The Impact and Process of Transition from Face-to-Face to Online Teaching During a Pandemic: A Grounded Theory Approach

Steven Busby, PhD, FNP-BC
*Associate Professor, Gordon E. Inman College of Nursing
Belmont University, USA*

Elena Wong Espiritu, PhD, OTD, OTR/L, BCPR
Associate Professor, College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences
Belmont University, USA

Marnie Vanden Noven, PhD, DPT, PT, ATC, CSCS
Associate Professor, College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences
Belmont University, USA

Jenny R. Mills, MSIS, MA
Professor & Director, Medical & Health Sciences Library, Thomas F. Frist, Jr. College of Medicine
Belmont University, USA

Julie W. Hunt, MSSW, LCSW
Associate Professor & Director of Field, College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences
Belmont University, USA

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic required a "rethinking and retooling" of many educational interactions, especially in schools that offer primarily face-to-face educational models. The sudden necessity for altering teaching formats and styles created challenges and opportunities for faculty and their students. There is little understanding of the impact the abrupt switch had on faculty and students, or the process by which the transition took place. The purpose of this study was to develop a theory about the impact on and the processes used by faculty for implementing online education in response to the pandemic. A total of 24 faculty members from a private southeastern university in the United States that primarily uses a face-to-face educational model were interviewed. The grounded theory methods of Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Charmaz (2014) were used to inform the inquiry. The unexpected transition to online teaching impacted faculty and students personally, professionally, and academically. Faculty readiness to teach online was highly dependent on perceptions of self-efficacy, which in turn affected their perceptions of the transition. Study findings reinforce the need for university administrators to provide faculty with structured pedagogical support, specifically, technological and instructional design assistance, dedicated time to learn and incorporate instructional changes, and mental

health services to care for themselves and their students during times of crisis. Determining the process by which the transition took place provides insight regarding both transition facilitators and barriers, which can inform future educational delivery and evaluation.

COVID-19 Pandemic Forcing Shift to Emergency Remote Teaching

Beginning in Spring 2020, educational institutions were faced with deciding if and how they were going to continue teaching and learning while simultaneously keeping their faculty, staff, and students healthy considering the evolving COVID-19 pandemic (Hodges et al., 2020). Ultimately, many institutions unprecedentedly shifted from in-person classroom teaching to online learning, all within a very short time (El Firdoussi et al., 2020; Gigliotti, 2020). This move resulted in educators experiencing significant challenges as they learned new technology and applied different pedagogy so they could continue teaching while also managing their own personal circumstances and emotional responses to the ever-changing situation (Hodges et al., 2020; Naylor & Nyanjom, 2020).

The temporary shift in instruction methodology provided during a crisis circumstance (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) has been termed "emergency remote teaching" or "emergency remote education" which is different and should not be viewed the same as established online distance education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; El Firdoussi et al., 2020; Gigliotti, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). Online courses and teaching virtually can be a very effective way to deliver content; however, developing this type of course typically takes six to nine months to ensure systematic models are utilized during the design and planning stages and requires different skills than traditional teaching (Baldwin et al., 2018; Hodges et al., 2020). Additionally, a significant indicator of a faculty member's readiness to teach online is the number of preparation days given to make the transition (Scherer et al., 2021). Unfortunately, faculty were not afforded the time and not all faculty possessed the skills needed for this type of careful and intentional course design (Gigliotti, 2020). Some institutions were more prepared than others for the transition. For those already adopting online teaching pre-pandemic, some faculty had the benefit of online training in best practices for teaching online, and some institutions were prepared to roll out additional training programs quickly (Jarvie-Eggart et al., 2023). For those at more traditional institutions that focused on in-person instruction, the overnight move to "emergency remote teaching" forced many instructors to make the move without training or with minimal support (Martinho, 2021). This qualitative study was undertaken to explore the process of rapid transition for faculty from face-to-face to online teaching at the university during the COVID pandemic.

Literature Review

Challenges to Shifting to Online Teaching During the Best of Times: Pre-Pandemic

Pre-pandemic studies show that the transition to online teaching can be challenging in the best of times. Some factors that influence a faculty member's perceived success or difficulty in making the shift to online teaching include prior experience, attitude, institutional support and training, and discipline. Prior to the pandemic, the shift towards online education was already happening, with approximately 35% of post-secondary students participating in distance education, approximately 17% of students enrolled in online education exclusively, and online degree program enrollments increasing from 2012 to 2017 at public four-year (nearly 60%) and private nonprofit (greater than 66%) institutions (Gigliotti, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). However, despite this movement, the percentage of faculty who had never taught online pre-pandemic remained high at nearly 46% (Gigliotti, 2020). As the number of semesters teaching online increases, a faculty member's ratings of self-efficacy to teach online

increases (Horvitz et al., 2015). More specifically, faculty members with at least five or more years of online teaching experience demonstrate increased self-efficacy and readiness in course design, classroom management, communication, and technical competencies compared to those with little to no experience (Horvitz et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2019; Scherer et al., 2021). Therefore, because having experience teaching online is a significant factor in a faculty member's ability to make the sudden shift to remote teaching and many faculty members did not have online teaching experience, some faculty members may have experienced increased challenges converting their courses to an online format (Scherer et al., 2021).

Faculty preferences between face-to-face and online teaching can also impact attitudes towards a change in delivery mode. Faculty new to online teaching often experience negative emotions regarding the transition and experience of online teaching, whereas faculty with experience often view online instruction to be superior to face-to-face instruction (Samuel, 2021). Only nine percent of faculty report preferring to teach primarily online compared to 51% preferring to teach in-person with some online components (Galanek & Gierdowski, 2019). A faculty member tends to be more successful in making the transition from in-person to online teaching when they possess a desire to teach online, a willingness to learn, openness to change, and view the shift as an exciting opportunity with the potential to teach virtually in the future (Horvitz et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2019; Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021). This growth mindset is crucial because teaching online tends to take more time, requires the faculty member to obtain new skills, and to assume additional roles beyond content expert such as course designer/manager, mentor, and facilitator of student engagement (Martin et al., 2019; Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021). Alternative attitudes in response to moving teaching online are resentment, decreased self-efficacy, and lack of control leading to disillusionment, ambivalence, and frustration (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021).

Challenges to Shifting to Online Teaching During the Pandemic

Regarding the transition to emergency remote instruction, faculty perceptions differed according to discipline, online instruction experience, and participation in training programs (Ilgaz et al., 2023), however there were some universal challenges in these unique circumstances including the integration of technology, internet issues, lack of interaction, lack of motivation, external distractions, and increased workload (Seraj et al., 2022). Because faculty did not have the luxury of time to prepare for the overnight transition to an online format, many instructors opted to initially use many of the same activities they used in their typical face-to-face classroom, while simultaneously trialing some online tools such as online lectures, group activities, and discussion forums (Martinho et al., 2021). Faculty also reported taking on additional roles and responsibilities beyond being subject matter experts—such as counselor and facilitator—as they spent more time intentionally communicating with students to create personal connections and a sense of community (Egan & Crotty, 2020; Martin et al., 2019). Finally, despite spending an increased amount of time preparing for teaching online, faculty reduced their expectations of students related to the amount and quality of work in consideration of the challenges that the students were experiencing (Egan & Crotty, 2020).

Most faculty members and students reported negative views on the shift to emergency remote teaching and learning (Watermeyer et al., 2021). For many faculty, they experienced a loss of work/life balance as working from home blurred the lines between their personal and

professional lives (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Faculty members, particularly those who were caregivers, felt overwhelmed as they navigated responsibilities and stressful life situations occurring in their personal lives while simultaneously making the transition to online teaching (Ensmann et al., 2021; Ramlo, 2021). Professional boundaries were challenged as faculty were working longer hours to prepare and modify their content, spending more time communicating with students, often sending individualized emails, and feeling obligated to be always available to students around the clock (Egan & Crotty, 2020; Watermeyer et al., 2021). The "boundless online classroom" (Egan & Crotty, 2020) led to stress, burnout, mental health strain, and isolation, especially as students became more dependent on their instructors in the absence of peer interactions and faculty felt disconnected from their academic communities (Egan & Crotty, 2020; Perrotta & Bohan, 2020; Ramlo, 2021). Additional negative outcomes from the shift to online teaching specifically related to tenure and promotion include the potential impact of decreased research productivity and poorer course evaluations, despite faculty devoting extra effort and attention to teaching and the students (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021).

As faculty made the shift to emergency remote teaching, it was crucial for them to have training, available resources, and support from their institutions. Trainings on best practices for student interaction and engagement and course management ideas were needed early in the process so that instructors could focus on what would be most beneficial for students, particularly for those faculty members who were teaching online for the first time (Horvitz et al., 2015). Also, faculty found it more helpful to have technical support on demand, available anytime and anywhere, as opposed to workshops (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021). Finally, depending on the institution, some faculty had access to well-established instructional technology departments who provided support for online teaching and tools; however, overall, due to the quick transition to online teaching, many instructors did not receive training and converted their classrooms with minimal support (Gigliotti, 2020; Martinho et al., 2021).

Finally, discipline and previous offerings of online programming may have also influenced a faculty member's willingness to embrace online teaching (Horvitz et al., 2015; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Professional and graduate programs viewed online teaching more favorably as they had previously been offering distance learning and hybrid education (Horvitz et al., 2015). However, the quick shift without adequate time for preparation was particularly difficult for those in liberal arts, humanities, and disciplines that involved performance and practical skills such as labs, creative arts, and clinicals (Horvitz et al., 2015; Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021; Ramlo, 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021).

While faculty from various institution types faced challenges during the emergency transition to online teaching, the literature suggests that faculty perceptions differed greatly depending on the faculty member's level of preparedness to teach online, their confidence, and institutional support. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine the impact on and process for transition of teaching/learning methodologies from a primarily face-to-face delivery methodology to that of all, or nearly all online during the recent COVID-19 global pandemic. The study adds to the literature by focusing on traditional institutions that primarily offered in-person instruction pre-pandemic and were not well prepared to make the shift to online teaching.

Therefore, the research question for the project was: What was the process of rapid transition for faculty from face-to-face to online teaching at the university during the COVID pandemic?

Study Design and Methodology

Research Design

      The study authors employed Corbin and Strauss' (2015) qualitative grounded theory approach for this project. The methodology was chosen because grounded theory is best applied where little is known about a topic, and where there is an interest in an actual process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Little was known about the transition to on-line learning in institutions where the teaching primarily employees a face-to-face model. This may impact a faith-based institution to a greater extent, as strong faculty-student relationships are a hallmark of teaching pedagogy, and where a sudden shift in that pedagogy may threaten that environment. Since this was an area where little was known and since grounded theory is an excellent method for discovering process, it was chosen. Grounded theory allows for the narrative and graphic depiction of findings to help identify and explicate concepts and determine relationships that exist between them.

Recruitment

      Following institutional IRB approval, faculty were sent an email inviting them to participate in the study. Participant inclusion criteria were faculty and adjunct faculty who had been employed and teaching at the institution since no later than fall of 2017. This particular inclusion criterion was employed to ensure that faculty members had served at the institution sufficient time to have become accustomed to the environment, culture, and expected pedagogical standards. Mid-way through the interviews, researchers realized that faculty members of diverse backgrounds were not well-represented, therefore, considering theoretical sampling, additional email invitations were sent targeting those faculty members, resulting in several more minority faculty members being recruited. Potential participants were emailed two consent forms (participation and recording), signed, and returned prior to the interviews. Three emails were sent to all faculty members, not including the additional email sent to faculty from diverse backgrounds.

Data Collection

      The research was conducted at a medium-sized, faith-based university in the southeast. Interviews were conducted during the 2021-2022 academic year using the Zoom platform. While there were at least two research team members present during each live interview to ensure transparency among the research team and participants, the principal investigator posed the questions due to his expertise in qualitative research and interviewing. The primary interview questions posed were: 1) What was the impact of the transition from face-to-face to online teaching/learning on you as a faculty member, and on your students? 2) What was the process you used to make the change to online teaching? However, as the interviews progressed, it was clear that participants had strong ideas about techniques that did and did not work well. Therefore, after several interviews and through the iterative process of refining the interview, questions were posed to subsequent participants about what worked and what did not.

Interviews ranged from 20-45 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded and the MP4 files were uploaded into the NVIVO software, where transcription was performed. The combination of recording and transcription allowed researchers to return to original recordings when transcript fidelity was questioned.

Data Analysis

NVIVO software was used to organize and manage data for analysis and the interview transcripts served as the raw data. Data were analyzed using Corbin and Strauss (2015) methodologies. To increase credibility and improve transparency, all coding and analysis sessions included at least two research team members. In many cases three, and as many as five team members were present during analysis sessions. In keeping with acceptable qualitative research procedures, analysis was on-going, occurring after every two to three interviews allowing the team to determine developing patterns and reflexively ask additional questions suggested by the analysis.

Data were analyzed using an initial line-by-line analysis, and open-coded to name words, phrases, or larger sections. As more interviews were conducted, and thus more data available, incident-to-incident coding was performed to allow for comparison and contrast of like situations. As data became more voluminous, codes were sorted into larger groupings, and as necessary, a more abstract name applied to capture the intent of the larger data group. More than 500 open codes were managed. As greater numbers of codes emerged and relevance of codes determined, larger concepts emerged that became the building blocks of the final theory. Each of the large concepts was composed of properties (of the concepts) and the properties, as explicated by the interviewees, had dimensions which further described the properties. This method led to thick, rich description of the data. The final overall theoretical structure was developed from the eight large concepts with axial coding used to determine the relationship between the concepts.

Rigor

Adhering to Corbin and Strauss' (2015) methods and the principal investigator's extensive experience in qualitative research and grounded theory development, including contributing to the last edition of Corbin and Strauss (2015), improved the study rigor. Also, data management through the NVIVO software resulted in an excellently maintained audit trail and decision-making record. Because all recordings and transcription were uploaded into NVIVO, coding was completed within the software for a clear record of events and NVIVO's memo feature was utilized. After each coding session, and in some cases, during coding sessions, memos of agreed upon outcomes were documented, providing a clear and transparent trail of decision-making. Interviews and analysis were completed over a 10-month period to allow for immersion in the data and avoiding being rushed.

Results

Participants

A total of 24 faculty members participated in the research study. Demographics were captured and included age, ethnicity, identified gender, rank, college association, years teaching at any four-year institution, and years teaching at the current institution. Also, percentages of teaching online and face-to-face and knowledge-based vs. skill/application-based were collected. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for extended demographics.

Table 1

Categorical Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Categorical variables	n	%
Race		
African American	2	8.3
Caucasian	20	83.3
Chinese American	1	4.2
Hispanic American	1	4.2
Gender		
Female	15	62.5
Male	9	37.5
College		
Entertainment & Music Business	2	8.3
Business	2	8.3
Health Sciences	5	20.8
Science & Mathematics	8	33.3
Liberal Arts & Social Sciences	3	12.5
Pharmacy	1	4.2
Theology	3	12.5
Rank		
Adjunct	1	4.2
Instructor	1	4.2
Assistant Professor	8	33.3
Associate Professor	8	33.3
Professor	6	25.0

Table 2

Numerical Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Numerical variables	n	Mdn	M	SD	Range
Age	24	49	49.9	9.6	35 – 64
Yrs. Teaching 4-Year	24	16	17.1	10.2	5 – 42
Yrs. Teaching at Institution	24	9	13.9	9.5	4 – 34
Typical Percent In-Person	24	100	94.1	11.5	50 – 100
Typical Percent On-Line	24	0	5.9	11.5	0 – 50
Percent Knowledge-Based	24	75	72.1	17.8	40 – 100
Percent Skill/Application-Based	24	25	27.9	17.8	0 – 60

Major Concepts

Qualitative analysis is both described narratively and graphically depicted to allow the reader to follow the explanation for concept depiction and theoretical structure. Major concepts, along with any corresponding properties and dimensions conveyed in the narrative analysis are displayed individually (Refer to Tables 3-11), and collectively in the overall theoretical structure (Refer to Figure 1). Because the data were too voluminous to narratively describe, only major concepts, properties, and dimensions are explicated in the tables. However, a complete audit trail and decision-making memo set were maintained and could be made available upon request.

Change in Mode

Participants referred to the change in teaching methodology from mostly face-to-face to completely online by describing a complete change in mode of the approach to and delivery of course content. The *Change in Mode* from the basic pedagogical culture of face-to-face classroom teaching to one of fully online in a matter of several weeks proved difficult for most participants (Refer to Table 3). Since the transition and mode change occurred over spring break, not only was there increased workload, but the purpose of spring break was negated and there was an incredible amount of "decision-making" that occurred in a short period of time. While faculty wanted to "maintain content integrity," they found that the situation called for a "reassessment of assignments" and content could not be delivered in the same way. They felt they had to use "pre-recorded videos" in addition to real-time online teaching. They also felt "unprepared," not preparing as they would have liked, and that the mode change was simply "draining." One participant said," I changed how I prepare for class every day, because I knew I had to have my dog and pony show ready to go." One participant said, "I lost my enthusiasm for teaching." Others found some benefits including some participants saying that having knowledgeable and experienced faculty allowed for helpful "collegial consults."

Table 3

Concept of Change in Mode

Concept	Property	NVIVO Exemplar
Change in Mode	*Reassessment of Assignments	
	*Maintaining Content Integrity	
	*Collegial Consult	
	Faculty Constrained by Tech Contract	
	Fear of Evaluation	
	Loss of Semester Break	
	Unprepared	
	Decision-Making	
	Lack of	
	Overwhelming	
	Departmental Direction	

Collegial Consult		
Drained	"It was chaotic. It was personally, emotionally draining."	
Unprepared		
	"I changed how I prepare for class every day because I knew I had to have my dog and pony show together."	
	"I lost my enthusiasm for teaching."	
	"I love working with students. I love being in the classroom. I love office hours. I love engaging with this population. And you know, one email over spring break just kind of took that away from us."	

Online Teaching

       Following *Change in Mode,* faculty commented on the actual *Online Teaching* process (Refer to Table 4). Participant comments under this concept provided for several properties. First, participants suggested that there was a "financial burden" that the faculty had to bear including setting up and providing for "home office needs," with dimensions such as product licensing, improved internet service, and materials. Another property was "technology" with dimensions ranging from feeling that "Zoom" was a superior platform to others, that they "needed to practice," and that they were "learning from colleagues." An additional property of this concept was "pedagogical changes." Dimensions of this property included needing to "target the audience" more specifically, to "engage quiet students" because the online format allowed them to disappear into the background, and to break instruction up into more sections.

Table 4

Concept of Online Teaching

Concept	Property	Dimension	NVIVO Exemplar
Online Teaching			
	Home Office Needs		
	Use of Pre-Recorded Video		
	Financial Burden for Faculty	Materials/Licensing	
	Technology	Zoom Far Superior to Others	
			"…without the nonverbal and oftentimes verbal feedback, I just

			really kind of felt out on a limb."
		Bad Evals Related to Tech Issues	
		Needing Practice	
		Learning from Colleagues	
	Pedagogical Changes	Targeting the Audience	"…this is about them; this is not about you right now."
		Engaging Quiet Students	
		Chunked Instruction	

Self-Efficacy

Participants felt that the degree to which they felt able to perform well was driven by several recurrent ideas that were expressed. The large category housing these properties and dimension was determined to be the faculty members' *Self-Efficacy* (Refer to Table 5). There were several properties that made up this category. Since many faculty needed to make the change from face-to-face to online with little experience, they expressed the fact that their "lack of hands-on skills" made it difficult to jump in and be immediately effective. Some suggested that they were able to make this change only because they had experience teaching online and that "previous online experience matters" regarding being able to make the transition on short notice. The perceived lack of self-efficacy among participants many times revolved around the lack of teaching skills or the fact that they experienced a host of "tech issues." The property of "tech issues" had several descriptive dimensions including being "comfortable or not" with technology. Participants expressed appreciation for the university instructional technology department as having been a big help in negotiating the increased technological environment. One participant suggested that there were cases where students intervened to help smooth out technical issues.

Other participants expressed psychological and emotional ramifications of feeling under-prepared, suggesting that the change caused a serious "loss of style" in their typical teaching that decreased the effectiveness of their teaching. One participant shared, "I just couldn't do it, it was the worst teaching year of my career." Others suggested that they simply had to let go of some of the angst by simply "accepting imperfection."

Table 5

Concept of Online Teaching

Concept	*Property*	*Dimension*	*NVIVO Exemplar*
Self-Efficacy			

*Previous On-line Experience Matters			
Lack of Hands-On Skills			
Loss of Personal Style			
Accepting Imperfection			
Tech Issues	Level of Comfort		
	IT Helped		
	Student Intervention		
			"I became a more compassionate teacher, leader, person, parent….because I saw not only what I was going through……on a daily basis, but my colleagues – young faculty, older faculty, students"
			"….just couldn't do it….just worst teaching year of my career."

Communication

Participants were clear that the need for *Communication* was important, and it emerged as a category (Refer to Table 6). They stated that there was a clear "change" in how communication was handled, including increases in "frequency" and the addition of "modes" including "email," "phone," "text," "Zoom," "Group Me," "Blackboard," (educational platform) and others. Participants stated that there was a greater need for "cohesion" and a greater "need for clarity" in communications. They also stated that they felt the need for "engagement" to the point of feeling "pressure" to do so, and to the extent that one participant felt she was "mothering" students. She said, "I became much more of a mother…and less of a teacher in the rest of that semester."

Table 6

Concept of Communication

Concept	*Property*	*Dimension*	*NVIVO Exemplar*
Communication	Change	Modes – email, text, phone, zoom, Bb, Group Me	

		Frequency and Volume	"I had PTSD with my phone ringing…dinging"
Need for Clarity Engagement		Mothering	"….I became more of a mother….less of a teacher in the rest of that semester."
			"So, I felt like there was a huge need….to counsel students as much as its teach them during that time."
Cohesion Connections		Pressure to Establish Maintain Encourage Check-In	
			"Initially, I think part of the process was just listening to students to understand their needs."

Perception of the Transition

It was clear from participant comments that the *Perception of the Transition* involved whether the focus of the comment made by participants was from experiences encountered early, toward the middle, or later in the transition (See Table 7). "Early" comments generally seemed to be coming from circumstances at the outset of the transition to fully online teaching, which occurred in spring of 2020. Data that appeared to be coming from experiences in the middle of the transition were generally felt to be coming from experiences toward the end of spring 2020 through early fall of 2020. Later experiences were focused generally on the mid-fall 2020 to spring 2021. These timeframes are only estimates from the data. Another concept emerged that could not be easily placed into a clear timeframe. The concept of "student disengagement" was considered a stand-alone property of the *Perception of Transition* concept.

Early in the experience, faculty felt that the transition was "sudden" and very "anxiety-producing", and it left faculty feeling like they were "scrambling" to plan the rest of the semester. Some faculty were "supportive of the administration" and its decisions during the transition, but some felt that decisions could have been conveyed in a timelier manner and were therefore "not supportive" of those decisions. During, or in the middle of the transition, faculty

found teaching and interacting with students "very difficult" and experienced significant "reduced job satisfaction." Later during the pandemic, faculty seemed to get their footing to some degree, with some faculty suggesting that it "wasn't terrible" and that they "enjoyed the challenge." Faculty also felt however, that subsequent semester performances suffered with one participant saying, "And the stress affected them more in the second year than it did that first spring." Some administrative decisions that were made regarding student grading, however, were not supported by faculty. One such decision was to allow students to accept a pass/fail grade for their lowest grade to prevent undue impact on grade point averages.

The property of "student disengagement" could not be clearly linked to a timeframe under this conceptual heading. It nonetheless was clearly tied to the idea of the actual transition. Faculty felt that previously engaged students became disengaged because of the sudden and unexpected shift, especially because many students chose the university because it has traditionally relied on face-to-face teaching methods with classroom interaction. One participant said, speaking about the perceived engagement of students before and after the transition, "…feeling like students were engaged…in most of my sections…being very interactive, to being painfully not."

Table 7

Concept of Perception of Transition

Concept	Property	Dimension	NVIVO Exemplar
Perception of Transition (Early)	Sudden		"it was jarring in the sense of going from a face-to-face format which I'm very comfortable with, to a virtual format."
	Anxiety Producing		"…rocked my world." "It was very anxiety inducing."
			"I didn't die in the fall, I thought I might in the beginning, but I made it."
	Scrambling		
	Supportive of Administration	Preparation Time	
	Not Supportive of Administration	Communication of Decisions	
(During/Middle)	Very Difficult		
	Reduced Job Satisfaction		"I was so tired of hearing the word "pivot"."

			"If I look back at it, it was just trying…tread water." "I've taught a long time, and the spring where we were finishing and the following semester were hands down the most stressful times for me professionally."
(Late)	Not Terrible		
	Not Supportive of Administration	Pass/Fail Allowance	"And that was so very irritating to me to communicate that. They weren't failing because of the pandemic; they were failing they weren't doing they're work."
	Enjoyed the Challenge		
	Student Disengagement	Watching TV	"…and the stress affected them more in the second year than it did in the first spring."
			"…feeling like students were engaged……. being very interactive, to being painfully not."
			"…so he was on the Zoom while skiing."
			"The engagement of students changed significantly, which influenced delivery. I felt more like I had to entertain them than I have ever felt in my teaching career."
		Running Errands/Driving Lower Expectations Unaccounted for Students Poor Subsequent Semester Performance	

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Impact on Faculty and Students

The first interview question generated data regarding the impact that the transition had on both the faculty and their students. What emerged from the data were points of impact that were mostly classified as falling into two categories: personal and professional. The data carry the labels *Personal/Professional Impact on Faculty* and *Personal/Academic Impact on Students* (refer to Tables 8 and 9). It is important to recall here that our interviewees were faculty members, and so the data that emerged related to student impact was completely from the view of the faculty members, because no students were interviewed for this study.

Though the impact on faculty and students was most easily sorted using labels of "personal and professional" (faculty) and "personal and academic" (students), the types of needs were different. Faculty professional issues included having been concerned about the suddenness of the need for transition, the short time to prepare for the transition, and the loss of instruction time. They were also quick to report the vast amount of time it took to make the switch mid-semester. Personal issues included physical, spiritual, and mental stressors, with one participant saying they were "…trying to help someone else, when I felt I fully couldn't help myself." There also was a financial burden that bled over into the concept of *Online Teaching* (refer to Table 4), mentioned by faculty regarding creating an environment at home conducive to teaching as well as having had to acquire some teaching materials on their own.

Challenges for students from the perspective of faculty included students feeling frustrated about various things; among them were the lack of materials and having technology issues. Regarding the lack of learning materials, the transition occurred during spring break, so many students had gone home and were not allowed to return to campus to retrieve their course materials. That posed a challenge to them. Faculty reported that students had family, personal and mental health needs during this time. Some students had returned home to find parents working from home, and schooling younger siblings, with whom they were required to help with schoolwork and caretaking. One faculty member suggested that trying to help students through this time of difficulty involved, "…hearing their horror stories, and their, kind of, cries of desperation and just kind of figuring it out."

Table 8

Concept of Personal/Professional Impact on Faculty

Concept	*Property*	*NVIVO Exemplar*
(Professional)		
Time	Required More Consuming	
	Loss of Instruction	
	Short Transition	
(Personal)		
Parenting		
Health Issues	Mental	"I had to basically go….to a psychologist and get help just to survive."
	Spiritual	
	Physical	

Financial

		"My life was falling apart in every way. It was really important to me to be calm, …and to appear….as if its somewhat of a controlled situation."
		"…trying to help someone else, when I felt I fully couldn't help myself."

Table 9
Concept of Personal/Academic Impact on Students

Concept	**Property**	**NVIVO Exemplar**
(Academic)		
Lack of Materials		
Technology Issues		
Feeling Frustration		
(Personal)		
Family Needs		
Personal Circumstances		"…hearing their horror stories, and their, kind of, cries of desperation and just kind of figuring it out."
		"I think that was a helpful reminder of how outside factors play a part in how they're successful within a class."
Mental Health Needs		

During the early interviews, participants conveyed important information regarding strategies they employed during the transition and beyond. Some of those strategies were things that seemed to work very well in the transition to online teaching. Some of them so much so, that participants said that they began to employ them in non-pandemic times as well. Others, despite their best efforts, were simply failures. Therefore, since this seemed to be important, the research team reflexively began asking subsequent participants about *Things That Worked,* and *Things That Didn't Work* (refer to Tables 10 and 11).

Things That Worked

Participants suggested that some online teaching techniques initiated because of the transition were so effective that they continued to use them even when they returned to in-person teaching (refer to Table 9). Things like, holding "virtual office hours" for student check-ins, use of external tools such as "Padlet," "You Tube," and "Grade Scope" proved to be helpful. Some participants suggested that sharing "faculty personal stories" seemed to connect with students and make them feel more comfortable sharing their own stories. Though the university had another online platform, faculty began using "Zoom," which was eventually provided for them, and proved to be very effective. "Altered teaching techniques" such as "unfolding case studies, "use of "shorter videos," and because the classroom was virtual, one participant suggested that it was easier to get high quality "guest lectures." Another faculty suggested that a "moment of

silence" recognizing the extra stress that all involved were experiencing, allowed students and faculty alike to center before class.

Table 10

Concept of Things That Worked

Concept	**Property**
Things That Worked	
Zoom	
Zoom	Breakout Rooms
Pre-Recorded Lectures	
Virtual Office Hours	
Blackboard	
External On-line Tools	Padlet
	Tablet White Board
	You Tube
	Grade Scope
Use of Faculty Personal Stories	
Altered Teaching Techniques	Quizzes
	Unfolding Case Studies
	Shorter Videos
	Lab Pre-Brief
	Student Feedback
	Hybrid Format
	Guest Lectures
Moment of Silence	
Increased Honor Code Vigilance	

Things That Didn't Work

Because new techniques had to be implemented to move from face-to-face to online teaching, some of those techniques were less than successful (refer to Table 11). The online virtual platform that the university was currently using proved to be ineffective. "Hyflex" teaching (half the students in the classroom and half online), proved to be clunky, technologically challenging, and ineffective by every participant who mentioned it. Other things like, "online group projects," "asynchronous lectures" and allowing students "screen-off attendance" to virtual classes, failed in the eyes of participants.

Table 11

Concept of Things That Didn't Work

Concept
Things That Did Not Work
Blackboard Collaborate
Hyflex Teaching
Breakout Rooms

Online Testing
Online Group Projects
Asynchronous Class
Pre-Recorded Lectures
Screen-Off Attendance

<u>Relationships and Consolidated Theory</u>

Being true to the Grounded Theory process, following the development of concepts that emerged, the research team reviewed the data for the presence of revealing relationships that existed between the concepts in a process called axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The conceptual relationships that were found to exist are depicted in the overall theoretical model (refer to Figure 1). It is notable that grayed out boxes in the theoretical structure are not considered data because the headings were imposed through the specific question asked.

It was clear early on that *Change in Mode, Self-Efficacy, and Online Teaching* were highly related. The *Change in Mode* drove the move to *Online Teaching*. Participants felt they did that well, or not, based on the degree to which they experienced *Self-Efficacy*. This triangular portion of the model carried the most similar concepts and the tightest relationships. Because of the sudden change in teaching mode, the need to teach online and the degree of self-efficacy faculty felt, rapid changes were made in teaching pedagogy and plans. It was also clear that the connection between the impact on students and faculty and teaching portion of the model (*Change in Mode, Self-Efficacy, Online Teaching*), was bridged by an extensive (and unusually high) level of C*ommunication*. That *Communication*, however, required more than communication about classes, assignments, and due dates. Out of it flowed an increased need for inter-connectedness between students and faculty and the personal, professional, and academic impact that the pandemic, and change in teaching format had on them. The perceptions they had of the transition extended beyond the early part of the change to online teaching and were labeled as *early*, *during* and *late* perceptions. This created a fluid and on-going impact on the perceptions of faculty at different times during the pandemic. These changes in pedagogy, teaching style, technology use as well as to the environment one was teaching or learning in, in addition to the societal changes, had various types and levels of impact on both faculty and students.

Figure 1 *Theoretical Model*
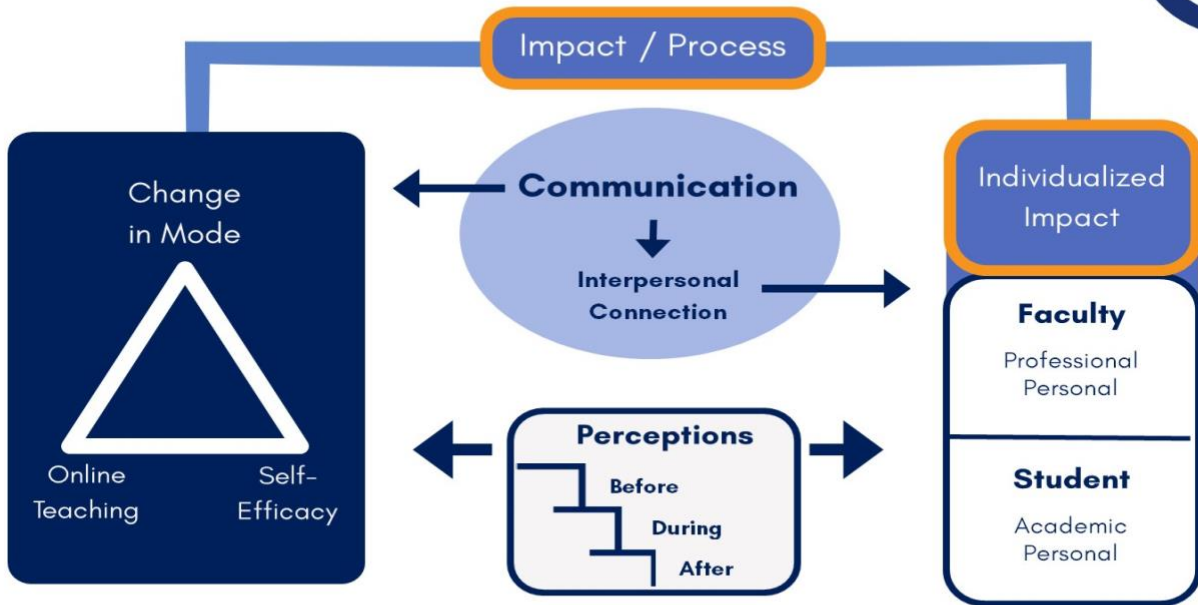
Discussion

The pandemic prompted faculty at a private southeastern university using a primarily face-to-face educational model to rapidly reimagine and implement all or nearly all courses to online educational offerings. This study interviewed faculty to determine the impact of the transition from face-to-face to online teaching/learning on faculty members and their perception of the impact on their students. Interviews also probed into the process faculty used to make the change to online teaching, and their impressions of what worked and what did not work. A grounded theory approach was utilized to create abstract categories and determine social processes utilized by participating faculty during the pandemic. Results included *Change in Mode*, *Online Teaching*, *Self-Efficacy*, *Communication*, *Perception of the Transition*, *Impact on Faculty and Students*, *Things That Worked*, and *Things That Didn't Work*. These were then integrated into a theoretical framework identifying the different relationships (refer to Figure 1). Changes faculty made to their pedagogy, teaching style, use of technology, paired with the changes in teaching and learning environments and societal changes significantly influenced faculty and students.

The Impact and Process of Transition from
Face-to-Face to Online Teaching During a Pandemic: A Grounded Theory Approach

Scherer et al. (2021) identified three different profiles of teacher readiness for online teaching and learning, including low, inconsistent, and high readiness. Each level of readiness is dependent on the teacher's degree of self-efficacy and requires a different amount of institutional support. One of the key findings of the study that was consistent with Scherer et al. (2021) was the impact of self-efficacy on the faculty member's experience with the abrupt change in mode and transition to online teaching. Faculty struggled to meet the unexpected demands of transitioning to online teaching. Some faculty reported feeling unprepared to teach online because they lacked the necessary skills or were burdened by both hardware and software technology issues. However, faculty who had experience teaching online perceived the transition to be much less challenging and stressful than faculty who had less experience, and in some cases, no experience at all (Scherer et al., 2021). This confidence while transitioning was even truer for faculty who had training in online pedagogy in addition to simply having online teaching experience.

In addition to self-efficacy, timing also seemed to impact the faculty members' transition to online teaching. Developing an effective online course typically takes six to nine months (Baldwin et al., 2018; Hodges et al., 2020). However, in this case, faculty were provided far less notice (e.g., ten days) to make the transition, leaving them without the expertise to teach online or enough preparation days to successfully and seamlessly transition (Scherer et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021). Some administrative decisions, including the timing and/or method of communication of those decisions led to faculty frustration and confusion. Therefore, in the haste to move courses online, not enough time was given for faculty to deeply contemplate and plan for the differences between online and face-to-face teaching, how to implement careful and intentional course design, and consideration given to the skills and knowledge needed by those new to online teaching (Gigliotti, 2020).

Online teaching requires different capabilities and expectations from students, teachers, and institutions and is best executed when the physical classroom is not mirrored (Gasevic, 2020). Unfortunately, this university had traditionally focused on in-person teaching and the physical classroom prior to the pandemic. Therefore, many of the faculty at this institution navigated the transition to online teaching mostly on their own, adopting a "do what you think is best" type philosophy, lacking the tools needed to make the transition successful (Schmidt et al., 2013). Faculty found that they were changing assignments, modifying teaching practices, and struggling with technology during this rapid transition. While most agreed that the university's Department of Instructional Technology (DIT) was instrumental in assisting faculty in feeling supported as they provided resources, some of the new technology faculty attempted to integrate into their courses was still not successful. Implementing new technology can be difficult in "normal" times, however, faculty at this institution were navigating the transition while worried about their own safety and the safety of their families and friends. Faculty challenges associated with the change in mode from face-to-face, in-classroom teaching to fully online teaching were not isolated to this institution. The speed of the transition, lack of online teaching experience, and redesigning courses in the middle of the semester were common challenges (Colclasure et al., 2021). Singh, et al. (2021) reported similar challenges and suggested that although higher education is past the quarantine and isolation of the pandemic, these same issues continue to impact teaching and learning practices.

The Impact and Process of Transition from
Face-to-Face to Online Teaching During a Pandemic: A Grounded Theory Approach

Despite the higher education institution and faculty's valiant efforts to continue course instruction amidst the pandemic, the sudden transition to online teaching impacted faculty and students at this institution, personally, professionally, and academically. While faculty experienced challenges and stress, students were also feeling distress during the transition. Faculty struggled with the lack of preparation and instruction time, changing their location, and acquiring the proper materials and settings needed to teach, while students struggled with a sudden return home, often lacking materials they needed for classes, and the need to navigate home environments unconducive to academic activities. These challenges were echoed in the literature (Neuwirth et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021).

For students, the sudden shift to online learning was disruptive and they perhaps received lesser quality of instruction compared to what would have been traditionally offered (Gigliotti, 2020). From the participants' perspective, for some students, they lost collaborative learning opportunities through student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions, valuable discussions with a diverse population, and may not have received the most effective teaching practices (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Ensmann et al., 2021). Also, some students were less motivated, perhaps because of the loss of peer interactions and support and missing out on more hands-on learning experiences such as tools, labs, and studios (Egan & Crotty, 2020; Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021).

There were also implications that extended beyond academics including social connections, living situations, finances, and mental health concerns. Due to online learning and being away from traditional campus life students experienced feelings of loneliness, isolation and disconnection from peers, professors, and the overall college community (Ensmann et al., 2021; Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; James et al., 2021). Participants also reported changes in living situations created challenges for students whether it be moving back home to less than ideal situations (Ensmann et al., 2021; James et al., 2021; Lederer et al., 2021), becoming caregivers and responsible for homeschooling family members (James et al., 2021; Lederer et al., 2021), lacking study space (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; James et al., 2021), or experiencing technology issues such as unstable internet (Ensmann et al., 2021; Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021). Other challenges included financial stress (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; James et al., 2021; Lederer et al., 2021) and for minority students, some experienced discrimination and health disparities related to COVID-19 (Kee, 2021; Lederer et al., 2021).

While mental health concerns were already on the rise prior to COVID-19, participants speculated that student anxiety, depression, and stress were exacerbated by the pandemic and transition to remote learning and services became even more difficult to access (Ensmann et al., 2021; Kee, 2021; Lederer et al., 2021). According to Browning et al. (2021), students expressed stress and anxiety associated with changes in education mode during the pandemic. Fear of technology, limited knowledge of software, time management issues, and feelings of isolation were issues for both faculty and students (Singh et al., 2021), and were further exacerbated for students in disadvantageous situations (Neuwirth et al., 2020). Students experienced an increased lack of motivation and further isolation (Browning et al., 2021). These experiences strongly correlate with the experiences of students in this study based on faculty perceptions and resulted in faculty feeling disconnected from their students and questioning their desire to continue teaching. However, despite so many negative effects on students reported in the literature,

participants suggested there were some positive aspects to transitioning to online learning for students including convenience, comfort, flexibility, increased resilience, and personal development as students increased their independent learning and technological skills (James et al., 2021).

While long-term outcomes from the shift to online teaching during an emergency are still to be fully understood, the literature describes preliminary positive and negative results specifically impacting future education, faculty members, and students. Specifically, as programs are shifting back to in-person learning, there are some positive outcomes related to how higher education is delivered from the emergency remote teaching experience that may be beneficial to institutions going forward (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Now that faculty have taught online and utilized new technology, they are overall less resistant and more enthusiastic to teach online, especially when they are the ones to decide which classes and determine how and what technology to use knowing that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution (Martinho et al., 2021; Ramlo, 2021). The transition to online teaching caused many instructors to reflect on their instructional practices and their assumptions about teaching online (Wargo, 2022). Further, because they have experience with using technology in remote teaching, as they transition back to face-to-face classes, faculty recognize that technology can complement their teaching, leading to continued, new, and innovative pedagogies (Egan & Crotty, 2020; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Finally, higher education institutions who solely or primarily delivered education through an in-person format, may be more open to making more permanent organizational and format changes including offering online or blended learning, therefore, making education accessible for more people (Galanek & Gierdowski, 2019; Martinho et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021). One consideration related to increasing online options could be that universities may see this as a cost-saving measure to eliminate the need for running a physical university (Watermeyer et al., 2021).

Recommendations

Now that faculty have navigated this experience successfully or somewhat successfully, there are several steps administration, faculty, and students can take to provide better community support and structure for improved online teaching and learning. One of the most important and jarring realizations during this study was the impact of the pandemic on faculty and student mental health. Study findings reinforce the need for universities to provide adequate resources, particularly online options, to help faculty and students maintain their mental health, which is critical for navigating any upheavals during a semester (Browning et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021). One such resource is adopting a trauma-informed model of care for all community members (e.g., faculty, staff, students). A critical element of trauma-informed care is recognition of trauma. This recognition requires the use of care, compassion, contact, and understanding. Starting with recognition could lead administrators, staff, and faculty to not only take better care of their students, but also each other. While all community members could benefit from care and consideration, populations at increased risk include veterans, current and former youth within the foster care system, people who identify as Black, Latin American, Indian, Alaska Native, refugee or LGBTQ, as well as non-traditional adult learners (Davidson, 2017).

Trauma-based education and training, through Human Resources or specialty areas on campus, could take place for all community members. Faculty and staff would benefit from training on recognizing student struggles, such as difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and

recalling, missing a lot of classes, challenges with emotional regulation, anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed, and withdrawal/isolation (Davidson, 2017). Faculty relationships and expressed care for students is so important and could be pivotal in addressing student needs more quickly as faculty have regular interactions with students. Student Affairs and other associated areas could provide online resources and educate faculty/staff on policies and procedures to follow when a student is in peril. Additional resources that might be of value could include safe spaces staffed by individuals who are trained to provide support and care, and counseling, support for academic success, financial help, cultural humility training, and community-wide acknowledgement of how trauma and loss can impact work environments. In addition to having a trauma-informed model of care, additional activities that could be conducted virtually like group exercise, exercise challenges, recipes, book clubs, podcast sharing, movie nights, and community service might be beneficial in promoting mental health for all (Schlesselman et al., 2020).

Another recommendation is the development of a strong Department of Instructional Technology (DIT) and Teaching Center for colleges and universities that do not already have them. Both the Teaching Center and DIT at this institution were present and extremely active during the shift to online teaching. The Teaching Center focused on developing meaningful online pedagogy, however, unfortunately, the faculty's inexperience with online technology and varying student attendance and engagement made pedagogy challenging. The DIT was helpful in assisting faculty develop viable replacements for previously hands-on learning activities and suggesting ways to maintain online attendance that balances rigor and compassion (Neuwirth et al., 2020). However, both departments were understaffed. The DIT has since increased instructional design staff to coach and mentor faculty and added new resources such as video capabilities, instructional media production, curriculum development, technology integration, and technology-enhanced learning experiences. In addition to being fully staffed, it would also be helpful to have institutional assistance with faculty actively engaged in best practices for working and teaching from home and helping faculty transition to working online and providing online technology support, awareness, and education to students (Johnson et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021), and ensuring that participation is encouraging and a means of professional development, and not punitive.

Finally, administration could work with faculty, staff, and students to best meet needs, especially for at-risk faculty, staff, and students who experienced increased stress and anxiety with the change in education mode (Browning et al., 2021). Shared decision-making, a clear process for communicating plans, and employing equitable support systems would be very helpful (Lederer et al., 2021). Additional benefits could include flexible work schedules and locations for faculty and staff, offering more online courses, online mental health services, assistance with childcare and childcare available on campus, improved and expanded technology offerings, improved technical security, and training to support colleagues and students.

Limitations

Faculty in this study represented a convenience sample and were not randomly assigned to participate, instead self-selecting. Also, to increase representation, follow-up recruitment emails were sent directly to self-identified diverse faculty. Therefore, the results of this study may not represent all faculty members' experience with the transition to online teaching. Additionally, this was a qualitative study where all responses were retrospective and limited by the memories of

participating faculty. Finally, while participants reported increased levels of psychological distress, because this study focused on qualitative responses to the pandemic, no quantitative standardized measures of stress, anxiety, depression, or well-being were used.

Conclusion

The time of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent semesters was personally, professionally, and academically challenging for faculty, students, and administration as they navigated uncertain times. A grounded theory approach was applied to this experience through interviews with faculty, enabling researchers to determine the impact of the transition from face-to-face to online teaching/learning on faculty members, their perception of the impact on their students, the process faculty used to make the change to online teaching, and their impressions of what worked and what did not work. Based on the results, the researchers then gleaned related concepts to inform recommendations that could be used by universities to better address not only the challenges that students and faculty faced during the pandemic, but also to prepare for future challenges. Support and understanding for faculty and student mental health along with adequate preparation for engaging and teaching in an online environment are of utmost importance. Although administrative policies were central to the struggles and successes of faculty and students during this time, future strategies that prioritize development of an engaged and caring community that actively looks out for one another is imperative.

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