TEACHING ASSOCIATES' PERSPECTIVES OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCE DEGREE

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BACKGROUND

COVID-19 restrictions have forced instructors to quickly adapt to the online environment by familiarising themselves with various strategies for teaching online (Epps, Brown, Nijjar, & Hyland, 2021). One of the online teaching strategies employed at Monash University in the Pharmaceutical Science course was the combination of breakout rooms in synchronous *Zoom*[TM] meetings with *Google Docs*[TM], which replaced the small face-to-face workshops.

AIMS

This project aims to identify approaches used by teaching associates (TAs) to facilitate small synchronous workshop-style online classrooms by analysing their perspectives of online teaching and learning.

DESIGN AND METHODS

Seven semi-structured interviews with TAs teaching in the Bachelor of Pharmaceutical Science degree were examined qualitatively using the abductive thematic analysis approach.

RESULTS

The results show that setting expectations and having a structured workshop with judicious group formation and instructor-prepared *Google Docs*[TM] were considered effective for facilitating small synchronous online classrooms. However, non-compulsory classes that were not assessed and student-prepared *Google Docs*[TM] were perceived as less effective. Identified areas for improvement included: promoting camera use during class, holding TA briefing sessions prior to workshops earlier to allow more preparation time, and expanding training for online facilitators. Barriers to improvement were also revealed, such as students' unfamiliarity with their peers and lateness of facilitator notes provided to TAs by academics. The former discouraged students from using cameras during class while the latter led to the TAs feeling under-prepared for the workshops which they were facilitating.

CONCLUSION

By keeping the identified successful teaching approaches while implementing strategies to address both the not-so-effective approaches and barriers to improvement, instructors would be able to create more effective and meaningful online learning experiences for students.

REFERENCES

Epps, A., Brown, M., Nijjar, B., & Hyland, L. (2021). Paradigms lost and gained: Stakeholder experiences of crisis distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education, 37*(3), 167-182. https://doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2021.1929587