IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences (IMPACT: IJRANSS)
ISSN (P): 2347-4580; ISSN (E): 2321-8851
Vol. 6, Issue 8, Aug 2018, 85-100
© Impact Journals

THE EMOTIONAL FACILITATION SKILLS OF ONLINE EDUCATORS CONTRIBUTING TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES IN PRIVATE LEARNING SYSTEMS

Carlos E. Rios-Collazo

Adjunct Professor, King Graduate School of Monroe College, New York, United State of America

Received: 06 Aug 2018 **Accepted:** 23 Aug 2018 **Published:** 31 Aug 2018

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the role of emotional facilitation—one of the four skills supporting the Mayer-Salovey Emotional Intelligence model—in the way a selected group of online professors advances positive outcomes in successful colleges and universities. The attention was placed on how the educators use emotions harnessed in their online classes to facilitate learning. The study[1] was based on a qualitative design involving a final purposive sample of (N=17) online professors employed at four distinguished American institutions. Based on the results of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), the best performing examinees were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The results suggest the respondents' emotional facilitation skills play a leading role in positive outcomes experienced in class.

KEYWORDS: *Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Connection, Inspiration, and Success*

INTRODUCTION

As collegiate institutions expand their reach, they also wrestle with the need to outdo competition (Hanover Research, 2014). In that battle, online learning plays an important function (p. 5). However, the online instruction was not always viewed as a significant factor (Economy Intelligence Unit, 2008, p. 5). In fact, the evolving vision of American academic leaders underscores the previous point. In 2002, for example, less than 50% of the industry's leadership valued online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Today, approximately 70% of academic leaders consider online learning a critical factor in higher education (p. 4). Part of the shift is associated to the growth of interactive media offering, in part, new financial options to higher learning organizations (Carr, 2012; Caruth&Caruth, 2013; Neumann & Sachar, 2003). As part of the expansion, the education industry adopted computer-mediated learning (CML) models empowering students to remotely access instructional materials, just like correspondence courses, but with the added value of bringing the participants (virtually) closer through a face-to-face effect (Arnold, 2012; Klass, 2000; Neumann & Sachar, 2003). However, with the inclusion of CML options also came issues affecting the growth of the American education market.

Background and Problem

Research shows that for the last decade the American online learning market has suffered its slowest growth (Haynie, 2014). Allum and Okahana (2014) reported graduate enrollment rates, between 2013 and 2014, remained at an insipid 0.04%. Another study focusing on (*N*=640) students enrolled in a Master of Business Administration program suggested that online students were six times more propense to drop out than traditional students (McFadden & Patterson, 2009).

Capra (2011) suggested the constant growth in student attrition, and interaction issues—between professors and students—keep eroding the efficiency of online education. A major problem, the author observed, involved professorial practices favoring limited interactions with online students. According to their survey of (*N*=249) graduate students, Fedynich et al. (2015) reported student-professor interactions had a major impact on student satisfaction. Therefore, there is an impending need to find solutions that may empower academic leaders to promote success in a hostile online education market. Emotional Intelligence (EI) appears to be a viable solution to these problem(s). Goleman (1995; 1998; 2002), Ghanrawi et al. (2013) and others insist that EI is a predictor of success. Hence, exploring the power of EI in online learning promises answers to the problems considered earlier.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study pivoted on a bifurcated model (see Figures 1a and 1b below). And, the theoretical design is based on the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2002) EI system that focuses on the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking (Mayer et al., 2002). Under the model's macrostructural theory (Figure 1a) the participants' use of EI in class was presumed.

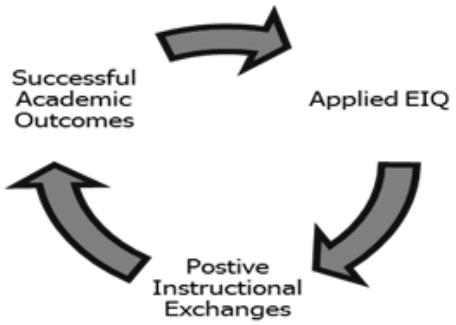

Figure 1a: Macrostructural Theory **Figure 1b: Microstructural Focus**

Supporting the above is a microstructural focus (Figure 1b) predicated on the emotional facilitation variable, which involves the human ability to combine emotions to advance cognitive activities supporting education/training, such as reasoning, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication (Brackett, Rivers, Salovey, 2011). Interpersonal communication is a major concern in this study, for it affects student retention and academic perseverance (Capra, 2011; Fedynich et al. 2015).

Emotional Intelligence: Concept and Implementation

Contrasting popular beliefs, EI emerged as a psychological theory (Matthews, Roberts, &Zeidner, 2002). A great amount of attention has been placed on the concept because it has been regarded as a predictor of success (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2002; 2009). And while EI appears to be the center of attention in mediatic outlets promoting the idea that emotional awareness is what people need today (Matthews et al., 2009, p. 3), EI does not enjoy a universally embraced definition nor a generalized technical foundation. And, despite the emergence of many conceptual theories, none confirmed if EI operated independently from other forms of intelligence. As a result, original EI literature exposed a lacuna of models capable of defining and measuring EI, as well as demonstrating its independent operability and predictability (Matthews et al., 2009; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Framing a Scientific Model

Responding to the technical silence of pioneering EI theories, Mayer et al. (1997) developed a scientific-based model offering a technical link between EI and success. Contrasting other EI supporters, Mayer and Salovey (1997) applied the principle of intelligence correlation to demonstrate how EI acted as a form of human intelligence operating independently from other types of intelligence (p. 6). Mayer et al. (1997) noted that under the intelligence correlation principle, a high correlation oftwointelligence represents the same intelligence. According to the theory, a high correlation between two variables predicts their tendency to increase and decrease together, the researchers noted. Hence, since two intelligence would be considered the same if their index level corresponded within each sampled individual, EI's independent operability as a "new" intelligence could be established by showing its potential measurability and moderate correlation with other known intelligence. Based on the previous, the researchers formulated an ability-based EI model.

The Mayer-Salovey Four-Branched Model

Developed as a four-branched model, the Mayer-Salovey approach measures how EI impacts achievement (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2000; Matthews et al., 2002; 2009). The focus is placed on assessing a person's capacity to reason with and about emotions (Caruso et al., 2000). Based on these criteria, EI measures include the ability to (1) perceive, appraise and express emotions; (2) access or produce feelings that facilitate thought; (3) understand emotions and apply the acquired emotional knowledge; and (4) regulate emotions to induce emotional and intellectual development (Caruso et al., 2000, p. 328-329; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Hence, emotions serve as stimulators while thoughts act as moderators. The previous set the foundation of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) described next (Caruso et al. 2000).

Understanding the MSCEIT: A Synoptic Description

The first ability tested in the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model involves perceiving and appraising emotions. The testing principle in this area is based on how humans learn since infancy to interpret facial expressions of emotions in others and during their growth learn to differentiate their meaning and authenticity (Caruso et al., 2000; Mayer et al., 2000).

The second concern of the test deals with emotional facilitation (Mayer et al., 1997; 2000; Caruso et al., 2000). The objective is to measure a person's ability to assimilate ordinary emotional experiences (Mayer et al., 2000) by evaluating how emotions are mentally calculated against other feelings and thoughts, and how emotions direct a person's attention, the authors explained. The test measures this skill by directing examinees to judge similarities between given emotional dynamics (e.g. love) and other experiences (Caruso et al., 2000; p. 331). The third branch of the test focuses on understanding/reasoning of emotions (Mayer et al., 2000). This ability is evaluated via a methodology in which the experience of a specific emotion is bound by a corresponding rule, the researchers advised. The predicating principle of this testing domain is that EI was thought to involve the ability to recognize an emotion, determine how it may be expressed, and reason about them (Mayer et al., 2000). The ability is measured here by asking the examinee to match a set of emotions to another (Caruso et al., 2000). The lastbranch examines how people introspectively modulate emotions and/or regulate those perceived in others (Caruso et al., 2000; Mayer et al., 2000). As Caruso et al. (2000) explained, the managing of emotions task in their EI test is concerned with "the best way to regulate emotions in oneself and other people" (p.331). Under the previous configuration, the MSCEIT objectively measures EI competencies according to task-based performance.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to offer new insights into the role of the participants' emotional facilitation skills in their contribution to positive outcomes in online venues.

Selection and Recruitment

All selected participants were required to actively serve as graduate-level faculty teaching online at successful private institutions. Institutional success was determined by selecting recruitment venues from the top 35 programs among the best 100 U.S. based institutions ranked in the US News & World Report's national survey published in 2016. The participants contributing to this study served at four organizations meeting the institutional success criteria defined earlier.

Specifically, the first group of participants was part of a faculty that included over 50% African Americans, 30% Caucasians, and close to 10% Hispanics (Allimadi, 2015). The second group belonged to a body of over 600 educators. Among them, over 40% served full time and close to 60% worked part-time. The third group was found among a group of almost 600 members of which close to 60% were no-tenure tracked. The last group of participants was part of a faculty staff of almost 300 professors, among which close to 50 educators were classified as full-time—while the rest were non-tenured. A final pool of (n=79) available candidates was identified.

Recruitment included the use of (1) Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes; (2) Proxy; (3) data provided by college officials; and (4) publicly available faculty data. All invitations were delivered via emails and none of the participants were financially compensated. Finally, upon receipt of signed consent forms, instructional e-mails were individually sent to all participants with hyperlinks and passwords giving secured access to online MSCEIT portals regulated by Multi-Health Systems.

Methodological Approach

EI literature suggested that empirical research was needed to validate the effectiveness of EI (Cleveland & Fisherman, 2009). Hence, designing a qualitative research was prudent, for it is an approach intended to help understand the meanings that people ascribe to social phenomena (Creswell, 2014). To attain a practical understanding of the role of emotional facilitation within the context of the participants' online experiences, the following research question guided the study:

RQ: *How do online educators use emotions to promote learning at successful private venues?*

In furtherance of the above, several factors were considered. First, the scope of the research was set on private institutions because they traditionally host class sizes that are significantly smaller than what is observed in public institutions. Small class sizes were expected to promote environmental conditions that were EI-friendlier than those anticipated in larger settings such as lecture halls where proximity between the lecturer and his audience is severely attenuated. Citing Richmond and McCroskey (2000), LeFebvre and Allen (2014) affirmed that educators "trained in immediacy could demonstrate more positive classroom outcomes for students" (pp. 29-30).

Second, a case study approach was adopted in this case because it facilitates answering inquiries that are not based on "why" questions and/or when researchers cannot control behavioral events contextualizing contemporaneous manifestation of studied phenomena (Yin, 2014). Specifically, a holistic multiple-case study model—which Robinson (2012) defines as "research with more than one case study but with only one unit of analysis" (p. 60) — was implemented in this process to add credibility to the findings (Robinson, 2012; Yin, 2014). Following the principles of replication logic, which is a multiple-case study concept comparable to that used in multiple experiments (Yin, 2014), semi-structured interviews were utilized to replicate individual explorations of the participants' perceptions. In that sense, the content of the participants' responses was expected to be analyzed as a single unit.

Essential Instrumentation

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso-Emotional Intelligence-Test (MECEIT)

The participants' EIQ was objectively measured with the MSCEIT. The test measured how well the participants performed tasks and solved emotional problems, rather than asking about their subjective estimation of their emotional abilities—like self-assessments do (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). Because the MSCEIT was developed from an intelligence-testing tradition, responses to the test not only represent actual abilities to resolve emotional problems, but also test scores are relatively unaffected by confounds, such as emotional state, or self-concepts (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). Moreover, the test was divided into experiential and strategic areas sustained by a four-leveled evaluative approach: (1) perceiving emotions, (2) using emotions to facilitate thought or learning, (3) understanding emotions, and (4) managing emotions (Mayer et al., 2000; 2002). In this study, all tests were administered online and typically completed in between 30 and 45 minutes.

The internal consistency of the MSCEIT is comparable to accepted intelligence (IQ) tests (Mayer et al., 2004). And, when compared with Bar-On's EQ-I test (a mix-method based self-reporting measuring device), the overall test-to-test correlation in a subsample of (n=137) was r=0.36—an indication that the two tests had about 10% of the shared variance (Mayer et al., 2004). Research on the test confirmed its overall reliability of r=0.91 or 0.93 (Mayer et al., 2004).

MSCEIT records further support a full-scale test reliability of r=0.91, with area reliabilities of r=0.90 in the experiential area and r=0.85 in the strategic area (MHS, 2015).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews represented the primary instrument supporting the research. The empirical data expected to logically connect with the focus of this investigation were elicited through open-ended questions responding to the research question guiding this study. After the MSCEIT phase, two pilot interviews were conducted prior to initiating the interview stage. EI data found in the content of the interviews framed the empirical evidence supporting the findings of this study.

Administration of Selected Instrumentation

In support of all MCEIT administrations, emails were sent to the participants with guiding instructions embedded web links with passwords set to provide secured access to individual testing portals and assigned alphanumeric ID codes. All tests were administered and collected remotely via Multi-Health Systems' server support.

Semi-structured interviews followed the MSCEIT phase. As part of the calibrating process, two pilot interviews were completed. Because all participants were domiciled in different regions throughout the United States, coordination included securing their voluntary assent to participate in consensually recorded telephonic interviews. During their interviews, the participants were asked on the record to confirm their consent to be interviewed and recorded. While on the record, the participants were exclusively referenced by their assigned research ID code (the same one assigned to take the MSCEIT) to keep their roles confidential. At the end of their interview, the participants had an opportunity to correct their statements.

Analysis of Qualitative Data: Content Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from the participants were preserved by consensually recording and transcribing (verbatim) their interviews. Content analyses were conducted, as Moretti et al. (2011) suggested, by classifying units of meaning into thematic categories (i.e. open coding). Themes and categories were processed in relation to the selected research question. In this process, coding was both descriptive and analytical. While the first case illustrated what was in the transcripts text(s), the analytical variation was based on reflecting on the transcribed expressions (p. 305). The goal was to identify similarities and differences embedded in the participants' statements to achieve a holistic understanding of their experiences. In this study, MAXQDA-12®—an professional software designed to analyze qualitative data—was used to develop codes and themes derived from the interviews.

MSCEIT RESULTS AND QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Applied Research Protocols

Confidentiality was maintained by assigning to each participant generic alphanumeric identifiers (ID codes) consisting of a hyphenated three letter prefix followed by a three-digit suffix reflecting their ordinal recruitment sequence. Out of the twenty participants (N=20) who completed the MSCEIT, three (n=3) did not participate in the interview stage; leaving a final purposive sample of seventeen (N=17) participants (21.51% response rate).

Emotional Intelligence Competence (EIQ) Results

Table 1: Total EIQ Scores

Rank	Participant	Total EIQ Score	Qualitative Range
1	CRC-007	128.21	*Strength*
2	CRC-003	122.67	*Strength*
3	CRC-018	113.24	*Competent*
4	CRC-017	106.72	*High Average Score*
5	CRC-009	106.42	*High Average Score*
6	CRC-015	106.39	*High Average Score*
7	CRC-002	105.76	*High Average Score*
8	CRC-005	105.19	*High Average Score*
9	CRC-019	103.59	*High Average Score*
10	CRC-004	102.40	*High Average Score*
11	CRC-006	100.49	*High Average Score*
12	CRC-014	91.33	*Low Average Score*
13	CRC-016	90.83	*Low Average Score*
14	CRC-013	86.59	*Consider Improvement*
15	CRC-020	84.41	*Consider Improvement*
16	CRC-001	81.05	*Consider Improvement*
17	CRC-010	–	--

Table 2: Emotional Facilitation Scores

Rank	Participant	Branch II Scores	Qualitative Range
1	CRC-002	132.21	*Significant Strength*
2	CRC-016	127.12	*Strength*
3	CRC-003	114.62	*Competent*
4	CRC-017	133.35	*Competent*
5	CRC-015	110.80	*Competent*
6	CRC-005	109.51	*High Average Score*
7	CRC-014	106.82	*High Average Score*
8	CRC-019	103.84	*High Average Score*
9	CRC-009	102.32	*High Average Score*
10	CRC-018	100.57	*High Average Score*
11	CRC-006	98.37	*Low Average Score*
12	CRC-020	96.38	*Low Average Score*
13	CRC-004	94.15	*Low Average Score*
14	CRC-013	92.58	*Low Average Score*
15	CRC-007	89.71	*Consider Improvement*
16	CRC-001	69.14	*Consider Improvement*
17	CRC-010	–	--

Note: CRC-010's results are omitted because the participant provided incomplete data

The collection of EIQ data involved online administrations of the MSCEIT. The MSCEIT helped to objectively measure the participants' EI competencies. Results used to support this phase of the study were based on total scores and area scores of the MSCEIT. Test scores were calculated as empirical percentiles supporting a normal curve with an average score of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Analyses of MSCEIT scores were construed as Mayer et al. (2002) prescribed in their user's manual. Scoring of all MSCEIT assessments was based on expert criterion because the participants were expected to be thoughtful and collected in their emotional reactions when responding to their ordinary job demands (e.g. being measured, collected, patient, etc.). In this process, seven qualitative ranges provided descriptive parameters ascribed to the scores. Qualitative ranges went from as low as a score that is ≤ 69 (i.e., "Considered Development") to the highest qualitative range score set at ≥ 130 (i.e., "Significant Strength"). Testing protocols included providing to the participant's information about the MSCEIT and sample questions attached to their email invites. Additional material (e.g. notification of assigned ID codes) and test-taking instructions were sent to the participants via email to guide access to online MSCEIT portals. As part of the results, Table 1 shows above aggregate MSCEIT Total EIQ scores of the final sample fall within the High Average score range (M=102.21; SD=12.83). Among the scores reflecting performance in the area testing emotional facilitation, the largest proportion of participants (n=5, 29%) falls within the High Average Score range (100-109). Total EIQ scores showed the largest proportion of examinees (n=8, 47%) falls within the High Average range.

Overall MSCEIT scores included four data subsets measuring the participants' ability to use emotions to facilitate thought. All scores were based on calculated comparisons between their performance and the MSCEIT's normative sample. The participants' "correctness" was scored according to pre-established expert consensus. In this case, CRC-007 ranked at the top with a score of 128.21, and CRC-001 had the lowest score (81.05). Table 2 reflects how emotions affect the participants' skills in problem-solving activities. In this area, CRC-002 had the highest score (132.31), and CRC-001 had the lowest score (69.14).

Applied EIQ: In-depth Interviews

Building on the above, the study moved towards exploring if and how the participants use emotions to facilitate learning. Semi-structured interviews advanced the exploratory interest. The responses revealed the participants purposely use emotions to facilitate learning through interactive experiences designed to promote enthusiasm and interest among their online students.

Interview Question Alpha (IQ-A)

The objective at this stage of the study was to learn how the participants interact with their online students. Pursuing the present interest was important because interactive processes in online settings affect student attrition (Brunet, 2011; Capra, 2011). The approach was designed to learn what factors influenced dynamics associated with the participants' connectivity with their students. To elicit responses to the previous concern, the participants were asked: "Describe your interactions with your online students and what concerns influence the way you provide feedback to them." The question had an open-ended structure allowing an unrestricted exposure to data reflecting emotional influences that may affect the way participants modulate feedback provided to their online students. Exploring emotional processes influencing a professor's feedback to students is vital because feedback may serve as a relational moderator. Hattie and Timperley (2007) agreed that feedback is one of the most powerful influences in both learning and academic success.

In this study, the participants were found combining communication means to reach their online students to help them connect with their course material. Also, the participants reported their use of interactive platforms to cultivate credibility and employ emotional agents, such as empathy, encouragement, and motivation.

Motivation and Encouragement*:* In this study, 88.23% of the participants spoke about motivation and encouragement. The data involved (n=38) coded segments (M=2.24, SD=1.52, 31.66%). These results find alignment with Jaschick's (2008) reports about motivational agents playing an active role in education today.

Criminal justice professor CRC-007, a woman (between 50-60 years of age) with 25 years of teaching experience employed at a prestigious university in the Northeastern region of the United States, reported her great interest in using positive emotions to promote positive academic outcomes. The participant said: "Well, certainly, my interactions (certain ones), they are via messaging, via emails…what they might need to focus on more. What they've done well. I like to let them know when they've done something well." On the other hand, Biblical Studies professor CRC-006, a male (between 20-30 years of age) with 5 years of teaching experience at a faith-based university in the Western region of the United States, reported that he adjusts his feedback and communication according to perceived student needs. The participant said: "… my feedback is meant to help them improve on that assignment for the next time…we'll probably

try a form of communication, a little more personal…we can settle it in real time: Skype, phone call, whatever." Adding to the previous, business professor CRC-002, a male (between 50-60 years of age) with 16 years of experience teaching at an urban college in the Northeastern region of the United States, was identified using different interactive processes to encourage online students. Describing his exchanges in discussion forums, the educator noted: "My remarks are usually the positive type because I'm well aware that the other students are reading my remarks to the other students because it is a public forum."

Interview Question Bravo (IQ-B)

Responses to IQ-B provided new insights on how the participants inspired academic growth and optimum student performance. In their interviews, the participants were asked: "How do you inspire your online students to grow and do their best in class?" The intention was to determine if the participants' EI was used to promote a sustainable commitment among their online students (Modassir, 2008).

The data showed the participants were concerned with inspiring their students by continuously engaging them with communication designed to keep them excited and resilient. For example, while explaining how she cultivates enthusiasm in class, CRC-007 revealed: "I try to be very much a cheerleader for them…because I do find the material, personally exciting, so I try to share that with the students. 'Wow! Isn't this great…What do you think about this?'...That type of [inaudible] enthusiasm." In her attempts to promote student resilience, criminal justice professor CRC-015, a woman (between 30-40 years of age) with 6 years of experience at a top-ranked university in the Northeastern region of the United States, explained how she combined positive language and applicable life stories in her grading feedback. The educator shared: "I give them my personal kind of introduction about what I kind of went through to get through schooling and what I'm involved in. I just try to set an example for them." Supporting the previous, CRC-002 emphasized the value of consistently engaging online students with positive and cheerful language to keep them enthusiastic. With a joyful demeanor, CRC-002 affirmed: "I think it's important to write in a way that encourages students…"

Interview Question Charlie (IQ-C)

The goal pursued at this point was to explore how the participants promote a sustained interest among online students. The question had a direct connection with Lillis (2011) and Vianden's (2015) findings of professors having a critical function in student retention and perseverance. At this juncture of their interviews, the participants were asked: "How do you keep your students interested and eager to learn, and how do they respond to you?" The responses revealed the participants ignited academic interest and commitment among their students through innovative approaches aimed to show empathy, professional credibility, and care. Enthusiastic Creativity/Innovations is the compound theme developed from content analysis.

Enthusiastic Creativity/Innovation: A total of 76.47% of the final sample described how they apply innovative instructional approaches to stimulate enthusiasm among their online students. Thirty coded segments (M=1.76, SD=1.63, 25%) were developed from the discussions. The participants eagerly shared how they motivate student interest and commitment with innovative interactive strategies. Actions aimed to cultivate their credibility and a persistent interest to empathize with their online cohorts highlighted the participants' targeted use of emotions supporting their pedagogy. Exemplifying the results, CRC-015 motivates academic enthusiasm by "making sure that all of the assignments is interesting and is going to provide them with some education that's going to be relevant to their real-life practice."

Business professor CRC-017, a male (between 50-60 years of age) with 12 years of experience at a career-oriented college in the Northeastern region of the United States, also reported the adoption of similar approaches. The participant explained: "There's a lot of things going on in the world right now that allows a professor to take those examples and insert them into the courses." Business professor CRC-003, a woman (between 40-50 years of age) with 8 years of experience teaching graduate and undergraduate cohorts at an urban college in the Northeastern region of the United States, said that she adopts instructional dynamics to encourage interconnectivity among students, the professor, and the instructed material. The participant stated:

> I keep them motivated and interested and make them responsive by picking topics and choosing assignments that seem directed to them…I use materials they can relate…it's particularly important in an online forum to connect with them in a way that they can relate to who you are and make the material relate to themselves… if you make it something that they're able to connect to, and you create a curriculum in a way that connects to them, and you chose texts that they can read and make some connection to, then education is more likely able to stick, and you have a greater opportunity for success. And I find that students respond to that very well.

Health Science instructor CRC-009, a male (between 20-30 years of age) with a professional experience of 5 years educating at a faith-based university in the Western region of the United States, said that one of the purposes of continuously engaging his online students is to encourage sustained enthusiasm. CRC-009 said:

> If they know that I'm emailing them on regular basis, giving them feedback…I think that keeps them interested because whether they hear my voice or see my written word, they see that I'm interested in them, and so that keeps them interested…So, I think that it inherently creates the interest.

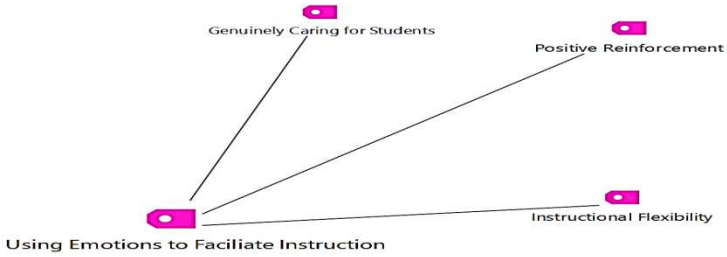

Figure 2: CTs Associated to the Participant's Emotional Facilitation Skills

Converging Themes

As part of the content analysis, converging thematic data were found repeatedly among responses linked to multiple interview questions. Figure 2 displays the following converging themes (CTs) associated to reported pedagogical practices supporting the participants' emotional facilitation skills: (1) Genuine Care for Students, (2) Instructional Flexibility, and (3) Positive Reinforcement.

Table 3 illustrates that from the themes enumerated earlier, Genuinely Caring had the highest score (n=24), and Positive Reinforcement had the lowest code score (n=6). The data previously described resulted from a content analysis of fifty-two coded segments (43%) developed from the participants' interviews.

Table 3: Convergent Thematic Indicators

Thematic Indicators	*N*	Coded Segments	Mean	*SD*	%
Positive Reinforcement	17	6	0.35	0.48	11.53
Genuinely Caring	17	24	1.41	1.33	46.15
Flexibility	17	22	1.29	1.24	42.31
Total	**17**	**52**	**1.02**	**1.02**	**100**

Positive Reinforcement: A total of 35.29% of the selected sample reported experiences related to positive reinforcement practices. Data related to positive enforcement matters involved six coded segments (*M*=0.35, *SD*=0.48, 11.53%) revealing that practicing positive reinforcement in class can facilitate a positive learning climate, encourages student performance, and/or helps to diffuse conflict. Supporting these findings, CRC-007 explained that she encourages student performance by genuinely recognizing what they do well. Complementing the previous, CRC-002 added: "…it's also important that, week after week, if a student does improve, that you acknowledge that improvement by telling the student, 'Hey, you did an awesome job. Your writing has really improved...' Things of that nature." Business professor, CRC-001, a male (between 50-60 years of age) with 16 years of experience teaching at a recognized university in the Northeastern region of the United States, explained how he relies on proactive transparency and positive reinforcement to motivate improvement and discourage students from feeling victimized when obtaining results that do not meet their expectations. Business professor CRC-001 said:

> What I do…is post the two best papers…so they (students) can reflect on what they see differences between what they've turned in and what the two better papers on my information have had. I also use that to deflect anyone who calls me and says…, "Gosh, I don't think you treated me fairly..."

Genuine Care for Students: Showing how they cared for their students is a priority for the participants. The data reflected 77% of the interviewees sharing experiences related to how they show their students how much they care for them. A total of (*n*=24) coded segments (*M*=1.41, *SD*=1.33, 46.15%) supported the findings. The participants were found leading their online cohorts by first establishing their credibility and trustworthiness. Kouzes and Posner (2007) recognized that credibility is keys for anyone seeking to lead others. Demonstrating that they had their students' best interests at heart is a relational mechanism the participants use to establish their credibility. CRC-002 answered with conviction:

> …when a student feels that a professor is genuine—and I emphasize the word genuinely—engaged with the student and the student outcomes…, you see students that improve their work, students that want to do better, students that are equally just as engaged…

Business instructor CRC-004, a male (between 40-50 years of age) with 4 years of experience serving at a diverse urban college in the Northeastern region of the United States, claimed that the positive online learning environment he promotes is attributable to his consistent demonstration (to his students) of how much he cares for them. Supporting the referenced participant is CRC-006, who shared: "I have found in my experience as an educator when I am genuinely interested in hearing what somebody has to say, it, in my experience, has not created conflict."

Instructional Flexibility: A total of 65% of the interviews suggest the participants responded to their students' needs with a flexible teaching demeanor. The results emanated from (n=22) coded segments (M=1.29, SD=1.24, 42.31%). In this area, the participants shared their desire to offer alternatives to students to help them overcome problems while protecting programmatic integrity.

The participants explained that offering flexible approaches that do not jeopardize academic integrity nor raise ethical issues are necessary to effectively help students to succeed. When warranted, the participants extend deadlines when students run into unforeseen issues to help reduce stress—a negative emotion that can affect academic performance (Veenan& Shastri, 2016).

Supporting the above is Political Science professor CRC-005, a woman (between 40-50 years of age) with 10 years of experience serving at a faith-based university in the Western region of the United States, who said: "…I really tailor my course template to be able to work with people who work outside of school." The participant noted that her inclination to afford flexibility is reserved for students showing commitment and communicate issues affecting their academic progress without delay. The professor stated: "I tend to give a lot of more grace to a student who has communicated with me." Lastly, with a cheerful demeanor and positive attitude, English Literature professor CRC-020, a male (between 70-80 years of age) with 16 years of experience teaching at a faith-based university in the Southern region of the United States, reflected on the need to be flexible to effectively lead online students. With a resonant conviction, the veteran educator said: "You got to be flexible and the time and the flexibility and just the willingness to devote time to not just students…but just any individual student who needs the help…"

CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

Student retention issues and poor classroom interaction continue to imperil the growth of online education (Allum & Okahana, 2014; Capra, 2011; Haynie, 2014). In response to these problems, the participants' emotional facilitation skills were explored. The results suggest that a healthy online education market cannot ignore the need to improve its students' experience through positive student-professor interactions.

In this study, the participants' EIQ and emotional facilitation skills surpassed average competency ranges. The foregoing factor(s) help explain why these educators refuse to act as mere course administrators favoring limited interactions with their students. Instead, the results illustrate how the participants enrich their programs by continuously engaging their online students to inspire their sustained commitment and perseverance. And through effective pedagogical practices, the participant model ways to regularly apply their emotional facilitation skills amid the increasing variety of operational challenges curtailing the growth of online education in the United States.

REFERENCES

1. *Allen, E. I., & Seaman, J. (2013). Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States (Tenth annual report in series initially known as the Sloan Online Survey, pp. 1-42). Oakland, CA: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group, LLC.*
2. *Allmadi, M. (2015, February 27). Nationally-ranked YYY College's Secret to Success: Student-centric Focus on Instruction. BSN - Black Star News. Retrieved from BSN - Black Star News.com Web site: http://www.blackstarnews.com/education/education/nationally-ranked-YYY-colleges-secret-to-success-student.*
3. *Allum, J., &Okahana, H. (2014). Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2004 to 2014. In Council of Graduate Schools (Ed.), The CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees (Council of Graduate Schools and the Graduate Records Examination). Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools.*
4. *Arnold, S. D. (2012, October). Assessing Student Learning Online: Overcoming Reliability Issues. Scholarly Article presented at the International Conference on Cognition and Exploratory Learning in Digital Age, Madrid, Spain.*
5. *Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2011). Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Personal, Social, Academic, and Workplace Success. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5 (1), 88-103.*
6. *Brunet, J. R. (2011). Distance education design: the importance of designing interaction and activity into the course. Distance Learning Journal, 8 (3), 35-40.*
7. *Capra, T. (2011). Online Education: Promise and Problems. Merlot Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 7 (2), 288-293.*
8. *Carr, N. (2012). The Crisis in Higher Education. MIT Technology Review, 111 (6), 32-40. Retrieved June 3, 2015, from MIT Technology Review Web site: http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/429376/the-crisis-in-higher-education/*
9. *Caruso, D. R., Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (2000). Competing models of emotional intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), Handbook of Human Intelligence (2nd. ed., pp. 396-420). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.*
10. *Caruth, J. D., &Caruth, D. L. (2013). The Impact of Distance Education on Higher Education: A Case Study of the United States. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 14 (4), 121-131.*
11. *Cleveland, J., & Fleishman, E. A. (2006). A Critique of Emotional Intelligence: What are the problems and how can they be fixed? (K. R. Murphy, Ed.). New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.*
12. *Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.*
13. *Economy Intelligence Unit. (2008, October). In New Media Consortium (Ed.), The future of higher education: How technology will shape learning (A Report from the Economy Intelligence Unit Sponsored by the New Media Consortium, pp. 1-32). Retrieved January 17, 2016, from New Media Consortium.org: https://www.nmc.org/pdf/Future-of-Higher-Ed-(NMC).pdf*

14. *Fedynich, L., Bradley, K. S., & Bradley, J. (2015). Graduate students' perceptions of online learning. Research in Higher Education Journal, 27, 13 pgs.*
15. *Michael A. Altamirano, A Comprehensive Approach to Emotional Intelligence: A Theory in Relation to Online Learning, IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Engineering & Technology (IMPACT: IJRET), Volume 5, Issue 8, August 2017, pp. 61-74*
16. *Ghamrawi, N., Shal, T., &Ghamrawi, N. (2013). Leadership Performance of Emotionally Intelligent Subject Leaders. Educational Research, 4 (2), 143-152. Retrieved July 3, 2016, from International Research Journals Web site: http://www.interesjournals.org/full-articles/leadership-performance-of-emotionally-intelligent-subject-leaders.pdf?view=inline*
17. *Goleman, D. (1995). Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. New York, NY: Bantam Books.*
18. *Goleman, D. (1998). What Makes a Leader? Harvard Business Review, Best of HBR, 82-91.*
19. *Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). Primal Leadership: Realizing the power of Emotional Intelligence. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.*
20. *Hanover Research. (2014, March). Trends in Higher Education, Marketing, Recruitment and Technology. In Hanover Research (Ed.), Academic Administration Practice (A report on academic trends and developments in higher education, pp. 1-27). Retrieved November 16, 2016, from Hanover Research.com Web site: http://www.hanoverresearch.com/media/Trends-in-Higher-Education-Marketing-Recruitment-and-Technology-2.pdf*
21. *Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The Power Feedback. Review of Educational Research, 77 (1), 81-112.*
22. *Haynie, D. (2014, January 15). Study: Online Learning Sees Slowest Growth in a Decade [News Report on Education]. Retrieved June 6, 2015, from U.S. News & World Report Web site: http://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2014/01/15/study-online-learning-sees-slowest-growth-in-a-decade.*
23. *Jaschik, S. (2008, November 6). In Inside Higher ED (Ed.), Evaluating the Adjunct Impact. Retrieved from Inside Higher ED Web site: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/11/06/adjuncts*
24. *Klass, G. (2000). Plato as Distance Education Pioneer: Status and Quality Threats of Internet Education. First Monday, 5 (7). Retrieved June 4, 2015, from First Monday Web site: http://ojs-prod-lib.cc.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/775/684#author.*
25. *Kouzes, J. M., Posner, B. Z. (2007). The Leadership Challenge (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (Original work published 1945).*
26. *LeFebvre, L., & Allen, M. (2014). Teacher immediacy and student learning: An examination of lecture/laboratory and self-contained course sections. Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 14 (2), 29-45.*
27. *Lillis, M. P. (2011). Faculty Emotional Intelligence and Student-Faculty Interactions: Implications for Student Retention. Journal of College Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 13 (2), 155-178.*

28. *Matthews, G., Roberts, R. D., &Zeidner, M. (2002). Emotional Intelligence: Science & Myth. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.*
29. *Matthews, G., Robert, R. D., &Zeidner, M. (2009). What We Know About Emotional Intelligence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.*
30. *Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). One - What is Emotional Intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications (pp. 3-31). New York, NY: BasicBooks.*
31. *Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2000). Chapter Eighteen: Models of Emotional Intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), The Handbook of Intelligence (pp. 396-420). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.*
32. *Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2002). Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test: User's Manual. North Tonawanda, NY: Multi-Health System*
33. *Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2004). Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings and Implications. Psychological Inquiry, 15 (3), 195-215*
34. *Mayer, J., Brackett, M., & Salovey, P., & (2004). Emotional Intelligence: Key readings on the Mayer and Salovey model. Port Chester, NY: Dude Publishing.*
35. *McFadden, C., & Patterson, B. (2009). Attrition in Online and Campus Degree Programs. Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 12 (2).*
36. *MHS.com. (2015). Multi-Health Systems. Retrieved from MHS.com Web site: http://www.mhs.com/product.aspx?gr=cli&prod=msceit&id=overview*
37. *Modassir, A. (2008). Relationship of Emotional Intelligence with Transformational Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. International Journal of Leadership Studies, 4 (1), 3-21. Retrieved September 17, 2016, from Regent University Web site: https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/ijls/new/vol4iss1/IJLS_V4Is1_Modassir_Singh.pdf*
38. *Moretti, F., van Vliet, L., Bensing, J., Deledda, G., Mazzi, M., Rimondini, M., Zimmermann, C.,... Fletcher, I. (2011). A standardized approach to qualitative content analysis of focus group discussions from different countries. Patient Education and Counseling, 82 (3), 420-428.*
39. *Neumann, Y., & Sachar, M. (2010). Twenty Years of Research on the Academic Performance Differences Between Traditional and Distance Learning: Summative Meta-Analysis and Trend Examination. Merlot Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 6 (2), 318-334.*
40. *Robinson, D. (2012). A Comparative, Holistic, Multiple-Case Study of the Implementation of the Strategic Thinking Protocol and Traditional Strategic Planning Process at a Southeastern University. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL.*
41. *Veenan, N., & Shastri, S. (2016). Stress and Academic Performance. The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 3 (3), 71-82.*

42. *Vianden, J. (2015). What Matters in College to Students: Critical Incidents in Undergraduate Experience. Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 52 (3), 287-299.*

43. *Yin, R. K. (2014). Case Study Research: Design and Methods (Applied Social Research Methods) (5th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.*