
Exploring Factors that Impact Faculty Decisions to Teach Languages Online: Is It Worth the Individual Return on Investment?

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Abstract

Over the past decade, scholars have explored factors that motivate or impede faculty decisions to teach online in the broader context of higher education (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Shea, Pickett, & Li, 2005; Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008; Wright, 2014; Zhen, Garthwait, & Pratt, 2008). However, comparable research in specific, academic disciplines is limited, especially as it relates to online language learning (OLL). This study investigates the role of faculty demographics, experience, and their perceptions of OLL as they relate to motivating factors, barriers, and the perception of quality. The results identified seven interrelated themes that shaped the participants' (n = 24) decisions whether to participate in online instruction. Findings related to the personal nature of the decision to teach online and perceived return on investment distinguish this study from others. The article concludes with a discussion of reframing faculty decisions to teach online in terms of individual return on investment and with suggestions for future research.

Introduction

Many public universities have increased their offerings in online courses to meet student demand and maintain a competitive advantage in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). By improving student access and appealing to nontraditional students, they are hoping to enhance enrollment and compete with private institutions, and it seems to be working. While enrollments for private institutions have declined for the fourth consecutive year, numbers for public institutions have steadily increased (Seaman et al., 2018). Wright (2014) classifies this constant growth in online enrollment as a “disruptive change” in public higher education, and he highlights its impact on the role and function of faculty members.

It may be this disruptive nature, caused by a perceived need to compete with other institutions and accompanied by administrative pressure to develop online courses and programs, that explains why many faculty members remain skeptical about online learning. Regardless of fourteen straight years of growth in enrollment (Seaman et al., 2018), faculty acceptance of the value and legitimacy of online education in higher education remains low, 30%, and has even decreased in recent years (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2016). How can online learning continue to increase, yet still be overwhelmingly unaccepted by those most relevant to the design and delivery of the courses? Allen et al. (2016) describe this disparity as the primary failure of online education.

Several studies, examining approximately 300 to 2,000 participants, have examined faculty members' decisions to adopt online learning (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Shea, Pickett, & Li, 2005; Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008; Wright, 2014; Zhen, Garthwait, & Pratt, 2008). Their findings reveal that convenience and flexibility, time and effort, training and technical support, and perception of quality affect faculty members' decisions. However, as Shea et al. (2005) point out, the content area being taught also plays a role when faculty decide to teach online. While Murphy-Judy and Johnshoy (2017) capture the availability of online language courses, research with a focus of documenting the nuanced decision-making process related to teaching languages online has been limited. The study presented here attempts to fill this gap in the research.

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of foreign language faculty who teach languages online?
2. What is the level of online language teaching experience of foreign language faculty?
3. What factors motivate foreign language faculty to adopt online language instruction?
4. What factors inhibit foreign language faculty from adopting online language instruction?
5. How do foreign language faculty members perceive the quality of online language instruction?

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background for this study draws heavily from Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) (Rogers, 2003) and Tabata and Johnsrud's (2008) conceptual model for evaluating faculty attitudes toward distance learning.

Innovation Diffusion Theory

IDT attempts to explain “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003). Simply put, IDT explores the manner and rate of adoption for specific innovations, including its perceived relative advantage, the perceived compatibility with existing values, needs, and past experiences, the complexity or difficulty level of adoption, the trialability or opportunity to experiment with the innovation risk-free, and the observability of the results of utilizing the innovation. Rogers (2003) also delineates adoption stages that correspond to faculty members' levels of experience with adopting an innovation: Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, and Laggards (see Table 1).

Table 1

Rogers' (2003) Adopter Categories

Adopter category	Defining characteristics
Innovators	Innovators take risks and their tolerance for risk allows them to adopt new technologies even if they may fail.
Early Adopters	Early adopters are leaders of public opinion. They are more selective than innovators in adopting new technologies.
Early Majority	The early majority adopts an innovation after a period of time that is longer than innovators and early adopters.
Late Majority	The late majority adopts an innovation after the majority has already adopted it, and they do so with skepticism.
Laggards	Laggards are the last group to adopt an innovation. They resist change and tend to be focused on the traditional way of doing things.

The widespread use of IDT in empirical studies that investigate the process of adopting new technology in higher education (Keengwe, Kid, & Kyei-Blankson, 2009; Sahin, 2006; Surry, 1997; Surry, Ensminger, & Jones, 2002) demonstrates the robustness of the theory and its conceptual framework. Several researchers have implemented IDT as a theoretical framework to examine faculty decisions to adopt online teaching (Shea, Pickett, & Li, 2005; Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008; Wright, 2014). In particular, derived from IDT, Tabata and Johnsrud's (2008) conceptual model for evaluating faculty attitudes toward distance learning proposes that “demographics, attitude towards technology and distance education, and adoption of innovation are directly related to faculty participation in distance education” (p. 628). Their model serves as the foundation for the survey administered in this study.

Online Language Learning

Online language learning (OLL) at the university level has garnered more attention over the past decade because of the expanded use of the Internet and digital technologies. To better gauge the current status of OLL, Murphy-Judy and Johnshoy (2017) conducted a survey-based study that offers an overview of “who's teaching which languages online”. Similar to national trends in the broader context of higher education (Seaman et al., 2018), Murphy and Johnshoy's data indicate that public institutions are leading the way in online language courses, accounting for roughly 80% of the courses reported in the study. As expected, Spanish courses made up 62% of the enrollment for the online language courses documented, and first- and second-year courses were more prevalent across the various languages.

From a pedagogical perspective, books, such as *Teaching Languages Online* (Meskill & Anthony, 2010) and *Developing Online Language Teaching: Research-Based Pedagogies and Reflective Practices* (Hampel & Stickler, 2015), provide an overview of best practices for online teaching and learning. Such texts focus predominantly on developing the readers' technical competence and knowledge of online tools. Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, and Freynik (2014) evaluate 350 studies to locate evidence of efficacy of various technologies in online activities, which they describe as being limited. However, they do suggest that some research highlights the beneficial role of technology in providing increased access to target language input, interaction, and feedback. While effectiveness

research is useful for informing faculty members' use of various online tools, it does not necessarily impact their decisions to teach online.

A salient issue in OLL research that may contribute to faculty decisions to teach online is that of developing students' oral proficiency. As Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008) point out, language educators often "harbor deep-seated doubts as to whether or not a DL [distance learning] course could ever provide L2 learners with a way to gain linguistic proficiency, especially when oral language skills are in question." Various studies demonstrate that language students in hybrid or blended courses are capable of reaching levels of oral proficiency comparable to face-to-face students (Chenoweth, Ushida, & Murday, 2006; Isenberg, 2010; Rubio, 2014; Thoms, 2014). Furthermore, other research has yielded similar results when comparing fully online language courses with face-to-face courses (Blake & Delforge, 2007; Blake et al., 2008; Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Green & Earnest-Youngs, 2001; Grgurovic, Chapelle, & Mack, 2013). Yet, faculty still have doubts about teaching online language courses, because they view the development of oral proficiency as an insurmountable challenge.

Faculty Acceptance of Online Education

"Faculty members are the key to the successful design, development, and delivery of online instruction" (Wright, 2014); however, a large majority of faculty still do not accept the legitimacy of online education (Allen et al., 2016). Clearly, online instruction provides many relative advantages to face-to-face instruction, including convenience, anytime instruction, and the elimination of geographic constraints (Arkoful & Abaidoo, 2015; Bowers & Kumar, 2015). Therefore, why do some faculty members acknowledge the benefit and value of online education while others do not? Tabata and Johnsrud (2008) articulate the need to answer this question by examining factors impacting faculty decisions to teach online:

Faculty are a critical and core resource to the success of any distance education initiative and facilitating understanding of university educators and policy makers as to the conditions that encourage or discourage faculty participation may assist in sustaining academic quality and integrity (p. 626).

Many faculty members are deterred from adopting online instruction, because they perceive online teaching as a major challenge which requires more time and effort than face-to-face teaching (Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008; Wright, 2014). Through survey data collected from 2,048 faculty participants in a 10-campus public university system in the western U.S., Tabata and Johnsrud (2008) identified workload as a core issue that explains faculty non-participation in distance education. On the contrary, others report being motivated to teach online by the perceived flexibility and convenience provided to students and instructors (Wright, 2014).

A second factor to consider is one's "willingness to change" (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009). Within the field of OLL, Comas-Quinn (2011) gathered instructor reactions to teaching blended language courses, and she attributes instructors' negative opinions of blended teaching to the amount of change experienced by switching from a traditional, face-to-face teaching environment to a blended environment. Mitchell and Geva-May (2009) also identified institutional and job change as factors most related to faculty members' decisions to not teach online at five colleges in Canada. In addition, their research brings to light the issue of compatibility, intellectual resistance to online teaching (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009), or philosophical differences (Zhen, Garthwait, & Pratt, 2008).

Another important consideration is the perception of effectiveness and availability of technology-based training and technical support (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008). Comas-Quinn (2011) faults training, which was unsuccessful in transforming face-to-face instructors into online instructors, as a barrier to adopting online language instruction in the context of her study. Similarly, Murday, Ushida, and Chenoweth (2007) describe how instructors want more technology-based training prior to teaching online, also supported by Shea, Pickett, and Li (2005) in their large-scale study. They found that the level of training and technical support provided by the institution had a direct impact on faculty members' decisions to teach online.

Last, the findings of Wright (2014) and Tabata and Johnsrud (2008) highlight faculty members' general, negative opinion about the quality of online instruction. Some researchers have referred to this in terms of the level of interaction in the course and describe how faculty members want to be equipped to make meaningful connections with the students (Shea et al., 2005). Others include the role of academic integrity with the discussion of quality (Wright, 2014), indicating that faculty are concerned with the increased potential for cheating and plagiarizing in the online environment. Shea et al. (2005) also explain how the discipline area being taught plays a role in affecting the perception of quality and may impact the faculty member's decision to teach online, which motivates the current discipline-specific study.

Methods

Context and Participants

Data for this study were collected in a department of foreign languages at a university in southeastern U.S. The participants of the study (n = 24) were full-time and part-time faculty members. The department offered a major or minor in Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Enrollment numbers for these programs were robust and stable. Online courses were offered sporadically in lower level French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and several hybrid courses were offered as a means to alleviate a classroom shortage on campus. The university's strategic plan highlighted the institution's commitment to expand online learning environments by increasing the number of courses and degrees offered online. The university and college maintained distance learning offices, which offered centralized training for the design, development, and teaching of online courses, in addition to technical support.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study adhered to Creswell and Creswell's (2017) description of a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. In the quantitative phase, all full-time and part-time, foreign language faculty members in the department under investigation were invited to complete the online survey. The qualitative phase, consisting of follow-up interviews, was used to verify the survey findings and further explore faculty members' individual decisions to teach online.

The survey instrument, based largely on the work of Seaman (2009) and Tabata and Johnsrud (2008), was taken from Wright (2012) and modified with permission to explicitly target foreign language teaching and learning (see Appendix A). The items consisted of five sections: demographic information, faculty experience in online learning, motivating factors, adoption barriers, and perceptions of quality. Responses to the statements consisted of a five-point continuum (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*, (3) being neutral. Last, the interviews were conducted with faculty members selected based on willingness to participate (n = 14). The interview protocol utilized open-ended questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) designed to further explore faculty perceptions of online teaching and learning by eliciting their descriptive responses.

Data analysis for the survey included summary statistics for the individual survey items and aggregate means for the five subsections. Qualitative data analysis for the interviews was based on thematic analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) describe, thematic analysis is a useful method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes in data sets. Following the transcription and coding of the recorded interviews, cycles of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions were repeated until reaching data saturation (Ness, 2015). The patterns identified in the interviews aid to highlight how the faculty members perceived OLL and were categorized according to emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Throughout the research process several methods were employed to ensure rigor and reliability. First, the same procedures were followed for recruitment of each participant, data collection, and analysis, which contribute to the dependability of the study (Shenton, 2004). Second, to ensure the trustworthiness of the themes data triangulation and member checking were performed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of data sources involved quantitative results of the survey, one-on-one interviews with faculty members, and the results of member checking. Member checking was done to establish credibility of the findings (Shenton, 2004). Last, rich description in the findings provides a detailed account of the context and participants' quotes to allow the reader to determine the transferability of the results to another context.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Faculty Who Teach Languages Online

Of the 27 full-time faculty in the department, 21 completed the survey, 77.8%. In addition, three of the 20 part-time faculty completed the survey, 15%. Combining the two groups, the response rate was 51%. The three part-time faculty who completed the survey were also the only three part-time faculty actively involved in online teaching at the time of the study.

Of the 24 participants for this research, six had previously taught a fully online course; 18 had never taught completely online (see Table 2). Each of these 18 participants was both middle-aged, 35 – 54 years old, and roughly at the midpoint of their careers. However, no faculty member under 35 years old completed the survey. Of those with online teaching experience, three were full-time faculty, three were part-time, and only one was tenured. Three of the six were from the Spanish program, two were from Italian, and one was from French. Males who had taught completely online outnumbered females at a ratio of 2:1. However, in the department under investigation, female faculty outnumbered male faculty 2:1.

Table 2

Overview of Faculty Demographics (n = 24)

Demographic characteristics	Faculty with experience teaching online	Faculty with no experience teaching online
<u>Q1 Professorial rank:</u>		
Full professor	0	2
Associate professor	1	5
Assistant professor	2	1
Lecturer	3	10
<u>Q2 Tenure status:</u>		
Tenured	1	7
Tenure track	2	1
Non-tenure track	3	10
<u>Q3 Employment status:</u>		
Full-time	3	8
Part-time	3	10
<u>Q4 Language program:</u>		
Chinese	0	2
French	1	3
German	0	3
Italian	2	1
Japanese	0	1
Korean	0	1
Spanish	3	7
<u>Q5 Gender:</u>		
Female	2	15
Male	4	3
<u>Q6 Range of age:</u>		
23 – 34	0	0
35 – 44	4	5
45 – 54	2	9
55 – 64	0	4
65 or older	0	0
<u>Q7 Range of higher education experience:</u>		
0 – 4 years	0	1
5 – 9 years	3	7
10 – 14 years	3	3
15 – 19 years	0	5
20 or more years	0	2

Level of Online Language Teaching Experience

Table 3 provides an overview of the participants' experience with online learning. As mentioned, six participants reported teaching online previously. The item that relates to having taught a hybrid or blended course, Q11, received the most positive responses of the subsection, indicating that the participants had more collective experience in this area. The faculty reported the least amount of experience in taking an online course (Q8), teaching an online course (Q10), and conducting research with online or hybrid learning (Q12).

Table 3

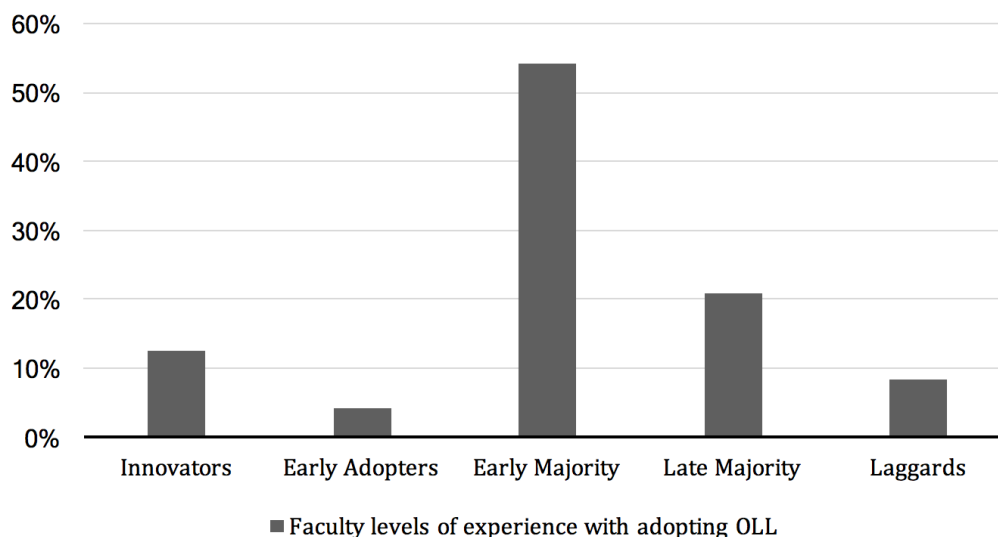
Faculty Experience with Online Learning

Faculty experience with online learning	Yes	No
Q8: I have taken an online course as student.	6	18
Q9: I have taken a hybrid course as a student.	11	13
Q10: I have taught an online course.	6	18
Q11: I have taught a hybrid or blended course.	16	8
Q12: I have conducted research with online or hybrid learning.	3	21
Q13: What percentage of your teaching load comes from online or hybrid courses?		
0%	12	
1 – 25%	10	
26 – 50%	2	
51 – 75%	0	
76 – 100%	0	

Ten of the participants reported teaching online or hybrid courses for 1 – 25% of their teaching load. Twelve indicated 0%, and the two remaining participants indicated 26-50%. In addition, after assigning a one-point value for each “yes” response for Q8 – Q12, an aggregate sum was calculated for each participant to calculate an online learning experience index. Each index accounted for all facets of the faculty member’s experiences with online learning and was also used to classify each participant according to Rogers’ (2003) levels of experience with adopting an innovation: sum of 0 – 1 (Laggards), 1 – 2 (Late Majority), 2 – 3 (Early Majority), 3 – 4 (Early Adopters), and 4 – 5 (Innovators). Figure 1 portrays each faculty member’s level of experience with online language learning using the identifiers from Innovation Diffusion Theory with over 50% of the participants aligning with the Early Majority category.

Figure 1

Faculty Levels of Experience with Adopting OLL



Factors that Motivate Faculty to Adopt Online Language Instruction

To determine the factors that motivate foreign language faculty to adopt online language instruction, survey items Q14 – Q22 were evaluated and responses to interview questions were reviewed. Overall, the subsection average of 2.91 indicates a neutral opinion of motivating factors for adopting online instruction. However, the role of flexibility and convenience and the personal nature of the decision proved to be more significant than other factors in the individual’s decision-making process.

Flexibility and Convenience

The participants of this study reported favorable perceptions of the flexibility provided by online learning and teaching, for both students (Q14: mean of 3.38) and themselves (Q15: mean of 3.75). During the interviews, several faculty members mentioned the “anytime, anywhere” benefits of online learning and explained how providing online course options helps to meet students’ needs by making the course schedules more flexible. Others describe

the advantageous role that asynchronous delivery methods can have on students' learning. One summarized this impact:

My students always tell me they appreciate having extra time to process the language, the questions, and formulate a response. Doing some asynchronous activities online gives them this extra time, and I think their work is better for it.

This appreciation for flexibility also carried over to the faculty members' perceptions of teaching online. Some explained that teaching online offers the "relative advantage" of being able to structure their workload or daily work activities in a way that suits their schedule preferences. One participant referred to the flexibility and convenience as a "type of reward that you get for teaching online." These descriptions demonstrate how online teaching may also serve the needs of faculty members. For example, when asked about how teaching online changes her work schedule, one faculty member stated:

Teaching online courses allows me to be more engaged in my research and service load, because it frees up my daytime hours when I would most likely have been teaching. When I teach online, it is easier to travel for research or conferences. It is easier to make other appointments with local partners. I feel like I have more control over my own schedule. It's much more convenient, but I also understand why some may not like it and that should be their choice. There are many other factors to consider, not just flexibility.

This participant's comments highlight the perception shared by many that online teaching provides more flexibility and convenience compared to face-to-face teaching. Simultaneously, it expresses the idea that deciding to teach online should be a personal decision based on a variety of factors.

"It's a personal decision"

The faculty members who participated in this study shared perceptions of deciding to teach online as a personal decision, not a requirement (Q21: mean of 3.71).

They also indicated slightly negative perceptions of deriving personal satisfaction from teaching language courses online (2.67). As one faculty member indicated, "Teaching online is not as much fun, because you do not have the opportunity to interact with the students or to see their learning process as it happens in the classroom." However, there were other accounts of drawing personal satisfaction from the decision to teach online:

"I enjoy teaching online because it forces me to be more creative in how I prepare my activities and assignments. I tend to think more intently about the role of technology and building a community of learners."

"Some do not enjoy teaching online, but I do. I like the opportunity to make connections with the individual students on a more personal nature. I am able to adapt my feedback and provide comments that address each student more uniquely. Teaching online, it's a personal decision but it works for me."

Perhaps as a result of viewing the decision to teach online as a personal one, faculty perceptions of feeling pressured to do so were low, including means of 1.88 (Q20), 2.04 (Q19), and 2.38 (Q18), and 2.79 (Q17). Although the survey results indicated that pressure to teach online was not a considerable factor, some faculty interviews included references to the increased attention being given to online courses and programs by the university. One participant stated that he felt "bombarded with increased professional development opportunities for developing online courses, but there is more to it than just administrative pressure." The faculty members also described feeling empowered to resist teaching online, "I still have control over the final decision to teach online or put courses and programs online, regardless what the university wants. I get to do my own needs analysis to determine the best path to take."

It should be noted here that the mean response for feeling pressured by competitors was highest (Q17: mean of 2.79), but still below neutral. Although the department under investigation was experiencing direct competition from lower cost, statewide online Spanish courses, the participants of this study did not report feeling pressured to compete with this program.

Factors that Inhibit Faculty from Adopting Online Language Instruction

Two primary factors were identified as inhibiting faculty from teaching online: poor return on investment and philosophical opposition.

The faculty participants of this study expressed the most concern about the amount of work (Q26) and time (Q27) that it takes to teach languages online. One faculty member described this, "There are just so many other things that

I could be doing rather than designing a new online course where the regular course already exists. It's not worth the return on investment." This concept of return on investment when considering online instruction also appeared in other interviews:

"Teaching online requires a lot more time and effort. Things that you take for granted in a regular class, you have to plan for and *invest* more time and energy in addressing."

"I would say that teaching my online Spanish class takes about 50% more of my time to plan and prepare for the weekly activities. Teaching face-to-face is just easier. Besides, you don't really get anything more out of teaching online versus face-to-face. There is no *return on investment*."

"Of course, teaching online requires more work, especially when you consider the amount of time that it takes to design the course too. You have to put in so much more work before the class begins."

"Before you decide to teach online, you have to determine if it is worth the *return on investment* that you will get over the long run."

Overall, this perception of low return on investment may have also contributed to higher feelings of frustration with teaching online (Q25: mean of 3.21). However, there was another counterexample that framed the return on investment in a more positive light. Faculty interviews consisted of several references to the university's policy of paying extra compensation to faculty members who teach online and the importance of such compensation for part-time faculty in particular. The three part-time faculty participants of this study expressly indicated how receiving extra compensation motivated them to teach online, which made the return on investment valuable enough to make the commitment. This also demonstrates that each individual weighed the relevant factors differently according to their personal preferences.

Philosophical Opposition

Although Q23 of the survey, "I am philosophically opposed to teaching languages online", yielded a mean below neutral (2.58), several faculty members contradicted this result in the interviews. For example, one mid-career faculty member explicitly stated that she was "philosophically opposed" to teaching languages online. She explained that, "Learning a language should occur face-to-face, not online." Others supported this reasoning, "You can't possibly learn a language without interacting and communicating with others in person." In addition, although some framed their opposition in terms of philosophical approaches to teaching, they described more specifically their preferences to not commit more work and time to designing new classes in an online environment:

"Teaching online goes against how I believe you should teach and learn. And it would take too much work to transfer my existing classes to online. It wouldn't be worth it at all for me to do that."

"I've been teaching for quite a bit now. If I don't have to make any changes, I'm probably not going to. I know what works for me and my students. Making the change to online teaching would be a waste of my time."

This form of philosophical opposition highlights the perception that teaching online is different than face-to-face teaching and that making the change itself would require more work and time. Furthermore, it demonstrates the interrelatedness of multiple factors in making the decision to teach online.

Training and Technical Support

The participants of this study did not describe training and technical support as playing a pivotal role in making the decision to teach online. Faculty perceptions of these elements were favorable (sub-section mean of 3.38) but were not considered a motivating or inhibiting factor. Many described the widespread availability of training and support which was precipitated by the university's strategic plan to develop more online courses and programs. As one faculty member stated, "We have all that we need if we want to teach online." Findings from the survey support this claim: Q33 technical support is available (3.75), Q34 funding is available for professional development (3.58), Q37 and Q39, and Q41 opportunities to learn in relation to online teaching are available (3.58, 3.42, and 3.25). Furthermore, the participants felt they had the necessary technical skills (Q36: mean of 3.80) pedagogical skills (Q38: mean of 3.63), and knowledge to develop instructional materials (Q40: mean of 3.42) to teach online.

Faculty Perceptions of the Quality of Online Language Instruction

To determine faculty perceptions of the quality of online language instruction, survey items Q43 – Q50 were evaluated and responses to interview questions were reviewed (see Appendix A). Only Q49, relating to the use of

innovative technology in online courses, received a favorable mean response, 3.29. During the follow-up interviews, several faculty members cited examples of using innovative technology-based activities in their online courses, such as collaborative writing with Google docs, peer review of students' oral presentations with YouTube commenting capabilities, and reading comprehension using QR codes and text within a virtual museum-based, learning activity. Aside from Q49, all other items within this subsection received mean responses less than neutral (3), and the subsection mean was 2.67

Drawing from the interviews, several major issues related to the perception of quality of online language instruction arose. These included concerns related to:

A Lack of Interaction Time with Students

In the interviews, the faculty expressed concerns about what they perceived to be a lack of interaction time with students. Based on this lack of interaction time, they also described difficulty related to forging personal relationships with the students in the online setting. An experienced faculty member stated that "part of teaching and learning a language is developing a relationship with the instructor and your classmates. You get to know each other, rely on each other, and practice with each other. That is much harder online." Similarly, others addressed what they perceived as increased difficulty in providing feedback, because the instructor is not physically present:

It is much harder to give immediate linguistic feedback in an online course, because you aren't there with the students. Feedback can be much more deliberate, but they may not receive it until much later, after they have moved on from the activity. I'm not sure this feedback will impact their language learning at that point.

Additionally, the participants expressed concerns about the students' ability to develop oral proficiency skills without meaningful interaction time. A few of the faculty members, those who had taught online and others, expressed their concern, even doubt, about whether students could successfully develop this skill in an online course:

"Time that would be spent interacting, speaking, and listening in a face-to-face class is drastically reduced in an online course. How can we expect students to develop speaking skills online?"

"I teach online courses a lot, but I am always concerned about the students' ability to speak in French. I worry that they will go on to the next course and struggle to speak in class, because they didn't have the same experience as other students."

Overall, the participants' perceptions of interaction time contributed to a low perception of quality for online teaching and learning. This finding further highlights the need to evaluate learning processes and outcomes from online courses to ensure maintaining academic rigor.

The Students' Inability to Maintain the Pace of the Course

Another chief concern expressed by multiple faculty members was that students are not always capable of maintaining the pace of the course in the online environment, which results in the poor learning outcomes described previously. One faculty member described how this concern, expected of face-to-face classes too, is exacerbated in online language courses:

In an online course, the students seem to wait until the very last moment to complete activities or study. If you do not require daily activities to be completed, they may try to do everything in one day, usually on the weekend or just before the chapter activities are due that week. Then, they do not fully grasp the material, and this makes it more difficult when they tackle new material, which depends on previous material. This happens in my face-to-face classes too, but it's much worse online.

Another faculty member articulated a similar concern, addressing the online "buffer" created between the instructor and students:

Many students struggle with keeping up in a language course, but in an online course, it is more difficult to know whether their struggles stem from difficulties in language learning, challenges with technology, time on task, personal issues, etc. Being online is sort of a buffer that makes these discussions more difficult.

As such, the participants attributed the students' inability to maintain the overall pace of the course to poor learning outcomes and by extension lower quality instruction. This finding demonstrates that some faculty did not want to

engage in online teaching, because they felt it would be detrimental both to their teaching and to students' learning.

Increased Academic Dishonesty

The last concern stated by several faculty members in the interviews relates to academic dishonesty. The faculty referenced students drawing help from more advanced peers, but the increased use of online translators was the primary concern. Multiple faculty members explained how students are relying on online translators as a means to complete assignments in online courses:

“Online translators are going to be the death of me. They are destroying the minds of our foreign language students. They equate translating online with language learning.”

“I find that many more students use online translators in an online course, probably because they are more accessible, and they don't have to worry about me looking over their shoulders.”

“Students are looking for the path of least resistance, especially if they do not intend to continue studying the language next semester. So, they use online translators to just get through the assignment, and they learn nothing.”

In this manner, faculty described how the online environment enables students to substitute original work with online generated materials using tools such as translators. By doing so, students are not able to achieve the same learning outcomes and thus, online language learning results in lower quality skill levels.

Discussion

The study reported here aimed to investigate various factors related to faculty members' decision to adopt online instruction. With regard to faculty demographics and online teaching experience, the study found that relatively few of the 24 participants had experience in teaching completely online courses. Only three full-time and three part-time faculty participants had taught online previously. Other studies in the broader field of higher education have reported higher percentages of faculty experienced in online teaching experience, 39% reported by Wright (2014). In terms of language programs, faculty from Romance languages reported online language teaching experience in the department investigated here (French, Italian, and Spanish), and three of the six were from the Spanish program. This finding supports the national survey findings from Murphy & Johnshoy (2017), which indicate that 62% of the reported online language enrollment draws from Spanish alone.

An unexpected finding of this study was that many faculty reported having taught hybrid or blended courses (70.8%). When asked about hybrid teaching, one faculty member indicated that, “Teaching a hybrid course, instead of an online course, is a lower risk opportunity to experiment with online activities and teaching.” Another offered this explanation, “It allows you to maintain some face-to-face contact with the students, which is extremely important in language learning.” Consistent with IDT (Rogers, 2003), which highlights the role that trialability plays in adopting a particular innovation, this study captured faculty members' preference to experiment with hybrid courses as a means to entering the field of online instruction.

In relation to motivating and inhibiting factors and perceptions of quality in online instruction, the study identified seven interrelated themes that shaped the participants' decisions whether to participate in online instruction. Aside from not feeling pressured to teach online, these findings are consistent with previous research (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Shea, Pickett, & Li, 2005; Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008; Wright, 2014; Zhen, Garthwait, & Pratt, 2008). In particular, while academic leaders in higher education have increasingly accepted online learning as being as good as or better than face-to-face instruction, 71.4% (Seaman et al., 2016), the participants of this study reported negative perceptions of quality that were explicitly linked to deficiencies in addressing students' language learning needs.

This study is also distinct from others, because it highlights the personal nature of the decision-making process, which draws heavily from the interrelated motivating and inhibiting factors. Many participants framed their decisions to teach online in terms of perceived relative gains and losses, and some participants referred to this as “individual return on investment”. Much has been written about return on investment provided by online courses and programs from an institutional perspective, including discussions of institutional cost effectiveness (Jung, 2003), financial return on MOOCs (Valentin, 2015), and cost evaluation of professional development opportunities (Elliott, Rhoades, Jackson, & Mandernach, 2015). The findings of this study extend this line of thinking to better understand the individual faculty member's decision to teach online.

Conclusions

Within the context of the department under investigation, this research was successful in identifying seven interrelated factors that drive faculty decisions to teach online: (a) favorable perceptions of increased flexibility and convenience afforded by teaching online, (b) the personal nature of the decision to teach online, (c) availability of training and technical support, (d) not feeling pressured to teach online, (e) a philosophical opposition to teaching online, (f) negative perceptions of increased time and work needed to develop and teach online courses, and (g) perceptions of inferior learning processes and outcomes in online instruction. Collectively, these factors may be framed as return on investment, which highlights the individual faculty member's assessment of the gains and losses expected when teaching online. This aggregate reconceptualization is important, because, as this study illustrates, most faculty decisions to teach online were not based on one factor alone.

Also, the context of this study demonstrates that an institutional desire to increase online courses and programs does not directly transfer to faculty desire or willingness to do so. If universities want to increase online offerings, they should plan more intentionally to mitigate the concerns of faculty. Similar to evaluating potential return on investment for the institution, attention is needed on the faculty members' individual return on investment. Therefore, when encouraging faculty to engage in online instruction, a more personalized approach to incentivizing them to do so may be needed. In particular, the perceived quality of learning processes and outcomes in online instruction is paramount in the decision to teach online. If this obstacle is to be overcome, more research is needed to demonstrate high quality, online learning outcomes across academic disciplines.

Last, based on the limited context of the foreign language department under investigation and the small sample size, the findings of this study are not readily generalizable to other contexts. Also, based on the voluntary nature of participation, the results may be biased. It is possible that the faculty who participated in this study did so because they were more experienced in online or hybrid teaching, and they were attracted to the focus of the investigation. Similarly, the data collected through the survey and the follow-up interviews were self-reported, which may call into question their validity. Future research should attempt to mitigate concerns for validity by conducting larger scale studies across multiple universities.

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Appendix A: Survey results

Motivating factors for adopting online instruction	Mean	Standard deviation
Q14: Teaching language courses online provides more flexible learning opportunities for students.	3.38	1.13
Q15: Teaching language courses online provides me with more flexible working conditions.	3.75	1.51
Q16: Teaching language courses online provides opportunities for extra compensation.	3.58	1.10
Q17: I feel pressured by competitors to teach language courses online.	2.79	1.18
Q18: I feel pressured by the university to teach language courses online.	2.38	1.41
Q19: I feel pressured by my colleagues to teach language courses online.	2.04	1.20
Q20: I feel pressured by my students to teach language courses online.	1.88	1.03
Q21: Teaching language courses online is my own personal decision, not a requirement.	3.71	1.30
Q22: I derive personal satisfaction from teaching language courses online.	2.67	1.27
Subsection results	2.91	1.24
Inhibiting factors for adopting online language instruction	Mean	Standard deviation
Q23: I am philosophically opposed to teaching languages online.	2.58	1.28
Q24: I feel anxious about my abilities to teach languages online.	2.25	1.11
Q25: Teaching languages online is more frustrating than face-to-face courses.	3.21	1.06
Q26: Teaching languages online is more work than face-to-face courses.	4.13	1.03
Q27: Teaching languages online takes more time than face-to-face courses.	4.13	.95
Q28: The time it would take to teach a language online would be better spent on other work.	3.17	1.46
Q29: I am concerned about a loss of control over teaching and learning in an online environment.	2.79	1.32
Q30: It is difficult to learn the technology needed to teach online.	2.17	1.20
Q31: It is difficult to obtain technical support to teach online.	2.08	1.14
Q32: Teaching languages online is not rewarded in the tenure and promotion process.	2.88	.85
Subsection results	2.53	1.05
Faculty perceptions of training and support	Mean	Standard deviation
Q33: When I need technical support, I am able to obtain it.	3.75	1.26
Q34: Funding is available to attend professional development to support my development as an online instructor.	3.58	1.31
Q35: I have had opportunities to observe other faculty members who teach online language courses.	2.71	1.43
Q36: I have the necessary technical (computer) skills to teach online language courses.	3.80	1.10
Q37: I have had opportunities to learn how to develop the technical (computer) skills for teaching online language courses.	3.58	1.38
Q38: I have the necessary pedagogical skills needed to teach online language courses.	3.63	1.13
Q39: I have had opportunities to learn how to develop the pedagogical skills for teaching online language courses.	3.42	1.41
Q40: I have the necessary knowledge to develop instructional materials for online language courses.	3.42	1.28
Q41: I have had opportunities to learn how to develop instructional materials for online language courses.	3.25	1.48
Q42: I prefer to receive one-on-one training to develop my online skills instead of attending workshops.	2.67	1.09
Subsection results	3.38	1.29

Faculty perceptions of quality	Mean	Standard deviation
Q43: There are pedagogical advantages to teaching languages online	2.79	1.32
Q44: I feel the quality of online language course content is at least as good as a traditional face-to-face course.	2.71	1.23
Q45: I am able to create deeper comprehension and understanding of the content when I teach online.	2.08	.93
Q46: I feel the quality of instruction in an online language course is at least as good as a traditional face-to-face course.	2.75	1.22
Q47: I feel the quality of language learning outcomes in an online language course is at least as good as a traditional face-to-face course.	2.54	1.06
Q48: I feel the quality of student's work in an online language course is at least as good as a traditional face-to-face course.	2.79	1.32
Q49: I feel students will use more innovative technology in an online language course than they would in a traditional course.	3.29	1.40
Q50: The advantages of teaching languages online far outweigh the disadvantages.	2.42	1.18
Subsection results	2.67	1.21