

# Key Factors Affecting Participant Satisfaction of Course Facilitators in a Large-Scale Online Professional Development Context

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# Florida Online Reading Professional Development (FOR-PD)

- Florida's first large-scale statewide online professional development project (state funded).
- Designed to enable teachers to keep abreast with emerging standards, current scientifically-based research, best instructional practices, and the ever-changing literacy needs of an increasingly diverse population of preK-12 students.
- Participants to date: Over 31, 000 preK-12 educators from all (67) Florida's school districts, 7 state universities, and 6 community colleges (CC) across the state.
- A FOR-PD course delivered in four ways: District and Open sections for school district participants at no charge and University and CC sections for college students at charge.
- Courses for facilitators: a 7-week training course, a professional development – teaching presence course, and more lessons under development.

# Online Learning

- An increase in online professional development courses since the advent of advanced technology and the internet in information age.
- Three types: Web-enhanced, mixed-mode, and fully online courses (CDWS, 2006) delivered in a course management system.
- Allowing for “flexibility of access, from anywhere and usually at anytime” (Anderson, 2004, chap. 1, para. 3).
- Demanding facilitators’ time and efforts to provide adequate resources and support for participants (Anderson, 2004).

# Roles of Online Facilitators

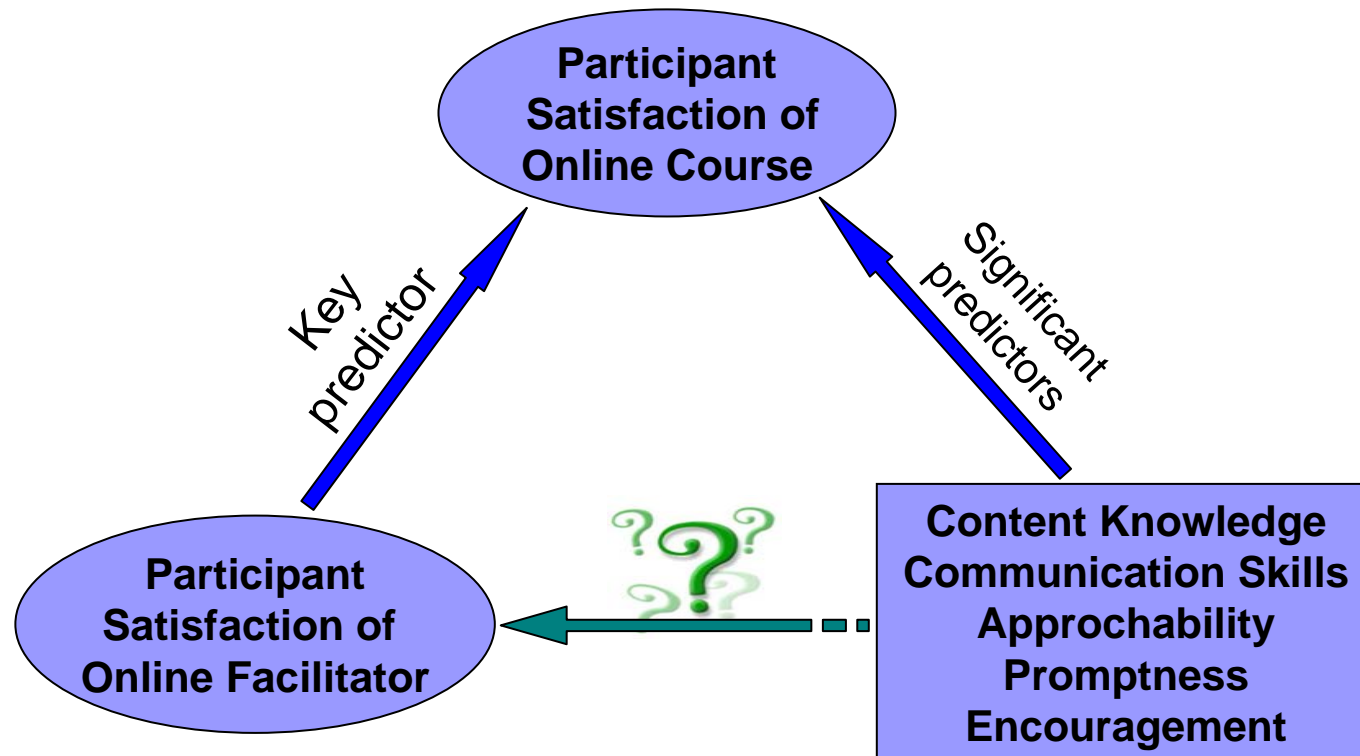
- Four Areas of Online Facilitators' Roles (Berge, 1995)
  - **Pedagogical roles**: employ some ways to facilitate student intellectual learning.
  - **Social roles**: create a comfortable and friendly environment to stimulate learning.
  - **Managerial or Organizational roles**: use organizational and administrative procedures to run the class.
  - **Technical roles**: become comfortable with software that compose the online learning environment and provide technical assistance and guidance.



# Facilitator Factors Affecting Participant Satisfaction

- Content Knowledge
- Communication Skills
- Approachability
- Promptness
- Encouragement

# Facilitator Factors Affecting Participant Satisfaction (Cont'd)



*Figure 1.* Relevant previous research findings

*Notes.* Literature review was done with the selected studies (Arbaugh, 2001; Finaly-Neumann, 1994; Thurmond, Wambach, & Conners, 2002; Williams & Ceci, 1997).

# Purpose of the Study

## ■ Purpose of the Study

- To investigate key factors affecting participants' satisfaction of their facilitators in FOR-PD courses.

## ■ Research Questions

- How well did the three selected factors (content knowledge, communication skills, and approachability) predict the overall rating of course facilitators?
- Which was the best predictor of the overall rating of course facilitators?

# Data Sources

- An end-of-course survey designed by FOR-PD and conducted before the last lesson by an internal evaluation team of the project.
- The FOR-PD Sections database updated semester by semester by a data management specialist.

# Sample Selection

Table 1

*Subjects Who Completed the End-of-course Survey (Spring 2006)*

	# Enrolled	# Started	# Sampled
District	1,308	846	1,038
Open	1,030	718	191
Total	2,338	1,564	1,229

*Notes.* District and Open sections only were considered for sample selection in order to increase subject homogeneity. University and Community College sections were excluded from sample selection.

# Selected Variables

- Dependent Variable: The overall participant rating of a course facilitator.
- Independent Variables:
  - “The facilitator displayed content area expertise” (*content knowledge*).
  - “The facilitator communicated with me effectively” (*communication skills*).
  - “The facilitator was friendly and approachable online” (*approachability*).

# Data Analysis

## ■ Standard Multiple Regression

(Pallant, 2005; Stevens, 2002)

- Phase 1: Entered all the three predictors into an equation at once and found a too high correlation between two predictors (communication skills and approachability).
- Phase 2: Entered two predictors (content knowledge and the composite of the other two variables) into the equation.

## ■ Descriptive Statistics

- Number of sections offered and course facilitators served.
- Completion rates and class sizes.
- Participant experience: first attempt at taking the course, pace of study, and time spent.

# Results (Cont'd)

Table 2  
*Description of Course (Spring 2006)*

Section Type	# Offered	Average Class Size (Min. & Max.)	Completion Rate	
			% Started & Completed	% Enrolled & Completed
District	51	17 (6 & 27)	77%	50%
Open	52	14 (6 & 20)	76%	53%
Total	103	15	77%	51%

- 91 facilitators served these sections.
  - Each of 79 facilitators served at least one section.
  - Each of 12 facilitators served a maximum of two sections.

# Results (Cont'd)

Table 3

*Description of Subjects' Experience with the Course (Spring 2006)*

Item	Measure	Frequency	Valid Percent
First attempt at taking the course	Yes	1,055	86%
	No	173	14%
Average number of lessons completed a week	1 per week	819	67%
	1 per two week	199	16%
	2 per week	156	13%
	3 or more per week	52	4%
Average time spent on the course	3 hours or less	226	18%
	4-6 hours	622	51%
	7-9 hours	234	19%
	10 or more hours	146	12%

*Notes.* Of 1,229 subjects, 1,038 (84%) were from the 51 District sections and 191 (16%) were from the 52 Open sections.

# Results (Cont'd)

Table 4  
*Correlations between four variables*

		Overall	Content Knowledge	Communication Skills	Approachability
Pearson Correlation	Overall	1.00	.626*	.722*	.726*
	Content Knowledge	<b>.626*</b>	1.00	.669*	.640*
	Communication Skills	<b>.722*</b>	<b>.669*</b>	1.00	.783*
	Approachability	<b>.726*</b>	<b>.640*</b>	<b>.783*</b>	1.00

\* indicates a statistically significant correlation at  $p < .05$ .

# Results (Cont'd)

Table 5  
*Correlations between three variables*

		Overall	Content Knowledge	Composite (Communication Skills & Approachability)
Pearson Correlation	Overall	1.00	.626*	.767*
	Content Knowledge	<b>.626*</b>	1.00	.693*
	Composite (Communication Skills & Approachability)	<b>.767*</b>	<b>.693*</b>	1.00

\* indicates a statistically significant correlation at  $p < .05$ .

# Results (Cont'd)

Table 6  
*Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.778(a)	<b>.605</b>	.605	.505	.605	936.20	2	1221	<b>.000</b>

a Predictors: (Constant), Composite, Content knowledge

# Results (Cont'd)

Table 7  
*Coefficients (a)*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	.13	.10		1.25	.20	-.071	.335			
	Content Knowledge	.25	.03	<b>.182</b>	7.23	<b>.00</b>	.182	.316	.626	.204	<b>.131</b>
	Composite	.49	.02	<b>.641</b>	25.67	<b>.00</b>	.448	.522	.767	.592	<b>.462</b>

a Dependent Variable: OVERALL

# Results (Cont'd)

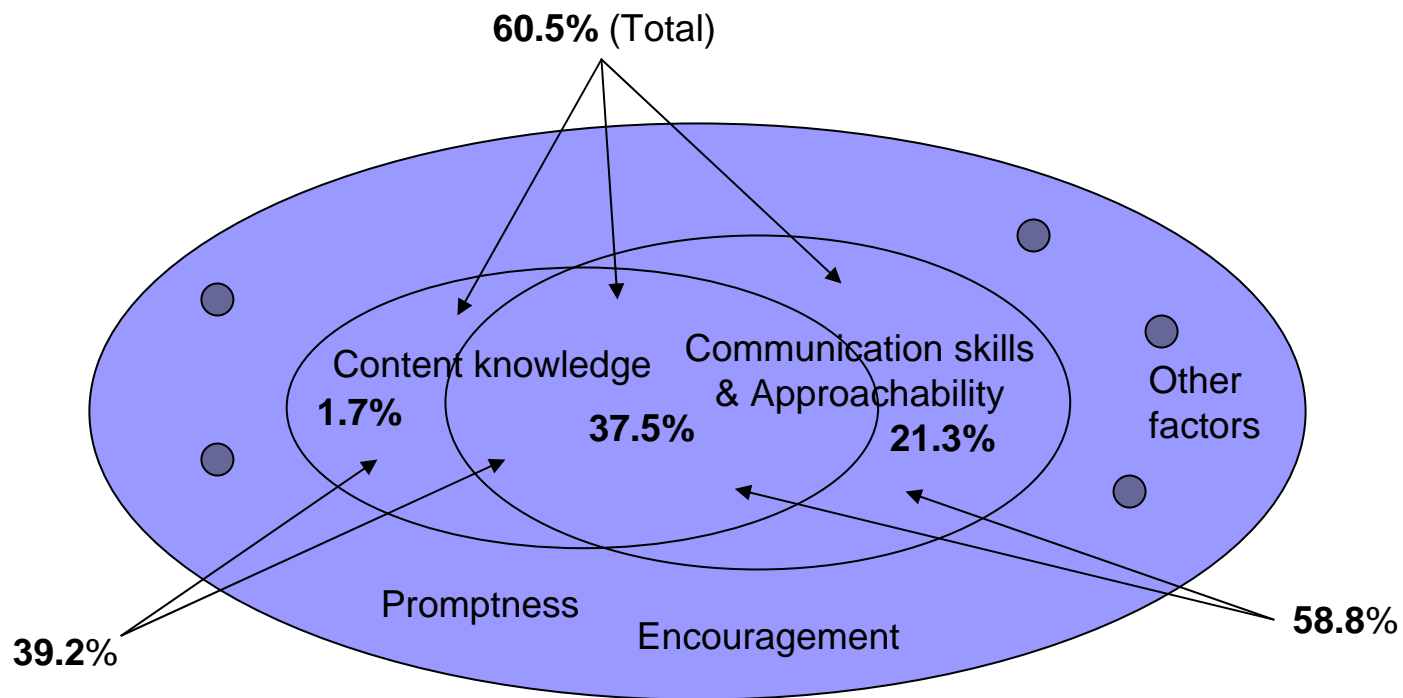


Figure 2. Summary of the Multiple Regression Analyses

# Discussion

## ■ Study Findings

- The selected factors were able to predict the overall rating of course facilitators to a great extent, explaining 60.5% of the variance in the overall rating.
- The composite variable (communication skills and approachability) accounted for 58.8% of the variance and was able to predict the overall rating of course facilitators much better than content knowledge explaining 39.2%.

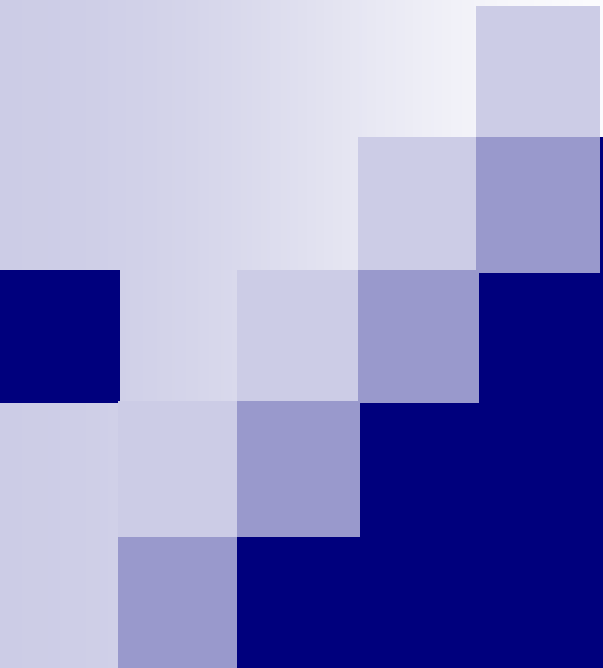
## ■ Limitations

## ■ Suggestions for Future Research

- Investigate more instances of similar or diverse context to expand its horizon to a greater extent
- Examine more factors and include more items for each factor.
- Collect qualitative data.

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