integrity. Additionally, adhering to copyright laws is essential in obtaining appropriate permissions for using copyrighted materials and encouraging students to respect intellectual property rights. By proactively addressing these legal, ethical, and copyright issues, online educators can create a secure and responsible learning environment for their students.

### 3.5 Communication

Communication skills is vital for a lecturer regardless of online or physical classes. However, the method of communication and the medium of communication is different. Thus, communications should be carefully designed (Craddock & Gunzelman, 2013). Effective communication skills are crucial for online teaching as they facilitate clear and concise delivery of information to students. The statement is further supported by the research by (Abdous, 2011) that states an important communication strategy is facilitating and maintaining interactive discussion and information exchange. Online instructors need to express ideas, instructions, and feedback in a way that is easily understandable in a virtual environment. Strong communication skills help build rapport, foster student engagement, and create a supportive learning community in the online classroom. Apart from that, ensuring the quality and accuracy of written messages and feedback and detecting typographical and grammatical errors is vital (Fuller & Yu, 2014). online communication relies heavily on written messages, such as emails, discussion forum posts, and feedback comments.

Ensuring the quality and accuracy of these written messages is essential to convey information clearly and facilitate student comprehension. Clear and well-constructed messages help students understand instructions, grasp concepts accurately, and engage in meaningful interactions. Additionally, Munoz Carril et al., (2013) states that it is important to recognize that tone is critical to effective communication in online classroom. Unlike face-to-face interactions, online communication lacks nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Without these cues, the intended tone of a message can be easily misinterpreted. Therefore, online educators must be mindful of the tone they convey through written messages to ensure their intended meaning is accurately understood by students.

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## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the acquisition and continuous development of these skills are crucial for educators to excel in the realm of online teaching. As technology continues to advance and online learning becomes increasingly prevalent, educators must embrace these skills to effectively engage students, create dynamic learning environments, and foster a sense of community and collaboration. By prioritizing the cultivation of these skills, educators can embrace the opportunities and potential of online teaching, ultimately transforming education for the better. Based on the compilation of literature review, skills needed for online teaching encompasses pedagogy, technology, design, management, and communication. Each of the skills plays an important role on moulding the education system and facilitating online teaching. Pedagogical knowledge helps in designing engaging and learner-centred online experiences, while technology proficiency enables the effective use of digital tools and platforms. Design skills ensure the organization and presentation of course materials, while management expertise facilitates smooth course administration. Effective communication ensures clear instruction, feedback, and interaction with students. The importance of these skills lies in their collective contribution to creating an optimal online learning experience, fostering student engagement, and promoting successful learning outcomes. These skills collectively contribute to fostering student engagement, promoting active learning, and facilitating successful outcomes in the online teaching and learning environment. Nevertheless, by honing these skills, educators can adapt to the demands of online teaching, facilitate effective and meaningful learning experiences, and prepare students for the digital age.

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