

BENEFITS OF ONLINE TEACHING

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Abstract:

There are multiple benefits when it comes to online teaching. It stimulates the interest towards the knowledge taught by capturing the attention due to the audio-visual presentation of the notions, thus eliminating the risks of inattention due to routine or boredom. The imagination is stimulated by presenting audio-visual information, but also by using computer games that increase the speed of reaction when stimuli appear. Teaching can be individualized; computer-assisted training programs having the quality of allowing students to learn at their own pace, without emotions that change the way they behave or react. The teacher receives immediate feedback, signalling very quickly any errors or difficulties, facilitating their immediate correction and leading to accountability of learners.

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Online teaching has become a hot trend in recent times, due to the new COVID-19 pandemic. In Romania as in most of the countries all over the world, the whole educational system switched from classical, face-to-face to online teaching for almost an entire year. Teaching staff of all backgrounds and ages have had to prepare and deliver their classes from home, with all the practical and technical challenges this entails, and often without proper technical support¹.

An online teaching experience, unlike a traditional classroom experience, comprises of a number of computer-assisted teaching procedures involving computer tools and software applications like Zoom, Google Meet, Classroom, Moodle, etc. All around the world, educational institutions have been looking toward online learning platforms to continue with the process of educating students. Nowadays, digital learning has emerged as a necessary resource for students and schools all over the world. For many educational institutions, this has been an entirely new way of education that they have had to adopt. In recent months, the demand for online learning has risen significantly, and it will continue doing so in the future.

Online learning and teaching involve a diverse array of tools, resources, pedagogical approaches, roles, organizational arrangements and forms of interaction,

¹ Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A., 2020. *The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning*. Educause Review, 27 March. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>.

monitoring and support — with many possible combinations of substitution and integration².

Many digital platforms that facilitate online learning allow teachers to easily save information and access it whenever they connect. This type of automatic organization allows the teachers to focus their time on aspects of the work that need more attention, such as lesson planning and communication with their students.

Online teaching brings about many advantages. Audio and video presentations can easily be incorporated in the lesson. Both teachers and students can access internet sites, videos, films and games that can be used throughout the lessons. For example, students can read short texts used to introduce the relevant topic and vocabulary, and then listen to some people discussing the text. Later, they can share their opinions with other colleagues, so that, in the end, they write them down in their notebook. This type of course can just as easily be held in a classroom or online, with the difference that direct discussions between students are replaced by a discussion in a breakout room.

Online learning offers teachers an efficient way to deliver lessons to students. Online learning has a number of tools such as videos, PDFs, podcasts, and teachers can use all these tools as part of their lesson plans. By extending the lesson plan beyond traditional textbooks to include online resources, teachers are able to become more efficient educators. Learning through videos, voice recognition, automatic corrections, and live exams, are a few examples of the effectiveness of online learning.

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It is possible to learn effectively through online courses. However, the teachers need some technical knowledge to integrate the components of a traditional course into online lessons. Some examples are mastering the means by which all learners can present their work, from each device, live, the method by which students are divided into breakout rooms (online alternative for learning in smaller groups), and managing activities that involve dialogues and group discussions. Also, during the lesson, the teacher can divide the class into smaller groups to do different activities, which gives students the opportunity to speak more in different contexts.

It is also important for teachers to be more careful when explaining an exercise or discussing a detail, and to constantly check that each student is following it. In the same context, the teacher takes into account the fact that some students use devices with small screens, such as those of phones, so it presents less information on each slide, so that it can be easily traversed.

The fundamentals observed in traditional courses can be replicated in the virtual space, which means that each student continues to interact with other colleagues and teachers based on a well-established program. For most students, working after a fixed schedule is a strong incentive.

The most important thing, when talking about efficiency in the learning process, it is not where one is (either in a traditional classroom or an online one), but what are the

² Bates, A. W., & Poole, G., 2003. *Effective teaching with technology in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 89. Google Scholar

method, structure and content of the courses, as well as how much time one can devote to study. The teachers can guide students to the best learning experience, regardless of the environment in which the course takes place.

Nowadays, teachers are better conceptualised as facilitators of learning who provide learning opportunities for their students, and give feedback to support improvement. The essence of teaching is not therefore something fixed but rather dynamic, adapting to the context and situation in which each teacher finds themselves. The facilitation of learning through technology is a highly skilled endeavour, and in many contexts can offer a really useful support to the classroom, providing students with the chance to learn in new and interesting ways.³

Whether in a context of a pandemic or not, the biggest benefit is the possibility to participate in courses, not to interrupt the learning process. For some students it has been easier to attend classes now, as they no longer had to travel to school or university locations. Similarly, some adult learners, who often had difficulty getting to class on time due to meetings and business trips, are glad that they no longer have this concern and that they can fully enjoy learning English from the comfort of their own home, but being together with their colleagues. It is obvious that any study resource or information in digital format is very easy to be accessed and shared. While teaching online, one can get help from digital libraries, search engines and also social media channels for searching, accessing and sharing resources and information.

Another benefit of online education is that it allows students to attend classes from any location of their choice. It also allows schools to reach out to a more extensive network of students, instead of being restricted by geographical boundaries. Additionally, online lectures can be recorded, archived, and shared for future reference. This allows students to access the learning material at a time of their comfort. Thus, online learning offers students the accessibility of time and place in education.

One of the advantages of the current crisis is that it forces everyone to learn new skills and try things they would not have tried before. Some students were pleasantly surprised at how enjoyable online virtual classroom courses can be.

COVID-19 pandemic has definitely precipitated the online teaching. However, online learning has been growing in the last decade, the number of online courses, degrees, and masters have greatly increased.

For those who do have access to the right technology, there is evidence that learning online can be more effective in a number of ways. Some research shows that on average, students retain 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to the fact that students are able to learn faster online; e-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting because students can learn at their own pace, going back and re-reading, skipping, or accelerating through concepts as they choose.⁴

Of course, there are certain disadvantages as well. For many students, one of the biggest challenges of online learning is the struggle with focusing on the screen for long periods of time. With online learning, there is also a greater chance for students to be easily

³ Harrison G., 2020, *English teaching and learning during the Covid crisis: online classes and upskilling teachers, online* <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/blog/english-teaching-and-learning-during-the-covid-crisis/>

⁴ Li, K., Lalani, F., 2020 *The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how.* <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/>

distracted by social media or other sites. Therefore, it is imperative for the teachers to keep their online classes attractive, engaging, and interactive to help students stay focused on the lesson.⁵

Another major challenge of online classes is the internet connectivity. In smaller cities and towns, a consistent connection with decent speed is a problem. Without a consistent internet connection for students or teachers, there can be a lack of continuity in learning. This is detrimental to the education process.

Students can learn a lot from being in the company of their peers. However, in an online class, there are minimal physical interactions between students and teachers. This often results in a sense of isolation for the students.⁶

Online learning requires teachers to have a basic understanding of using digital forms of learning. However, this is not always the case. Very often, teachers have a very basic understanding of technology. Sometimes, they do not even have the necessary resources and tools to conduct online classes. To combat this, it is important for schools to invest in training teachers with the latest technology updates so that they can conduct their online classes flawlessly.

Perhaps the biggest benefit to online teaching is the fact that teachers still play the most important role in the learning experience. Technology cannot replace the teacher's job, but it is suitable as a very useful tool for improving the experience for both the teacher and the student. Since online education has brought a revolution in the education industry, being a part of it could be a great benefit to every teacher.

As an upcoming benefit, universities and language schools, in general, will launch more online courses in the future, which means they will be targeting many more students, not just those living near their locations. Students who could have otherwise been hindered from attending classes due to distance will also benefit from online classes offered by schools and universities.

It is very likely that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits.⁷ It is beyond any doubt that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated and that online education will eventually become an integral component of school education.

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