

Evaluating Teaching and Learning from Students' Perspectives in Their Classroom through Easy-to-Use Online Surveys

LIP Paul Chi Hong

Caritas Institute for Further & Adult Education

E-Mail: lipch@carkln.edu.hk

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to help technophobic teachers to use a free and easy-to-use online survey to investigate their students' opinions and beliefs about the learning and teaching in the classroom. This article would also help technophobic teachers who were used to analyzing the results manually by counting the students' responses from the traditional paper-based questionnaires/surveys to instantly and conveniently use online surveys to get qualitative and quantitative data from their students' responses with just a few clicks. In this article, the researcher will share the following aspects: 1) the need to use online surveys at secondary and postsecondary level; 2) the definition of technophobia and the need to train technophobic teachers to use technology; 3) the definition of an online survey; 4) and a sharing of how to create an online survey that can be easily made by one of the online survey providers on the Web.

Keywords: online surveys, technophobic teachers, evaluating, course management systems, Web

INTRODUCTION

The use of web-based learning is increasing around the world (Wentling & Johnson, 1999). With the innovation, questions arise about the effectiveness and quality of practice with these web-based tools (McCollum, 1998 as cited by Wentling & Johnson, 1999). Quite a number of universities and institutions are using online student course evaluation surveys to efficiently evaluate the quality of learning and teaching in

the classroom (Anderson, Cain & Bird, 2005; Zimitat, 2003; Zimitat & Crebert, 2002; Wentling, & Johnson, 1999; Poirier & O'Neil, 2000; Ho, 2006; Thomson & Stringer, 1998; Watt, Simpson, Mckillop & Nunn, 2002; Moss & Hendry, 2002; Champagne, 1998; Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, Kenneth & Chapman, 2004).

Many studies have shown that university students provided more comprehensive and qualitative feedback towards the teacher and curriculum of the course through online surveys than completing the traditional paper-based surveys. For example, Anderson, Cain and Bird (2005) reviewed a number of studies comparing the effectiveness of online surveys compared with traditional paper-based surveys taken by university students for course evaluation purposes in Rutgers College of Pharmacy, St Louis College of Pharmacy, Brigham Young University, the School of Pharmacy at University of California-San Francisco, the University of Florida, School of Pharmacy and the University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy. They found that university students tended to write more comments in terms of words and quality about the learning and teaching of the course than paper-based surveys. The common reasons generated from most studies reviewed by Anderson, Cain & Bird (2005) were that students could complete their surveys more efficiently than paper-based questionnaires and preferred to give more helpful and meaningful comments outside class than inside the classroom at their own convenience.

There are clear advantages to using an online method for evaluations. Online evaluations appear to provide more effective methods of gathering constructive feedback than traditional paper-based methods and students can complete the surveys in a more efficient manner. The majority of students prefer not using class time for evaluations, and they suggest that their comments are more thoughtful and purposeful when completed outside the class. (Anderson, Cain, & Bird, 2005:34)

With reference to previous university or college studies on comparing the effectiveness of evaluation comparing online and traditional paper-based surveys, most students gave more detailed and helpful comments about the learning and teaching of the course. Anderson, Cain & Bird highlighted clearly the advantages of online surveys for course evaluation based from their previous university studies: 1) students could provide quick feedback to teachers conveniently and instantly as it is user-friendly; 2) students are less affected by the influence of the teacher as the survey is done outside

the class; 3) students have more time to complete the online survey at their own pace and time; 4) students could evaluate many teachers; and 5) the results of the online evaluation for each teacher can be stored on the computer as data for future reference.

Referring to a study at St Louis College of Pharmacy which compared the traditional paper-based surveys with online surveys for course evaluation purposes taken by the college students, the study found out that one group of college students just needed about 10 minutes to complete the online survey while the other group of college students needed 25 minutes to complete the traditional paper-based questionnaire (Anderson, Cain & Bird, 2005). This study implicates that the use of online surveys were convenient and saved the students a lot of time (Wright, 2005). Another issue that arises is that the staff collecting and analyzing the data from students completing the paper-based surveys in this study used about 30 hours of gathering results and comments from the students while the other staff only used 1 hour to download the students' results and comments from students who completed the online surveys (Anderson, Cain & Bird, 2005). This shows strong implications that online surveys can help to reduce the burden of teachers and students and the administrative load of staff.

However, most of the studies comparing the effectiveness of online surveys when compared with traditional based surveys for course evaluation appear to come from colleges or universities where the participants doing the online surveys are mostly college or university students (Anderson, Cain & Bird, 2005; Zimitat, 2003; Zimitat & Crebert, 2002; Wentling, & Johnson, 1999; Poirier & O'Neil, 2000; Ho, 2006; Thomson & Stringer, 1998; Watt, Simpson, Mckillop, Nunn, 2002; Moss & Hendry, 2002; Champagne, 1998; Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, Kenneth & Chapman, 2004). Anderson, Cain & Bird made a clear distinction that online surveys are not being used at schools or pre-university level and that higher education institutes such as universities are making use of the Web with online surveys to measure the effectiveness of learning and teaching of their courses.

The majority of schools use paper-and-pencil evaluation systems. However, with the development of the Internet, online course evaluations of teaching are gaining momentum in higher education. (Anderson, Cain and Bird, 2005)

Referring to Anderson, Cain and Bird's studies, most of the students were positive about the effectiveness and quality of student feedback from the online surveys for

course evaluation at university or college level and it would implicate that schools such as secondary or postsecondary schools could follow the same practice to use online surveys to get efficient and effective responses from students regarding the quality of learning and teaching of courses.

Need to train technophobic teachers

Rosen and Weil (1990, cited in Rosen & Weil, 1995) have defined technophobia among teachers and students as an anxiety or negative views relating to current or future use of computer-related technology in the society. There have been studies which have conveyed the reasons behind secondary and primary teachers fear of using technology. For example, in a study that measured the levels of technophobia among 171 elementary teachers, 117 secondary science teachers and secondary 200 humanities teachers in 54 schools across five urban school districts, many teachers did not use computers even if they were available at their schools and that many teachers were afraid of learning and using computers because they were afraid of making computer errors (Rosen and Weil, 1995). This brings an important message to school administrators to find solutions to help technophobic teachers to adapt to new technology more comfortably to help them in their teaching and administrative duties.

Even though there are many benefits of using online surveys in course evaluation, private institutions may find it difficult to administer online surveys because of constraints of budget which includes expenditure of the use of commercial course management systems for implementing online evaluations such as *Blackboard* and *WebCT* and the hiring of IT technicians for extra support (Anderson, Cain & Bird, 2005). Even though online surveys can be implemented in open-source course management systems that can be downloaded by anyone for free such as *Moodle* which is widely popularly used by educators (Brandl, 2005), the matter arises on excessive budget to train technophobic teachers to use course management systems, especially for private institutions. Rosen and Weil state that training is essential to alleviate the fears of technophobic teachers to use technology. Universities are currently training university instructors to use course management systems such as the Hong Kong Baptist University which has a task force to train instructors to use *Moodle* and *WebCT* (SAMS T&R Unit, 2006). In order to find a solution for private institutions who want to enjoy the benefits of administering online surveys from budget constraints, the

researcher searched the Web and tried out a number of free online survey providers but these providers do not seem to have as many benefits as a free online survey provider “Zoomerang,” a company that creates free and easy-to-use online surveys for clients to send to more than 100 million consumers all over the world (MarketTools, 2006) In this article, *Zoomerang* will be used as an example of a free online survey provider that technophobic teachers can create an online survey at ease and evaluate their teaching and their students’ learning in their classrooms conveniently which may also reduce the need for training staff as these online survey makers are user-friendly.

What is an online survey?

There are different types of online or electronic surveys available on the web such as email surveys (Smith, 1997 cited by Zimitat & Crebert, 2002) and popup web surveys (Comley, 2000 cited by Zimitat & Crebert, 2002). Training Technologies, a company that provides survey services and software services to educational providers gives a clear definition of different types of electronic surveys:

- **E-mail Surveys** come in two forms: simple text-based surveys and feature-rich form-based surveys. E-mail surveys are sent directly to your designated respondents and tend to provide a large response rate. This method works best for parent and school board surveys if the surveys can be sent directly to their homes or work computers.
- **Web Surveys** bring the power of the World Wide Web or a school-wide/office-wide intranet to your survey project. Your survey will be converted into a Web page and placed online. Web surveys offer a familiar interface and are perfect for the education market which is more likely to have wide access to the Internet. This method works best when anonymity is required.
- **Survey-by-Disk** surveys are placed on a 3.5" disk and distributed or placed on a central kiosk computer (such as a computer in the lunch room or in the library). Respondents open the survey, reply, and pass the disk along to another user or leave it in the kiosk for the next user. All surveys are encrypted to protect the replies. This method works well with surveys completed on school grounds.
- **Network Surveys** are placed on a school or office's internal network, allowing respondents easy access to the survey when they're ready to take it. This method works best in schools with internal networks.

- **Scannable paper surveys** are common and familiar to most people, especially students and teachers. Scannable surveys provide a standardized, professional look and are paper-based. Our Survey Tracker software works in conjunction with high-powered Pearson NCS scanners to provide rapid and reliable data collection.

(adopted from Training Technologies, 2007)

In fact, *Zoomerang* surveys are email surveys and technophobic teachers can send their URL link to their students' email addresses of their class in the form of an invitational email to ask their students to fill in the survey (MarketTools, Inc., 2006). With *Zoomerang*, technophobic teachers can register for free at basic level and enjoy the following benefits which they would have needed to pay for other online survey makers on theWeb (see Table A). *Zoomerang* surveys offer the following features: 1) create as many online surveys as you like; 2) create up to 30 questions for each survey; and 3) administer your online survey to 100 users; 4) and calculate the percentage results of each item of the online survey (MarketTools, Inc., 2006). With *Zoomerang*, technophobic teachers wouldn't need to bother about the budget constraints of their school and still be able to enjoy the features of free and easy-to-use online surveys that can be used for evaluating the courses they teach and still get effective results conveniently under little stress.

Wright (2005) gave a list of popular websites that provided online survey software packages and web survey services on the Web for researchers who are willing to pay to use online evaluation services or software. With reference to Wright's list, the researcher personally went to each website to compare the disadvantages of each survey software or web survey service and found out the following results in Table 1 which is below as follows:

Table 1 Web Surveys from the Web (adapted from Wright, 2005)

Web surveys from the web	Disadvantages	Link
SurveySite	Pay to use web survey service	www.surveysite.com
EZSurvey	Time limited—Free evaluation of software use	www.raosoft.com
Hosted survey	Time limited--Free trial for web survey service	www.hostedsurvey.com
PollPro	Time limited—Free evaluation of software use	www.pollpro.com
Perseus	Time limited—Free evaluation of software use	www.perseus.com
Quask	Time Limited—Free evaluation of software use	www.quask.com
Ridgecrest	Time Limited—Free trial of web survey service	www.ridgecrestsurveys.com
SumQuest	Pay to use web survey service	www.sumquest.com/
SuperSurvey	Pay to use web survey service	www.surveysite.com
SurveyMonkey	Only 10 questions per survey for basic level	www.surveymonkey.com
WebSurveyor	Time limited—Free evaluation of software use	www.websurveyor.com
Zoomerang	Only 30 questions per survey for basic level	www.zoomerang.com
Mysurveylab	Only 18 questions per survey for basic level	www.mysurveylab.com
PollDaddy Surveys	Only 10 questions per survey for free service	http://www.polldaddy.com
Constant Contact	Time limited--Free trial for web survey service	www.constantcontact.com

Referring to Table A, ten websites that provide web survey services or downloaded software only offer free trials or evaluation use which customers will need to pay in order to get the full version of the software or full service if they do not want their evaluation or trial period to expire. However, it seems that only two online survey providers, *SurveyMonkey* and *Zoomerang* that offer a basic account for customers to register for free with no expiry date on the usage of online surveys. The only difference between the two online survey providers providing web survey services is that you can create up to 30 questions for *Zoomerang* and only 10 questions for *SurveyMonkey*. Therefore, it appears that *Zoomerang* can create more questions that can provide more meaningful survey results and implications. Although *Zoomerang* and *SurveyMonkey* require customers to pay if they want better services and features, the researcher believes the basic level is already appropriate for novice teachers in technology as they just need to master the usage of the basic tools in making an online survey.

How do we make an online survey?

In this section, the researcher would like to share his experience of making an online survey by *Zomerang* so technophobic teachers would be able to make their own online surveys at convenience. First of all, technophobic teachers would need to sign up for an account at basic level at <https://signup.zoomerang.com/registration/free.aspx> by filling in their name, last name, email, and password. *Zoomerang* will send an email to their email to confirm their account by clicking on the link they have provided for you. In the following sections, the researcher will explain how to make an online survey with the following instructions which are stated below as follows:

1. Creating a survey using a template

First, when you have registered and logged into your account, you will see an icon “Create a survey from a template”. Click on the icon and you will see below the third step “Select a survey template” and below you will see links to different survey templates in different categories: business, community, personal and education. Click on the “education templates” icon and it will lead you to a page with the heading “Education Templates” which will have different categories with

sub-categories. Click on the sub-category “Course Evaluation” icon under the category “Professors and Teachers”, then fill in the “survey filename” of your choice and press “Submit” and it would produce a sample of a course evaluation survey that could be edited or changed which is on the “Edit Survey” page.

2. Editing the title for their survey

At the “Edit Survey” page, you can easily edit the title of your survey by clicking on “Edit Title” and type in the name of your title preference in the space provided under “Edit Title Text” and press “Submit” to confirm your choice.

3. Editing the properties of their survey such as changing the language and button settings

After you press “Submit,” you will arrive back at the “Edit Survey” page. To edit properties of your survey, click the “Edit properties” icon where you can choose the “Language” of your survey or disable the “Browser Back Button” to prevent students from going back to changing their previous selections of the completed online survey (MarketTools, 2006) and press “Submit” to confirm changes.

4. Adding questions, choosing a question type for each question (e.g. multiple choice) and entering the options of answers for each question of the survey

At the “Edit Survey” page, press “Insert” to insert a question and it would lead you to a page with two options “Choose a question type” and “Question?”. For the first option, you have to select the “Question Type” such as Multiple-Choice or Yes/No questions. Here, you can choose Multiple-Choice as an option by selecting “Choice-Multiple Answers (Bullets)” as it is the most commonly used question type for course evaluation surveys. Then, you can input the question under “Question?” and input the three alternative choices as the answers for the question and press “Submit” to confirm your selection.

5. Designing a theme

The theme of your survey can be changed such as the colours and patterns by selecting the option “Design theme” at the “Edit Survey” page where there is a range of colours for you to choose from such as the basic black colour to the Money Green colour. When you have selected your theme, press “Submit” to confirm your selection.

6. Adding or deleting a page

At the “Edit Survey” page, you can add a page to your survey by clicking the icon “Add Page” and it would lead to another page where you can insert new questions and press “the icon “Save” to confirm your new page. Alternatively, you can delete the page by pressing the icon “Delete” and the page will be deleted.

7. Editing the Web Greeting page of the survey

When you have finished editing your survey, press the icon “save” and after it has been saved, press on the icon “my surveys” which would lead you to the “My Surveys” page. Go to the category “Survey Filename” and press on the icon with the name of the survey you have created where it will lead you to your survey-editing page with options: “Edit and Review”, “Invite & Deploy” and “Analyze Results”. The icon “Edit and Review” will have already been selected. To edit the “Web Greeting Page”, click on the icon “Edit Web Greeting” where it will lead you to a page with the heading “Web Greeting” and you can edit the message of the “Web Greeting Page” under the subheading “Edit your web greeting.” The “Web Greeting Page” is the first page that your students will see before they complete your survey when they receive it through email so it will be a good idea to write the purpose of the survey, state that their views are important and thank them for their participation. When you have finished editing, press the icon “Submit” to save the changes.

8. Generating a URL link for the survey

When you return back to your survey-editing page, select the icon “Invite and Deploy” and then select the icon “Invite respondents and deploy your survey” and you will be led to a page with three options. Select the option “Generate a URL link” and press “Submit” which will lead you to a page with two options. 1) “The survey may be taken multiple times per computer station” and 2) “The survey may be taken only once per computer station”. To make sure that the survey can only be taken once from one computer station to ensure fair results, select the second icon and press “Submit” and eventually you will arrive at a page where you have a chance to launch your survey. To generate the URL link of your survey, press “Launch Survey” and your survey will be launched and you will arrive at a page with the heading “Survey Launch Complete” with your URL link of your survey generated below the heading. Click the icon “My Surveys” and return to your survey-editing page.

9. Adding email addresses to be sent to recipients

At your survey-editing page, click on the icon “Invite and Deploy” where you will arrive at the “Specify Survey Recipients” page. At the “Specify Survey Recipients” page, you can type the email addresses with a space between each address of your students’ email addresses in the big space under the subheading “Type and paste your email address” and press “Submit” to save.

10. Editing the email invitation message

When you have pressed “Submit,” you will arrive at a page with the heading “Edit Email Message” and you can edit the subject heading of your email invitation message in the first box and edit the email invitation message in the second box. You can even check if there are any spelling mistakes in the email invitation message by clicking on the icon “Check Spelling”. When you have finished editing, press “Submit” until you reach the icon “Launch Survey” and press “Submit” and your email invitation messages will be sent to your students’ email addresses.

11. Protecting the survey from being taken more than once

You can make sure that your email invitation messages containing your online surveys being sent to your students' email addresses can only be taken once and that the link cannot be shared by your target students by making sure that the icon "Respondents may take this survey only once" is selected and press "Submit" to confirm your selection at the "Specify Survey Recipients" page.

12. Checking the recipient status of the recipients and sending a reminder to survey recipients who have not responded to the survey

You can check the "Recipient Status" of your online survey to your target student at the "Invite and Deploy" page and by clicking on the "Recipient Status" icon. You can send a reminder to the target student who has not completed the survey by clicking on the icon "Sending Email Invitations" and sending the email invitation message again by inputting his/her email address, press "Submit" and in the space for the subject heading of the email invitation message, write "Reminder" and the student's name and press "Submit" and launch the survey to the student by pressing "Launch Survey" so the reminder can be sent through email to the target student.

13. Analyzing the percentage rates of each question from their survey

When you go back to your editing survey page, click on the icon "Analyze Results" and it will show your survey status, the number of email invitations that you have sent, and the number of partials and completes by the students of your online survey and the percentage rates of each question item done by the students.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The disadvantage of using *Zoomerang surveys* is that the percentage analysis of the results for each survey only last for 10 days. All the data can all be gone if technophobic teachers are not aware of the expiry date of their survey data. So it would

be recommended that teachers who are interested in using *Zoomerang* surveys to evaluate their students' learning to set earlier deadlines for students to do the survey at home or at school within 5 days so teachers would have time to copy and analyze the data.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the researcher has highlighted the importance and the benefits of online surveys for evaluating the teaching and learning of courses based on students' views at university or college level such as convenience, efficiency and the production of comprehensive and quality comments produced by university and college students from previous studies mentioned earlier that compared the effectiveness and quality of university and college students completing traditional paper-based surveys and online surveys for evaluating courses. The researcher hopes that online evaluation will gain momentum at the secondary or postsecondary level to ease the administrative burden of teachers and staff and the workload of students in the near future. Online evaluation may become widespread at all levels if more and more school administrators realize the value of convenience of technology to help in course evaluation. The researcher also hopes his sharing and explanation of the instructions of the usage of an example online survey service by *Zoomerang* for course evaluation would be another free alternative to help technophobic teachers to use online surveys more easily and conveniently to evaluate the teaching and learning in their classroom without involving the complex knowledge of using commercial or free course management systems or other software available online.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would want to thank God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the 2007 E-Case Conference committee members for the valuable presentation and publication opportunity. I am also really honoured and thankful to Professor Niki Davis, Director of the Center for Technology in Learning and Teaching of Iowa State University for her gracious efforts in giving me her honourable feedback with her words of wisdom on the previous drafts

of this paper. I am really honoured and thankful to Dr. Kong Siu Cheung, Associate Professor at the Department of Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences and Technology of the Hong Kong Institute of Education for his invaluable comments on the draft of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, H, M., Cain, J. & Bird, E. (2005). Online student course evaluations: Review of literature and a pilot study. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 69(1). Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://web.njit.edu/~bieber/pub/Shen-AMCIS2004.pdf>
- Brandl, K. (2005). Are you ready to use Moodle [Electronic version]. *Language Learning & Technology*, 9(2), 16-23.
- Champagne, V.M. (1998). Dynamic evaluation of distance education courses. *Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning*. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/11/0c/db.pdf
- Dommeier, C.J, Baum P, Hanna, R W, Kenneth S. & Chapman, K, S. (2004). Gathering faculty teaching evaluations by in-class and online surveys: Their effects on response rates and evaluations. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 29(5). Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a713611297~db=all>
- Ho, G. (2006). Launching online course and teaching evaluation at Lingnan. *Learning Matters at Lingnan*. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from http://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/learning_matters/08-2006-722006.pdf
- Rosen, L.D. & Weil, M.M. (1995). Computer availability, computer experience and technophobia among public school teachers [Electronic Version]. *Computers in Human Behavior* 11 (1), 9-31.
- MarketTools, Inc. (2006). Zoomerang: Easiest way to ask, Fastest way to know. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://info.zoomerang.com/>

- Poirier, T.I. & O'Neil, C.K. (2000). Use of web technology and active learning strategies in a quality assessment methods course. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 64. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.ajpe.org/legacy/pdfs/aj640311.pdf>
- SAMS T&R Unit (2006). Hong Kong Baptist University Web-based Teaching & Learning Taskforce. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from http://webtl.hkbu.edu.hk/webtl_taskforce.asp
- Training Technologies (2007). Education survey services for course evaluation, student assessment, testing capabilities, and more. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.surveystacker.com/services/educate.htm>
- Thomson, J.S. & Stringer, S.B. (1998). Evaluating for distance learning: feedback from students and faculty. *Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning*. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/11/0d/5d.pdf
- Watt, S., Simpson, C. Mckillop, C. Nunn, V. (2002). Electronic course surveys: Does automating feedback and reporting give better results? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(4). Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.informa-world.com/smpp/content~content=a713611571~db=all>
- Wentling, T.I & Johnson, S.D. (1999). The design and development of an evaluation system for online instruction. *Web '99 World Conference on the WWW and Internet Proceedings*. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from http://edwebsfiles.ed.uiuc.edu/hre/online/eval_model.pdf
- Wright, K. B. (2005). Researching internet-based populations: Advantages and disadvantages of online survey research, online questionnaire authoring software packages, and web survey services. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(3). Retrieved June 5, 2007, from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue3/wright.html>
- Zimitat, C. (2003). First year students' perceptions of inclusion and relationships with other university experiences. *Proceedings of Higher Education and Research Society of Australasia 2003 Conference*. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from

<http://surveys.canterbury.ac.nz/herdsa03/pdfsref/Y1206.pdf>

Zimitat, C & Crebert, G. (2002). Conducting online research and evaluation. Proceedings of Higher Education and Research Society of Australasia 2002 Conference. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from <http://www.ecu.edu.au/conferences/herdsa/main/papers/ref/pdf/Zimitat.pdf>