

The Effects of Electronic Resources in a College Course Discussion Forum
To Acquire Quality Research and Critical Thinking Skills

Laureen Kodani

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

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The growing number of electronic resources has motivated a shift from print based reading materials to electronic based reading materials, including textbooks and journals in portable document format (PDF). Specifically, library online resources continue to grow as a viable source of information. Summerfield, Mandel and Kantor (2000) found that books offered in electronic and paper format were more often used in electronic format. Still, students are not fully aware of helpful tools available with electronic resources. In order to conduct quality online research which enhances critical thinking skills, students need understanding and experience using library online resources such as EBSCO or ebrary.

According to Lym (2009), students often surf the Web for research information before accessing scholarly journals. Due to students' lack of awareness, Rowley et al. (2004) suggest introducing and integrating electronic information systems as a support for teaching quality research. Franzoni and Assar (2009) suggest implementing information technology as a way to support learning processes. Cagiltay (2006) recommends integrating online procedural scaffolding as an effective learning tool. Students can exercise quality research skills while utilizing note-taking tools such as flags, bookmarks, and highlighting to mark specific locations in a document. The student interacts directly with the electronic resource. In addition, note-taking tools emphasize the synthesis of ideas and concepts from various scholarly resources.

The purpose of this action research study is to evaluate whether implementing scholarly electronic resources as part of an assignment is an effective strategy for college students to acquire quality research and critical thinking skills when learning SWOT analysis in an online introductory marketing course at University of Hawai'i, Maui College.

The subjects for this action research are University of Hawai'i, Maui College students enrolled in an online introductory marketing course. One of the fundamental units of marketing

is the SWOT analysis. An assignment will be implemented which requires the students to research electronic articles or books about SWOT analysis. Within one week, the student chooses one electronic resource to post in an online discussion forum and lists 3 to 5 features explaining how they specifically gained knowledge about the topic. In addition, the students will reflect on using electronic note-taking tools and how it may have helped with analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information to create new knowledge. Students will also be required to respond with peer feedback to fellow classmates.

A mixed-method will be used to collect data. Qualitative data to measure student reactions and perceptions will be collected from the discussion posts and responses. Quantitative data to measure more specific questions will be collected from a post-assignment online questionnaire which should take approximately 10-15 minutes for the student to complete. The questionnaire will consist of 7-10 questions and will be created in Google Docs.

I will evaluate and organize the data collected with the following criterion as a guide. First, identify major themes in the discussion posts and survey. Second, does the data support improvement in the students' abilities to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the concept of SWOT analysis? Third, identify potential changes to improve the instruction and learning. Finally, identify additional questions that may arise as a result of the action research.

This action research will be conducted as an effort to build enthusiasm for improving critical thinking skills while utilizing electronic resources and tools. Online instructors can benefit from understanding how students interact with online resources. The study will provide information that can help improve online teaching and learning.

References

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