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Understanding the Lived Experiences of Instructors Establishing Teaching Presence in Online Higher Education Programs in Jamaica

Venesse Morrison-Leon

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Understanding the Lived Experiences of Instructors Establishing Teaching Presence
in Online Higher Education Programs in Jamaica

by
Venesse Morrison-Leon

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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This applied dissertation was submitted by Venesse Morrison-Leon under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Beverly Knox-Pipes, EdD
Committee Chair

Jaime Arango, EdD
Committee Member

Kimberly Durham, PsyD
Interim Dean

Statement of Original Work

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Venesse Morrison-Leon
Name

March 2, 2023
Date

Abstract

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Instructors Establishing Teaching Presence in Online Higher Education Programs in Jamaica. Venesse Morrison-Leon, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: teaching presence, community of inquiry, online learning, social presence, cognitive presence, student engagement, distance education

Online programs are growing exponentially; the structure, program design, and instructional strategies used determine learner success and the viability of online programs. Instructors are expected to demonstrate competence as online facilitators, creating an educational experience that meets the demands of 21st-century teaching and learning. In turn, learners are expected to demonstrate readiness for learning. The community of inquiry (CoI) model was used as the framework to understand the phenomenon of establishing teaching presence and the implications in improving learner success.

There is a paradigm shift in teaching and learning online, and many universities and colleges see this as an opportunity to create niche markets and augment new horizons. However, learners may not naturally have the proclivity to manage and direct their learning, and stimuli for learning are not always packaged to guarantee learner success. For this research, understanding how teaching presence is established in higher education classrooms in the Jamaican context was explored. The CoI model was instrumental in measuring learners' engagement in both synchronous and asynchronous environments.

The exploration identified trends, characteristics, patterns, and behaviors of online instructors establishing teaching presence in higher education classrooms in Jamaica. The research investigated how online instructors establish teaching presence in synchronous or asynchronous courses, exploring the fundamental principles that they use to keep students motivated and engaged online. The probability that learners are successful hinges on the climate created by instructors and the quality of the course design, thus increasing the overall mandate of how instructors establish teaching presence.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Online education is no longer seen as a trend for higher education but a necessity, with over one third of all college students engaged in online programs (Dhawan, 2020). In meeting the demands of online learning, the design of online programs must consider teaching presence, one of the three tiers of the community of inquiry (CoI) model for online learning (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence is the blueprint for the planning, designing, and implementation of the educational experiences students anticipate (Anderson et al., 2001). Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) posited that establishing teaching presence improves the metacognitive skills of students and reduces the attrition rate of students in online programs.

Teaching presence consists of three elements: direct instruction, facilitating discourse, and course design (Garrison et al., 2000). It requires more than visibility online; instructors must be competent in facilitating learning as well as being able to establish teaching presence so that the learning outcomes are met and students are satisfied with the educational experiences. "The relationship between instructor and student is at the heart of the learning process" (Pearson, 2016, p. 2). Instructors should be trained to establish teaching presence so that they can guide the process of instruction. The literature posited that universities that invest in programs to increase instructors' presence improve learner success. When instructors spend time teaching and making themselves available to learners, learning gains are predictably higher (Lancaster & Lundberg, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The Research Problem

The problem for this qualitative study was that in a higher education institution in Jamaica, online course design does not yet meet quality standards as

outlined by the standards of the University Council of Jamaica and the National

Standards for Quality Online Learning (NSQOL). This teacher training institution in

Kingston, Jamaica, is one of the oldest teacher training institutions, at 180 years

(National Heritage Trust, 2011). It provides teacher training for adults nationally and

regionally and is the largest teacher training institution in the western hemisphere.

Establishing teaching presence in higher education courses is important for learner

success, yet course design lacks evidence of strong teaching presence. All online

courses delivered in Jamaica must meet the established NSQOL established by

standards of the University Council of Jamaica and the NSQOL (2007).

Powell-Wilson (2017) reported that the Council of Community Colleges in

Jamaica was given the directive to increase the number of programs being offered

fully online to Jamaican students. This proposal was endorsed by the Ministry of

Education, Jamaica, and given as part of the goal to fulfill the Jamaica 2030

sustainable development goals and strategic vision (Planning Institute of Jamaica,

2018). It is envisioned that a world-class education must be provided to all Jamaicans

(Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2018), and access to education positively impacts the

probability of the country's productivity and gross domestic product. Providing

programs that offer fully online delivery contributes to an educated population and is

seen as one avenue to alleviate poverty. This plan to lessen the impact of poverty and

develop a more educated population proposes that empowered people require

significant education and training. Offering fully online programs at this Kingston-

based teacher training institution of higher education in Jamaica is envisioned as the

means to this end (Giovetti, 2022).

Since 2010, online learning in higher education has skyrocketed by 30%, and

it is predicted that this will continue to grow given the effect of the Coronavirus 2019

(COVID-19) pandemic (McGraw, 2021). This research study was designed to guide course developers in the process of how to develop quality online course programs by exploring how instructors designed their online courses. The study specifically focused on establishing teaching presence to improve course development and thereby positively impact learner success following the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000). This research explored the lived experiences of how instructors developed and established teaching presence in online courses in this Kingston-based teacher training higher education in Jamaica. The institution serves a population of over 2,500 students and 150 instructors. The results inform key stakeholders, course designers, course writers, course coordinators, policymakers, educational institutions, educational associations, and the Ministry of Education in Jamaica about key components required in the design and delivery of quality online courses that impact teaching practice and learner success in online learning environments in Jamaica.

Phenomenon of Interest

Teaching presence in the higher education classroom is a phenomenon worth exploring in the Jamaican context. Teaching presence is one of the three tiers of the CoI framework, established by Garrison et al. (2000). Anderson et al. (2001) suggested that teaching presence acts as the blueprint for the planning, designing, and implementation of the educational experiences students anticipate. Improving the teaching presence of the instructors directly impacts the metacognitive skills of students and reduces the attrition rate of students in online programs in Jamaica.

Background and Justification

In 2014, when online programs were formally introduced to this Kingston-based teacher training university as part of its strategic objective, over 2,500 students and 150 lecturers who were engaged in face-to-face programs resisted transitioning to

an online format for the delivery of instruction. The resistance was based on instructors and students being asked to teach and learn in an unfamiliar environment. Based on their trepidation of the virtual environment, a program evaluation of the online program development processes and the framework used to design courses was commissioned by the Online Learning Unit to identify the reasons for the resistance. The evaluation considered the quality of the course design compared to the NSQOL and the CoI framework to determine how teaching presence is crafted in the design of the courses and how it is operationalized in the online environment. The results indicated a lack of quality in the course design.

The following issues were noted in the survey data: lack of quality in the design and development, lack of teaching presence in the online learning environment, and lack of students' feeling of connectedness in the online learning experience. Some students reported that the lack of human presence impeded their online learning success. Results from a Student Satisfaction Survey 2018/2019 revealed that teaching presence in the online learning environment was needed. The evaluation prompted the researcher to use the university setting to study the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica so that the phenomenon and the benefits of establishing teaching presence could be understood by key stakeholders. A Steering Committee report from the university in 2018 also recommended that mechanisms were needed to foster improved teaching presence, as student success was predicated on evidence of the presence of instructors. To fill a gap in the literature, this research studied the process by which teaching presence is established in online environments in this Kingston, Jamaica higher education institution.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Establishing teaching presence in online courses is seen as a new phenomenon in higher education in Jamaica, and there is a paucity of literature to support the processes of establishing teaching presence in Jamaica's online courses. Morrison-Leon (2021) suggested that online teaching presence in the Jamaican higher education classroom requires instructors to interact with learners and "promote a culture of excellence" (p. 1). The studies to support establishing teaching presence are not readily available for the Jamaican context. Searches related to establishing teaching presence and providing timely feedback were conducted at EbscoHost, ProQuest, UWILinc Library Information Connexion, Alvin Sherman Library, Nova Southeastern University, and Google Scholar. The search on establishing teaching presence yielded little to no information related to the Caribbean and the Jamaican context. The search provided peer-reviewed journal articles on teaching presence in universities in the United States but not specifically related to the Jamaican context.

Investigations were also conducted with the governing higher education quality and auditing agency, the University Council of Jamaica. Their standards for distance education (University Council of Jamaica, 2014) neither fully account for teaching presence nor refer to the CoI framework. The standards refer to the need for institutions to pay attention to the online presence of their facilitators. They suggested that discussion boards and presence in cyberspace must meet the established standards but did not provide specificity about establishing teaching presence or the global NSQOL benchmarks (University Council of Jamaica, 2014). The University Council of Jamaica standards are being reviewed and will become available for universities and colleges island wide.

The literature on how to establish teaching presence in the Jamaican context is

scarce, so this research adds to the field of study. This research investigated establishing teaching presence online in higher education, with a specific focus on the Jamaican context. Garrison et al. (2000) suggested that teaching presence must be disaggregated to fully understand its relationship to the CoI framework. Exploring teaching presence provides evidence-based information to improve the quality of establishing teaching presence in the Jamaican context.

Audience

The participants for this study were online instructors drawn from three faculties and two schools employed by this Kingston-based teacher training university college. This university has offered 16 fully online programs since March 2020. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, over 60 undergraduate courses were offered in blended modality, and all but one fully online graduate school program was offered in blended modality.

The research informed online course designers, online learners and facilitators, school administrators, and education policymakers. The research benefited all key stakeholders with data-driven information about establishing teaching presence online in higher education with a focus on the Jamaican context. Higher education administrators and policymakers in the Jamaican context became cognizant of the importance of establishing teaching presence, the rudiments of teaching presence when designing courses, and the infrastructure and technology needed for the establishment of teaching presence in the design and implementation of online courses. This study assisted stakeholders to gain insights about establishing teaching presence and how to ensure that the course design and development processes incorporate teaching presence. Findings may allow stakeholders to make decisions regarding online education policies, protocols, standards, course design procedures,

quality guidelines, and funding to develop online courses.

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this study was principal investigator. The researcher was responsible for designing the study; identifying, selecting, and creating valid instruments for the data collection; administering the instruments during the data collection process; developing and following evaluation protocols; analyzing data, presenting the findings, and creating a chain of evidence; safeguarding participants by ensuring their anonymity; and monitoring and reducing bias. This role included "explaining the study without biasing the potential participants; conducting interviews properly, according to the design; making appropriate field observations; selecting appropriate artifacts, images, journal portions, and so on; handling data per design; and analyzing and interpreting the data per the design" (Capella University, n.d., para. 10). Sutton and Austin (2015) posited that the role of the researcher in qualitative research includes attempting to evaluate the ideas and feelings of the research participants. The researcher's role was to ensure that the research agenda was articulated and followed.

As an instructional technology and distance education (ITDE) expert operating at a leading teacher training university in Jamaica serving a population of over 2,500 students and 150 instructors, the researcher's role involves designing, evaluating, and implementing instructional solutions; providing professional development; and managing online learning programs in partnership with all faculties and schools. The researcher also has over 10 years of experience working at the higher education level facilitating and managing online learning units for external colleges and serving on academic boards that offer instructional technology solutions. The researcher is passionate about ITDE and has written several articles published in the local

newspaper about issues, challenges, and opportunities in ITDE. Based on the researcher's passion and drive for ITDE, this added value to the research efforts being undertaken. The researcher was eager to undertake the challenges associated with the research to investigate establishing teaching presence at the higher education level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how higher education instructors establish teaching presence in online courses offered in one higher education setting in Jamaica. Teaching presence is critical for accessing the nexus between learning needs, pedagogy, technology (Smadi et al., 2019), and student satisfaction (Osman & Saputra, 2019). The participants for this study were online instructors drawn from faculty at three departments and two schools (the school of continuing studies and the graduate school of education) in a Kingston-based teacher training higher education institution. Participants had been online instructors for at least four semesters. The overall aim of the study was to determine how instructors who teach at a distance using online modalities establish teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica.

Definition of Terms

For this research, some key terms relating to establishing teaching presence were explored. Teaching presence from the three-tiered framework of the CoI was explored along with other related terms for greater insights into establishing teaching presence in higher education in the Jamaican context. The following terms were defined.

Asynchronous instruction requires learners to work at their own pace based on contractual timelines. Learners are not expected to communicate in real time; they are engaged continuously using guided facilitation. Scheiderer (2021) posited that

asynchronous learning allows learners to interact with instructional material at their own pace.

Best practice, according to Luscinski (2017), is "a method that has been deemed more effective than other alternatives due to the positive outcome produced. A best practice is a technique or methodology that has been shown by experience and/or research to lead to a desired result" (p. 13). Best practices are also defined as "a set of documented strategies, procedures, or methods employed by highly successful organizations to effectively achieve results in particular circumstances" (Orellana & Hudgins, 2009, p. ix).

Cognitive presence refers to the intellectual discovery of the content students are exposed to. It considers the learning experiences provided in the community of learning to construct meaning collaboratively through dialogue and intellectual discourse. The development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills cultivates the intellectual prowess of the community (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison et al., 2000).

Community of inquiry (CoI) model, according to Anderson et al. (2001), is a three-tiered approach to engaging learners using cyberspace. They suggested that the three concepts are teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. The undergirding philosophy is that learners, irrespective of their independent responsibilities and the isolation that is experienced by learners online, must collaborate with others to foster a harmonious learning environment. The concepts, even though they may be examined independently, overlap and are connected.

Distance education was defined by Moore and Kearsley (2012) as "teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as a special

institutional organization" (p. 2). It is also defined as "institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors" (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010, p. 1).

Instructional design is "the systematic and reflective process of translating principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials, activities, information resources, and evaluation" (P. L. Smith & Ragan, 2005, p. 4). Instructional design is referred to also as instructional system design or instructional system development. Generically, it is designing instructional material based on the profile of learners. The methods and strategies designed facilitate learning and academic success. The popular instructional design includes ADDIE, an acronym for five phases: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Other designs are the Kemps model, Dick and Carey, successive approximation model, guaranteed learning, and many others (P. L. Smith & Ragan, 2005). Instructional design can be traced from as early as the 1900s with prominent influences of Gagné (1985) and Keller's (2009) attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction design model.

Learner disengagement is a complex phenomenon. It includes poor academic performance, lack of interest in social activities in school, and a lack of ownership of one's learning. When these cognitive and social responsibilities are not present, learner disengagement is a risk for any institution. Greener (2018) suggested that disengagement in higher education can be seen as early as the first few weeks of the course. Teaching presence was also assessed to gain greater insights into whether teaching can provide academic support to reduce the incidences of disengagement. Balwant (2018) suggested that disengagement has to do with "students' simultaneous

withdrawal of themselves and defense of their preferred self in displaying low activation behaviors that are characterized by physical, cognitive and emotional absence and passivity" (p. 398).

Learner success occurs when learners achieve their educational goals in an institution (Brunton & Brown, 2020). Learner success in the context of online learning depends heavily on the learner's expectations, goals, and purpose. The indicators of learner success consider the benchmarks established by the course design. It includes the depth of knowledge to be obtained by learners throughout a course study and is dependent on the contractual agreements established by learners and facilitators through active engagement and motivation.

Online learning is "the use of online communication networks for educational applications, such as course delivery and support of educational projects, research, access to resources and group collaboration" (Harasim, 2012, p. 27). Online learning is also defined as "education that takes place over the Internet. It is often referred to as 'elearning' among other terms" (Stern, 2018, p. 1). When the primary mode of teaching and learning is done using electronic technology and media, it is referred to as online learning (Hejase & Chehimi, 2020; Tamm, 2023). Online learning can take place synchronously and asynchronously or a combination of both. It is seen as part of distance learning.

Phenomenology was developed by Husserl (1965) as the "science of science" (p. 23). It examines the substance of a thing and provides the essence for other sciences and the other sciences neglect to examine things using the same degree of detail. Furthermore, Husserl (1981) explained that phenomenology is the "science of consciousness" (p. 12). Zahavi (2019) defined phenomenology as "the science or study of the phenomena" (p. 1)

Social presence allows learners to develop relationships that will drive learning activities based on the design of the curriculum. Learners are expected to develop social relationships with the community of learning to stimulate meaningful interaction (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison et al., 2000). Social presence is part of the CoI framework.

Student engagement entails the quality time and effort expended by students in the attainment of academic qualifications and the efforts made by institutions to design a curriculum that would provide varied experiences for students to enhance their intellectual prowess (Chan & Bose, 2018).

Synchronous activities allow for the community of learners to be engaged in activities in real time, anywhere, and any place based on the course schedule. Scheiderer (2021) posited that synchronous learning requires students to log on at a specific time based on the course delivery schedule.

Teaching presence considers the activities teachers are engaged in to inspire and sustain learning connections throughout the study. Anderson et al. (2001) posited that learning will not happen automatically without the careful structural design of the facilitator. Students are expected to develop competence based on interaction with the other tiers of the framework, and the facilitator of teaching and learning can predict the outcome based on meaningful engagement that is cultivated. Teaching presence is part of the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Distance education dates back to the 1800s but started to progress in the 1990s with the revolution of contemporary technology. Teaching and learning online are not new, and exponential growth in the field of technology is in keeping with industrial revolutions across the eras. The Online Learning Consortium (2018) suggested that public and private educational institutions have seen improvement in their enrollment as a result of using online education to offer programs that ordinarily would not be offered using this modality. The higher education institutions in Jamaica have seen accelerated growth in online learning and have been encouraged to package their online product based on the standards established in the field of ITDE as developed by NSQOL (2007) and the University Council of Jamaica (2014). Online and distance learning in the Jamaican context became a necessity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically increased the number of online offerings. The emerging trend likely will continue to rise as online instruction provides flexibility and accessibility to quality education.

To predict the positive trajectory of online learning, institutions are focusing more on personalized learning, specialized pathways, on-demand learning, and opportunities to interest learners in continuous learning (Brain, 2020). These advantages will further support learners to see online as the future for educational engagement and resolve some of the dilemmas associated with access to higher education in the Jamaican context.

In online education, institutions and instructors alike must ensure effective educational experiences to encourage continued growth in the sector and to ensure that online learners are workplace ready (Reilly, 2021). The experiences online can signal the dawn of a new way of engaging students, and the satisfaction they

experience can expand the industry. The course design must follow the quality standards outlined by the NSQOL.

Though online learning has evolved in Jamaica, the attrition rate of students is concerning. Instructors' presence and the quality of course design can determine the throughput rate for programs. With this in mind, the CoI framework is critical to ensuring engagement is created and promoted in the community of learning. This theoretical framework was introduced by Garrison et al. (2000) and has been the cornerstone of online education for more than two decades. Teaching presence is a major element of the CoI and was used as one of the frameworks for the theoretical underpinning of this study. Additionally, teaching presence influenced the methodological analysis.

This literature review commenced with the exploration of the theoretical frameworks selected by the researcher to augment the quality of the research. The researcher selected constructivism theory and online learning, connectivism learning theory, and the CoI framework. Literature was then reviewed on blended and online learning, instructor presence, engagement and satisfaction, and faculty preparation to teach in online environments. Academic searches for literature related to teaching presence in the Jamaican context revealed very limited research. The Nova Southeastern University database containing peer-reviewed journal articles was explored along with a search for journal articles through Google Scholar and other scholarly databases. The CoI website was explored, and the reference lists of dissertations with similar interests were examined and credible references used.

References were examined for the direct and indirect match to the dissertation topic. Search words included but were not limited to *online instructors, teaching presence, teaching presence in higher education, establishing teaching presence in*

the Jamaican context, the community of inquiry, the perception of teaching presence on students' success, lived experiences online, instructor presence, and *connectivism*. The criteria for articles included in the literature review consisted of the following: (a) published within the last 5–7 years, (b) appeared in a peer-reviewed journal, (c) related to teaching presence, and (d) related to online courses. Items excluded were (a) items not related to higher education; (b) articles pertaining fully to students or other stakeholders, instead of faculty; (c) articles not published in English; and (d) articles not related to online courses.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism Theory and Online Learning

The CoI framework is grounded in constructivism. The constructivism theory suggests that learning makes meaning and constructs knowledge rather than absorbing information as docile learners. Constructivism suggests that the teaching must be designed so that big concepts and principles can be explored. Jean Piaget conceptualized constructivism in the 1930s, opining that people create knowledge when they share experiences and ideas. Piaget (1936) dispelled the notion that intellectual development is a fixed trait; instead, it is based on environmental experiences.

There are three main types of constructivism: cognitive, social, and radical. Cognitive constructivism means that learning must be linked to the learner's developmental stages so that they can utilize new information and connect them to prior learning to enhance their meaning-making. Cognitive constructivism was pioneered by Piaget (1936) and his work on cognitive development in children. This type of constructivism should be used when developing courses for online delivery, especially to create a student-centric learning environment. Quality online courses

allow students to learn the content sequentially as well as integrate information learned across content areas.

Social constructivism was developed by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizing collaboration as a central part of learning. In social constructivism, knowledge evolves from interaction with people, their culture, and their environment. The presumption is that learners depend on their peers to construct meaning.

Radical constructivism is not similar to cognitive or social constructivism. It postulates that learners and the knowledge they create reveal nothing new, but only provides information on how they operate in their learning environment. Ernst von Glasersfeld (1974) posited that radical constructivism requires learners to invent and not discover knowledge. Constructivism takes on the position that learning is based on the shared knowledge of both the instructor and the teacher and that the teacher facilitates and guides learning.

Online learning, when designed using the standards to ensure quality courses, must be guided by constructivist theory (Reid-Martinez & Grooms, 2018). The course activities should use the construct outlined in ITDE standards as well as the CoI framework. Another classical theoretical framework that must be considered is scaffolding, Vygotsky (1978) purported that learning is constructed through interaction with others. Scaffolding can be used to motivate and inspire learners to develop to their full potential. Instructors can use the structure of scaffolding to empower students to grow. Mamun et al. (2020) suggest that when scaffolding is done well in the online learning environment, online learners can use information independently. Quality online programs are predicated on the constructivist learning theory based on the tenets outlined by the theory.

There is a call for higher education to transition from instructivism to

constructivism to enhance the meaning-making of students (O'Connor, 2022).

Instructors are expected to design the lesson content to accommodate students'

dissecting the content and empower them to use the skills in real-world contexts. In

the online learning environment, constructivism should allow for exploration,

interpretation, explanation, and construction of knowledge. This happens when

instructors utilize the standards to ensure that the course content and assessment

activities demonstrate quality.

Connectivism Learning Theory

Connectivism was introduced by Siemens (2005) and Downes (2007).

Siemens (2005, 2018) proposed that technology influences the way people learn and

assumed eight principles:

1. Learning and knowledge involve diverse opinions.

2. Learning has to do with the process of connecting.

3. Learning can involve nonhuman applications.

4. The ability to learn is more important than current knowledge.

5. Connections are critical for lifelong learning.

6. Seeing connections between ideas, disciplines, and concepts is important.

7. Staying up to date is critical for all learning activities.

8. Making decisions is a type of learning.

Siemens (2018) opined that connectivism is the "amplification of learning,

knowledge, and understanding through the extension of a personal network" (para.

32). Siemens (2018) further argued, "The core notion of connectivism appears to be

that the learning process must create interconnections for knowledge that is

distributed over many actual and virtual locations" (para. 1).

Downes (2007) stated that the digital knowledge economy allows students to

know more because they have access to information. With this in mind, access to information using technology can change the way people think, behave, and learn in the virtual environment (Western Governors University, 2021). Online instructors must consider the technology that is incorporated in the course design; the technology will not account for learning, it is how the technology is incorporated that will determine how much knowledge is attained.

Connectivism means that "knowledge and learning knowledge are distributive, that is, they are not located in any given place, but instead consists of networks of connections formed from experience and interactions between individuals, societies, organizations and the technologies that link them" (Goldie, 2016, p. 5). Knowledge can be found in the networks of individuals and databases that store information. Learners are permitted to see the information through multiple lenses, and the information can be stored in any digital form.

Siemens (2004) posited that connectivism is grounded in technology and is driven by networks referred to as nodes and links, which are seen as the community of learning. The nodes are sometimes seen as places that have a reservoir of information, libraries, organizations, websites, and journals, to name a few. The underpinning of the theory suggests that learners have access to new and updated information and can decipher the information to determine the facts. Knowing how to access the information, Siemens (2004) suggested, is as good as knowing the information in and of itself. With connectivism, the technology is regarded as part of the learner's internal process once the information is accessible. Figure 1 illustrates connectivism.

For distance and online learning, the technologies are an important part of the educational experiences of the learner. Fiore (2018) stated, "Whether a student is learning in an online program or distance education course, teaching and learning can

be improved by the incorporation of connectivist learning theory," since it connects

the learner with information in the virtual environment (para. 5). Connectivism views

learning as a means of input, where short-term memory is managed and used when

needed for long-term memory. The enabling environment that complements learning

is just as important as the information (Siemens, 2004).

Figure 1

Connectivism Theory
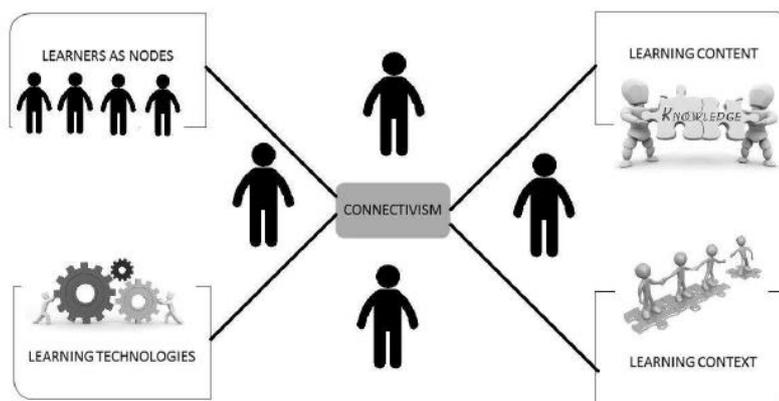
Note. From "Connectivism: Probing Prospects for a Technology-Centered
Pedagogical Transition in Religious Studies" by D. Chetty, 2013, *Alternation, 10*,
172–199. Reprinted with permission.

Goldie (2016) purported that an example of connectivism is the course

designed by Siemens and Downes in 2008 and 2009 that was offered on massive open

online courses. The platform epitomized the theories of connectivism by allowing

learners to access information and make connections with the content to enhance their

learning. The design and structure of the learning management system allowed

learners to take responsibility for their learning and to make connections with the

content using various media, blogs, discussion forums, posts, and tweets, not

depending on the support of a facilitator. This format embodied the paradigm shift in

learning, where learners are now responsible for making decisions about what, how, when, and from whom they learn. This autonomy is centered around the emerging technologies in learning, which is different from the traditional modes of learning.

CoI: Framework and History

The CoI model developed by Garrison et al. (2000) provides the theoretical foundation for teaching presence. The model includes three equally represented elements, cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. The CoI Venn diagram (Garrison et al., 2000) outlined in Figure 2 illustrates the need for all the presences to overlap to create meaningful educational experiences.

Figure 2

Community of Inquiry Framework

Note. From "Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education," by D. R. Garrison, T. Anderson, and W. Archer, 2000, *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2–3), p. 88. Reprinted with permission.

The CoI model explores the juxtaposition of teaching presence and student interaction in the community of learning. Teaching presence embodies the design and

facilitation processes that measure if learners are achieving the educational experiences according to the CoI framework. Learners are provided with support to ensure that the content is understood and that the climate is right to improve online learning (Anderson et al., 2001).

With this in mind, the growing needs of online programs require a deeper understanding of teaching presence as one of the key elements to increase student success (Barton & Maness, 2017). Student retention is highly influenced by the degree of interaction, the perception of interaction, and the presence of the instructor. Teaching presence can be established through planning and structure of online courses (Orcutt & Dringus, 2017). The essence of "presence" is "not one-dimensional in that the instructor merely follows a set of prescribed actions that demonstrate availability and supportiveness in the online course. Presence is also a mindset for extending activity between student, instructor, and content beyond just being there" (Orcutt & Dringus, 2017, p. 2). Online learning has evolved, and the product must provide a sense of presence to prevent isolation and separation (Orcutt & Dringus, 2017). Kizilcec et al. (2015) reported that students who were able to see their instructors in a synchronous environment had better experiences in the virtual environment and consequently performed better.

Based on the framework of the CoI, instructors are expected to evaluate the model to ensure that the educational experiences created for students meet the program goals and outcomes. Teaching presence online requires instructors to adapt to an environment where the primary mode of learning involves electronic technology and media (Hejase & Chehimi, 2020; Tamm, 2023). In addition, teaching online requires a paradigm shift in how instructors adapt to the new normal as well as using new instructional methodological approaches (Espino-Díaz et al., 2020).

Teaching presence is one of the three tiers of the CoI framework; the other two presences are social presence and cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 2000). Though all three presences have established relationships, the framework does not adequately describe how to establish teaching presence (Dunlap et al., 2016).

Online programs are growing rapidly; researchers for the Babson Survey Research Group (Allen & Seaman, 2017) reported that distance education had seen growth for the 14th consecutive year in 2016. In 2016, more than 30% of higher education students were registered for at least one distance education course in the program of study (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Online education will continue to grow given the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic (McGraw, 2021). Carefully designed courses are needed to provide educationally nourishing experiences to engage learners and promote deep learning. The exponential growth of online programs has compelled universities to pursue online teaching and learning, ensuring that all programs have some element of online learning included. Online programs have become a preferred way to access education because of the flexibility, affordability, and accessibility to content that they provide (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2019). Learners are allowed to access education any time or place, and with other commitments, they appreciate the benefits of online teaching and learning.

When designed accurately, online courses result in rich educational experiences based on the CoI framework. McAlvage and Rice (2018) suggested that institutions must ensure that the online course design meets benchmarks and standards in the field of education. Following standards will promote sound ITDE practices in keeping with educational policies developed to guarantee learner success.

Teaching presence is part of an encompassing model of learning that focuses on learning while exploring many dimensions. Learning theories typically focus on

multiple elements of learning and complement or build on other research in the field of learning. The CoI was selected for this research because of the goal of the theory and its unequivocal focus on online distance learning environments. Garrison et al. (2000) posited that the CoI model provides the framework for online learning, and the onus is on the designer to ensure that online learning provides the educational experiences needed by learners.

The CoI model outlines the structure for assessing the educational experiences of learners. Curriculum designers must consider how teaching presence is established in higher education in the Jamaican context. The three-tiered framework with its interlinking dynamics suggests that all three elements of the framework play a critical role in the educational experiences of learners, thus requiring that all stakeholders become actively engaged in the process of learning (Anderson et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2021). Within the framework, the teaching presence is juxtaposed as the element with the responsibility to ensure that the content and learning experiences provide appropriate intellectual and educational content as well as clear expectations from the facilitator (Garrison et al., 2000).

The CoI model provides the framework for meaningful interaction—teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence—which is essential for creating a community of teaching and learning (Garrison, 2017). Garrison (2017) described the model and all three components as fundamental for the delivery of knowledge and meaning-making experiences. From experience and observation, students model teaching and learning skills from their facilitators and form their perception about teaching presence, meaningful interaction, and students' participation. This confirms that all three variables are important to the framework (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012).

Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005) noted that the three-tiered approach of the community of inquiry creates meaningful inquiry, allowing students to acquire knowledge and improve their competencies based on the experiences provided. The design of online courses with teaching presence will allow students to discover and construct meaning within the established learning community. Fink (2013) suggested that instructors must be cognizant of what they intend for students to learn, decide on how they will measure actual learning, and decide on the instructional strategies to be used to ignite and sustain learning throughout the course of study. Costley and Lange (2016) stated that learners' perception of learning is based on the outcome of the course and the facilitators' support.

Martin et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of the CoI to investigate the correlation between social presence, teaching presence, cognitive presence, and learning outcomes. The investigation explored actual learning, perceived learning, and satisfaction. The study showed a strong relationship between the presences and perceived learning. Cognitive presence and perceived learning also showed a strong relationship. The Martin et al. analysis contributed research-based evidence to the design of quality online courses, and instructors must pay attention to the correlation between the presences and learning outcomes. For decades, higher education institutions grappled with the pedagogical strategies employed by instructors, currently embracing transactional active learning strategies. Intentional design decisions must be employed to ensure quality courses are developed (Stover & Ziswiler, 2017).

Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) proposed that a fourth tier be added to the CoI framework. The element that they suggested is emotional presence, which they claimed is not sufficiently explained by the social presence element. They argued

that emotional presence can impede learning if not handled well but could also promote learning if managed well. They debated that emotional presence can enhance the educational experiences anticipated by the CoI framework. This new element is proposed to compel learners to take greater ownership of their learning because they are expected not just to receive information but also be engaged in the pragmatic environment created for them (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

CoI: Constructs and Criticism

Garrison et al. (2000) established the CoI framework, followed by numerous articles elaborating on the three-tiered presences, cognitive, teaching, and social. In the CoI framework, meaning-making experiences develop on each presence, and researchers have examined the relationship and interdependences between the presences (Castellanos-Reyes, 2020). The relationship between the three presences is depicted in the overlapping circle (see Figure 1). Although the CoI is a credible framework and has been one of the most extensively used frameworks for developing online teaching and learning, critique from Rourke and Kanuka (2009) suggested that learners are not able to achieve meaningful learning using the CoI framework. They argued that the CoI requires other elements to increase its robustness as a framework. Researchers have suggested that to enhance the quality of the framework, other presences could be considered, such as learner presence, autonomy presence, and emotional presence. However, none of the suggested presences have been substantiated or tested to be accepted as viable additions (Castellanos-Reyes, 2020).

Though Garrison et al. (2000) argued that the CoI framework represented a collaborative constructivist point of view, Annand (2019) contended that it does not fully explain how pedagogical and andragogical principles should be incorporated into the design of fully online courses for higher education. Annand further suggested

that the three tiers of the framework do not follow the natural law of adult teaching and learning. He cited that the social presence is not realistic in all contexts, and in some instances is exaggerated. Research has revealed that adult learners do not have the time or interest in the social presence being postulated by the CoI framework, which makes the model inadequate to design learning in higher education (Annand, 2019).

The CoI framework suggests that ongoing dialogue is an integral part of the educational experiences anticipated, and any gaps in the framework must be accounted for. Quality standards should be considered when designing online courses, and all the elements must emphasize enhancing learning and learners' meaning-making. In their defense, Garrison et al. (2000) suggested that not all online or blended environments reflect the composition of the CoI framework, and as such Annand's (2019) critique might have some gaps.

CoI Survey Instrument

The CoI instrument was designed to legitimize the framework established by Garrison et al. (2000). The instrument was developed by Arbaugh et al. (2008) and was regarded as a valid instrument. Based on its use in research, the instrument has proven to be effective to measure social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence in online learning environments. The potency of the instrument resides in the fact that it can measure the instructor's behavior during the course of study as well as the design, organization, and structure of the course (Arbaugh et al., 2008).

The instrument has been in use since 2008 and is currently available in English, German, and Spanish. The Rasch psychometric technique was used to measure the authenticity, reliability, and validity of the instrument. The instrument was scrutinized, and the number of questions was reduced to 21. The instrument is

now recognized as having solid internal reliability and a normal structural validity (Wei et al., 2020).

Blended and Online Learning

Siemens et al. (2015) stated that online learning means "a form of distance education where technology mediates the learning process; teaching is delivered completely using the Internet" (p. 101). Blended learning is deemed the best of both worlds; it combines face-to-face and technology-mediated instruction, providing students with the opportunity to interact with their instructors and allowing them to take responsibility for their educational journey and performance (Baragash & Al-Samarraie, 2018).

Blended and online learning are growing rapidly in higher education, with almost 100% of all tertiary institutions offering their programs fully online or in blended modalities (ThinkImpact, 2021). In 2019, approximately 3.45 million college students were enrolled in distance education in the United States (American National Bank of Texas, 2023). The chief executive officer for edX, Anant Agarwal (as cited in Hess, 2021), stated that online learners have increased 15-fold, that is, there has been an observed 161% increase in the number of learners who have registered for online programs between 2019 and 2021. It is anticipated that this number will increase in the coming years (Capture Higher Ed, 2018), as evidenced by the transition to remote learning due to the global pandemic (McGraw, 2021). UNESCO (2021) reported, "More than 1.5 billion students across the planet are or have been affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-10 pandemic" (para. 1). As such, schools had no choice but to embrace the paradigm shift to online learning and see online learning as a viable option (UNESCO, 2020).

Online courses are courses that have over 80% of the course content and

assessment activities online. Blended courses are those with 30% or more of the course material and assessment activities online. The online learning environment, if organized and managed well, can provide opportunities for learning to be offered any place and at any time, providing access and flexibility. B. Smith and Brame (2014) opined that online and blended learning can propel learners to take responsibility for the educational journey. Quality online and blended learning provides learners and instructors with the best of both worlds: the opportunity for guided facilitation as well as self-directed learning. Smalley (2021) reported that over 2.5 million new students are doing their courses fully online or in blended modalities. The trajectory is said to skyrocket given the increase in online offerings since COVID-19. The research results pointed to the need for quality design to promote greater interest in online and blended learning. In the Jamaican context, all higher education students are exposed to online teaching and learning (A. Smith, 2020).

Means et al. (2010, as cited in B. Smith & Brame, 2014), opined that online and blended learning using quality designs and packaged well can simulate or even exceed the face-to-face experience. B. Smith and Brame (2014) suggested that a supportive, engaging, and collaborative environment can augment learning. They identified good practices and benefits to ensure that learning is successfully delivered. These best practices include metacognitive awareness, collaborative teaching and learning, establishing a learner-centered environment, packaging content based on the profile of learners, flexibility, and ongoing feedback (B. Smith & Brame, 2014).

Blended and online learning is growing at the university level is based on the flexibility it provides, access to higher education, and the cost-effectiveness of programs. Research has suggested that learning in a community is a major part of blended and online learning (Park & Shea, 2020), making the CoI framework one of

the first points of reference when designing and facilitating online and blended learning. Online and blended instructors are expected to prepare quality instructional material based on agreed-upon standards, for student retention as well as satisfactory educational experiences for learners.

Instructor Presence, Engagement, and Satisfaction

Instructor presence can be considered the bedrock of the CoI framework, referred to as teaching presence, as the facilitation of the content is centered on the instructor. Garrison et al. (2000) suggested that written language has transformed the interaction between learners and their facilitators, and as such, learners are being encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning outcomes. To this end, this responsibility can increase learners' reflectivity, reflexive practice, and meaning-making, enriching the educational experiences of the community of learning. With sustained instructor presence, teaching and learning will be realized naturally, and the other elements of the CoI framework, cognitive and social presence, will synchronize, allowing learning to become a harmonious experience (Garrison et al., 2000).

Hesrcu-Kluska (2019) interrogated whether online learning in higher education changes the interaction between learners and facilitators. Questions were also raised about teaching presence in asynchronous form as well as synchronous form, the two modalities of engagement that establish teaching presence in higher education. Establishing teaching presence is of interest for the Jamaican context, because student attrition rates are higher without synchronous interaction. When students are expected to operate in an asynchronous environment, the quality of the course design enhances students' active engagement in the course (Subramanian & Budhrani, 2020).

Shackelford and Maxwell (2012) defined seven interactions among learners

and facilitators: (a) "providing information on goals, expectations, and ethics" (para. 14), (b) "participating in and guiding discussions" (para. 15), (c) "providing support and encouragement" (para. 16), (d) "providing timely feedback" (para. 17), (e) "using multiple modes of communication" (para. 18), (f) "instructor modeling" (para. 19), and (g) "required participation" (para. 20). To develop meaningful and sustained participation, all seven types of interaction must be demonstrated consistently in the online environment by the instructor. Establishing teaching presence should set the stage for the juxtaposition of all three variables of the CoI framework. Once learners are aware that instructors are present in the community of learning, scholarship and meaningful interaction will be promoted (Garrison et al., 2000).

Despite the convenience and flexibility provided by distance and online learning, teaching presence and evidence of deep learning are of concern in higher education, thus requiring meaningful interaction between instructors and learners as well as quality in the course design (Turley & Graham, 2019). There has been a paradigm shift in how online education is packaged. The standards outlined by the NSQOL and the Jamaican local accrediting bodies require excellence in the instructional design, emerging technology tools, and delivery of online courses. The use of emerging technology to provide on-the-go programs that are accessible has become critical, and the paradigm shift is most evident in higher education (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005). Based on the revolution in education, learners in higher education are making the most of the accessibility and flexibility of online learning, accessing education from their preferred institutions without the fear of placing their careers on hold or disrupting their physical location (McAlvage & Rice, 2018).

Online learning that has been packaged right, based on the standards in the ITDE field, provides educational experiences including interaction with the instructor

and peers (Garrison et al., 2000). In the Jamaican context, this encourages online learners in higher education to complete their programs given concerns about the isolation that can happen in the online environment. Wagner (1994) explored the distinction between interaction and interactivity. Meaningful interaction requires learners and facilitators to be engaged mutually using cutting-edge technologies and technology-enhanced tools. These can heighten the capabilities of connecting within the community of learning using asynchronous and synchronous modalities (Wagner, 1994). Based on the CoI framework, learners and instructors should be actively engaged in ongoing dialogue based on the instructional design, since interaction and interactivity are critical design elements based on the CoI framework. Meaningful interaction is a major concern within the community of learning, and varied approaches must be explored to provide adequate educational experiences. The design of the courses in higher education must consider instructors utilizing course gamification activities, gaming elements and features that can be transferred to an educational setting to increase learner success (Werbach, 2014).

The benefits of interaction and teaching presence in online courses can be achieved by incorporating Shackelford and Maxwell's (2012) seven types of interaction. The CoI model emphasizes teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence and sets the framework for the educational experiences that can stimulate collaboration, allowing learners and instructors to make meaning of the processes of engagement and increase learner success. These must be considered during the design and development of the courses to ensure quality (Garrison et al., 2000).

Bonk and Graham's (2006) research suggested that quality online programs will grow increasingly because of the views that teaching presence improves learning

experiences. Geng et al. (2019) suggested that learners in higher education have shared that there is a positive influence on learning when courses are designed with the learners in mind and denote quality. Geng et al. suggested that learning will heighten as a result of learners' self-directedness, ownership of their learning journey, and the presence of their instructors to provide guided facilitation. It is evident from the research that fully online teaching and learning may not satisfy the learning needs of all learners and instructors; how learners and instructors are cultured about learning plays an important role and determines their readiness for the online environment (Gillett-Swan, 2017). Notwithstanding this, programs must be designed using the CoI model paying attention to the three-tiered presence, global and local benchmarks, and guidelines related to ITDE. Establishing teaching presence when courses are being designed will influence the didactic engagement of learners and facilitators (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Faculty Preparation to Teach in Online Environments

Teaching online is not new for many, but for some, it is a new paradigm that requires preparation to guarantee student success. Coswatte Mohr and Shelton (2017) suggested that when faculty are prepared to teach online, it enhances their competence and gives them the confidence to immerse themselves in teaching and learning. When faculty members are prepared and empowered with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward teaching online, their curiosity about using the technology is heightened and impacts positively on their lived experiences.

Rice and Deschaine (2020) suggested that faculty preparation is critical to enhancing learner engagement. The preparation will equip faculty with the skills to move from mere persons who use cyberspace to competent instructors with the skills to demonstrate the rigors and rudiments of operating in a virtual environment. Rice

and Deschaine also suggested that faculty preparation must include exposing instructors to the standards to promote quality in their course design as well as delivery in the learning environment. The engagement of faculty must be ongoing so that instructors can hone their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Being cognizant of the fact that teaching online requires new skills, faculty must be prepared with online pedagogical and andragogical competencies to effectively manage the virtual classroom (Albrahim, 2020). When designing professional development for online faculty, the design must be pragmatic and learner centered so that learning is experiential and experimental. Instructors must be able to readily model how they were engaged online when they facilitate teaching and learning in the online learning environment. Gurley (2018) suggested that there is a difference between faculty who learn to teach online on the go compared with those who are certified online instructors. Faculty who are certified can easily model the skills obtained when they engage their students. Trained instructors are competent, can anticipate the online environment and student reactions, and can make adjustments to ensure learner success. They are also equipped with the skills to design quality courses.

Gurley (2018) contended that the pedagogical approaches of the online instructor are not the same as those for instructors who engage students in a face-to-face context. When online courses are being designed, attention must be given to the skills of the instructors who will guide the process. Their technological and pedagogical competencies must be assessed and the deficits mediated to ensure that the engagement online leads to positive educational experiences and attainment for learners. Assessment activities also must be designed to ensure that the course objectives are achieved. Online instructors' training must be carefully planned and

executed so that online instructors can fully manage the virtual learning environment.

As part of the preparation, institutions must provide support to faculty members to ensure that their lived experiences online have a positive influence and impact on learners and learning. Consistent online support heightens instructors' presence and expected outcomes of the quality courses they design. Brooks et al. (2020) suggested that instructors who have the support of instructional designers and information technology staff usually demonstrate more competence in their online delivery. They have the support in place to assist with navigation and pedagogical decisions that will determine the efficacy and quality of their courses. The readiness of online instructors allows student–instructor exchange to be positive, increasing the probability of learner success.

Summary

Teaching presence requires a pedagogy that is embodied with online instructional strategies that support students' success. This is articulated in seven principles posited by Shackelford and Maxwell (2012): unambiguous course goals and expectations, discussions, support, timely feedback, multiple types of communication, instructor modeling, and required participation. These principles must be considered to increase teaching presence in the online learning environment. When they are used as part of the course design framework, they can influence the trajectory of learner success and determine the attrition rate of students, notwithstanding the need for the other components of the CoI framework: social presence and cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 2000).

Two critical strategies that influence teaching presence are the training of instructors and adopting standards that ensure quality course design. These must be explored because they determine the levels of presence observed in an online teaching

and learning environment (Yang, 2017). The instructor's efficacy online is based on their levels of comfort with online teaching tools and the proclivity of the students to learn online and take responsibility for their learning. The structure of the higher education online classroom is not the same as that of the face-to-face environment. There are additional expectations to enhance teaching presence. Teaching presence is not only being visible online, but also about having the skills to increase the intellectual inquiry of the community of learners as well as provide instructive support to enhance deep learning. These are critical competencies that higher education instructors must have to propel learners to achieve their learning goals. In some instances, instructors have to provide opportunities for students to unlearn some habits that might hinder learning from taking place and encourage them to learn new skills to enhance their online competencies. Darling-Hammond (2019) reported that the brain develops based on experiences, and thus instructor presence, as part of the learning experience, is a critical component of the engagement process.

With this in mind, teaching presence will yield meaningful and worthwhile educational results (Garrison et al., 2000). Researchers have suggested that the major responsibilities of online instructors include providing guidance, encouraging socialization, promoting motivation, and demonstrating coordination skills (Bonk et al., 2004; Lehman & Conceição, 2010; Seaton & Schwier, 2014). Establishing teaching presence must include intentionally planned activities that can increase the goals of learning (Southcombe et al., 2015). Further research is needed to explore establishing teaching presence in higher education in the Jamaican context. Teaching presence is a critical part of the CoI framework that corroborates with cognitive presence and social presence to ensure the educational experiences of learners.

Research Questions

One overarching central question guided this study: What are the lived experiences of instructors developing teaching presence in the online courses? The central question was investigated through the following six subquestions:

1. How do online instructors perceive their teaching presence in their online courses?

2. How do online instructors perceive the impact of their teaching presence on student success?

3. How do online instructors establish presence in their online courses?

4. How are online instructors trained to establish teaching presence in their online courses?

5. What successes do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?

6. What challenges do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica, based on the CoI framework with emphasis on teaching presence. This chapter was organized using nine main headings: the qualitative research design, phenomenological analysis, the participants, the setting, the data collection and all its processes, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, potential bias, and the limitations of the research study. The CoI survey was used to guide the development of the interview questions. The survey evolved from the research conducted by Arbaugh et al. (2008) and is accessible under the Creative Commons license, making the survey available for public use.

Qualitative Research Design

A phenomenological approach was used to investigate the phenomenon. This research had the instructors' opinions at the center of the investigation. Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative research starts with beliefs that "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (pp. 1–2). Qualitative research focuses on the natural environment of the participants and uses the natural setting to collect the data. The phenomenological approach was used to explore insights into the phenomenon of the meaning-making of teaching presence. These insights about establishing teaching presence provided understanding into the phenomenon and experiences of Jamaican online instructors in higher education.

Creswell (2013) established that observing participants in their natural settings

allows for authentic exploration of the phenomenon. Structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Approval to interact with the participants was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that their human rights and welfare were protected. As part of the investigation of the phenomenon, the researcher prepared, organized, and reviewed the data for greater insights into what was revealed by the participants. Coding mechanisms to identify themes were employed, and the themes were used to explore the phenomenon of establishing teaching presence in higher education online classrooms in Jamaica. This research approach provided a clear account of the collection and analysis of the data, so that insights on establishing teaching presence in higher education settings in Jamaica are clearly understood (Bryman, 2008). In determining the research approach, the researcher was mindful of the setting, the Jamaican unique context, the disposition of the participants, and the phenomenon being explored.

The research approach involved collecting and analyzing nonnumerical data to understand the lived experiences of online instructors in Jamaican higher education and how they establish teaching presence in their online learning environment. This phenomenological research described instructors' perceptions about teaching presence at the center of the research so that the phenomenon could be understood from a Jamaican perspective. The researcher described the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence instead of trying to explain the meaning of the experience. This prevented subjectivity of the information collected and encouraged participants to share freely their experiences without restricting the information (Creswell, 2013). The researcher also reviewed the course design processes and protocols to ensure that there was evidence of strong teaching presence embedded in the design of the courses to promote teaching presence in the online learning

environment.

There are five types of qualitative studies: case study, phenomenological, narrative, grounded theory, and ethnographic. Phenomenological studies are focused on understanding the science of social and psychological occurrences based on participants' perspectives (Groenewald, 2004). The phenomenon of teaching presence was explored, and the qualitative research design was used to investigate and understand complex issues on teaching online in higher education in the Jamaican context. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to unlock meaning from the instructors, allowed participants to describe the experiences, and documented emerging themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019). A phenomenology research design was used to explore the experiences of faculty members using instructional technologies and meaningful interaction to enhance students' meaningful engagement in blended courses to understand the experiences that contribute to learners' retention in virtual communities.

Groenewald (2004) suggested that phenomenology requires a systematic methodology to ensure that the data collected reflect the intent of the informants and give meaning to the personal experiences and the phenomenon being investigated. Emerging technology requires the teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence of facilitators within the learning environments. The CoI model was used to investigate the experiences of lecturers (Garrison et al., 2000) with the hope of unearthing and documenting best practices to mitigate students' retention and better understand how teaching presence is established.

The phenomenology research approach was the most potent and applicable for this study because it allowed individuals to share in-depth experiences about how teaching presence is established in higher education online environments in the

Jamaican context. Phenomenology research design is used in several disciplines to explore experiences related to a variety of issues and topics that are anthropologically related, such as special needs, community awareness, human trafficking, sexual abuse, communicable diseases, and autism, to name a few. As such, the phenomenological approach was the most appropriate to understand the experiences of the participants. To develop an awareness of how online instructors establish teaching presence, bracketing was used to assist the researcher with the assumptions and intentionality of the phenomenon being explored.

Creswell (2015) explored the characteristics of qualitative research design, which were used to substantiate the choice of research design:

1. The researcher explores a problem and develops a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon.

2. The literature review plays a minor role but justifies the problem.

3. The purpose and research questions are stated in an open-ended way to capture the participants' experiences.

4. Data collected are based on words (e.g., from interviews) from a small number of individuals to obtain participants' perspectives.

5. Data are analyzed for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings.

6. The report is written using "flexible, emerging structures and evaluative criteria and including the researchers' subjective reflexivity and bias" (Creswell (2015, p. 18).

Based on the characteristics of qualitative research outlined by Creswell (2015), the researcher explored the establishment of teaching presence by examining the literature around the phenomenon. Research questions and interview questions

were designed as open-ended questions to stimulate the participants to share their experiences. The data were collected using the qualitative approach of interview sessions. The data collected were sanitized to ensure objectivity so that teaching presence in the Jamaican context could be understood.

Phenomenology

The phenomenological inquiry was used to understand the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica. Phenomenology was suitable for this research because the core of the approach is to value the person's experiences. Phenomenology was established as a philosophical movement with the central premise of the nature of experience from the point of view of the person experiencing the phenomenon, their lived experience (Connelly, 2010). The methodology was pioneered in the 20th century by Husserl (1965, 1981) as "pure" phenomenology.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is credited to Jonathan Smith (J. Smith et al., 2009) and integrates the traditions of Husserl and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences and the meaning-making experiences of instructors. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that this investigative method involves looking at phenomena through lenses that allow them to speak for themselves. They stated that all phenomena can be interpreted. To ensure objectivity, Husserl (1965) promoted that research should focus on the problem and experience based on one's consciousness. Typically, phenomenology is used in psychology, education, and health care professions. It is usually focused on conscious experiences, such as judgments, perceptions, and emotions (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Sloan and Bowe (2014) explained that phenomenology is a philosophy, a

methodology, or an approach to study or research. There are two primary approaches to phenomenology, descriptive and interpretive. Phenomenology has three main types, realist, transcendental, and existential. Creswell (2013) suggested, "Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 58). One main idea of phenomenology is to overcome the thoughts of subjectivity and promote the sense of rational discourse.

Groenewald (2004) suggested that in phenomenology, "realities are thus treated as pure phenomena and the only absolute data from where to begin" (p. 2). Phenomenology has germinated into a well-respected research philosophy and methodology. Creswell and Creswell (2018) postulated that phenomenology employs an "analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description" (p. 272). Researchers thus have authenticated phenomenology as a sound research methodology. The methodology allowed the researcher to describe accurately the phenomenon without prejudice. Welman and Kruger (1999) suggested, "The phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (p. 189). The researcher was concerned with the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in a higher education Jamaican context. Researchers who use this methodology are unwilling to impose a linear approach to understanding any phenomenon to ensure the integrity of the approach is not compromised (Hycner, 1999).

Heidegger (1962) described IPA, and the researcher concluded that the IPA approach was suitable to use because it looks at lifeworld and being-in-the-world, detailing that people cannot absolve themselves from the world around them. With IPA, the methodology allows people to do more than just describe their experiences.

It allows people to explore their lived experiences and describe their interactions with others in their context. This approach was most suitable for the Jamaican and the higher education context being explored. Instructors had the opportunity to explore their experiences of teaching presence within their context because the IPA framework allowed for exploration of the phenomenon of teaching presence (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Similar research was conducted using the same phenomenological methodology and approach. Holt (2020) explored teaching presence in higher education online mathematics courses, using phenomenology. Gudapati (2018) used phenomenology and the CoI framework to study the blended learning experiences of Caribbean community college students. Both provided insights about the CoI framework, the methodology being used for this research, and Gudapati focused on the Caribbean context. The information from these studies provided insights into instructors' experiences. The interview questions were compelling and provided the springboard for questions that were used with the participants of this study.

Participants

The participants for this study were identified using purposeful and snowball sampling. Creswell (2012) proposed that purposeful sampling is a "qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 626). In phenomenological research, a systematic process is used to explain the phenomenon and make predictions. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling are the most suitable types of sampling for qualitative research, as the researcher can select the most suited participants to be involved in the process, and additional referrals will meet the criteria of the research sample (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling allowed for the development of a

detailed understanding of the phenomenon of teaching presence (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The participants included 20 teachers who had experienced teaching online for over four semesters at a teacher training institution in Kingston, Jamaica. As reflected in the snowballing approach, the teachers were asked to refer colleagues who also teach online, and those additional potential participants were contacted and asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Creswell (2015) posited that purposeful sampling allows for the intentional selection of participants and sites to collect data related to the phenomenon being explored, and snowballing sampling also allows for the exploration of a central phenomenon. The potential sample included those who were purposefully selected and those who were referred based on their affiliation.

The research site was contacted to provide the contact details for the participants. An email was prepared 14 days prior to the time of the data collection period and sent to the participants to enlist their involvement in the research. The participants were asked to respond in 3 days to the letter of consent. Fifty percent more than the anticipated number of persons to participate in the research were contacted to mitigate low or slow response to the invitation. The age categories who volunteered to participate in the research were persons 25 and older. They were selected based on the profile outlined by the researcher:

1. The participant must be an online instructor in higher education.

2. The participants must be teaching online for over four semesters.

3. The participants must be willing to share experiences about establishing teaching presence in higher education online environment.

Participants were provided with the topic being investigated as well as the description and purpose of the research. They received an email detailing their

consent to participate, which included the statement of confidentiality related to information collected, how data would be maintained, and the timeframe for the information to be destroyed. Participants had the option to refuse to participate in the research study or withdraw from the study at any point in the research without any penalty.

The schedule of the interview sessions was shared with the participants via email. The days for the interview were shared, and participants had the option to be interviewed Tuesdays or Thursdays, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. or 1:00–4:00 p.m. When those times were not convenient, other days and times options were explored to accommodate the interview session. The interviews sessions lasted for a maximum of 60 minutes. The participants were asked to share their lived experiences about teaching presence in higher education online courses. Based on Creswell and Creswell's (2018) inquiry into phenomenology and data saturation, 3–10 participants would be needed for the research, so the minimum sample was decided to be 15. Ultimately, the sample was 20 participants. Guest et al. (2006) suggested that saturation can take place when 6–12 are interviewed, authenticating the sample size for the research.

The participants were given numbers to protect their identities. Participants were given several options for participation, including online options as well as an in-person option. All information for the sessions was confirmed and sent to the participants via email.

Setting

The setting for this research was a teacher training institution in Kingston, Jamaica, one of the oldest teacher training institutions, with over 180 years of experience in higher education. The institution provides teacher training education for

adults nationally and regionally and is the largest teacher training institution in the western hemisphere. Given its rich history in teacher education, the institution provides models, frameworks, and prototypes of teacher training and education nationally and is relied upon by the local Ministry of Education for policy directions related to teacher education. The institution provides over 19 undergraduate programs in three faculties and over seven graduate programs at its graduate school of education. Other academic programs are offered through its school of continuing studies, including associate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and professional development courses. The complement of staff is over 150 full-time and adjunct teachers. The total population served is approximately 2,300 full-time and part-time students.

Data Collection

The data were collected for this study using semistructured interviews. A series of 10 interview questions allowed the collection of data on participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon. The researcher used Zoom to interview the participants who confirmed their availability for the study. The researcher used the interview questions developed to solicit information on how online instructors establish teaching presence in the higher education learning environment (see Appendix). The interview questions revealed the instructors' beliefs on how to establish teaching presence in an online course. During the interviews, the researcher probed participants to ascertain their beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives on teaching presence.

The interview questions were developed utilizing the teaching presence survey questions (Arbaugh et al., 2008) as the frame of reference, since the instrument measures how teaching presence is developed in an online learning environment. The

questions asked participants to share their experiences so that the phenomenon of establishing teaching presence in online higher education could be understood from the Jamaican context.

Interview questions and questionnaires from Holt's (2020) and Orcutt's (2016) dissertation instruments were perused to ensure that the interview questions being developed for this research were contextually appropriate and aligned with the topic being investigated. Ten questions were developed and broken down into two sections. The sections mirror what is referenced in the CoI survey instrument (Arbaugh et al., 2008): (a) planning, designing, and organization and (b) facilitation and direct instructions. The open-ended questions were designed to interrogate participants about their lived experiences as instructors online. The questions solicited information about instructors' preparedness; perceptions about teaching presence; and feelings about how teaching presence is established, its challenges, and successes. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) opined that questions should cover feelings, opinions, behavior, and experience. The questions were not always asked in the order outlined; the interviewee's responses sometimes stimulated a change in the order of the questions. Brinkmann (2008) postulated that interviews are "the most widespread knowledge-producing practices across the social scientific disciplines" (p. 471). Interviews, whether in focus groups or individual, are used in qualitative research to assist individuals to explore their experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The interview questions revealed the instructors' thoughts on how to establish teaching presence in an online course. According to Creswell (2015), data collection from interviews allows the interviewer to probe participants for individual beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives. Each interview session lasted 45–60 minutes and was conducted via the Zoom video conferencing app. The researcher reviewed

interviewing protocol procedures and questions with each participant to ensure comfortability with the procedures and familiarity with the study. The researcher made notes during the interview sessions. The interview recordings were converted into mp4 files and transcribed for data analysis.

Data collection from the interviews, coding of the data, and data analysis occurred separately in this study. The interviews were essential for the researcher to acquire a description of the phenomenon. Prior to coding the data, the teachers' interviews were transcribed. The audio files from each interview were transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were read for accuracy and reread for preliminary coding. The transcripts from the interviews and notes from the interviews were used to assist in finding any muffled portions from the recordings of the online instructors. A line-by-line analysis was done, and meaningful words, phrases, or sentences were coded using descriptive category names and kept in a notebook by the researcher for initial coding purposes. All expressions, phrases, or statements of the participants were coded using descriptive labels and colors and kept in a locked file located on the hard drive on a computer. The grouping of all participants' phrases and statements was used to determine any themes or patterns that emerged from each interview question. All transcripts were reviewed again to begin the preliminary coding process.

Procedures

This study used IPA for the research analysis. The researcher's place of employment was contacted for approval. The researcher also solicited IRB approval and permission to conduct the study. Participants identified were emailed to request their participation in the research. The recruitment period lasted for 3 weeks. Once the participants agreed to participate in the research, the interview questions and the interview schedule were shared with them.

The participants were informed of the nature of the research and information regarding voluntary participation were also included. The e-mail sent to the participants detailed the confidentiality of the information collected and informed the participants that the data collected is for this research and not the research site. The email included Nova Southeastern University IRB General Informed Consent Form detailing the risks and benefits of participation in the research. They were informed that the interview would be recorded with their consent.

The interviews were semistructured, and each session was scheduled for up to 60 minutes. The researcher sought expert review from a qualitative specialist and piloted the instrument with two persons to ensure its trustworthiness. The interview questions were shared with the dissertation chair for review and feedback. Based on the feedback received, the interview questions were refined. Three days before the interviews, participants were sent an email reminder. The interview questions (see Appendix) were shared with the participants to keep the interview focused on the phenomenon being explored. After the interviews, the participants were given the transcripts to review to ensure the accuracy of the information and to validate the transcription.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom. All participants received an informed consent form detailing the procedure and outlining the researcher's ethical responsibility. The researcher also made notes during the interview, as recommended by D. G. Oliver et al. (2005) as a critical part of the data analysis process. The recordings were converted to mp4 files, and the researcher created an assessment trail with the word-review section in Microsoft Word.

The researcher color coded the different sections to determine patterns. Once a

theme or pattern emerged, a color represented the theme for the study. After

developing themes, the researcher organized them into a matrix using color coding for

distinguishing themes and wrote a final narrative explaining the themes that emerged.

Bracketing was used to "mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of

unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the

rigor of the project" (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). The interview questions (see

Appendix) included questions under the headings that were suggested by the teaching

presence survey: (a) planning, design, and organization and (b) facilitation and direct

instruction.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the six steps outlined in the IPA framework to complete

the data analysis: (a) reading and rereading, (b) initial notations, (c) development of

emergent themes, (c) search for connections across emergent themes, (d) analysis of

the next case or participant transcript, and (e) looking for patterns across transcripts or

cases (J. Smith et al., 2009). The researcher listened to the interviews and carefully

transcribed them within 24–48 hours to ensure the precision of the information

shared. Creswell (2013) suggests that multiple approaches can be employed in the

data analysis process inclusive of data organization, the codification of themes,

repeatedly reading the transcription for accuracy, and assessing and documenting the

researcher's notes to authenticate the themes. Once the themes were identified, they

were documented, and the information was used to prepare a table of the themes

based on the interview questions.

Ethical Consideration

The purpose of the study was clearly articulated to the participants, and they

had the option of deciding whether they wanted to participate or not (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher designed and sent the consent form to the participants for them to sign. This documented their willingness to participate in the research and their rights as participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to protect their identity and ensure the confidentiality of the data collected. Participants were guaranteed protection of the data collected, and only the researcher had access to the data. All documentation, including interview notes, recordings, and transcripts, was securely stored in a locked cabinet, and only the researcher had access to the data. The participants were given the assurance that the data would be secured by password and would be destroyed after 3 years. "The principal matters, in an ethical sense, are that as researchers we take all reasonable measures to ensure the peace of mind, and fair treatment of the people we ask to help us with our research" (P. Oliver, 2010, p. 47).

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness and integrity is fundamental during qualitative research. To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, a peer debriefer was utilized to ensure the validity of the data collected to prevent biases about the research topic being studied (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, participants member checked their transcripts for accuracy.

Potential Researcher Bias

The researcher's potential bias was that the researcher was the team leader for the Instructional Design Team at the university where the research was conducted. This role might contribute to professional bias in the study. The researcher is passionate about the topic and has the hypothesis that establishing teaching presence can improve students' success. The researcher is concerned about the teaching presence of instructors and believes that the topic must be investigated so that information about the phenomenon is available from the Jamaican context.

Notwithstanding these facts, the researcher mitigated the probability of bias throughout the study by maintaining a reflective journal to document the experiences as they occurred. Additionally, a qualitative expert was asked to provide guidance to safeguard against any bias. Bracketing was used to safeguard against bias as well. The researcher was able to assess the themes established and authenticate the accuracy of the information shared from the interviews.

Limitations

All studies have some limitations (Price & Murnan, 2004). Creswell (2012) posited that limitations are "potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher" (p. 199). The sample size was restricted based on the time the data were collected. The interviews were scheduled during one of the busier times on the academic calendar of faculty; as a result, some participants indicated an interest to participate in the research but did not attend the interview session. Some of the participants also responded to the email but did not schedule the interview session. Another limitation was that the university's expectations of the study conflicted with the researcher's expectations. Online teaching and learning are heightened at the university based on their strategic goal to deliver online learning programs on a larger scale. However, the procedures and practices to design quality online courses conflict with what is practiced in the institution on a large scale.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the phenomenological research study that assessed teaching presence based on the CoI framework with a focus on understanding the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica. IPA was used to allow the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the instructors and the meaning-making experiences of the instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs. IPA was useful in assessing the perceptions, evaluations, perspectives, beliefs, activities, observations, and actions of instructors establishing teaching presence. The topics in this chapter include participants' demographic data, the purpose and research questions of the study, the themes, results by interview question, results by research question, and the summary of key findings.

The chapter presents the results of this phenomenological study, which explored the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica. This study documented the lived experiences of instructors who were employed to teach courses online. The focus of the study was teaching presence. Teaching presence considers the activities teachers are engaged in to inspire and sustain learning connections. Learning will not automatically happen without the design of the facilitator (Anderson et al., 2001). The study posed one central research question: What are the lived experiences of instructors developing teaching presence in the online courses? The answer to the question central to the study was extrapolated from the following six research subquestions:

1. How do online instructors perceive their teaching presence in their online courses?

2. How do online instructors perceive the impact of their teaching presence on

student success?

3. How do online instructors establish presence in their online courses?

4. How are online instructors trained to establish teaching presence in their online courses?

5. What successes do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?

6. What challenges do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?

There were 10 interview questions under two categories (see Appendix). Questions 1–5 asked about planning, design, and organization. Questions 6–10 asked about facilitation and direct instruction. The relationship between the research subquestions and the interview questions is outlined in Table 1, which shows alignment between both elements.

Table 1

Alignment Between Research Subquestions and the Interview Questions

Research subquestion	Interview questions
1. How do online instructors perceive their teaching presence in their online courses?	Interview Questions 4–8
2. How do the online instructors perceive the impact of their teaching presence on student success?	Interview Question 9
3. How do online instructors establish presence in their online courses?	Interview Questions 4–8
4. How are online instructors trained to establish teaching presence in their online courses?	Interview Questions 1–3
5. What successes do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?	Interview Question 9
6. What challenges do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?	Interview Question 10

Study Participants

   This study included online instructors from a Kingston, Jamaica university college consisting of three faculties and two schools. The details of the sample are presented in Table 2. Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Creswell (2012) proposed that purposeful sampling is a "qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 626).

Table 2

Participant Details

Participant	Department	Years' experience teaching online
Participant 1	Education; online mentor to other instructors	3
Participant 2	Humanities & Liberal Arts	2
Participant 3	Online mentor to other instructors	5
Participant 4	Education; online mentor to other instructors	5
Participant 5	Humanities & Liberal Arts; online mentor to other instructors	3
Participant 6	Humanities & Liberal Arts	2.5
Participant 7	Humanities & Liberal Arts	2
Participant 8	Education	2.5
Participant 9	Science & Technology	3
Participant 10	Science & Technology	5
Participant 11	Education	2.5
Participant 12	Humanities & Liberal Arts	3.5
Participant 13	Online mentor to other instructors	4
Participant 14	Education	2.5
Participant 15	Humanities & Liberal Arts	2.5
Participant 16	Science & Technology	3
Participant 17	Online mentor to other instructors	3.5
Participant 18	Humanities & Liberal Arts	2.5
Participant 19	Humanities & Liberal Arts	3.5
Participant 20	Science & Technology	2.5

Twenty-four participants consented to participate in the research, and 20 of the participants scheduled interviews and participated in the research. The remaining four participants were contacted but did not respond after numerous emails were sent. The participants were assured of the ethics of research, and their information was protected by using pseudonyms as identifiers. All the participants taught online in higher education and worked at the university college providing online instruction for over four semesters. The participants taught across faculties and schools. The participants had to meet three requirements: (a) an online instructor in higher education, (b) teaching online for over four semesters, and (c) willing to share experiences about establishing teaching presence in higher education online environment.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how higher education instructors establish teaching presence in online courses offered in one higher education setting in Jamaica. Teaching presence was guided by the CoI framework and the emphasis of teaching presence research were planning, design and organization, and facilitation and direct instruction. Six research questions were developed to guide this study, as described in the introduction to this chapter. There was one overarching central question: What are the lived experiences of instructors developing teaching presence in the online courses?

Study Themes

The overarching research question was answered by the interview responses to the subquestions. The study had six subquestions there were addressed through 10 interview questions (see Appendix). The interview questions were broken into two main sections: (a) teacher preparedness and perceptions about teaching presence

(planning, design, and organization) and (b) teacher feelings about teacher presence, its challenges, and its successes (facilitation and direct instruction). The first five questions covered the first main section that addressed teacher preparedness and perception. The last five questions addressed the second main section that addressed challenges and successes.

Five themes emerged from the data from the interview questions:

1. Teachers received proper training for online courses.

2. Teachers' online tools were enough for students to achieve success in the course.

3. Teachers believed that the course expectations were clear and that students could achieve those learning goals while online.

4. Teacher presence is important to the overall course success and student learning goals and success.

5. The absence of teacher presence leads to more work for the teacher, student apathy, low course attendance, and poor participation.

Summary by Interview Question

Summary for Interview Question 1

Interview Question 1 asked participants, "How were you trained to establish teaching presence in your online courses?" The majority ($n = 12$, 60%) agreed that they were trained to establish teaching presence in their online courses. Six (30%) said that they received or participated in training sessions that gave them the needed information to establish teaching presence in their online classes. Three (14%) said that they received professional development from the online department which proved to be helpful to them. Two (10%) said that they received training both from the university and training that they sought out for themselves. Two (10%) said they

found articles or sought help from colleagues to establish teaching presence in their classes. On participant (5%) said that they had not received any training at all.

Participant 2 reported that there were professional development sessions and resources from the Online department that were helpful training. Participant 2 posited, "Well, I remember that we had professional development sessions. Professional development sessions were organized to help me. I also followed the resources shared from the Online Department via our email." Participant 4 stated,

When I just started working at the institution in 2015, I believe I started working with the online department. As the facilitator, I was exposed to teaching and learning from the aspect of being a well, not just a supervisor, but also a coach, mentor, and a facilitator. I did get some training from that department.

Participant 6 said,

Well, most of what was provided by the college I believe that the structure that they have presented along with my training in curriculum and instruction helped to make my teaching experience more meaningful. How to share course content, utilize appropriate resources for students to utilize, how to create a sense of interactivity within the space and how to make them to become more accountable in terms of when they're dealing with the assessment activities.

Summary for Interview Question 2

Interview Question 2 asked the participants, "What preparation and training have you participated in to learn how to organize your online content instructional activities and assessment activities?" In terms of preparation and training that assisted the participants in the organization of online course content, instructional activities,

and assessment activities, many participants stated that they were prepared and trained on the different strategies for course development.

Participant 2 stated,

The sessions helped me to organize, and the resources shared in the email messages were reminders. My assigned online mentor met with us and explained how we could do it. So those were helpful sessions for preparing and for training me how to organize the course.

Participant 3 shared,

I went through a professional development program given by the university. The activities were geared towards showing us how to maintain and increase teaching presence. I was taught to use different media and how to engage with students online.

Participant 10 said, "We have had specialist training that helps me personally to really prepare well my online course delivery, content, instruction, and assessment activities." Participant 12 stated,

Okay, so usually every summer before school starts, we would have some developmental workshop. And so these workshops, they go on for the entire week, you know, where you have this rigorous training in terms of how to organize, for example, you know, how to layout your resources on the platform that we used to facilitate students. We are trained in the art of, for example, gamification, on how to use the Zoom. We call them the Zoom icons, how to facilitate students using those Zoom so the lesson is more interactive and stuff like that.

Summary for Interview Question 3

Interview Question 3 asked participants, "What preparation and training have

you participated in to learn how to develop teaching presence in your online courses?"
Workshops and professional development opportunities were most of the responses
from the participants. Participant 8 said,

> The workshop, I think it was 2012 at the Commonwealth training, we were
> working on how to use Moodle then, we were trained at a 5-day workshop, so
> I had that knowledge in terms of how to set up a page. The whole intention of
> that program was for us to write programs for online. I had prior knowledge
> before coming in.

Participant 6 responded, "I think I went through two official trainings offered by the
institution and then some other training that I saw online and also having discussions
with staff at the time I was head of department."

Two participants, Participants 3 and 18, said they had prior knowledge, and
they used that knowledge plus the training provided to enhance their teaching
presence in their online courses. One participant stated that articles and applications
of the tips given in the different articles were helpful in developing teaching presence
in the courses. Another participant said that colleagues were the most helpful along
with the staff of the online department.

Summary for Interview Question 4

Interview Question 4 asked the participants, "How do you ensure that your
students achieve their learning goals?" Most of the participants stated that they took
the time to discuss the course description and goals of the course with the students.
The participants also said that they had student discussions about the students'
expectations from the course to make sure that everyone, including teacher and
students, was on the same page regarding course expectations and learning goals.
Participant 3 stated,

One of the ways in which I, in the first place, seek to identify this is kind of informally, in the discussions in the initial meeting with the students. The students are asked to share why they are in the course and what they want to achieve. And then of course, the next thing is to discuss the goals already established in the course and how those goals can be aligned to the students' learning goals.

Participant 6 stated,

One of the things I tend to do in the first class is to look at the course outline, the expectations that are there that would be what they would use to be aligned with their personal goals sometimes with the informal discussions. Now with me, I deal with mastery learning, so I give students an opportunity to improve on any grade that they get that they don't think it's mastery enough, because you know, there are various theories out there that speak to, you know, this whole thing about constructivism and how you build from a particular level going up. And I think mastery learning helps.

Participant 9 said,

So the first thing we have a course outline, and what I do with the course outline is, it is placed on the platform, and the students, and we discuss it at the beginning of the class. The objectives, the units, the method of assessment, the expected skills, and the strategies to achieve their goals are all reinforced.

Participant 17 explained,

Firstly, we know the goals from the beginning. Those are established, and we always end with it. Most times we end with an exit tickets or reflection activities, where they would reflect on how they personally are doing in achieving the learning goals and make the action plans going forward.

Summary for Interview Question 5

Interview Question 5 asked, "How do your students know that they are achieving the established learning goals?" Most of the participants expressed that getting and providing feedback from and to the students was the key to the students' achieving the learning goals of the course. The participants also stated that the course assessments, assignments, tests, and quizzes provided the students with knowledge of whether they were achieving their individual learning goals. Many of the participants spent time going over the course objectives and learning goals and had the students talk through their individual learning goals. Participant 1 said,

> There are rubrics that they get, as we are going through each unit. When they come online, the week after, the first thing I do is question them to find out if they got through the assignments, what challenges they were facing, or what challenges they faced.

Participant 2 answered,

> Well, they know from the responses that they give from the assessment. That's one thing that will help them to know that they are achieving, okay. . . . I really don't have a checklist. Okay. It happens as I go along.

Participant 3 said,

> I think that the most objective measurements that they have is their performance on the formative assessment tasks, they are ongoing. Okay. That is how they can most objectively measure where they are and whether they are achieving the goals.

Participant 5 responded,

> I guess, the things that students will always do, so probably look at the type of feedback and grades that they're getting for the different activities. Right, I

think that will be the main thing, though, the objectives or the learning

outcomes are shared.

Participant 6 stated,

So, how they know, the feedback that I would have, sometimes it is written on

the Moodle platform, sometimes it is aired in breakout rooms, and so on, and

sometimes in the chat, sometimes in the WhatsApp group, sometimes

[students] message me directly or they write straight and say that they think

they fell below the mark.

Participant 9 responded,

So, they know that they are achieving it because of the constant feedback and

time given to answering of questions. Also, they get feedback from the tests

and when they do their research and presentations. When they get feedback,

they know that they are doing well.

Participant 10 answered,

The students are also invited to participate in the assessment process, so the

students, once again, they would have had opportunities for self-assessment

and peer assessment. They are informed when it is that they are falling short of

those goals, and then there is a discussion, so they also have a voice in the

required activity.

Participant 11 stated,

So, one of the things that I do, I mean, assessment is key in that. So, I tend to

integrate assessment through the learning process. So of course, utilize

informative and formative assessment, and so in that way I get a chance to see

what it is that students are really understanding.

Participant 18 said, "Students do a reflection each week. They get the

necessary feedback from me, the assessments and the reflections all lead to their understanding and achieving their educational goals." Participant 19 posited, "The assignments are set up so that students are able to assess their progress by how they are able to do the assignments. All assignments are in line with a class objective. Participant 20 answered, "I'll ask the students. So, we look back at the engagement. Ask the students to explain in their own words what was accomplished."

Summary for Interview Question 6

Interview Question 6 asked participants, "What guidelines do you provide to help students understand the expectations of the course?" To most of the participants, the course outline or syllabus provided the necessary expectations for the course for the students. The participants also stated that they spend time in class reviewing the syllabus and assignments with the students. Eighteen (90%) of the participants said they had robust discussions with students at the beginning of the course about the expectations.

Participant 1 said, "One of the things I put out there in the beginning is the fact that it is not strictly one person's situations. It is a combined effort, it has to be, as I said previously, a two-way street." Participant 2 posited,

When I meet them, I go through the course outline, because that for me is the bottom line. The course outline sets out the guidelines for the course. So, I spend a little time explaining, having a discussion really on the objectives.

Participant 3 answered,

Well, at the initial introduction to the course, we go through the course outline, we go through the assessment sheet, and we deliver a schedule, so they understand what expectations are, just based on the goals and objectives outlined in the course document.

Participant 5 stated,

> The course requirements, as you know, the way how the course outline is
> structured, the expectations can be made from it. So sometimes students may
> have interpretations of one thing, and after having a discussion, we have a
> general consensus of what is expected. Sometime based on time constraints we
> agree to a certain modifications to make sure that they have an equal
> opportunity to achieve their collective and personal expectations. So the
> guidelines would be what would be on the course outline and sometimes the
> various discussions that we have and we come to a consensus that this is the
> way we are going to go.

Participant 7 answered, "The expectations are in the course delivery schedule,
assessment sheet with attending deadlines, the rubrics for each assignment. There is
discussion of the course outline and of the student's expectations of the lecturer and
lecturer's expectation of the students." Participant 8 said, "I give them the course
outline, I go over the assignments with them, I . . . think and share when an
assignment is given to them." Participant 18 stated, "We go through the expectations
at the beginning, and we reassess each week." Participant 19 said "The guidelines are
set out in the course outline and in the course scheduler. We also discuss them in
class."

Summary for Interview Question 7

Interview Question 7 asked, "What instructional technologies and meaningful
interaction do you use to enhance students' meaningful engagement in the course?"
Most of the participants strongly believed that providing the students with interactive
content was vitally important to the success of the course. Participant 2 answered,
"So, for example, I use quiz like Kahoot. In argumentative discourse. Okay. I use that.

I use the Padlet. Yes. I actually pay for the subscription." Participant 3 said, "I also use videos, online quizzes, Padlets and other activities for students to have meaningful interaction with the content and then collaborative work for meaningful interaction takes place among students like using breakout rooms." Participant 19 uses polls, audio files, videos, online images to help keep the students "interested in the course." Participant 20 uses Zoom and gamification platforms to keep the students engaged in the learning process. Participant 10 stated,

> For the most part, we tend to stick to what is available, so the students will, utilizing Zoom. They may be utilizing PowerPoints, they may be utilizing videos, etc. We do try to make it as interactive, also as creative as possible.

Table 3 highlights the variety of instructional technologies used by the study participants.

Table 3

Instructional Technologies Used in the Learning Management System

Instructional technology	Applications
Traditional	PowerPoint
	Websites
Video/phone/audio	Zoom
	What's App
	Google
	YouTube
	Educational video (Pearson, Parsons, etc.)
	Voice Thread
Others	Padlet
	Kahoot
	Gamification platforms
	Flipboard

Summary for Interview Question 8

Interview Question 8 asked, "How do you develop a strong sense of community among your students to mitigate retention and better understand how teaching presence when established improves learner completion of the course?" Six of the participants use WhatsApp to provide students with a forum and avenue for community building. Students can use WhatsApp to express themselves on personal and educational issues. Three of the participants use the Zoom breakout rooms to give the students opportunities to get to know each other better and to do group work. Ten participants create social opportunities for themselves and for the students to interact. Two participants use grouping to foster community within the course. One participant did not consciously establish a sense of community but believed that it was established through the group work needed to complete the course.

Participant 5 posited,

Alright, so in my class at the beginning of the class, and not only do I provide an icebreaker and devotional activity, usually, at the end of my class, I have discussions with the students. For every class, I asked some of the students remain after the session to talk with them if I see that they need help in one area or another. I've always said to my students that we are family, and family work together, and that no person should be left behind. We also create WhatsApp groups, even though predominantly that is used to share information, notices, and what's happening for class, but like, if anything should happen to a student it is to share.

Participant 6 answered, "Well, I have a WhatsApp group, I always, any class that I have, since the online thing, I have WhatsApp, and I find that it works well."

Participant 7 said,

WhatsApp group for all courses taught. This allows for constant communication among the students and myself. Concerns can be aired, issues ventilated, corrective actions can be taken. Plans can be made and decisions taken within a short period of time.

Participant 9 stated,

For each of the courses, I have a WhatsApp group, so the students can communicate with each other and with you, so they can communicate with me. There's also a student leader that we have in the group, and we call on these people, or sometimes in my class I appoint leaders, they are leaders for the month. And I create an environment where students can express themselves. I think I have an open-door policy.

Summary for Interview Question 9

Interview Question 9 asked, "Do you observe any successes in higher education online classes when teaching presence is established?" Most participants observed success in online classes when teaching was established. Participant 11 said, "Alright, so what I find is that, especially as it relates to completion of task, I realize that when the teaching presence is established, it really helps to respond to individuals as opposed to the group." Participant 16 posited, "I think it is also evident in the number of students who turn up. I hardly have students missing classrooms, because they are coming expecting something different, and the facility." Participant 13 stated, "Students were motivated and believed that they were a part of the learning environment." Participant 2 said, "I observe that they are more attentive. Okay. They are more responsive. Okay. When that is done, they want to come. I hardly have anybody being absent." Participant 19 stated, "When there is a teaching presence, the class is [like] a drug. Students want to participate."

Summary for Interview Question 10

Interview Question 10 asked, "Do you observe any challenges in higher education online classes when teaching presence is not established?" Participants expressed that when teaching presence was not established, (a) students complained, (b) class participation was low, (c) students logged in late or turned in assignments late, and (d) students had a lack of accountability.

Participant 1 said, "I see lack of interest. Okay. And also, a lack of commitment. Okay. I also see that they're not committed to the work, they're not committed to the community." Participant 2 responded,

Well, earlier when I never had that, when I never had teaching presence, absenteeism was high. Okay. It was high because they were saying that they didn't have any Wi-Fi, and I don't know if it was true. Okay. But I found that they weren't as interested in coming, and in the discussion forums they never participated. So that was a problem.

Participant 7 stated,

If teaching presence is not established, this certainly is a recipe for disaster, which ultimately ends in the nonachievement of learning goals. If students know that consistently there are no meaningful plans in place for learning to take place, they will resort to staying away from class, lose interest, among other things.

Participant 6 added, "Lack of interest, reluctance in submission, submitting papers, but once that is attacked, then the reverse happens, so it moves to a positive." Participant 9 stated, "Most definitely. Yes, students are logging in late, and when you are calling on them, and they are not answering." Participant 16 responded, "They feel that you know it's almost like a waste of time, and some of the things they could

easily just read it."

Findings by Research Question

Research Questions 1 and 3: Establishing Teaching Presence

Research Questions 1 and 3 asked "How do online instructors perceive their teaching presence in their online courses?" and "How do online instructors establish presence in their online courses?" Answering Research Questions 1 and 3 used participant data from Interview Questions 4–8, which focused on the (a) achievement of learning goals, (b) course expectations, (c) instructional technologies used to enhance course interaction, and (d) developing a strong sense of community.

Most of the participants stated that they took the time to discuss that the course description and goals of the course with the students. The participants also said that they had student discussions about the student's expectations from the course to make sure that everyone, including teacher and students, was on the same page regarding course expectations and learning goals.

Most of the participants expressed that getting and providing feedback from and to the students was the key to the students' achieving the learning goals of the course. The participants also stated that the course assessments, assignments, tests, and quizzes provided the students with knowledge of whether they were achieving their individual learning goals.

Many of the participants spent time going over the course objectives and learning goals and had the students talk through their individual learning goals. For most of the participants, the course outline or syllabus provided the necessary expectations for the course for the students. The participants also stated that they spent time in class reviewing the syllabus and assignments with the students. Ninety percent of the participants said they had robust discussions with students at the

beginning of the course about the expectations.

Most of the participants strongly believed that providing the students with interactive content was vitally important to the success of the course. Six of the participants use WhatsApp to provide students with a forum and avenue for community building. Students can use WhatsApp to express themselves on personal and educational issues. Three of the participants use the Zoom breakout rooms to give the students opportunities to get to know each other better and to do group work. Ten participants create social opportunities for themselves and for the students to interact. Two participants use grouping to foster community within the course. One participant did not consciously establish a sense of community but believed that it was established through the group work needed to complete the course.

Research Questions 2 and 5: Effect of Teaching Presence

Research Questions 2 and 5 asked "How do the online instructors perceive the impact of their teaching presence on student success?" and "What successes do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?" Answering Research Questions 2 and 5 involved data from participant responses to Interview Question 9, which focused on successes observed when teaching presence is established. Most participants observed success in online classes when teaching presence was established. Participants shared that students are more attentive, more responsive, and motivated; turn up for class; complete class assignments; and generally want to participate.

Research Question 4: Training

Research Question 4 asked, "How are online instructors trained to establish teaching presence in their online courses?" Answering Research Question 4 involved data from participant responses to Interview Questions 1–3. Out of 20 participants, the

majority ($n = 13$) agreed that they were trained to establish teaching presence in their online courses. Six said that they received or participated in training sessions that gave them the needed information to establish teaching presence in their online classes. Three said that they received professional development from the online department which proved to be helpful to them. Two said that they received training both from the university and training that they sought out for themselves. Two said they found articles or sought help from colleagues to establish a teaching presence in their classes. One participant had not received any training at all. In terms of preparation and training that assisted the participants in the organization of online course content, instructional activities, and assessment activities, many participants stated that they were prepared and trained on the different strategies for course development. Workshops and professional development opportunities were most of the responses from the participants.

Research Question 6: Challenges

Research Question 6 asked, "What challenges do instructors see by establishing teaching presence in higher education online classes?" Answering Research Question 4 involved participant data from Interview Question 10. Participants indicated that when teaching presence was not established, students complained, class participation was generally low, students logged in late or turned in assignments late, there was a lack of accountability, students lacked interest, and students were not committed to the work or the community.

Summary

This chapter presents findings from this qualitative study to describe the lived experiences of teachers while establishing a teaching presence in online higher education courses from a Jamaican context. There was one main research question:

What are the lived experiences of instructors developing teaching presence in the online courses? Five themes emerged from the responses to the interview questions:

1. Teachers received proper training for online course

2. Teachers' online tools were enough for students to achieve success in the course.

3. Teachers believe that the course expectations were clear, and students can achieve those learning goals while online

4. Teacher presence is important to the overall course success and student learning goals and success

5. The absence of teacher presence leads to more work for the teacher, student apathy, low course attendance, and participation.

Notably, 65% of the participants shared succinctly what teaching presence should resemble in their online classes. Their narrative focused on how they organize their content on the learning management system, but they were not explicit on how they inspire and sustain learning connections in their online courses. When the researcher probed, participants retained their verbiage and focused on ensuring that the context was appropriate for the online environment. The researcher extrapolated that emphasis was placed on the cognitive presence and not teaching presence. Online course design does not yet meet quality standards as outlined by the standards of the University Council of Jamaica and the NSQOL in this higher education institution in Jamaica.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored teaching presence using the CoI framework. The research focused on understanding the lived experiences of instructors establishing a teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica. The CoI framework comprises three major components: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence considers the activities teachers are engaged in to inspire and sustain learning connections throughout the study. Anderson et al. (2001) posited that learning will not happen automatically without the careful instructional design of the facilitator. Students are expected to develop competence based on interaction with the other tiers of the CoI framework, and the facilitator of teaching and learning can predict the outcome based on the meaningful engagement cultivated. Teaching presence requires the other core elements of the CoI framework for the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of learning.

Teaching presence considers two components: (a) planning, design, and organization and (b) facilitation and direct instruction. Both categories require careful instructional design to enable learning and optimal education experiences. Teaching presence requires instructors to create a significant learning experience for learners using constructivist and pragmatic approaches to learning (Fink, 2013; University at Buffalo, n.d.; see Figure 3). Instructors must be able to use the elements described alongside the three tiers of the CoI framework for an effective online educational experience. Teaching presence requires juxtaposing ideas and scaffolding concepts so that deep learning can be applicable and transferable. During this process, learners might experience disequilibrium; this indicates inquiry and interrogation of the content, providing the evidence that learning is taking place.

Figure 3

Fink's Significant Learning Outcomes
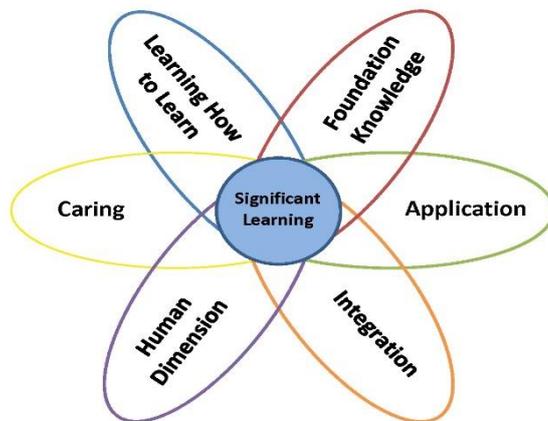
Note. From "Fink's Significant Learning Outcomes" by University at Buffalo, n.d., https://www.buffalo.edu/catt/develop/design/learning-outcomes/finks.html

The phenomenological analysis used allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica. The research considered the experiences, such as judgments, perceptions, and emotions, of the instructors establishing teaching presence (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This chapter includes a summary of the findings, the interpretation of the findings, the implications of the findings, the limitations of the findings, and the recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Interview data were collected from 20 instructors employed at the Kingston, Jamaica university college drawn from three faculties (science and technology, education, and humanities) and two schools (the school of continuing studies and the graduate school of education). Participants were employed by the Kingston-based teacher training higher education institution and had been online instructors for over four semesters. The criteria for selection were (a) an online instructor in higher education, (b) teaching online for over four semesters, and (c) willing to share

experiences about establishing teaching presence in higher education online environment.

The teaching presence categories for the interview questions were (a) planning, design, and organization and (b) facilitation and direct instruction. Teaching presence considers the activities teachers are engaged in to inspire and sustain learning connections. Anderson et al. (2001) posited that learning will not happen automatically without the careful instructional design of the facilitator. Students are expected to develop competence based on interaction with the other tiers of the CoI framework, and the facilitator of teaching and learning can predict the outcome based on the meaningful engagement that is cultivated.

Five themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Teachers received proper training for online courses.

2. Teachers' online tools were enough for students to achieve success in courses.

3. Teachers believed that the course expectations were clear and that students could achieve those learning goals while online.

4. Teacher presence is important to the overall course success and student learning goals and success.

5. The absence of teacher presence leads to more work for the teacher, student apathy, low course attendance, and poor participation.

Interpretation of Findings

The emerging themes from this phenomenological research align with Ghavifekr and Rosdy's (2015) research on teaching and learning with technology and effectiveness of information, communication, and technology integration in schools. They posited that training with online technologies and tools can increase teachers'

efficacy to manage and sustain learning connections. They also posited that information, communication, and technology literacy is critical to engage 21st-century learners.

Preisman (2014) suggested that teaching presence must be accompanied by quality design to be effective. One variable that was noted as effective was quality feedback and its impact on students' success. Based on the current phenomenological study, many of the participants shared their lived experiences about the impact of providing meaningful feedback to students. They believe that feedback stimulates students into understanding concepts and ideas and keep them on track based on the course of study.

McDowell (2020), in his article "Making Learning Targets Clear to Students," suggested, "When students clearly understand classroom expectations, they're better able to assess and improve their performance" (para. 1). Many of the participants in the current study confirmed this idea and shared the importance of ensuring that students understand course expectations. The participants observed that when expectations are shared and clearly articulated, students complete assignments and generally want to participate in learning.

Zweig and Stafford (2016) suggested, "Online teachers may benefit from additional professional development, particularly in relation to supporting student perseverance and engagement in online courses" (p. 16). Zweig and Stafford also stated,

Online teachers may need additional training in multiple areas in order to best support their students in particular, in areas such as student engagement in which effective instructional strategies may differ between online and face-to-face teaching environments and in which teachers are a critical factor in

student support. (p. 14)

The current study participants shared how important professional development training was to them and how it assisted them with their teaching presence. They shared that the training assisted them with preparing the online course environment as well as how to ignite and sustain the attention of their students throughout the course of study.

"Teaching presence is more predictive of student success in online learning than interactions with peers" (Pearson, 2016, p. 4). In a study of teaching presence and student participation, Rubio et al. (2017) found, "There is a strong correlation between low levels of online participation and low grades in the course" (p. 226). Rubio et al. concluded the findings had "implications for course design and the use of learning analytics for the early identification of at-risk students" (p. 226). Teaching presence can mitigate the predictable risk once it is understood (Rubio et al., 2017).

Based on the quality of the course design along with teaching presence, students are encouraged to persevere within the online course environment. Stone and Springer (2019) concluded that instructional design combining regular, timely feedback and communication between teacher and students; interactivity; connectedness; and teacher presence will enable students to persist and meet learning goals. Miller (2014) stated, "Teachers are the most important school-based influence on student achievement" (para. 1). Thus, teaching presence can drive learning and is an important element of the CoI theoretical framework (Garrison et al., 2000).

Implications of Findings

This research study on understanding the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica addressed the research problem through the CoI model for online courses. The

identified research problem for this qualitative study was that online course design does not yet meet quality standards. This research has implications for online instructors and their understanding of teaching presence. Seeing teaching presence through the lenses conveyed by Garrison et al. (2000) and Anderson et al. (2001) posited that learning will not happen automatically without the careful instructional design of the facilitator; teaching presence must become the center of the design process. Simonson and Schlosser (2009) stated, "One key to effective distance education is correct instructional design, a systematic process that applies research-based principles to educational practice" (p. 4).

Based on the findings of this phenomenological research study, online instructors must pay attention to (a) the quality of the course design, (b) the effects of teaching presence and its absence on learner success, and (c) professional development training to understand teaching presence and how to use it effectively. Attention must also be given to the quality of student feedback, articulation of course expectations and learning goals, and development of a sense of community to mitigate student attrition. This research study provides instructive guidance to faculty and course designers on understanding the lived experiences of establishing teaching presence in online higher education.

Limitations of Findings

Creswell (2012) explained that limitations are "potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher" (p. 199). This study had two main limitations: The sample size was not evenly distributed across faculties and schools, and only 20 participants followed through with their interview appointments. It was anticipated that 30 participants would participate and be evenly distributed across faculties and schools, and this did occur based on the time on the academic

calendar that the data was collected. Another limitation was that the university's expectations of the study conflicted with the researcher's expectations. Online teaching and learning are promoted at the university based on their strategic goal to deliver online learning programs on a larger scale. However, the procedures and practices to design quality online courses conflict with what is practiced in the institution on a large scale.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research explored understanding the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education. The categories explored were (a) planning, design, and organization and (b) facilitation and direct instruction. According to Anderson et al. (2001), teaching presence considers the activities teachers are engaged in to inspire and sustain learning connections throughout the study. Thirteen of the participants had an idea of what teaching presence should resemble, but participants demonstrated some gaps based on the idea of how they inspire and sustain learning connections in their online courses. Future research can consider conducting action research on how to engage students so that their meaning-making is greater. This could serve as the prototype of how to enhance meaning engagement and deep learning in online higher education courses. Teachers also could use the results from such action research as the model for online course design in higher education.

Future research also could focus on effective instructional course design using best practices to enhance online instructional competence. In the interview question on preparation and training to organize course content, instructional activities, and assessment activities, one participant said that no training was received. An effective instructional design produces effective instruction, so learner success is predicated on

the quality of the course design (Simonson & Schlosser, 2009).

Summary

This research study explored understanding the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in online higher education programs in Jamaica. The CoI theoretical framework (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison et al., 2000) was used to understand teaching presence. This study helped fill the gaps in understanding the lived experiences of instructors establishing teaching presence in the Jamaican context.

This study included online instructors from a Kingston-based university college consisting of three faculties and two schools The participants were teachers with at least four semesters of experience teaching online. Interview data yielded five themes:

1. Teachers received proper training for online courses.

2. Teachers' online tools were enough for students to achieve success in courses.

3. Teachers believed that the course expectations were clear and that students could achieve those learning goals while online.

4. Teacher presence is important to the overall course success and student learning goals and success.

5. The absence of teacher presence leads to more work for the teacher, student apathy, low course attendance, and poor participation.

Based on this research, two recommendations are made. First, a recommendation is to conduct action research on how to engage students so that their meaning-making is greater. This could serve as the prototype of how to enhance meaning engagement and deep learning. Second, future research could focus on

effective instructional course design and good practices to enhance online

instructional competence. This future research also could focus on the relationships

between teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence in the Jamaican

context.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Research Topic: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Instructors Establishing Teaching Presence in Online Higher Education Programs in Jamaica

The interviews will be done virtually using Zoom and the following questions will guide the interview session.

Planning, Design, & Organization:

1. How were you trained to establish teaching presence in your online courses?

2. What preparation and training have you participated in to learn how to organize your online course content, instructional activities, and assessment activities?

3. What preparation and training have you participated in to learn how to develop teaching presence in your online courses?

4. What do you do to ensure that your students achieve their learning goals?

5. How do your students know that they are achieving the established learning goals?

Facilitation and Direct Instruction:

6. What guidelines do you provide to help students understand the expectations of the course?

7. What instructional technologies and meaningful interaction do you use to enhance students' meaningful engagement in the course?

8. How do you develop a strong sense of community among your students to ensure retention and better understand how teaching presence when established improves learner completion of the course?

9. Do you observe any successes in H.E. online classes when teaching presence is established?

10. Do you observe any challenges in H.E. online classes when teaching presence is

    not established?

Please share any other comments that you might deem useful to the research topic

being explored. _____

Thank you for your participation