Complexities of Educational Culture for Integrated Campus and Digital Education

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Introduction

Educational culture is a complex matter that needs to be understood in the progress of educational development, regarding all forms of education and teaching. In the concept of culture, one can assume that different norms, values, attitudes, views, and relationships influence the nature of education within higher education institutions (HEI). Trang (2022) emphasizes the influence of national culture and how HEIs responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on educational culture. Trang (2022) suggests that educational culture manifests through the awareness of education and the organizational structure of education within each country.

Additionally, the impact of educational culture extends to educational technology practices. Wang et al. (2008) stated that China needs to establish a new educational culture environment while enhancing the effectiveness of educational technology practices. The content of culture has become more perfect and abundant, and a new form of educational culture was formed based on the information technology and digital media "by the mutual influence and impact of educational technology practice and educational culture" (Wang et al, 2008, p. 480).

The twenty-first century demands reshaping of education systems. Rapid changes influenced by e-trends and technological advancement move universities towards digitalization. Digital transformation, like all revolutionary changes, involves adjustment (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). Furthermore, Fossland and Sandvoll (2021) argue that educational leaders are responsible for educational change. Educational leaders have an immense potential to enhance academic developers' "influence on educational change and their ability to become change agents" (Fossland & Sandvoll, 2021, p. 1). The digitalization process presents global challenges for universities, particularly their IT infrastructure (Thoring et al., 2018). Moreover, Thoring et al. (2018) identified that lecturers' experiences and suggestions show that improving the equipment and IT infrastructure is only secondary to the digitalization of teaching. Instead, a centralization of information, knowledge, and expertise in the field of digital teaching is required. From the lecturers' point of view, the university's perspective on digital teaching must change as well, overcoming baseless concerns that digitalization inevitably results in an entirely virtual university.

Targamadze (2009) suggests that educational culture should be conceptualized at five levels: societal, systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, and all levels operate in their own culture and impact the implementation of the educational objective formulation. In addition, Targamadze (2009) suggests that educational objectives are implemented in a distinct educational reality associated with culture and that organizational culture can play an important role as a potential factor affecting educational processes.

To achieve the necessary transformations required for attaining optimal education where campus and digital education are integrated and combined, we must first understand the complexity of educational culture. However, the current knowledge of educational cultures may be insufficient to fully understand the complexities of integrated campus and digital

education. Following this, the purpose of this paper is to identify motivators and deterrents for traditional HEIs' development of integrated campus and digital education. The paper is guided by the following research questions (RQ):

1. How do teachers, students, and educational leaders describe the educational culture at a traditional technical university?

2. What incentives are discussed by teachers, students, and educational leaders as drivers for integrated and combined campus and digital education?

Method

Focus group discussions with teachers, students, and educational leaders of a traditional Swedish technical university were selected as the method to address the research questions. Focus groups are a preferable qualitative method to gain an in-depth understanding of a social issue primarily designed to allow participants to voice their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Nyumba et al., 2018).

During 2022, five focus groups met on two occasions, each to explore a focus topic related to the papers two RQs. Two focus groups consisted of a mix of teachers and students, while three groups consisted of the educational leaders of an HEI. Participants were selected to represent different university roles, such as students, teachers, and educational leaders (Directors of Studies, Directors of First and Second Cycle Education, and Heads of educational administration). Furthermore, participants were selected to represent different disciplines, including domestic and international representatives. In total, 32 participants engaged in the two occasions of focus group interviews.

A total of 276 pages were generated from the transcriptions of the audio-recorded focus group interviews, which were analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis. The reflexive thematic analysis focuses on describing the phenomenon being investigated using, where a researcher actively identifies patterns and connections in the data guided by the study's research question and provides potential relationships between themes (Guest et al., 2012). As such, thematic analysis focuses on an in-depth understanding of the essentials of qualitative material that goes beyond summarizing to uncover comprehensive narratives.

Result

RQ1: How do teachers, students, and educational leaders describe the educational culture at a large traditional technical university?

1. Multiple educational cultures

Participants strongly emphasized the utilization of multiple educational cultures rather than identifying a single homogeneous educational culture. Each discipline exhibits its own distinct structures and teaching approaches, contributing to the diversity of educational practices. The influence of various teaching cultures is evident within each program, fostering a dynamic environment. The organization encourages conversations and dialogues in different forums to enable collaboration and exchange of ideas. Notably, participants highlighted the

existence of polarization within the university, reflecting divergent perspectives among teachers, students, administration, and management.

2. **Streamlining education**

The instructional process is influenced by limited time, leading to a prioritization of doing research over educational development. Additionally, the learning design process is often influenced by the emphasis on streamlining processes and prioritizing efficiency over educational innovation. Both student-centered and teacher-centered cultures are identified. In a student-centered culture, active learning is encouraged, with teachers providing support across various activities. Conversely, the traditional teacher-centered educational culture promotes passive learning, particularly during broadcast-oriented learning activities. This contrast gives rise to divergent opinions and diverse approaches when it comes to designing courses.

3. **COVID-19 as a game changer**

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly been a game changer, accelerating the adoption and transformation of digital learning on an unprecedented scale. Before the pandemic, students primarily attended higher education in person, while a notable shift has taken place since the pandemic, with the integration of on-campus and online learning in a blended format on the rise. A considerable portion of the digitalization process in the past years has been built on the Emergency Remote Teaching (Hodges et al., 2020) approach, subsequently followed by adopting Blended Synchronous approaches (Raes et al., 2020). The participants were clear in their opinion that incentives related to the pandemic should no longer serve as a motivation for digitalization, and they emphasized the urgent need for clear guidance on methods and suitability of campus and digital education at the course level.

RQ2: What incentives are expressed by teachers, students, and educational leaders as drivers for integrated and combined campus and digital education?

1. **Clear goals, unclear incentives**

Incentives for educational development often appear disconnected from the work of teachers. While there is a clear goal for both campus and digital education and the integration of these forms, participants point out that there are few and unclear incentives for them to engage in educational development. The participants agree that the focus should be on providing exceptional integrated campus and digital education options for students, preferably through blended and hybrid teaching models. However, the incentives are inadequate to drive the necessary changes.

2. **From vision to action**

Teachers need to better understand why more digital education is requested and how integration between campus and digital education can be effectively implemented. Clear visions and expanded possibilities for digital education are required to advance educational development. Translating visions and broader possibilities for digital education into actionable steps that can be implemented is crucial. Teachers seek recommendations on the benefits of specific educational forms for students, with visions stemming from teachers and

research teams involved in digital education. Step-by-step implementation is preferred over hasty and vague development agendas.

3. Conditions for development

Teachers vocalize concerns regarding insufficient conditions to effectively undertake course development. There is a need to provide more financial and technical support to institutions to ensure the successful implementation of these models. This will require a shift in focus from the current investment model. Teachers especially emphasize the need for guidance and support in pedagogical and technical domains, encompassing the successful implementation of blended and hybrid approaches. One evident factor is the insufficient digital competence among teachers, students, and administrative staff, which hinders their ability to fully exploit the potential and opportunities presented by modern digital education.

4. Students as drivers

The quality of courses, particularly their digital learning design, is a source of frustration for students. Integrated campus and digital courses allow students to access learning materials, participate in discussions, and engage with course content at their own pace and from any location. Integrated courses strike a balance by combining in-person interactions in a campus setting with digital components that foster active participation, collaboration, and the utilization of multimedia resources. Initially, students prioritize accessing high-quality online materials, with a specific emphasis on recordings of on-campus activities. These resources serve a crucial purpose for students who encounter scheduling conflicts between courses or are preparing for re-exams.

Discussion

This paper aims to contribute to the extensive research community regarding digital development of education by emphasizing the importance of understanding educational cultures for a deeper comprehension.

The results indicate a diverse range of cultures that influence educational development. An essential aspect of these cultures is the individual perspective, where educational development is often perceived as a personal endeavor focused on ‘me and my course’ rather than a collaborative effort. That said, various influences are at play, driven by streamlining and digitization, where individuals feel to be forgotten or that the organization’s strives do not match their perceptions. Hence, the systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels of educational culture (Targamadze 2009) are present in this study as they operate in their own cultures among the participants across the university.

The overarching goal of educational development is to enhance the quality of education. If the university can extract the best of all educational forms, there are still obstacles to conquer. As Fossland and Sandvoll (2021) suggest, management has the position to empower courses in the developing process. Development and change are slow processes that need time. Allocating time for development might function as an incentive for educational development. Support for teachers to move towards digital teaching and sufficient infrastructure for conducting suitable education will be a crucial element for HEIs in the future.

As students seem to be more positive regarding digital education in general, they state that more traditional campus-based teaching does not necessarily include digital elements in the way it could. Müller et al. (2018) argue that if the digitalization process is not to halt, precise rules are needed to be adapted to technological advances. Furthermore, structural, and strategic positioning is called for "if HE institutions are to act[s] as centre[s] of innovation with respect to the implementation of digital teaching and learning formats" (Müller et al, 2018, p. 1). However, there is insecurity on how to best count digital teaching towards one's own teaching load concerning the legal framework requirements.

This paper is limited to a narrow selection of participants at one HEI, which prevents generalizing the results on a large scale. Nevertheless, educational culture clearly affects the attitudes of faculty, students, and educational leaders toward digital education. Future research could evaluate the identified themes on a larger scale to test generalizability.

Understanding educational culture is essential for comprehensive educational development across various educational contexts. This research paper delves into the intricate dynamics of educational culture and its implications for integrated campus and digital education in HEIs. By examining these themes and patterns, we seek to contribute to the knowledge base surrounding educational cultures and inform strategies for creating compelling and transformative educational environments in an increasingly complex landscape.

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