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Assignment on Critique of a research article, Abstract and Research Proposal

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Part I Evaluation of a current research article:

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Jones, S.H. Benefits and Challenges of Online Education for Clinical Social Work: Three Examples. *Clin Soc Work J* 43, 225–235 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-014-0508-z>

I. Introduction

This is an article that seeks to explore the **benefits and challenges** of online educational courses (in particularly for teaching clinical skills in social work) and the **impact** on students, educators and faculty, with special reference to the writer's personal teaching experience in three clinical social work courses.

II. Summary paragraph

The central point advocated by the writer is : **online education** ,if strategically and rigorously developed, are **comparable to face-to-face courses** in many aspects (save and except for family and group intervention where no existing technology has yet been developed to the point of supportive effective group intervention without a face-to-face component).

The writer seeks to support her view with her own personal teaching experience in **three clinical courses**, leading to her conclusion that a well-designed online course, with sufficient structural and technological support, does have the **capacity for effective training skill** in foundation-level interviewing, beginning intervention, diagnostic assessment and practice with older adults.

The writer believes that the content of online educational course can be presented in **highly engaging ways**, and the assignments and assessment can be very similar to that of face-to-face

sessions. Also, **mentoring / role modeling** may occur successfully in online interaction which can be enhanced by good videoconferencing technology.

The only extra requirements for successful online teaching are additional investment by institutions and adjustment by educators to create **intensive instructor presence** and **engaging web-based communication**, with good technological infrastructure , management , instructional design , appropriate class size and workload adjustments.

III. Literature review section

This article is rather rich in literature review. In the introductory part, the writer has cited extensively from various literature on the **substantial growth** of distance-education (Vernon et al.2009), the **advantages** of online teaching (Blackmon 2013) and enhancement of student engagement (Ferrera et al. 2013)). The writer has also cited from literature the various **challenges** of online teaching (Kurzman 2013; Reamer 2013) and lack of adequate skill development opportunities for online students (Wilke and Vinton 2006).

The writer has also mentioned several investigation results from literature on the **effectiveness of distance learning of clinical skills** in an on-line psychosocial pathology course (Cummings et al., 2012), in an online MSW program (Noble and Russel, 2013) and in a clinical advanced standing program (Wilke and Vinton, 2006).

Examination of the **qualitative data** from literature review has revealed the importance of positive student responses, quality & quantity of instructor interaction (Noble and Russel, 2013) and sufficient skill development opportunities for fully online students (Wilke and Vinton, 2006).

The **advantages of hybrid or blended** formats in clinical courses are quoted from descriptive reports in the literature (Ferrera et al.2013; Flynn et al. 2013;Levin et.al) .

Comment:

Through the extensive examination of the literature, the writer has covered most of the major benefits, challenges and impacts of online teaching already mentioned by other researchers , thus

laying good foundation for further discussion and reference to the writer's own teaching experience in the three clinical courses.

To be more comprehensive and global in outlook, the writer could have examined the findings in **literature written by Asians or involve research carried out in places outside the Anglo-American domain.**

e.g. Reference to literature : a study of online education via survey in an Indian University (Chakraborty et.al., 2020); a study of online education by Korean professors (Chin & Kim, 2021); a study on the adaptations to face-to-face teaching format in university of HK (Moorhouse, 2020).

IV. **Description and discussion session**

In the general discussion of the article, the writer carefully examines the **imperative factors contributing to the success of online teaching** in terms of four main area as follows:

- (i) **Substantial investment of resources by educational institution-** e.g provision of distance learning office; instructional technology department ; adequate technological equipment 24/7 technological support and infrastructure maintenance; experienced instructional course designers; student support services and students' online orientation;
- (ii) **Student preparation** – in purchase of additional equipment (e.g. computer hardware and software, webcam,) , development of computer skill (e.g. in videoconferencing, streaming media) , and requirement of more time, discipline, and self-direction in online learning;
- (iii) **Instructor preparation** - more time is required for course development and course delivery by educators. It is emphasized that intensive instructor presence (e.g. by

more written communication, prompt replies to emails, and daily involvement in discussion forums) is imperative.

- (iv) **Course development & delivery** - a user-friendly course website, good technology management, innovative use of media and interactive learning activities can engage the interest of the students.

The second part of the discussion of the article focuses on the **benefits and challenges of effective clinical social work education**, with specific reference to **three MSW courses** taught face-to-face and online (the “three case studies”) -i.e. (a) a foundation course teaching interview and basic counseling skills; (b) a concentration course on diagnostic assessment, and (c) an elective course on gerontology about interviewing and assessment skills.

The **benefits** of online teaching of clinical social work is mainly the increased access to clinical skill education by students living in rural area, having caregiving responsibilities or full-time employment, or living abroad.

The **challenges** of online teaching of clinical social work involve mainly the required access to high speed internet for real-time video-conferencing and increased online fees.

With regard to the **structural factors** supportive of positive online experience in the three online case studies, the writer has observed the following features: (i) guidance by a university instructional designer; (ii) video-recorded lectures by the Instructional Technology department; (iii) interactive posting of opinion after reading others’ work; (iv) creative hands-on activities and interactive games designed by the Instructional Design team.

With regard to the **draw backs** of online teaching , the writer has noted the following features: (i) online lecture is a solitary activity in listening; (ii) during online delivery , students cannot stop the instructor and ask questions or comment; (iii) there is lack of immediacy of feedback and class room dialogue (iv) there is lack of interpersonal interaction making it less engaging for students.

The writer has particularly discussed the **importance of interpersonal interaction** in clinical social work. She notes that interpersonal interaction is necessary for mentoring students and demonstrating role model professional behavior or clinical skill. Since face-to-face interaction is normally more spontaneous and engaging for students, the lack of interpersonal interaction has become the biggest drawback in the development of online teaching of social work so far.

Apart from her very detailed observation and description of the positive features in the three case studies, the writer has also ingenuously suggested some **compensatory measures** to alleviate the downside of online courses:

1. Developing graded weekly group discussions and sharing of opinions / experiences to increase class interaction and practice of reflection more before responding via online interaction.

2. Weekly synchronous meeting using videoconferencing software in small practice classes to compensate for lack of face-to-face interaction in online courses.

3. Adapting the use of role plays to teach skill development - Students may complete role plays record and post them on course websites for classmates and instructor to discuss and critique.

V. Findings and Implications section

The writer has made some **practical findings** in the article, including: (i) The delivery of an online clinical social work session generally takes approximately twice the time required for a face-to-face session. (ii) The optimal class size for online class is 25 to 35 students and even smaller sections for practice skills course (e.g. 12 students) (iii) Academic dishonesty (plagiarism) exists in both online and face-to-face teaching formats. Online courses actually make it easier for instructors to discover plagiarism, since they do have more opportunity to know the student's style and quality of work.

With respect to the impact of online educational courses , the writer has identified various **positive impact of online teaching format** : (i) Increased access to graduate social work

education ; (ii) Increased flexibility in where and when to complete the course; (iii) More trained social workers can move into rural area to practice clinical social work; (iii) Instructors can generate creative quality educational content to engage students; (iv) More written interaction, feedback and mentoring on student's skills and professionalism can be achieved in online format.

On the other hand, the writer has identified several **challenges** of online teaching format : (i) More time, money and self- discipline are required from students; (ii) Students may experience loneliness in attending online course; (iii) Students will have to work harder for interpersonal interaction; (iv) Instructors will have to work harder and longer for course development and delivery in order to create intensive instructor presence throughout the course.

Sub-quality online programs and ill-prepared social workers graduating from fully online clinical tracks are identified as the biggest **negative impact** of online development.

Comment:

The writer's discussion about the impact of online courses is rather comprehensive and thoughtful. However, it is my opinion that more consideration can be directed to the perception and feedback of the **employers and governmental /commercial entities** in local and international societies towards online graduates. It is already noted in some research literature (Palvia et.al. 2018) that the acceptance of online training by prospective employers is very important for determining the future successful development of online education, since if the employers do not recognize the validity and credibility of online education, students will not choose to get educated by this format.

Secondly, in considering the learning or teaching experience of the students and educators, **empirical data on their experience** are imperative before one can make any generalized or specific observation to deduce some fair and trustworthy findings. In this article, there is apparently **no survey, interview or questionnaire** ever carried out to solicit information and feedback from students or educators. This is perhaps the biggest flaw in the credibility and dependability of this article in respect of the alleged findings concerning the students and educators.

VI. Research approach/design/ methodology section

Comment:

Distinctive variables

The discussion in this article is set out under distinctive sub-titles which indicates there is **adequate coding** by the writer of the information she has gathered from the three case studies.

Information about three examples (case study)

Citing from her own teaching experience in the three case studies , the writer has enabled **first-hand information** on the experience of online teaching, in comparison with the face-to-face format.

However, the description of the content, format or technology involved in the three case studies was perhaps **too scanty**, thereby failing to serve as a good factual background for the reference and comparison by the readers.

Positioning

The writer in fact has strong positioning /strong linkage with the topic of the research , by reason of her unique teaching experience.

Paradigm

The writer's paradigm (i.e. world view) is not mentioned at all . Judging from the content and approach of the article, the writer's paradigm should be post-positive The mentioning of various different opinion from the literature without rejecting categorically the alleged truth in those findings is evidence to support my belief that this writer does possess a post-positive paradigm.

Research theory /framework

Neither is the writer's **research theory** nor any **research framework** mentioned. It would be more academically richer and stronger to support the discussion with reference to some philosophical /research theory or framework. It is suggested that the writer can develop her

research under three different philosophical notions: **quality** of online education, **equity** of online education , **ethics** of online education .

Research purpose

Equally importantly , the **research purpose** of this article is not set out clearly at the beginning of the article. The **niche** for the discussion and research in this article is not explained at the introductory paragraph but rather in the concluding paragraph.

The writer has only mentioned in the introduction there is a phenomenon of growing usage of online education . But the reason (**research objectives**)why this phenomenon has to be examined and explored is not clearly set out.

Research statement

In fact, the whole nature, purpose and scope of the research is not summarized in a clear and concise **research statement**, thus rendering the reader losing focus and direction at the beginning.

Research questions

Neither are there any **research questions** clearly set out in the introductory paragraph. Appropriate research questions for this article could be : What is meant by a successful online educational experience? What factors constitute successful online education? What is the impact of successful or unsuccessful online education?

Research design/ Research methodology

The most major flaw in the presentation of this article, in my humble opinion , is that the **research design or research methodology** of the research is not stated at all in the article. Is it meant to be a qualitative research method? Is it designed to be inductive or deductive in

approach ? What are the sampling data ? How are the sampling targets chosen? What is the sampling class and size? Are there any interviews, survey , questionnaire or focused group being conducted to gather information or comment on information? How are the sampling data, if any, analyzed and coded?

Limitation

The **limitations** of the research are not mentioned, albeit there were obviously several limitations in this research article- e.g. the very narrow source of experience coming from the writer's own teaching experience only ; and the possibility of non-transferability of those findings to other subjects such as arts, science , sports .

Ethics of research

The **ethical considerations** in the research are not mentioned. The question of **confidentiality** and **required consent** regarding the subjects of research in the three clinical courses are not discussed. The process and outcomes of the three clinical courses could be information belonging to the institution that organized those courses. The question of consent to release those information should still be addressed.

Quality research criteria

The quality criteria of **trustworthiness** of the research article -i.e. **credibility** (authenticity of the information provided) , **confirmability** (that information can be traced back to reliable sources) , **transferability** (that the findings can be shifted to other context for application) and **dependability** (that the research findings are reliable) are not analyzed by the writer at all.

VII. Directions for future research section

The writer has aptly indicated three area for future further research : (i) **Comparison of different models of web-based learning** of clinical skill; (ii) **Identification of which kind of clinical skill** can be effectively taught online aand (iii) **Measuring the practice outcomes** to determine effectiveness (e.g. evaluation of clinical skill by experts or filed instructors) .

Comment:

The three future research directions are very practical and meaningful. But **more qualitative and quantitative research** on the effectiveness of the different combination of teaching format is necessary to inform the world the best future educational means . **Better co-operation /partnership between educators and technological experts** need to be researched for the purpose of formulating more innovative and interactive teaching activities.

Last but not least, I would like to point out that **the financial aspect of innovative online educational format** need to be researched and assessed, since educational institutions need research data to get informed on whether it is worthwhile to invest heavily on online teaching format (whether blended or hybrid).

Part II Abstract

As the world is growing more competitive and sophisticated in terms of epistemology and technology where continuous professional education is viewed as a hallmark for upstream development, it is contended that a pedagogical means for high education in Law and Business administration (“BA”) that possess **easier accessibility and better financial affordability** is conducive to the generation of better international understanding of respective legal rights, thinking paradigm and business approaches, thus enabling bridges and rapport be built up to synergize the nations into better collaboration with one another.

The Covid -19 pandemic has shocked and grounded the world to a halt. Visits and exchanges between China and the West had been stagnated for a long while and is likely to be so in the foreseeable future due to the endemic nature of the Coronavirus. In this polarized, unstable and segregated international environment, we do need **an effective means to promote epistemological communication , exchanges and influences.**

It is the intention of this research to explore the **value, function and impact of online education** in Law and BA in the three most interconnected educational hotspots in the world- England, China and HK.

It is also the aim of this research to examine the **commercial viability** of such online education in the eyes and stance of the educational institutions involved. The **interest and challenges of the teachers** required to adapt to online, blended or hybrid teaching format will be examined. The **student satisfaction and learning outcome** in online education will also be investigated.

An **empirical, inductive and qualitative Case study research approach** is adopted to gather sampling data for the examination and exploration of the above research purposes. Around 300 Questionnaires are sent out and 60 subjects (including students, teachers and Universities from the said three places) are interviewed.

Apart from empirical evidence, **rigorous literature review** is conducted over the development, meaning, function and technology concerning online education, with a view to find out the positive factors that support an effective implementation of this new pedagogical means.

The **results** of this empirical research has informed us that online education (including blended or hybrid) has been a very **positive, fast growing and indispensable** development all over the world since the availability of internet in the 2000's. It is predicted to be the most popular pedagogical means by 2025.

The **successful factors for effective online education** in Law and BA, as confirmed under this research, are : (i) Rigorous and creative course design and preparation; (ii) Intensive teachers' presence via prompt email reply or discussion board, (iii) Regular individual mentoring and assessment by teachers; (iv) Enhancement of technology (e.g. real-time communication via video-conferencing and 3D virtual devices), better internet access and on-line capacity (v) Substantial structural change and investment by Universities in technology and labor (e.g. hardware, software, technological team for design, delivery, training and maintenance) (vi) Alignment of interest between Universities and teachers (pedagogically and financially) (v) Supportive student satisfaction and feedback (vi) Greater societal and governmental support and recognition of online degree courses.

This research is significant in that it has pioneered into an in-depth investigation of the **commercial feasibility, viability and sustainability of online education in Law and BA** by British Universities for Chinese students or working adults in HK or China. The research is further intended to path the way for future consideration of **reciprocal provision of higher education in law and BA by Chinese universities** for students or working adults in Britain or other places.

A bigger perspective or objective of this research is to hopefully transfer the applicability of the findings herein to the consideration of possible development or expansion of online education in other academic disciplines in the future for the betterment of societal and international interest at large.

Part III Research Proposal

Research topic:

Value and viability of online higher education in Law and Business Administration in the post Covid 19 era, with special reference to the case of pedagogical exchanges between HK, mainland China and England

1. Introduction:

Background - niche for research

Competition in open market or professional jobs is forever increasing in this highly evolving and sophisticated world. Life-long education becomes not just a hobby but almost a must for anyone who wants to excel in his or her profession or marketplace.

Where daily work responsibilities are heavy and time-consuming, working adults find it very difficult to attend local education during normal office hours, not to mention putting aside work and family to travel abroad for study purpose.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost of short study trip abroad has increased multiple times, since the time required for in-bound or out-bound quarantine is often longer than the time required for attending the actual lesson. Further, the risk of catching Covid-19 with no adequate medical service abroad invariably discourages many people from considering pursuit of higher education abroad.

Should the intellectual interflow between the East and the West be undermined by the Covid-19 pandemic? How should this shortcoming be bridged so as to maintain the vibrance of intellectual exchange between the East and the West ? Online-education seems to be an obvious answer to resolve most of the distancing problem arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Further, epistemology and technology of this world are growing exponentially. The human global village need to keep abreast of the development of each other, learn from each other and

avoid misconception, misinformation and unhealthy bias. Understanding, communication and rapport of the world are best nourished through proper intellectual exchanges, not just via superficial tourists' contact, nor via politically biased propaganda by international media.

The need to foster intellectual and cultural exchange between the East and the West

become more pertinent after US has waged the Trade War and Cold War against China. Because of the political hostility, Chinese parents are scared of sending their children off to study in the west. What can be done to seal the problem of stagnation or deterioration of intellectual exchange between China and the West in the midst of political acrimony or decoupling?

The answer to this problem is perhaps again 'online education'. We are in dire need to develop rigorous online educational programs- to provide quality, easily accessible and more financially affordable higher education to the international public, with a view to widen their international outlook, uplift their objective /critical thinking capability, and foster better inter-race cultural and political understanding.

Since the 2000's, with the blooming growth of internet technology, online education has actually become rather popular in various part of the world, especially in United States. Quite a number of research and literature review have been done for online education, and the general outcome is usually positive.

However, research of the value, feasibility and sustainability of online education in England, HK or China is scanty. There may be a few individual research about HK or England. But there is no comparative or holistic evaluation of the sustainability of online educational exchanges in Law and BA between England, HK and China.

There is therefore an urgent need to examine the educational environment in England, HK and China – concerning the perspectives, expectation and experiences of the students, educators and Universities involved in online education, and to identify the benefits and challenges of online education in Law and BA in these area.

Positioning

Because of the personal ideal to build an intellectual bridge between the West and China in respect of Law and BA, an entity known as the “International Academy of Law and Business Administration” (“IALBA”) was established in 2020 for which I was one of the founding member. The Academy is now pioneering to provide practical short on-line courses in Law and BA for working adults in HK or China. It is seeking in the long run to develop partnership with Universities in England and mainland China to provide degree bearing online educational courses in Law and BA. It is the further aim of IALBA to provide online courses in International politics and Oriental cultural studies in the future for the promotion of better international understanding and cultural exchange between the East and the West.

With the existence of IALBA to promote online education in Law and BA , I am aware that I may tend to think more positive of online education, i.e. hoping to seek confirmation to justify its benefits and advantages (**confirmatory bias**) . However, at the same time, because of the very real business risk I face, I may be more sensitive and draconian towards any possible downside of online education that may cause the business of IALBA to dwindle.

In the past two years, in my attempt to complete a MBA program with the University of Manchester cum the Kelly school of business of Indiana university (which was originally a blended course with on-line correspondence and intensive weeks of workshop and lecture) , I had **experienced first-hand the benefits and challenges of a blended online education** run by western Universities.

The MBA course had finally turned out to be mostly online, since after the first workshop in Indiana, all other workshops had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This recent personal experience of being forced to go online, even during interactive workshop, has given me an indelible impression of the gains and loss, convenience and challenges of online education in BA . Despite the challenges, my impression of the online learning experience in the past two years is still largely very positive.

Personal paradigm

With a mixed intellectual background in law, counselling and business administration based on western epistemology, and having been brought up in a cosmopolitan society like HK ,albeit briefly in England during my master study, I believe my own worldview (paradigm) is of **post-positive** in nature , i.e. being able to accept there are multiple understanding and expression of an objective truth which can only be approximated by various means and experiences. I believe it is impossible to apprehend or establish a completely objective reality by anybody. The objective truth (i.e. the best answer to a particular question in a particular set of circumstances) may be manifested in different forms in different people's eyes. There is not just one single embodiment of truth or expression of truth. The truth has to be studied or discovered by people empirically and scientifically .

Because of this paradigm, I do largely respect differences in points of view. I will not categorically reject opposing opinion, and I do always try my very best to discern and search for the 'best answer' through different lens, experiences and paradigms, whether of the authoritative wise or the collective ordinary subjects.

Theoretical paradigm

My **theoretical assumption** in education is that people, irrespective of their talents, background or financial means, should be provided with equal, most easily accessible and affordable educational opportunities (available at different phases of their lives) for the maximized actualization of their potential. Working engagement, family responsibilities, long distance, linguistic barrier or financial means should not be unresolvable obstacles overriding the positive outcome of life-long continuous intellectual enhancement.

Literature review

Through rigorous literature review, the following observations are gathered:

Literature review on the general development of online education

There was widespread evidence that online education has been growing steadily worldwide, due to the confluence of new technologies, global adoption of the internet and the intensifying demand of a workforce adequately trained for the ever-evolving digital economy. It is predicted that online education will be the mainstream by 2025 (Palvia et.al., 2018).

Since early 2000's, institutions of higher education have increasingly embraced online education, and the number of students enrolled in distance programs is rapidly rising in colleges and universities throughout the US. A perfect e-storm linking pedagogy, technology and learner needs is raging (Kim & Bonk, 2006).

In Hong Kong, E-learning has been growing since the 2000's with substantial changes occurring in the infrastructure in HK schools in terms of hardware, software and peopleware (Pang, 2002).

Even for the teaching of clinical social work, where physical interaction is traditionally valued as indispensable, online teaching format has been empirically argued to be very effective (provided there is rigorous technological support / management, and adjustment by educators to create intensive teacher presence (Jones, 2014)).

Literature review on the phenomenon of online education during or after the Covid -19 pandemic

There is an interesting case study describing the **adaptation made to a face-to -face** teacher education course at the University of Hong Kong because of the Covid -19 pandemic, and the challenges faced by the teacher in the delivery (Moorhouse, 2020).

In 2020 in India, there was a study about **student feedback** towards online education in an Indian university in the post Covid-19 pandemic period which reflected that although 77.9% of the interviewed students said online education was useful many had expressed that **online learning was stressful** for them affecting their health and social life (Chakraborty, 2020).

In Finland, a quantitative and qualitative analysis was carried out in respect of the online learning experience of the students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Sciences of Halmö University. It was found that the most supportive factors for effectiveness of online

learning in the Covid-19 period were the **carrying capacity of network access and the ability of devices to access the internet**. (Hamid et.al., 2020) .

Literature review on successful factors for online education

(i) In a survey of 397 students in a University in midwest ,US in around 2005 and 2006, it was found that the independent variable - **course structure, instructor feedback self-motivation , learning style, interaction and instructor facilitation** all significantly affect students' satisfaction. As for the learning outcome, only instructor feedback and learning style were found significant . The findings **suggest online education can be a superior mode instruction** if it is targeted to learners with specific learning styles (visual and read/write learning styles) and with timely, meaningful instructor feedback (Eom & Wen, 2006) .

(ii) In a study of course design elements most valued by adult learners in blended online education, it is found that **design containing options, personalization , self-direction , variety and a learning community** was most valued(Ausburn, 2004) .

(iii) A research investigation into the degree of interaction contributing to student satisfaction in online learning showed that the **learner-instructor interaction , learner-content interaction and internet self-efficacy** were good predictors of student satisfaction (Kuo et.al., 2013) .

(iv) A conceptual framework was proposed for **detecting learning style** in an online education using graph representation learning (Muhammand et.al., 2020)

(v) A study on the effect of online education according to the **type of learn motivation** was carried out by professors from two Universities in S. Korea. It was found that personal and social motivation to explore issues could increase engagement in online educational content (Chin & Kim, 2021).

(vi)A study on the question of **credibility for unmoderated peer assessment** in massive open online course concluded that peer assessment was possibly the only universally applicable approach in massive open online course (Seun, 2018).

2. Theoretical background of this research

Research purpose statement

This research article is targeted to **describe and examine the experience** of the students, educators and institutions involved in online education concerning Law and BA, with a view to explore the **value, feasibility and sustainability of online education** in these subjects , which are to be provided by western educators in Britain to Chinese students in HK and/or mainland China.

(Note: Reciprocal teaching of Chinese law and Chinese business administration experience by Chinese educators to students in the west will also be discussed, as the popularity of the latter trend is anticipated to pick up in 5 to 10 years' time).

Research questions

The issues , questions and concerns in the research will involve the following:

Axiological questions - about value of education

- (i) What is the meaning and function of education in the present world today?
- (ii) What value can the promotion of exchange of legal and business administration experience between the West and East achieve?
- (iii) What value can the promotion of advanced learning in law and international business administration experience achieve for the working adults in our society ?

Practical questions - about niche for online education

- (iv) What are the obstacles to continuous professional study in law and business administration by working adults in modern society nowadays?

- (v) What are the challenges facing face-to-face international education in law and business administration in the post Covid-19 era?
- (vi) What measures can be introduced or stepped up to resolve the problems and obstacles encountered by people who want to pursue education provided by foreign institutions?

Empirical questions - about perception and feedback of online education

- (vii) What was the experience and feedback of those who had undergone online education (including blended or hybrid courses), in particular for law and business administration subjects?
- (viii) What are the perceived strength and weakness of those online education in comparison with the face-to-face version?

Epistemological /exploratory questions - about success in online education

- (ix) What are the factors that contribute to successful online education in law and business administration?
- (x) How much resources (structural, hardware, software, labor, time) is required for setting up online education in law and business administration?
- (xi) What is the financial implication of online education? Is it a commercial viable teaching format in comparison with the face-to-face version?
- (xii) Which is the best form of online teaching format – purely online, blended or hybrid?

- (xiii) What are the benefit and challenges of online education (including blended or hybrid version) in law and business administration in the post covid -19 era?
- (xiv) What is the impact of online education in law and business administration to students, educators and /or educational institutions?
- (xv) What should be done to improve the function, quality, availability and sustainability of online education in law and business administration?

3. Methodology / Research design

Research approach

The research approach for this dissertation is a **qualitative and inductive Case study approach**.

The case study is about the specific situation of online education in law or business administration between England, HK and mainland. Special reference will be referred to the ***MBA course by the University of Manchester*** which was well attended by students from HK, mainland and other international cities. Another case for special reference will be the ***online Legal qualification examination for the Greater Bay Area*** of China which was attended by 600 lawyers from HK last year.

The approach is **inductive**, since the data gathered from the interviewees are coded into themes and concepts for which qualitative assessment can be exercised by the researcher to formulate into categories of assertions or theories.

Data collection method

The research is intended to ***explore the experiences and perception*** of the ***students, educators and educational institutions*** in England, HK or China concerning the online education in law

and business administration by three kinds of qualitative data collection method: (i) **Interviews**, (ii) **Focus group interviews** and (iii) **Questionnaires**.

Sampling selection strategy for interviews

The qualitative data are going to be gathered from three groups of people - (i) **students**, (ii) **educators** and (iii) **educational institutions** coming from three different places - HK, mainland China and England.

Sampling size

The basic plan is to **purposefully choose 60 students** from HK, mainland China and/or England for interview – around half of whom have experienced online education (including blended or hybrid courses) in law and half of whom have experienced online education (including blended or hybrid courses) in business administration.

With regard to educators, a total of **18 teachers with online teaching experience** will be purposefully chosen for interview - half of whom having online teaching experience (including blended or hybrid courses) in law and half of whom having online teaching experience (including blended or hybrid courses) in business administration.

With regard to educational institutions, a total of **6 Universities** (two from each place) having online educational experience in law and/or business administration will be purposefully chosen as interviewed units.

A summary of the intended **sampling size** is set out as follows;

	HK	Mainland China	England
No. of students with online experience in Law	5	5	5

No. of students with online experience in Business Administration	5	5	5
No. of people in the Focused group with online experience in Law	5	5	5
No. of people in the Focused group with online experience in Business Administration	5	5	5
No. of educators with online experience in Law	3	3	3
No. of educators with online experience in Business administration	3	3	3
No. of educational institutions with online experience in Law	1	1	1
No. of educational institutions with online experience in Business administration	1	1	1

Sampling criteria

The students chosen for interview must be of or above University education, having experience with online education (including blended or hybrid courses) in Law or Business Administration that last for at least **three months' time**.

The educators chosen for interview must be lecturers or professors who have online teaching experience (including blended or hybrid courses) in Law or Business administration for **at least half a year**.

The educational institutions that are chosen for interview must be Universities or Higher Educational Institutes having experience in the provision of online education (including blended or hybrid courses) in Law or Business administration for **at least one year**.

Personal interview /Focused group interview strategy

Semi-structured interviews will be prepared for both personal interview or focused group interview. A combination / mixed type of sampling will be employed – i.e. a list of **open-ended questions** systematically and comprehensively shaped around the topics, covering multiple aspects, interest and needs (see sample interview listed out below) will be asked of the interviewees.

The **personal interview** will be conducted in **two parts** – the first part is conducted before the interviewee is invited to answer the Questionnaire (as discussed hereinbelow) . **Basic general open-ended questions** will be asked of the interviewees. In the second part of the interview which is carried out after the interviewee has answered the Questionnaire the interviewee will be invited to **elaborate or explain** the answers he or she has given.

The personal interview is intended to be **intensive and in-depth** exercise , whereas the focused group interview will require a **good facilitator** to lead the discussion of the intended questions.

During the interview, the technique of **triangulation and flexibility** will be employed. The skill of **active listening** and **smart probing** (without being presumptive, leading or biased) will be engaged. The kind of questions around the topics will be basically categorized as (i) **Grande tour questions** (general opened -ended questions soliciting long and descriptive answer), (ii) **Follow-up (probing) questions** (inviting interviewee to elaborate on a mentioned fact), (iii) **Metaphor questions** (asking interviewee to stretch their imagination in comparative description) and (iv) **Closing questions** (only where it is absolutely necessary to give specific choices for the interviewees) .

Sample interview /questionnaire questions

Topics	Issues to be covered by the Questionnaire	Sample core interview question for Students	Sample core interview question for Educators	Sample core interview question for Institutions
Meaning of higher education	For global equity of knowledge and competition, enhancement of human civilization, removal of poverty/racial bias, attaining global peace?	What is the meaning of higher education to you?	What do you perceive to be the function of higher education in the transformation of the world today?	Please describe the significance of higher education in the enhancement human civilization nowadays?
Value of Legal /BA education	For building international rapport,	How do you perceive the value of higher	What is the meaning of higher education	What is the function and value of online

	collaboration, international peace and prosperity? For professional advancement, enhancement in knowledge and international outlook, preparation of better societal leaders?	education in Law /BA in the present world today?	in Law /BA to you ?	course in Law / BA to your institution?
Value of online education in post Covid-19 era	Overcoming the problem of travel, quarantine, financial, political, risk of disease, stigma?	What do you perceive to be the value of online education is the post Covid-19 era?	What do you think the role of online education is in the post Covid-19 era?	Is there any adjustment to the educational means of your institution in the post Covid -19 era?
Experience with online education	<u>In respect of :</u> Learning attitude - attention, discipline,	Please describe your experience of the specific online course you have attended	Please describe your teaching experience in the online Law /BA course.	Please describe the reflection of your institution upon the provision of the online law /BA course.

	Accessibility, Technological support Teaching quality, Course preparation , Teacher-student interaction, Student-student interaction, Assessment, Ethical issues			
Strengths & weakness of specific online course experienced	<u>Upside</u> : Flexibility, Accessibility, Learning at own pace, Possible revision with recorded lecture , Individual coaching by teacher <u>Downside</u> : Inadequate interaction between	What's your reflection on the best part and worst part of your online learning experience?	What do you perceive to be the strengths and weakness of online Law/BA courses in comparison with the face-to-face version?	In the evaluation of the online Law/BA courses, is there anything in the planning or delivery of the courses that your institution has seen fit to maintain or change?

	teachers and students, Less attention by teachers if class is too big			
Benefit & challenges of online education in Law /BA	<u>Benefits:</u> -more affordable to students? -more revenue for institutions? -more convenient access to higher education, <u>Challenges:</u> - Heavy investment in infrastructure and technology - More course preparation time for teachers - Non-recognition of fully online degree by	What are the advantages or disadvantages in learning a Law/BA course online, in comparison with a face-to-face version?	What is the biggest benefit or challenge to an educator in teaching Law/BA online?	Do you find any benefit or challenges (whether structurally, financially, pedagogically or administratively) in running online Law / BA courses?

	employers or society			
Suggestions for change	<u>In respect of:</u> Teaching format Interaction Technological support Costing Assessment Status of the degree	If you have a chance to choose an online Law/BA course again, which format of teaching (ranging from purely online to blended, hybrid and face-to-face) will you choose?	What are the changes you would like to see to happen if the same online Law/BA course is run again?	Is there any plan to adjust or change any part of the online Law/BA course when it is due to be re-run next year?

Questionnaire strategy

A **structured electronic questionnaire** set with a list of around 30 questions (to be answered by indication of a range of agreement or disagreement) will be sent to around **300 University / postgraduate students** (with 100 students from either HK, mainland China or England) .

The Questionnaire will be designed around the “**list of issues to be covered by the Questionnaire**” as shown in the sample interview/questionnaire above.

Extended part of personal interview

Each personal interviewee will be invited to complete the Questionnaire after the first part of the basic interview. An extended part of the interview will be carried out **to elicit elaboration or explanation for the answers** they’ve given in the Questionnaire.

Processing of Questionnaire information

Out of all the data elicited electronically from around 200 students (66 % of expected response rate) and from 45 personal interviewees, the information will be summed up and expressed in terms of **charts** or **histograms** to inform the researcher of the issues and opinion arising.

Fine tuning of interview questions for the focused group

With reference to the preliminary feedback from the questionnaires, the semi-structured **interview questions for the 3 focused groups** (with 15 interviewees involved) **will be finetuned** to solicit more accurate understanding of the controversial questions or ambivalent answers.

Coding of overall information data

After all the personal/focused group interviews and questionnaire are carried out, the complete data will be **coded** and generated into respective **themes / assertions/concepts**, and then further coded into **categories**.

Qualitative assessment of the information (including **observation, interpretation , justification and extrapolation**) will be made and conclusions to the research questions will be formulated.

Research Timeline (Duration : 30 months from January 2022 to June 2024)

Research phase	Time	Activities
Preparatory	Jan to March 2022	Ascertaining the potential qualified interview subjects
	April to July 2022	Contacting the interview subjects , obtaining their Consent form

	August to September 2022	Applying for Research Ethical Approval (submitted with Research information sheet and the interviewees' Consent forms)
Empirical	October 2022	Commencement of qualitative data collection procedures -preparing questions for Questionnaire and for Interviews
	November 2022	Sending out the electronic Questionnaire
	December 2022 to February 2023	Conducting 45 personal interviews in person or via zoom
	March to April 2023	Formulating all Questionnaire data into charts or histograms Preliminary coding of the information – to find out any new issues or concepts Fine- tuning the questions for the Focused group (remaining 15 interviewees)
	May 2023 to June 2023	Conducting the three Focused group interviews
Analytical	July to September 2023	Analyzing the qualitative data by using the coding schema.
	October 2023 to November 2023	Perform re-coding to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Triangulate the data collected and document the analysis.
	December 2023 to May 2024	Draw preliminary conclusion Perform interpretation of the research results

Ethical consideration

It is noted that before any interview or questionnaire is going to be carried out, the **Consent Form** must be obtained from all the interviewees and to be submitted together with the Research Information sheet for **Research ethical approval** by the University.

The ethical standard of the Universities being interviewed and/or the professional Teachers' Association concerning the educators being interviewed have to be studied too. Application for ethical approval by these concerned entities may be needed. **Negotiation for authorship** for publication is another issue that has to be addressed.

No intended interviewees should be pressurized into consent. During the interviews, sensitivity of the questions, different cultural, social or political consideration must be respected. The potential problem of **power imbalance** must be noted. The emotions , queries or insecurities of the interviewees must be taken care of. The interviewer should **avoid appearing partial, biased , leading or oppressive**. He or she should also avoid any situation of conflict of interest.

The **privacy** of the interviewees must be given top priority. The **rule of confidentiality** will be strictly adhered to, in particular concerning the identity of the interviewees and the information data given.(For example, criticism against certain administrative aspect of a University by a lecturer must be subject the strictest confidentiality to protect the interest of the outspoken volunteer). The storage of the information data must be safe and discreet to curb inadvertent divulge.

In processing or interpreting the data, the researcher must be honest, authentic, **avoiding plagiarism** and strictly refraining from making use of any of the information to harm the interviewees. The **reflexive ethics** (Guilleman & Gillam, 2004) should be observed.

The **Trustworthiness criteria** for research (Lincoln, Y; Guba, E., 1986) should be satisfied as much as possible.

Firstly , the researcher's observation should be authentic and persistent , with peer debriefing , member's check , triangulation of sources/ methods /investigations, and possibly negative case analysis to establish **credibility** of the research.

Secondly , the question of **transferability** of the research result has to be considered, avoiding over generalization or inappropriate application of the research result to different context.

Thirdly, the question of **dependability** may be established with the assistance of an independent disinterested external auditor.

Fourthly, the question of **confirmability** can be achieved by accurate and reliable data referencing and tracking to the original source.

4. Implications for research

The qualitative research method has definitely enriched my research exercise by providing empirical evidence – by providing flesh and bones to the investigation of the research questions.

Without the qualitative research method, it will be impossible for me to **elicit perceptions, experiences, values and expectations** from the stakeholders in online education – (i.e. the students, educators and educational institutions) for my analysis and interpretation.

The interview method in qualitative research is **reflexive** for all parties concerned. It allows in-depth discussion and exploration of the various issues arising from the research problems. It allows **expression of individual aspiration, wishes, feelings or criticism** that may not be revealed by a quantitative research approach.

Where the qualitative research approach is for **search for subjective matters** of value, perception, experience, opinion , prejudice, bias, like or dislike, the quantitative approach is largely irrelevant to the present research , save and except for the financial assessment of the profit outcome and the comparative statistics of pedagogical outcome.

The qualitative data has confirmed or distinguished many of the literature finding and prediction, and has provided a **unique case study reference** for those hoping to invest or engage in higher educational exchange in Law and Business administration between HK, China and England .

5. Significance

This research is very **significant to the understanding of the feasibility** of educational development in the higher online education in Law and Business Administration between England , HK and China.

The **commercial implication of this research article is huge**, since China is growing to engage in collaboration and competition with the world since the 2010s'. Its young working adults need to understand the legal and business environment of the west, as much as the west need to understand better the situation in China. The working adults in HK can best serve as friendly intermediaries or advisors to connect both sides of the globe.

The current availability of online educational courses in Law and Business administration is **surprisingly rare**. Many working adults in HK who want to pursue these subjects by correspondence have little choice. The Covid- 19 pandemic has rendered it even more challenging , if not impossible, for safe study travel to England.

Hence, the positive implication of this research is that: it may inform many of the Universities in England to **expand their cyber presence** by providing online degree course in Law and BA, without requiring students from Asia to attend the lessons physically in England.

6. Limitation

The research focus of this article is narrow, in that it is only meant to be in investigation into the online education in Law and Business Administration only in the pedagogical interconnectivity between HK, China and England. Hence, the research result has no direct application to other academic subjects or other places.

Secondly, the research sampling is only about 60 interviewees and 200 Questionnaire over three places, without any differentiation between big city or remote rural area in China. Hence, the positivity and convenience of online education may not apply in some less developed part of China. Also, the linguistic barrier between the English educator and the average mainland Chinese students may be an obstacle discouraging widespread growth of direct online educational platform between England and mainland China.

Thirdly, as technological advancement is rapidly growing in the world , the technological limitation encountered by students or educators in online education this year may not be a problem any more next year . The challenges mentioned in the article may therefore become invalid in the light of the advancing technological improvement.

Fourthly, the political tension between England and China may render intellectual exchanges between these two countries sometimes impossible , as indeed in around 2019, China had ordered a ban against co-operation between any local mainland Chinese Universities with British or US Universities (albeit individual application to study a online course at a British University was not yet banned) .

Fifthly, the revelation of the challenges facing the University interviewed may not be entirely accurate, since there may be an element of commercial privacy about the financial , administrative or pedagogical weakness that these entities would like to keep away from public's eyes.

Similarly, the views of the educators should always be read with a pinch of salt in that they may not want to be perceived as complaining or criticizing the entity which has provided financial support to them.

Last but not least, the consumer perception of the effectiveness and user friendliness of online courses may be affected by the quality of the course preparation by the teachers and the technological support available to them.

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