DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A SURVEY OF ONLINE COUNSELING INSTRUCTORS ENGAGEMENT

Mohd Azrin Mohd Nasir, Northern University of Malaysia (UUM)
Timothy Janikowski, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York
Wendy Guyker, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York
Scott Meier, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate a survey assessing counseling instructors' engagement in distance education. The Survey of Online Counseling Instructor Engagement (SOCIE) is a student evaluation tool designed to measure instructors' engagement styles in the online classroom environment. The instrument was developed based upon an extensive review of the counseling literature in online teaching and distance education. The SOCIE was administered to 268 graduate students enrolled in online counseling courses across the United States during the Spring 2018 semester. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principle Component Analysis extraction and the Direct Oblimin method identified two dimensions of online engagement style with a total of 31 items: Organizing and Coordinating Style and Active Engaging Style. SOCIE scores also evidenced good internal consistency reliabilities and correlated as expected with a measure of student satisfaction. Based on these psychometric findings, this instrument may be used for student evaluation of teaching effectiveness by counseling instructors in online courses. Finally, limitations and implications are also discussed.

Keywords: counseling instruction; online learning; distance education, for graduate students; survey development

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities have created online courses to make higher education widely accessible at any place and any time. A major benefit of distance education is that the students may gain the same knowledge regardless of where they live. The flexibility of online instruction also allows students to work at their own pace. Therefore, online education has exploded in popularity in recent years, with 29% of higher education students having reported taking at least one distance learning course (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Distance education has carried over to counselor training as well (Albrecht & Jones, 2001; Benshoff & Gibbons, 2011). Many counseling courses and programs are now offered in an online environment. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) website indicates that online courses and programs have been offered in a variety of counseling programs, including clinical mental health counseling, community counseling, school counseling, marriage, couples, and family counseling, and counselor education and supervision (Watson, 2012). Additionally, most of the counseling training programs include some version of a beginning counseling skills course or an introduction to the counseling profession as an online course (Kozlowski & Holmes, 2017).

Regardless of the modality (in person or online), teaching counseling relies on the educators' philosophy, professional context, and interpersonal interaction to develop engagement

with students (Lear, Isenhagen, Lacost, & King, 2009; Lowenthal & Lowenthal, 2009). Counseling courses are often taught within a humanistic and experiential framework. Therefore, instructors may require an effective online pedagogy to ensure that students are academically and intellectually engaged because the language and communication style used in counseling may be different than that of other fields such as business, education, computer science, management, literature, mathematics, finance, or accounting (Lear et al., 2009; Lowenthal & Lowenthal, 2009; Perera-Diltz & Monaghan, 2014).

Counseling instructors are typically integrating a real-world context as a pedagogical tool to relate theory to practice and to help enhance learning outcomes (Benshoff & Gibbons, 2011; Sheperis & Davis, 2016). Thus, the ability to facilitate students' reflection, explore feelings (reflective dialogue), demonstrate cultural sensitivity (cultural immersion), foster positive relationships, and construct students' personal meanings are essential elements for distance education in counseling (Granello, 2000; Perera-Diltz & MacCluskie, 2012; Reicherzer, Dixon-Saxon, & Trippany, 2009). Clearly, the online environment creates challenges because the counseling discipline relies heavily on interpersonal interaction (Cicco, 2012). However, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (2016) asserted that the nature of the interaction should be included in the online environment, as both students and counseling instructors still want to feel connected to the material and to one another.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND COUNSELING COURSES

In the context of distance education, the nature of the online modality (i.e., the lack of a physical presence, full reliance on web-based technologies, and a reliance on text-based communication) will invite distinct interpersonal dynamics and interactions between instructors and students (Benshoff & Gibbons, 2011; Patrick, 2005; Perera-Diltz & MacCluskie, 2012). As a result, online courses demand different forms of engagement than the traditional classroom approach with students (Dickinson, 2017; Martin, 2019). Ekong (2006) argued that an instructor's style is the key to successful engagement in online teaching for counseling programs. Very little is known, however, about how online counseling instructors engage with their students in distance education. Exploring and developing an understanding of the particular engagement style necessary for navigating online counseling courses is needed to clarify the critical elements of this technology when mediated to an education approach (Perera-Diltz & Monaghan, 2014).

Instructor engagement is an essential component that is associated with student outcome, performance, and course satisfaction. In higher educational settings, Weimer (2011) defined engagement as faculty involvement in the course, faculty's interest in the material, and interaction with students that engages students in the course. In teaching, faculty can stimulate engagement by providing students with active learning experiences, conveying excitement and enthusiasm for their subject, and providing opportunities for student-faculty interaction.

Research indicates that a higher degree of instructor engagement positively impacts the student learning experience and influences student satisfaction and retention (Anderson & Elloumi, 2004; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Shea, Pickett, & Perlz, 2003). Given the increasing number of online courses, systematic research into the nature of this relatively new academic discipline and the extent of instructor engagement with it is warranted (Redmond, Heffernan, Abawi, Brown, & Henderson, 2018). Online learning has been well-studied in some disciplines and some fields have begun to identify what constitutes excellent online education (Perry & Edwards, 2005). Only a few studies, however, specifically examine instructor engagement as an aspect of the quality of online counselor education (Ekong, 2006). Thus, determining and measuring online teaching practices, particularly considering the nature of counseling courses, will provide an opportunity to explore its contribution to student outcomes. Researchers have already confirmed that the online instructional method has successfully maintained counseling students' self-efficacy and skills; surprisingly, the results show similar outcomes as compared to on-campus courses (Meyer, 2015; Watson, 2012). What is lacking from the research is empirical evidence that examines online counseling instructors' engaging behaviors with students in distance education (Ekong, 2006; Hall, 2016).

Furthermore, by identifying instructors' online teaching style and the behaviors that contribute to engagement, researchers may promote professional growth and contribute to student success (Zanjani, Edwards, Nykvist, & Geva, 2016). Online counseling courses are designed to respond to the counseling profession's particular standards, practices, values, and professional ethics (Cicco, 2016; Reicherzer, Dixon-Saxon, & Trippany, 2009). Online teaching, however, still needs careful attention to maintain the quality of professional standards and to enhance student readiness for direct clinical or professional work in the future (Reicherzer, Dixon-Saxon, & Trippany, 2009).

ONLINE INSTRUCTORS ENGAGEMENT

To understand instructors' roles in online learning environments, Farmer and Ramsdale (2016) conducted a study to investigate the role of faculty who teach online by using systematic review approaches to online teaching competency journals and articles. The study produced the Online Teaching Competency (OTC) Matrix which includes five competency areas: (a) Community Netiquette—online instructors nurture an inclusive community and supportive environment to encourage students' academic progress, personal matters, and professional growth; (b) Active Teaching/Facilitating—online instructors strive to create an active participatory learning atmosphere for students by providing feedback and support group work and by modifying materials and teaching strategies; (c) Instructional Design—online instructors ensure that course curriculum and student learning experiences support the course and learning outcomes, content, activities, and assessment; (d) Tools and Technology—online instructors select and organize tools and technology for learning that align with learning outcomes, and (e) Leadership and Instruction—online instructors act as leaders and facilitators by guiding students, focusing discussions, providing examples, and modeling behaviors.

In a similar study, Bailie (2015) gathered data from published studies regarding faculty roles in online protocols. He found that there were three major factors that drove instructional practice in online learning. The first role was Communication, where online faculty are expected to initiate email contact with each enrolled student, place a welcome telephone call to each student, organize class announcements and due dates, and include personal imagery in welcome messages. Second was Presence and Engagement, where online faculty are expected to access courses, actively participate and engage, and maintain office hours. Third was Timeliness and Responsiveness, where online faculty are expected to respond to email inquiries and voicemail from students and then grade assignments and final projects.

Lozano Rodriguez and Flores Fahara (2010) conducted a grounded theory study to examine online teaching styles in a Graduate School of Education. Six online instructors were selected to interview. All of the participants had more than five years of experience teaching online courses and received special training for online teaching from a virtual university in Mexico. The result detailed four styles of online teaching, including: (a) the designer-oriented style, designing and managing the online course; (b) the corrector-oriented style, structuring content and monitoring student progress; (c) the mediator-oriented style, fostering good relationships; and (d) the facilitator-oriented style, instructing knowledge and skills. Interestingly, this study found that the pattern of instructors' style was influenced by professional history, life experience, teaching philosophy, work characteristics, and personality.

Thus, the development and validation of a measure more representative of the counseling instructors' characteristics and online pedagogy merits an investigation into the context of the growth of distance education. The purpose of the present study was to develop a psychometrically sound, comprehensive, and practical scale to include the student's view in evaluating counseling instructors. In addition, the scale developed for this study can provide counseling trainees and online practitioners with opportunities to provide a standard guideline of engagement strategies that online counseling instructors might pursue and demonstrate.

METHODOLOGY

Instrumentation

The Survey of Online Counseling Instructor Engagement (SOCIE) was developed in a five-step process recommended by two sources, Springer, Abell, and Huston (2002), and DeVellis (2016). The process was as follows: (a) identify and define the

content areas of interest, (b) select the most proper instrument format to measure these content areas, (c) create a pool of potential items intended to illustrate the content areas to be measured, (d) submit the proposed items to a panel of expert reviewers to review items, and (e) pilot test the instrument with a small sample. The first step of the process involved a literature search of multiple sources, including ERIC, PsyINFO, Google Scholar, Science Direct Collection, Social Science Index databases, and the International Bibliography of the Social Science. The literature search was narrowed to content most relevant to online instructors' engagement related to the counseling field.

In Step 2, the instrument format and design were determined. The researchers selected a Likert-type scale widely used in social science, especially in measurement of opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Items would be phrased as closed-ended or forced-choice questions, where the respondents are provided with a limited number of options and asked to make a judgment about the question before moving on to the next question (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). A final consideration in Step 2 was overall survey length and creating enough items to be comprehensive but not too long to become tedious or overly time-consuming.

In Step 3 the researchers generated a tentative pool of survey items from the literature synthesis and to tried to capture as many ways of describing the constructs as possible. The initial item pool consisted of 54 items representing engagement for counseling courses.

In Step 4 a panel of three experts reviewed the 54 items. The panel consisted of a faculty member having expertise in counselor education, a faculty member with several years' experience teaching counseling courses online, and a faculty member with expertise in scale development. All three expert reviewers were members of a counseling department in a research university located in the Northeastern United States. The experts were asked to complete a reviewer feedback form used to rate survey items according to the degree the item content fit the description for the construct dimensions. They were also asked to provide specific comments and feedback on each item and on the overall instrument. Items were eliminated or reworded based on the feedback from the expert panel. This process resulted in a total of 38 items that were to be administered via an online, web-based survey.

Finally, in Step 5, the instrument was piloted with eight graduate students who were enrolled in online counseling courses. The participants in the pilot test were asked to report unexpected errors within the questionnaire (e.g., spelling and grammar) and possible problems during the online administration process. Final adjustments were then made to the instrument based on the feedback obtained from these pilot responses.

Participants and Data Collection

All procedures used in the study were reviewed and approved by the researchers' Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. A convenience sample of counseling students were recruited by contacting (a) the coordinator of counseling programs and relevant faculty members who teach online master's and doctoral level counseling students at local universities and (b) program directors throughout the United States who were identified from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP). For the CACREP program recruitment, the director of the programs and faculty contacts were obtained from the CACREP directory on their official site (http:// www.cacrep.org/ directory). The site provides descriptions of online counseling programs, which are linked to each of the institutions, counseling programs, and program contacts across the nation.

All faculty members and program directors were contacted via email and asked to distribute the survey to their students. Next, email invitations were disseminated to all potential students by the faculty or instructors via student listserv and the "instructor-to-student email" feature in Learning Management Systems (such as Blackboard, WebCT, and Moodle) and Facebook and e-learning portals. An online email/fact sheet describing the purpose of the project, the estimated time it takes to complete the survey, a link to the survey, and a promise to protect confidentiality were provided at the beginning of the survey. A request for documentation of informed consent was included and sent to all study participants.

As a part of the data collection, a demographic form was created for the study that asked participants about their age, gender, enrollment status, and which course they were using as

reference when responding to the questions. In addition to the SOCIE and the demographics form, the participants were asked to complete the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ; Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). The SSQ is a 24-item survey of graduate student satisfaction with online courses and has an internal coefficient of .92 and evidence supporting its construct validity (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012).

Data Analyses

A number of data analysis techniques were used to examine participant responses to the SOCIE, the demographics form, and the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Reliability and validity estimates for the SOCIE were explored using coefficient alpha, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and correlation coefficients with the SSQ. The factor analysis sequence included (a) examining the fitness of the data set, (b) conducting factor analysis, (c) obtaining item loadings on factors extracted, and (d) identifying the underlying factor structure.

RESULTS

Two hundred and eighty-five students responded to the recruitment email and followed a link to the Survey Monkey web page to participate in the study. Seventeen students were removed from the initial data set because they skipped entire sections of the survey; thus, a total of 268 students were retained for further data analyses. Two hundred students (74.6%) identified as Caucasian, 24 students (9%) were African-American, 12 students (4.5%) were Asian, 11 students (4.1%) were Hispanic, 10 students (3.7%) were multi-ethnic, four students (1.5%) were Native American, four students (1.5%) identified as Other, and three students (1.1%) did not declare ethnicity. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 63 years old (M = 31.74, SD = 6.73), while 49 (18.3%) were male and 219 (81.7%) were female.

Participants were asked to indicate their enrollment status and education levels. The sample consisted of 76.9% full-time students. Two hundred and fifty-one students (93.7%) were enrolled in Master's degree programs in counseling, nine students were doctoral students, six students (2.2%) were enrolled in advanced certificate programs, and two students (2%) were in non–degree-seeking programs. Participants identified their majors as Clinical Mental Health Counseling (33.2%, n = 89), Counseling (22%, n = 59), School Counseling (16.8%, n = 45), Rehabilitation Counseling (16%, n = 43), and Marriage, Couples, and Family Counseling (8.6%, n = 23). Six students (2.2%) were in a Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral program, and three students (1.1%) were identified as students in Counseling fast track and accelerated programs.

Students reported GPAs between 2.91 and 4.0 (M = 3.596, SD = 0.3086). They were taking eight credit hours per semester on average (M = 8.41, SD = 2.269), and the majority of students indicated that their current online course was not their first (94%, n = 252). Demographic questions also explored the reasons for students enrolling in distance education. The top three reasons for these students were convenience (81.3%, n = 218), preferred method of study (58.2%, n = 156), and distance to campus (39.9%, n = 107). Other reasons included work schedule conflicts with traditional sections (26.1%, n = 70), transportation concerns (13.4%, n = 36), illness/injury/disability (4.1%, n = 11), course not offered on campus (3.7%, n = 10), and traditional section closed (1.1%, n = 3).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Responses to the 38 items were examined via an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with Direct Oblimin rotation to identify the structure of the instrument and investigate which items most effectively represent variation in the data. In the analyses, seven items were dropped because they had inadequate loading problem (item loading less than .25), leaving 31 items. This yielded a two-factor solution that accounted for over 66.5% of the variance; the first factor accounted for 39.27% of the variance in the data, and the second factor accounted for 6.68% of the variance in the data. The two subscales are described in Table 2: Organizing and Coordinating Style was composed of 15 items, and Active Engaging Style was composed of 16 items.

Internal Consistency and Validity Correlations

The internal consistency of each of the two factors were examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The values obtained were: $\alpha = .87$ for Organizing and Coordinating Style and $\alpha = .81$ for Active Engagement Style. In addition, a summary

of correlation matrices between the subscale and total score of SOCIE and Student Satisfaction Questionnaire appear in Table 3. Positive correlations were found between all the SOCIE subscales 1 through 5 with Student Satisfaction Questionnaire-Instructor Subscale ($r = .502$ to $.699$, $p <. 001$). Overall, positive correlations were found between the SOCIE total score and the Student Satisfaction Questionnaire total score with high magnitude ($r = 0.77$, $p <0.01$).

DISCUSSION

The EFA of the online counseling instructors' engagement perceived by graduate students yielded a two-factor solution, labelled as Organizing and Coordinating Style and Active Engaging Style. The first factor, the Organizing and Coordinating Style, contains 15 items that address the extent of instructor skills regarding course development and management. Specifically, the items comprise measurement of the instructor's managerial roles, including the organizational, procedural, and setting

Table 1.*Demographic Characteristic of Participants* (*N=268*)

Characteristic		Frequency	Percent of Sample (%)
Gender	Male	49	18.3
	Female	219	81.7
Race/Ethnicity	African American	24	9
	Caucasian	200	74.6
	Asian	12	4.5
	Native American	4	1.5
	Hispanic	11	4.1
	Multi-ethnic	10	3.7
	Other	4	1.5
	Do not wish to declare	3	1.1
Enrollment Status	Full-time student	206	76.9
	Part-time student	62	23.1
Education Level	PhD	9	3.4
	Master's	251	93.7
	Advanced Certificate	6	2.2
	Non–Degree-Seeking	2	2
Distance from Campus	Less than 10 miles	14	5.2
	10–40 miles	90	33.6
	50 miles or more	164	61.2
Reasons for Enrolling in Distance-Learning Course	Traditional section closed	3	1.1
	Transportation concerns	36	13.4
	Childcare concerns	24	9.0
	Illness/injury/disability	11	4.1
	Work schedule conflicts with traditional sections	70	26.1
	Preferred method of study	156	58.2
	Convenience	218	81.3
	Too far to come to campus	107	39.9
	Only option, course not offered on campus	10	3.7
First Distance Course	Yes	16	6.0
	No	252	94.0

Table 1.*Demographic Characteristic of Participants* (*N=268*) (cont.)

Current Course	Counseling Theories and Techniques	42	15.7
	Foundations of Counseling	37	13.8
	Internship/Practicum/Field work	24	9.0
	Psychopathology and Diagnosis	19	7.1
	Multicultural/Cross Cultural	18	6.7
	Ethics in Counseling	18	6.7
	Addictions Counseling	17	6.3
	Assessment and Evaluation	14	5.2
	Case Management	13	4.9
	Grief, Crisis, and Trauma	13	4.9
	Research Methods in Counseling	11	4.1
	Life and Development	11	4.1
	Counseling and Leadership	11	4.1
	Group Counseling	8	3.0
	Family Therapy	15	2.6
	Career and Development	6	2.2
	Technology in Counseling	3	1.1
	Art Therapy	3	1.1

Table 2. SOCIE Factors from Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix)

Item	Factor 1 Loading	Factor 2 Loading
Factor 1: Organizing and Coordinating Style		
1. Communicated clear rules and expectations in the syllabus for this course (e.g., textbook, late assignment policy, and grading rubric)	.810	.32
2. Communicated deadlines for assignments	.781	.27
3. Offered me a safe environment for self-disclosure	.706	.30
4. Posted important information through announcements/emails to alert everyone in this course	.674	.32
5. Provided structure of format/templates for all assignments for this course	.625	.25
6. Response of student, and demonstrating respect to others	.607	.33
7. Acknowledged and became aware of my differences and personal needs when I expressed them	.592	.22
8. Communicated specific information about "netiquette" (appropriate ways for student to interact online)	.564	.31
9. Taught me to navigate the technology/system/online library resources for this course (e.g., how to create new threads and seek materials online)	.527	.23
10. Answered my email within 24 hours and 72 hours for my discussion posts	.517	.27
11. Was well-organized in every unit/chapter/module for this course	.510	. 24
12. Provided relevant topics and materials for every chapter/unit/module	.492	.30
13. Included case studies/research studies in class materials for this course	.467	.32
14. Offered continuous guidance through electronic communication in completing assignments (via, email, discussion thread, and chat room)	.440	.22
15. Provided relevant examples to help me understand the topic/chapter/unit/module	.411	.33
Factor 2: Active Engaging Style		
16. Provided advisement on career opportunity/further training or studies in counseling	.32	.880
17. Was consistently posting, commenting, replying to discussion threads for this course	.31	.815
18. Encouraged me about my personal or professional topics of interest in counseling for this course	.27	.768
19. Responded with empathy to my emotional stories/eventful experiences during the discussion/ assignments for this course	.22	.774

Table 2. SOCIE Factors from Principal Component Analysis (Pattern Matrix) (cont.)

20. Made reasonable efforts to ensure I would complete assignments (e.g., instructor sent me email reminders for missing coursework)	.27	.687
21. Provided relevant examples to help me understand the topic/chapter/unit/module	.32	.678
22. Encouraged me about my potential for growth as a future counselor, clinician, or other helping profession career	.26	.635
23. Participated in discussion forums when appropriate	.21	.619
24. Provided timely feedback on my assignments, discussion threads, and final project for this course	.30	.538
25. Kept up to date with mental health or development related issues (e.g., instructor introduced current mental health issues, research findings, psychological assessments, or evidence-based treatments that effect on therapy outcomes)	.19	.495
26. Used a variety of resources (e.g., video, website, and article) to help me think about the topic and specific information	.27	.436
27. Encouraged students to respectfully discuss or debate about our experiences, beliefs, and biases	.23	.416
28. Provided supportive efforts to help me get a good grade for this course (e.g., instructor allowed me to redo assignments or retake quizzes/tests)	.29	.412
29. Willing to respond to my personal life issues (individual, friends, roommates, family, and work) for this course	.15	.398
30. Taught me about ethical responsibility and moral development in counseling or helping profession	.19	.394
31. Helped me to stay current and aware of any change in the course syllabus, assignment or course grading (e.g., instructor posted announcement about update/change in information in syllabus/assignment)	.22	.365

Table 3. Pearson Correlations between the SOCIE and Student Satisfaction Questionnaire Total and Domain Scores

SOCIE-Subscale	Student Satisfaction Questionnaire						
	Total	Instructor	Technology	Course Setup	Interaction	Outcome	Overall satisfaction
Total	.75	.82	.73	.51	.64	.77	.72
Organizing & Coordinating	.62	.75	.82	.76	.55	.53	.67
Active Engaging	.61	.62	.35	.56	.84	.71	.77

All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

norms for the course. The second factor, Active Engaging Style, rendered 16 items that addressed the extent of the instructors' ability to provide direct instruction and facilitate the overall learning environment. Furthermore, the SOCIE and Student Satisfaction Questionnaire total and domain scores were found to exhibit a strong relationship with student satisfaction with the course.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations must be noted regarding this study. First, because the results are based on a convenience sampling, conclusions must be interpreted with caution. The findings represent effects in the sample used in the study and are cautiously generalizable to counseling instructors as a whole. Second, different types of counselling course content were sampled in this study. This may limit the universality of the data, although this study included participants from diverse content areas, from individual counseling lab/internship (clinical), and foundation of counseling course/theories of counseling (nonclinical). Abell, Cain, and Lee (2016) noted that the teaching style may change with the type of course, the amount of content associated with the course, or the level of the course.

A majority of participants in this study were self-identified as Caucasian and female. In this study, over two-thirds of participants (81.7%) were female and only 18.3% of participants were male. Though this study aims to reflect general graduate students in counseling courses, the absence of a more diverse participant sample also may limit the findings. Finally, participants completed the survey questions in a self-chosen online environment. This

practice may expose the participants of this study with different levels of distraction and attention. While online research presents this potentially confounding issue, the benefit of collecting data using this method exceeded its potential risks. As technology and the Internet are more available and accessible, online recruitment has opened a new window of opportunity to collect large samples and diverse data that are otherwise difficult to accomplish in person.

Future researchers should conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a larger sample size to provide further refinement of the instrument. Researchers should also test the SOCIE's discriminant validity analysis to examine construct validity more fully. Moreover, future research should compare different perspectives of engagement and interactions between students and instructors. Such a comparison study will bring comprehensive outcomes to understand the pattern of engagement style in online counseling courses as a whole. Having an appropriate measure of online engagement in counseling courses is also useful for exploring the best teaching practices for online instructors. SOCIE data can provide useful feedback to instructors regarding their engagement style and their pattern of engagement. From the scores obtained, the instructor may provide extra effort and attention to improve lower scores on each dimension. Knowing areas of strengths and weaknesses as an instructor may help the instructor to understand which areas need improvement as an educator.

As a student evaluation of teaching effectiveness in counseling courses, the SOCIE can be a tool to assist online programs in evaluating overall courses and their impacts on student satisfaction, student retention, final grades, and student outcomes for the course. Also, counseling instructors may use the SOCIE measure to predict levels of satisfaction and student retention as well as to improve student-learning outcomes. In short, the better the understanding of the instructor's engagement style, the better the outcomes of the course for students.

In sum, the goal of this study was to develop an instrument that is reliable and valid to support teaching counseling in distance education. Developing and testing a measure that has evidence for reliability and validity is the first step to creating a measure that can be used across counseling courses in distance education. Understanding and cultivating strong engagement style is imperative in teaching online courses; however, in order to better do this, an understanding of factors related to the engagement construct to strengthen the online teaching environment is needed. Research on counseling instructor engagement will provide useful feedback to instructors and will serve to strengthen online teaching engagement. Additionally, the items could be useful as a research tool for future studies of teaching performance as perceived by students. Overall, data collected via a psychometrically sound measure of engagement can assist to improve the quality of engagement and performance in distance education.

REFERENCES

Abell, N., Cain, M., & Lee, C. Y. C. (2016). Essential attributes for online success: Student learning preferences and faculty teaching styles. International Journal on E-Learning, 15(4), 401–422.

Albrecht, A. C., & Jones, D. G. (2001). High Tech/High Touch: Distance Learning in Counselor Preparation. Alexandria, VA: Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2016). Online report card: Tracking online education in the United States. Babson Park, MA: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group.

Anderson, T., & Elloumi, F. (2004). Theory and Practice of Online Learning. Athabasca, Canada: Athabasca, University.

Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. (2016). ACES teaching initiative taskforce Report: Best practices in teaching in counselor education report 2016. Washington, DC: Author.

Bailie, J. L. (2015). Online graduate instruction: What faculty consider reasonable in relation to what students expect. Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 11(1), 42–54. Retrieved from jolt.merlot.org/vol11no1/Bailie_0315.pdf

Benshoff, J. M., & Gibbons, M. M. (2011). Bringing life to e-learning: Incorporating a synchronous approach to online teaching in counselor education. The Professional Counselor, 1(1), 21–28. doi:10.15241/jmb.1.1.21

Bolliger, D. U., & Halupa, C. (2012). Student perceptions of satisfaction and anxiety in an online doctoral program. Distance Education, 33(1), 81–98. doi:10.1080/01587919.2012.667961

Cicco, G. (2012). Counseling instruction in the online classroom: A survey of student and faculty perceptions. i-Manager's Journal on Educational Technology, 8(2), 1–10. doi:10.26634/jsch.8.2.2022

Cicco, G. (2016). Reflecting on online course evaluations: Five must-do's for faculty students. i-Manager's Journal on School Educational Technology, 12(1) ,1–7.

DeVellis, R. F. (2016). Scale development: Theory and applications (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Dickinson, A. (2017). Communicating with the online student: The impact of e-mail tone on student performance and teacher evaluations. Journal of Educators Online, 14(2). Retrieved from https://www.thejeo.com/archive/2017_14_2/dickinson

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., Christian, L. M. (2014). Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: Tailored designed method (4th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Ekong, J. I. (2006). What factors facilitate online counselor training? Experiences of Campus Alberta graduate students. Journal of Distance Education, 21(1), 1–14.

Farmer, H. M., & Ramsdale, J. (2016). Teaching competencies for the online environment. Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology, 42(3), 1–17. doi:10.21432/T2V32J

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. The Internet and Higher Education, 2-3, 87–105. doi:10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6

Granello, P. F. (2000). Historical context: The relationship of computer technologies and counseling. In J. W. Bloom & G. R. Walz (Eds.), Cyber counseling and cyber learning: Strategies and resources for the millennium (pp. 3–15). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Hall, D. P. (2016). Online counselor training: Challenges and success in the experience of online counselor educators (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Retrieved from https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/listing.aspx?id=21345

Kozlowski, K. A., & Holmes, C. M. (2017). Teaching online group counseling skills in an on-campus group counseling course. The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision, 9(1), article 7. doi:10.7729/91.1157

Lear, J. L., Isernhagen, J. C., LaCost, B. A., & King, J. W. (2009). Instructor presence for web-based classes. The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal, 51(2), 86–98.

Lowenthal, A., & Lowenthal, P. R. (2009, April). Revisiting teaching present: An analysis of teaching presence across discourse community. Paper Presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Lozano Rodriguez, A., & Flores Fahara, M. (2010). Online teaching style: a study in distance education. International Journal of University Teaching and Faculty Development, 1(2), 1–14.

Martin, J. (2019). Building relationships and increasing engagement in the virtual classroom: Practical tools for the online instructor. Journal of Educators Online, 16(1). Retrieved from https://www.thejeo.com/archive/2019_16_1/martin

Meyer, J. M. (2015). Counseling self-efficacy: On-campus and distance education students. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 58(3), 165–172. doi:10.1177/0034355214537385

Patrick, P. K. S. (2005). Online counseling education: Pedagogy controversies and delivery issues. VISTAS Online, article 52, 239–241. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Perera-Diltz, D. M., & MacCluskie, K. C. (2012). The counselor educator's survival guide: Designing and teaching outstanding courses in community mental health counseling and school counseling. New York, NY: Routledge.

Perera-Diltz, D. M., & Monaghan, C. H. (2014). A dialogue on strategies for effective online counselor education instruction. VISTAS Online, article 54, 1–10. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Perry, B., & Edwards, M. (2005). Exemplary online educators: Creating a community of inquiry. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education—TOJDE, 6(2), 46–54.

Redmond, P., Heffernan, A., Abawi, L., Brown, A., & Henderson, R. (2018). An online engagement framework for higher education. Online Learning, 22(1), 183–204. doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1175

Reicherzer, S., Dixon-Saxon, S., & Trippany, R. (2009). Quality counseling training in a distance environment. Counseling Today, 51(12), 46–47.

Shea, P. J., Pickett, A. M., & Pelz, W. E. (2003). A follow-up investigation of "teaching presence" in the SUNY Learning Network. Journal of Asynchronous Learning Network, 7(2), 61–80. doi:10.24059/olj.v7i2.1856

Sheperis, C. J., & Davis, R. J. (2016). Online counselor education: a guide for students. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Springer, D. W., Abell, N., & Hudson, W. W. (2002). Creating and validating rapid assessment instruments for practice and research: Part 1. Research on Social Work Practice, 12(3), 408–439. doi:10.1177/1049731502012003005

Watson, J. C. (2012). Online learning and the development of counseling self-efficacy beliefs. Professional Counselor, 2(2), 143–151. doi:10.15241/jcw.2.2.143

Weimer, M. (2011). How do faculty and student define 'engagement'? Recruitment and Retention in Higher Education, 25(8), 6.

Zanjani, N., Edwards, S. L., Nykvist, S., & Geva, S. (2016). LMS Acceptance: The instructor Role. Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 25(4), 519–526. doi:10.1007/s40299-016-0277-2

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF ONLINE COUNSELING INSTRUCTOR ENGAGEMENT (SOCIE)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please indicate in which course you are referencing when you are responding to the survey.

Directions: Please indicate your degree of agreement to each of the items listed below.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Mildly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
(——————1	——————2	——————3	——————4	——————5	——————6——————-)

My online counseling instructor . . .

Dimension 1: Organizing and Coordinating Style

1. communicated clear rules and expectations in the syllabus for this course (e.g., textbook, late assignment policy and grading rubric)
2. communicated deadlines for assignments
3. offered me a safe environment for self-disclosure
4. posted important information through announcements/emails to alert everyone in this course
5. provided structure of format/templates for all assignments for this course
6. response of student, and demonstrating respect to others)
7. acknowledged and became aware of my differences and personal needs when I expressed them
8. communicated specific information about 'netiquette' (appropriate ways for student to interact online)
9. taught me to navigate the technology/system/online library resources for this course (e.g., how to create new threads and seek materials online)
10. answered my email within 24 hours and 72 hours for my discussion posts
11. was well-organized in every unit/chapter/module for this course
12. provided relevant topics and materials to every chapter/unit/module
13. included case studies/research studies in class materials for this course
14. offered continuous guidance through electronic communication in completing assignments (via, email, discussion thread and chat room)
15. provided relevant examples to help me understand the topic/chapter/unit/module

Dimension 2: Active Engaging Style

16. provided advisement on career opportunity/further training or studies in counseling
17. was consistently posting, commenting, replying to discussion threads for this course
18. encouraged me about my personal or professional topics of interest in counseling for this course
19. responded with empathy to my emotional stories/eventful experiences during the discussion/ assignments for this course
20. made reasonable efforts to ensure I would complete assignments (e.g., instructor sent me email reminders for missing coursework)
21. provided relevant examples to help me understand the topic/chapter/unit/module
22. encouraged me about my potential for growth as a future counselor, clinician or other helping profession career
23. participated in discussion forums when appropriate
24. provided timely feedback on my assignments, discussion threads, and final project for this course

25. kept up to date with mental health or development related issues (e.g., instructor introduced about current mental health issue, research findings, psychological assessments or evidence-based treatments that effect on therapy outcomes)
26. used a variety of resources (e.g., video, website, and article) to help me think about the topic and specific information
27. encouraged students to respectfully discuss or debate about our experiences, beliefs and biases
28. provided supportive efforts to help me get a good grade for this course (e.g., instructor allowed me to redo assignments or retake quizzes/tests)
29. willing to respond to my personal life issues (individual, friends, roommates, family, and work) for this course
30. taught me about ethical responsibility and moral development in counseling or helping profession
31. helped me to stay current and aware of any change in the course syllabus, assignment or course grading (e.g., instructor posted announcement about update/ change in information in syllabus/ assignment)