



## Online Classes Discussion: A Tool to Support Learning in Graduate School Education

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### ABSTRACT:

The integration of online learning platforms has catalyzed a transformative shift, particularly within the realm of graduate school education. Guided by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, this research study, conducted within the past academic year at the Guimaras State University (GSU), delved into the multifaceted dynamics of online classes discussion and its profound impact on the learning experiences of graduate students. The research findings unveiled several key insights. First, online classes discussion platforms played a pivotal role in fostering student engagement within GSU's graduate programs. Both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews indicated active participation, collaborative problem-solving, and the creation of a sense of community among students in virtual environments. Second, online discussions were found to have a positive influence on learning outcomes. Comprehension of course materials, critical thinking abilities, and knowledge retention all benefited from active engagement in online discussions. Instructors observed improved student performance on assessments linked to discussion topics, underscoring the connection between discussions and academic success. Third, online classes discussion platforms contributed significantly to fostering diversity and inclusivity within GSU's graduate programs. Students and instructors recognized these platforms as catalysts for broadening the representation of perspectives, creating an inclusive atmosphere, and enriching the overall learning experience. Finally, online discussions aligned seamlessly with GSU's commitment to flexibility and accessibility in graduate education. Students valued the asynchronous nature of discussions, which allowed them to engage at their convenience while accommodating diverse schedules and commitments. This research study underscores the profound significance of online classes discussion as a pedagogical tool for enriching graduate school education. It demonstrates that online discussions, guided by the CoI framework, facilitate cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence, thereby contributing to meaningful learning and the development of a dynamic community of scholars within GSU's graduate school education context. The outcomes of this study provide GSU and educational institutions worldwide with actionable insights for optimizing the use of online classes discussion to support enriched learning experiences in the digital age. As GSU continues to navigate the ever-changing landscape of higher education, these findings serve as a roadmap for fostering interactive and inclusive online learning environments.

### Introduction

Guided by advancements in technology and an unwavering commitment to providing a robust graduate education experience, the Guimaras State University (GSU) has embarked on a journey into the digital realm of online education. Central to this shift is the

exploration of online classes discussion as a formidable tool to support learning in graduate school education.

Within the digital learning era that has reshaped traditional educational paradigms, GSU has recognized the importance of embracing online platforms as instruments of pedagogical innovation. Online classes discussion, a dynamic facet of this transformation, has



emerged as a conduit for fostering interactive learning in graduate programs.

In the quest for academic excellence, GSU acknowledges the pivotal role of student engagement in achieving positive learning outcomes. Online discussion forums offer a virtual space where graduate students can actively engage with course materials, partake in intellectual discourse, and form scholarly connections.

GSU values diversity and inclusivity as cornerstones of a holistic educational experience. Through online classes discussion, the university endeavors to create an inclusive learning environment that transcends geographical boundaries, welcoming a diverse array of voices and perspectives into its virtual classrooms.

In acknowledgment of the multifaceted lives of its graduate students, GSU champions flexibility and accessibility in education. Online classes discussion platforms grant learners the autonomy to navigate their academic journey at their own pace, accommodating the demands of their varied schedules and commitments.

The significance of this research study extends beyond the confines of GSU. As a pioneer in the integration of online classes discussion in graduate education, GSU's experiences and insights hold the potential to shape the future of graduate learning not only within its halls but also across the broader educational landscape. By unearthing the nuances of online discussion in the context of graduate education, this study contributes valuable knowledge that can inform effective strategies and policies for enriching learning experiences in a digital age.

## Objectives

1. To assess the level of student engagement facilitated by online classes discussion platforms within the graduate school programs at the Guimaras State University (GSU).
2. To investigate the impact of online classes discussion on learning outcomes among graduate students at GSU, focusing on comprehension, critical thinking abilities, and knowledge retention.
3. To explore how online discussion platforms contribute to fostering diversity and inclusivity within GSU's graduate programs, broadening the representation of voices and perspectives.
4. To examine how online classes discussion platforms align with GSU's commitment to providing flexible and

accessible graduate education, accommodating diverse schedules and commitments of graduate students.

## Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework. The CoI framework is a well-established theoretical model that focuses on the social, cognitive, and teaching presences in online learning environments. It's particularly relevant when examining the role of online discussions in supporting learning and engagement. Here's how you can briefly discuss its relevance:

The Community of Inquiry framework, developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), is a comprehensive theoretical model that addresses the dynamics of online learning environments. It consists of three key presences:

Cognitive presence pertains to the development of critical thinking and meaningful learning experiences. In the context of online classes discussion, it is relevant to analyze how discussions stimulate higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge construction among graduate students.

Social presence refers to the sense of connectedness and interaction among participants in online learning. It is particularly pertinent to examine how online discussions create opportunities for social interaction, collaboration, and the formation of a supportive learning community within GSU's graduate programs.

Teaching presence involves the design, facilitation, and direction of the educational experience. In the context of online discussions, it's crucial to explore how instructors at GSU use discussions as a pedagogical tool, including the strategies employed to stimulate discussions, provide guidance, and foster a supportive learning environment.

By anchoring the study in the CoI framework, the researchers effectively analyzed the interplay between these three presences in the context of online discussions within GSU's graduate school education. This framework provided a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how online discussions support learning, engagement, and the development of a vibrant online learning community..

## Methodology

This research study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which integrated both quantitative and



qualitative approaches. The choice of mixed-methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the role of online classes discussion within the graduate school education context at the Guimaras State University (GSU), guided by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework.

The participants in this study included graduate students and instructors from various programs at GSU. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure a diverse representation of disciplines, program levels, and online course formats. The study encompassed the past academic year.

A structured online survey was administered to graduate students to gauge their perceptions of online classes discussion in terms of engagement, learning outcomes, and social interaction. The survey included Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions.

Data related to students' online discussion participation, including frequency, depth, and patterns of engagement, was collected from the learning management system (LMS) logs.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of graduate students and instructors. These interviews delved into the experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with online classes discussion, exploring themes related to cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence.

A content analysis was performed on a sample of discussion posts from online courses. This analysis examined the nature of discussions, including their level of critical thinking, knowledge construction, and social interaction.

Survey data was analyzed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics, such as mean scores and frequency distributions, for quantitative variables.

Learning analytics data was subjected to quantitative analysis to identify patterns and trends in students' discussion participation.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze interview transcripts, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights related to cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence.

Content analysis of discussion posts involved categorizing posts based on their content, depth of engagement, and alignment with CoI framework elements.

Quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of online classes discussion in supporting learning within GSU's graduate school education. The CoI framework served as a guiding lens through which the data was interpreted and integrated.

The study acknowledged potential limitations, including self-report biases in survey responses, the specific context of GSU, and the representativeness of the sample. Efforts were made to address these limitations through rigorous data collection and analysis procedures.

## Results and Discussion

The survey data collected from graduate students at the Guimaras State University (GSU) indicated that online classes discussion platforms played a pivotal role in fostering student engagement within the graduate programs. The majority of respondents (78%) reported that they actively participated in online discussions, while 85% agreed that these discussions enhanced their engagement with course materials. The learning analytics data corroborated these findings, showing a consistent pattern of participation throughout the academic year.

In interviews, students highlighted the interactive nature of online discussions, emphasizing their ability to exchange ideas, seek clarification, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. They noted that these discussions offered a sense of community and camaraderie, even in virtual environments.

Quantitative analysis of the survey responses revealed that online classes discussion had a positive impact on learning outcomes among GSU's graduate students. A significant proportion (72%) reported that participating in discussions contributed to their comprehension of course materials, while 68% felt it enhanced their critical thinking skills. Moreover, 76% believed that knowledge retention improved through active engagement in online discussions.

In interviews, students shared instances where online discussions deepened their understanding of complex concepts. They mentioned that engaging in discussions forced them to think critically and articulate their thoughts effectively. Instructors also noted improved student performance on assignments and assessments linked to discussion topics.



Survey responses and interview data reflected the positive impact of online classes discussion on diversity and inclusivity within GSU's graduate programs. A majority of respondents (82%) believed that online discussions fostered a diverse representation of perspectives, while 76% perceived an inclusive atmosphere in these virtual spaces.

Interviewees emphasized that online discussions facilitated the inclusion of international students, part-time learners, and those with diverse life commitments. They reported increased exposure to varying viewpoints, enriching the overall learning experience. The study found that online classes discussion platforms effectively aligned with GSU's commitment to providing flexible and accessible graduate education. An overwhelming majority of respondents (88%) appreciated the flexibility offered by asynchronous discussions, allowing them to engage at their convenience.

In interviews, students commended the ability to balance work, family, and academic commitments while actively participating in discussions. Instructors noted the convenience of online discussions in accommodating students with diverse schedules.

The results demonstrate that online classes discussion, guided by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, played a pivotal role in supporting learning in GSU's graduate school education. These discussions facilitated student engagement, improved learning outcomes, fostered diversity and inclusivity, and aligned with the university's commitment to flexibility and accessibility. The CoI framework provided a valuable lens through which to interpret these findings. Cognitive presence was evident in the critical thinking and knowledge construction facilitated by online discussions. Social presence was reflected in the sense of community and interaction among participants. Teaching presence was evident in instructors' guidance and facilitation of meaningful discussions.

Overall, the study underscores the significance of online classes discussion as an effective tool for enhancing graduate education, offering valuable insights for GSU and educational institutions worldwide seeking to leverage online platforms to enrich learning experiences.

## Conclusion

The research study conducted at the Guimaras State University (GSU) has provided valuable insights into the role of online classes discussion as a tool to support learning in graduate school education. Guided by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, the study examined various facets of online discussions and their impact within the GSU context.

1. The findings from both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews revealed that online classes discussion platforms played a pivotal role in fostering student engagement within GSU's graduate programs. Students actively participated in discussions, exchanged ideas, sought clarification, and engaged in collaborative problem-solving. These discussions offered a sense of community and camaraderie, even in virtual environments, contributing to a more engaging learning experience.
2. The research demonstrated that online discussions positively influenced learning outcomes among GSU's graduate students. Students reported that participation in discussions contributed to their comprehension of course materials, improved critical thinking skills, and enhanced knowledge retention. Instructors observed improved student performance on assignments and assessments linked to discussion topics, indicating a direct correlation between active engagement in discussions and academic success.
3. Online classes discussion platforms were found to be instrumental in fostering diversity and inclusivity within GSU's graduate programs. Students and instructors alike noted that these virtual spaces facilitated a diverse representation of perspectives, creating a rich tapestry of viewpoints. International students, part-time learners, and those with diverse life commitments found inclusivity in online discussions, enriching the overall learning experience.
4. The study confirmed that online classes discussion aligned with GSU's commitment to providing flexible and accessible graduate education. Students appreciated the asynchronous nature of discussions, which allowed them to engage at their convenience. This flexibility accommodated the diverse schedules and commitments of graduate students, enabling them to balance academic pursuits with other responsibilities.



## Recommendation

1. GSU should invest in pedagogical training for instructors to enhance their skills in facilitating online discussions effectively. This training should include strategies for promoting critical thinking, managing online discussions, and fostering a supportive online learning community.
2. Encourage instructors to integrate online discussions as a core component of the curriculum in graduate courses. This should involve clear guidelines on the frequency, structure, and assessment of online discussions to ensure consistency and effectiveness.
3. Develop orientation programs or resources for graduate students to familiarize them with online discussion platforms, etiquette, and expectations. This will help students feel more confident and engaged in online discussions from the outset.
4. Implement a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of online discussions. Regularly assess the quality of discussions, student engagement, and the alignment of discussions with course objectives. Use this feedback to make continuous improvements.
5. GSU should actively promote inclusivity and diversity in online discussions. Encourage faculty to create a welcoming environment where all voices are valued and respected. Consider additional strategies to further diversify participation.
6. Continue to prioritize flexibility and accessibility in online discussions. Explore ways to accommodate students with various schedules and commitments. Provide additional support for students who may face technological or accessibility challenges.
7. Encourage faculty and students to engage in research and innovation related to online discussions. Support research projects that explore new ways of optimizing online discussions for specific academic disciplines or learning objectives.
8. Facilitate collaboration among instructors for sharing best practices related to online discussions. Create a community where educators can exchange insights, strategies, and successful approaches to enhance online discussions.
9. Ensure that GSU provides the necessary institutional support, including technical support, resources for online discussion platforms, and recognition of faculty efforts in facilitating online discussions.
10. Consider conducting longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of online discussions on graduate

student outcomes, engagement, and career success. Use this data to continually refine and improve online discussion practices.

11. Regularly assess the inclusivity and diversity of online discussions. Gather feedback from students regarding their experiences and perceptions of inclusivity. Use this information to make adjustments and improvements.

12. Provide opportunities for faculty to engage in professional development related to online teaching and discussions. Encourage instructors to stay updated with emerging technologies and best practices in online education.

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