Parnaz Goodarzparvari

SWOT analysis to evaluate the integration of online education with a participatory approach in the field of art

Abstract

Problem Definition: The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis is one of the strategic planning approaches used to evaluate the status of a plan or strategy. The strengths describe which aspects of a topic or part of an organization are superior and what distinguishes it apart from the competitors. The weaknesses stop the effectiveness of a strategy at its desired level. Moreover, the opportunities indicate the desirable external factors which can provide the target strategy with a competitive advantage, while threats point out to the factors that are likely to harm the organization or its strategies. It should be noted that this method, in addition to the strategic planning, is generally employed in the situation analysis. In fact, this analysis is considered as an effective tool for identifying the environmental conditions and internal capabilities of a system.

Objective: The present research is based on the collected experiences of online education in the field of art, especially with practical content, which has been proposed and employed as an effective strategy in the field of education along with in-person training on the basis of the coronavirus pandemic conditions and its limitations.

Research Method: The current study has been conducted by collecting a questionnaire and analyzing the data in an indirect manner with the aim of avoiding the inclusion of tastes in the research findings. The SWOT analysis las been also performed using a quadruple standard worksheet.

Results: The research has been mainly focused on the use of creative methods by the teacher to induce the spirit of active participation and collaboration in order to enhance the learning experience of the students. It is known that the practical skills training is not possible except through the synergistic interactions resulting from active participation. The results illustrate the importance of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy in achieving the desired results for the novel techniques.

Keywords: Art education, Online training, Active participation, SWOT analysis

1. Department of Visual Communications, Faculty of Arts and Architecture, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran..
p.goodarzparvari@iauctb.ac.ir

26

Introduction

During the early years of the 21st century, institutions, economics, society, political structures, and even individual lifestyles have undergone new changes. Recently, the shift from an industrial to an information-based society and that from production to services have significantly affected the demands of the professional applications. Education experts have come to the conclusion that not only the existing programs and plans for the future, regardless of the type of educational environment planned, should be based on a careful study of future trends in the society, but the educational methods and strategies also need to be transformed. Over the past decade, the growth opportunities in online education have increased not only for the public institutions of higher education but also for non-profit or private universities. Analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) provides a framework for training managers to better focus on meeting the needs of their community. Although, at first glance it seems that this analysis method is to be used in business applications, the idea of using this tool in educational environments is not entirely new. For example, Finegold and Gorsky (1991) proposed this method to increase the enrollment and social participation in education or in activating regional colleges. This analytical approach is one of the management tools that was originally intended for the industry. However, due to the fundamental similarities in the administrative duties of the relevant executives, they can often be used for the training purpose as well. This strategy is a general tool designed to be used in the preliminary stages of decision making and strategic planning in various types of programs. Therefore, if used correctly for an educational structure, especially in the analysis of teaching methods, it can illustrate the current state of the structure in relation to the target community, other communities and atmospheres in which students enter.

Understanding the external factors (including threats and opportunities) along with an internal examination of the strengths and weaknesses will help shape future vision and appropriate decision making. Given the importance of rapid evaluation of the training methods, such foresight becomes the task of rejecting or approving a method in a short period of time, and educators seek to discover worthy programs and replace redundant and irrelevant programs with innovative ones and related guidance. The first step in the SWOT analysis is to create a cross-page worksheet, which includes four sections (quarter analysis) for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The next step is to list specific items related to the problem, under the appropriate heading on the worksheet. While presenting the structure, objectivity, clarity and focus on the discussion of strategy are very important because otherwise they may lead to misguidance or the analysis may be strongly influenced by the policy and personality. It should be noted that three distinct attitudes (positive/participatory, negative/non-participatory and neutral/indecisive) are considered while working in a team in the educational

27

environments. The main purpose of this study is to combine online education with collaborative art education using some theoretical approaches. One of these approaches is the participatory education. The participatory teaching approach, which is commonly used in other departments or disciplines, has been used to promote communication between art students. In fact, the main reason for choosing this theoretical approach is to reduce the impact of online-learning, to individualize the student and to increase the interaction between students in the classroom. In this matter, art education is essentially an element of the unity of online and participatory education approach. Therefore, the interdisciplinary effect of this strategy is targeted. For this reason, the use of online classrooms and computer lessons in art education is the basis for planning and preparing for the education.

Research Method

The present research has been implemented in the video communication course 2 during the master's degree. The project of the practical part of this course was to design a website in a specialized field. The current research has been done in the direction of practical training and implementation of the related project. At the beginning of each research cycle, a profile questionnaire was completed based on the students' opinions and without direct planning that leads to the orientation in the answers. Based on the results of this questionnaire, the students were subdivided into groups in a planned and imperceptible way cooperating on a participatory and online group task. All communications for this task had to be done online. Since feedback is an important part of the research method based on the practical question that is followed, the students participated in the feedback phase directly using an additional task. This was done as a heterogeneous online group discussion so that students could reflect on the positive and negative aspects of online group collaboration in their group. They should also have suggestions on how to improve the quality of the online collaboration experience. Considering that both research cycles involved a large number of students according to their degree (15 & 17, respectively), a large amount of feedback was received. It should be noted that due to the researcher's goal in tangible advancement of the feedback process, which was in fact an attempt to bring the results as close as possible to the students' real perceptions, the process of receiving results has sometimes been interrupted.

Research Background

Research has been conducted by evaluating online education using SWOT analysis strategy. These researches included the investigation and evaluation of the situation in the field of online and combined learning as well as the business science with the aim of assessing the situation and identifying the opportunities for meaningful research in the future. The results show that the volume and quality

28

of research in online and hybrid business education has increased dramatically over the past decade. However, the rate of progress between disciplines is somewhat unequal (Arbag, 2009). Strandova and Webernick (2015) examined the effectiveness of an online project called "First Step" with the participation of more than six thousand first-year students within the period of 2012-2014. The purpose of this study was to prove the usefulness of the project and students' satisfaction with it. The quantitative questionnaire review methods and SWOT qualitative analysis have been also used in this article. Tripati and Drapamali (2021) have also explored an online education startup that has introduced new trends in education, in particular, e-learning through visual, video and audio classes for grades 4-12, with focus on the math and science subjects. They also compared the target subject with competing samples along with their SWOT analysis.

Theoretical foundations of SWOT analytical structure

SWOT analysis is presented in the form of a four-position structure. This visual layout provides an overview of the organization's position or target subject. Although not all points may be equally important under a particular heading, they should all provide key insights into the balance of opportunities and threats, advantages and disadvantages, etc. However, the first idea for applying SWOT analysis was considered in the field of business evaluation. Today, this approach is often used by private and government structures, non-profit organizations and individuals including investors and entrepreneurs. The four aspects of this analysis are summarized in the following:

1. The strengths describe which aspects of a topic or part of an organization are superior and what sets it apart from the competitors: a strong brand, customer loyalty, a strong balance sheet, unique technology, and so on. For example, an investment hedge fund may have developed a proprietary business strategy to reverse market losses. It must then decide how to use these results to attract the new investors.

2. The weaknesses stop the performance of an organization or the effectiveness of a strategy at its desired level. The areas needed to stay competitive are including: a weak brand, above-average turnover, high debt levels, inadequate supply chains or lack of capital, among others.

3. The opportunities refer to the desirable external factors that can give a competitive advantage to the target strategy. For example, if a country cuts tariffs, a carmaker can export its cars to a new market and increase sales and market share.

4. The threats refer to the factors that are likely to harm the organization or its strategies. Drought, for example, is a threat to a wheat company as it may cause crop failure or reduced yields. Other common threats include the increased material costs, increased competition, increased labor supply, etc.

29

Online training from the perspective of SWOT

It is undeniable that technology has changed various aspects of our lives in other ways, including education. This provides a new opportunity for educators in order to individually present the educational concepts online and to create a new way of generating income. This is especially true in the form of online education. Instructors can not only sell educational videos, but can also use the Internet as a teaching platform. One of the strengths of online education is its flexibility. Here, the instructor can present the educational materials online and teach according to his/her schedule. In this approach, there is no regular daily work and it is possible to work flexibly. Moreover, this method provides various opportunities for the creativity in the approaches. Through online education, more jobs can be easily obtained, and the instructor is not limited to work with a single organization. Hoewer, online education has several drawbacks. For example, the technology can be frustrating for some, especially for older instructors who are used to traditional approaches of teaching. Offering online training courses may not ultimately achieve the benefits that come naturally when working in a real educational institution. There is also no personal interaction with students in this approach, which makes teaching very different. At the same time, teaching and evaluating the practical skills is very complex. Online education can open many windows, especially for the career growth. In addition to teaching, educational materials can also be sold in packages, allowing students to learn at their own pace, even without supervision. Financially, there are also opportunities to earn more, but it is not uncommon for online educators to take on multiple jobs. Also, the number of operating systems that can be used for online training is constantly evolving and growing. The number of people recognizing the benefits of online education is increasing day by day, so competition can be considered as a significant threat. Those who want to provide their personal training online are independent of the competitive environment. There are also some students who are not willing to learn in a class style for fear that online education will not be very effective.

SWOT analysis of the current approach

The first step was to analyze the pros and cons of online collaboration identified by students in their feedbacks, and to combine these ideas into a SWOT analysis. The identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Achievements of SWOT analysis. Source: Author

Strengths	Opportunities
•Active participation is encouraged. •Each student is dependent on the group to succeed in doing the job. There is no need to feel isolated. •Less anxiety for shy students.	•Develop the necessary participatory skills for future work. •Achieve good / positive communication where group members submitted timely

30

Strengths	Opportunities
•Module results were successfully obtained. •No time wasted setting up face-to-face meetings. •Student collaboration is encouraged. •Workload is divided among students.	responses. This can help strengthen the group. •Meet new people - strengthen personal relationships / social interaction. •Stimulate activity. •Stimulation of motivation
Weak points	**Threats**
•Not all groups worked together as a team. •Decisions are sometimes made without the consent of group members. •Inactive and non-participating people have a direct negative impact on the group. (They put pressure on the group, they delay teamwork.) •No face-to-face contact between group members. •Lack of immediate response due to the asynchronous nature of the discussions, in which case it is difficult to clarify group issues.	•Actions (inaction) of individuals can destroy the motivation of others. •Failure to comply with the framework and specifications of the task. •Require internet access. •Lack of electronic knowledge. •Lack of interest. •Lack of planning by students. •Lack of necessary "group skills". •Reluctance to participate and teamwork. •Unwillingness to work in unfamiliar and diverse groups. •Discussion of SWOT analysis

The online collaboration approach offers an attractive set of strengths identified by the students themselves. They are not only communicating and entertaining through asynchronous learning, but are also (unconsciously) seeking active participation in their learning experiences (Browne, 2003, 245 Although this is a joint venture with time constraints due to planning a semester for a specific budget group, each individual can switch according to schedule and follow the rules if allowed. Joining a group means that students never have to touch the sense of isolation (Fisher, 2003, 227). They had a communication channel, through which they could ask for help or encourage each other if necessary. Even though the individual workload was reduced, the students were able to achieve the results of the planned module. In addition, no time was wasted while planning the appointments. The asynchronous nature of the discussions also inferred that students had time to think before participating, which could lead to less anxiety for less fluent students. Although some weaknesses (for example, no face-to-face contact) are not very serious and can be easily remedied, some of the identified weaknesses can have a negative effect if not addressed in the next steps. As soon as people delay the project by not meeting the deadlines and specifications, the rest of the group becomes frustrated and loses interest in presenting the project and achievements. This can lead to the group inability to perform the task successfully, resulting in a failed joint effort.

Online participatory activity in the field of practical art education

Today, the technological advances have led to the emergence of various tools and their use in education, which in turn contributes to the educational environment

in terms of its structural and educational characteristics and thus provides new educational trends. These tools have been developed for the improvement, durability and efficiency of learning. In order to make optimal use of them, it is preferred to consider the multimedia strategies with different tools based on new technologies more than classes in which only single tool is employed. Researches and ideas in areas such as the learning environment and use of technology in education show that the use of multimedia tools, software and strategies is a common necessity at all levels of education. The opportunities offered by an online joint venture are similar to those presented in various studies. Such activities have the potential to help active participants improve their critical thinking as well as their problem-solving skills, teamwork, negotiation, group decision-making and task management as well (McDonald, 2003, 377). Teamwork activities can also help to enhance a deeper level of knowledge, initiative and higher-level thinking (Paloff & Pratt, 2001, 125). but can also help stimulate the activity and motivation among the group members. Another major advantage is that participants are given the opportunity to develop the skills they will need in future collaborative assignments (McDonald, 2003, 377). The classes using traditional methods cannot motivate the students. Since the collaborative online activity motivates different learning styles and abilities, it enables students to learn in a personal style and thus supports learning personalization (Orhan, 2002, 68). Some of the identified threats (See Table 1 are likely to eliminate any joint effort, as mentioned in other researches. An important element of any collaboration is the active participation of all participants (Kidney & Puckett, 2003, 203). If participants are reluctant to experience collaboration, the benefits of most of the mentioned strengths and opportunities are unlikely. There are numerous reasons why participants may be reluctant to participate in a collective participation strategy. This can be due to the dissatisfaction with the group in which they are located, lack of interest in dealing with problems or lack of necessary skills in cooperation. While some students only prefer to work with people they know, others prefer to work alone because they feel that the group is holding them back. Examining the effects of using multimedia tools, it is observed that the difference between students in terms of the academic status is one of the main reasons for such a reluctance. It is also possible that people may feel very positive about this partnership, but as soon as they know it is not what they anticipated, they lose their interest. It is clear that the participants' actions (or lack of them) can be considered as a factor of formation of the motivation or lack of it for other people. The lack of proper group planning / strategy seems to be the greatest threat in this area. In general, the strengths and opportunities of this online collaboration approach can be a fundamental improvement in the learning experience, while the lack of awareness of identified weaknesses and threats can lead to failure. In order to create an effective and efficient online collaboration environment, it is important to design ways to eliminate or minimize the impact of these factors.

32

Factors affecting the level of constructive and active participation

The students made various suggestions for improving the participatory assignments in the future. These suggestions were divided into three categories, including the suggestions for individuals, for the group and for the course instructor. The main suggestions for each category are listed in Table 2. It is important that an advanced participatory strategy is designed around current strengths, while providing attractive defensive moves to address these weaknesses and reduce the impact of identified threats. When learning takes place in a blended learning environment, the instructor has the opportunity to combine the best aspects of online and face-to-face mode to form an ideal practical training program. Although the online collaboration approach has several strengths, it can be further enhanced through combining it with some face-to-face interactions. Unfortunately, most students do not have much experience in participation and in most cases are not aware of the positive impact it might have on their learning experience. They should be aware of the strengths and opportunities of collaboration and how to help improve their learning experience. They also need to learn how to interact online with their peers. The in-person dialogue is an ideal approach for such an orientation (Fisher, 2003, 227). The use of multimedia tools and software suggest a more systematic learning method and at the same time addresses more students (Gunter, 1994, 35). Hence, the instructor will have the opportunity to encourage students (Kelly, 2004, 53) and guide groups on how to approach their tasks, emphasize certain aspects that need to be considered and explain the evaluation strategy (Fisher, 2003, 227). The orientation session can also be used to organize groups and give students the opportunity to meet their group members face-to-face

Table 2. Suggestions for future collaborative assignments. Source: Author

For students individually	For groups	For teachers
•Regular participation. •Prepare in advance. •Individual responsibility. •Patience in the face of heterogeneous environmental conditions. •Confidence to talk and ask for help	•Regular and improved online communication sessions. •Schedule face-to-face meetings. •Scheduling simultaneous online meetings. •Develop a group strategy. •Learn from mistakes.	•To be more "seen" online. •Provide individual feedback to groups. •Involve students in organizing groups. •Initiatives to increase participation. •Educate students to use discussion forums. •Further class discussion about homework assignment. •Creating opportunities for preliminary evaluation during the training process

33

Many of the identified weaknesses and threats can be removed if the groups plan their practical strategy with proper planning, and if all students are required to participate in a timely and regular manner online (Kelly, 2004, 53 It is recommended that groups use a face-to-face meeting to discuss project specifications, select a group leader, plan their approach and agree on group deadlines. Initially, they will design a group strategy that must be written and signed by all members of the group. This code of conduct acts as a contract between the members of the group and should also reflect the expectations that are expected from each group member regarding active participation and individual responsibility. It may not only stimulate the activity and motivation of the group, but also increase the commitment of group members to the achievement of task objectives. Unfortunately, due to the educational reasons and poor basic education, many students lack the necessary skills to succeed in a participatory environment. As a result of time constraints, students may have limited opportunities to develop the skills needed to succeed in a shared environment. One way is to give them the opportunity to practice in small group discussions or group work to practice these skills. Although these discussions/tasks are related to the class topic and not to a specific collaborative task, students get more opportunities to interact with their group members and practice their collaborative skills. This can help groups build a learning community (Paloff & Pratt, 2001, 125 which is likely to improve their online collaboration skills. In addition, there are several steps an instructor can take to enhance the collaborative experience. A special section of each face-to-face meeting can be devoted to discussing and responding to group questions about the participatory task. As a result, easy access to information removes a large burden from the teacher and creates opportunities for personal communication with students (Gunter, 1994, 35). The instructor should also be committed to give an individual feedback to each group at various stages of the project, probably through online group discussions. As a motivation strategy for the groups, the group that gets the highest score for the joint task can be given the opportunity to present the final product of their project to the whole class. As part of the evaluation, the group members should be given the opportunity to evaluate the participation of group members.

Conclusion

Using a completely fact-based approach, the present study showed that using student feedback can lead to increased online collaboration activities. When working with a diverse group of students, a combined approach to shared assignments can help increase their engagement. The students are given the opportunity to interact regularly with their classmates, while still actively participating in the advanced technology-based learning experience. The individual and social findings about the use of multimedia tools and software are consistent

34

with the data presented in the theoretical and practical foundations on the transition from the teacher-based learning to the approach of creating an Internet-based multimedia learning environment. In modern approaches to teaching practical art skills, the interactive use of educational materials and tools has been replaced by interactive planning of the educational environment. This is mainly due to the fact that the constructivist approach, which puts students and the interaction between them in the background, begins to play an active and efficient role in the art education system.

References

- Arbaugh, J. B.; Godfrey, M. R.; Johnson, M.; Pollack, B. L.; Niendorf, B. & Wresch, W. (2009). Research in online and blended learning in the business disciplines: Key findings and possible future directions. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 12, 71– 87.
- Browne, E. (2003). Conversations in cyberspace: a study of online learning. *Open Learning,* 18(3), 245-259.
- Fisher, M. (2003). Online collaborative learning: Relating theory to practice. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems,* 31(3), 227-249.
- Finegold, M., & Gorsky, P. (1991). Students' concepts of force as applied to related physical systems: A search for consistency. *International Journal of Science Education*, 13(1), 97-113.
- Kelly, H. (2004). Enhancing interpersonal interaction in online courses. *educational technology,* 44(1), 53-55.
- Kidney, G.W. & Puckett, E.G. (2003). Rediscovering first principles through online learning. *Çuarterly Review of Distance Education,* 4(3), 203-212.
- Macdonald, J. (2003). Assessing online collaborative learning: process and product. *Computers & Education,* 44(4), 377-391.
- Pallof, R.M. & Pratt, K. (2001). *Lessons from the cyberspace classroom: The reallties of online teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Strnadová, V. & Voborník, P. (2015). Effective online education system for first year students at the university. *International Symposium on Educational Technology (ISET)* (pp. 35-39). IEEE.
- Tripathy, S., & Devarapalli, S. (2021). Emerging trend set by a start-ups on Indian online education system: A case of Byju's. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 21(1), e2128.