

SOME OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN ONLINE LEARNING IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Monsalve Lorente Laura

laura.monsalve@uv.es

Department of Teaching and School Organization

University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Mukhtarkhanova Ainagul Madiевна

ainagul_mukhtark@mail.ru

Department of Foreign Languages

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Nursultan, Kazakhstan

Online learning is one of the most important tools of teaching instruments nowadays. It has become much more popular and effective because of the coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) throughout the world. However, it is important to consider its major aspects and some challenges that might be supposed equally fundamental in purpose. By examining the features of online learning this article will explore some conflicting moments with reference to survey and questionnaire to discover best solutions as the main effective ways of online learning.

The WHO officially declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) a global pandemic and that emergency situation has changed the normal way of a citizen's life. Significant changes have taken place in the education system. In order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, from March 16, 2020 all universities and colleges in Spain and Kazakhstan began to teach online.

In the Spanish context, the University of Valencia started online classes after the declaration of the State Emergency on March 14, 2020. At that time the daily teaching service based on face-to-face, with daily contact with students had to be replaced with non-face-to-face one. The teachers had to define the content of each subject, taking into account two components, so that students acquire general and specific competencies associated with each of them.

After that, teachers had to identify appropriate resources for remote access to it (books, articles, presentations and personal notes, exercises and solutions, free Internet access resources, etc.). Through the virtual classroom, students were informed about the university strategy. The main working tool was the virtual classroom for communication and hosting diverse activities and resources. The classes were resumed non-in-person via videoconference, which allowed for some virtual presence. Blackboard Collaborate was used as an online instrument. The University of Valencia has gathered different tools through the UVonline portal (www.uv.es/uvonline) that were available to students and professors. Students and teachers have a free Microsoft Office 365 account and have enabled a terabyte of One Drive storage. Individual communication between students and teachers has been done through the official email.

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University was one of the first to organize distance learning process in Kazakhstan. The main thing for the university was to ensure the high quality of the educational process on distance learning technologies and the implementation of the idea of student-centered learning. For online classes, ZOOM and Moodle, Webex, Google Classroom, Microsoft

Teams and other platforms were available. Every day, webinars and seminars, video lectures on working on online platforms were conducted at the faculties for the staff of the university.

Online course design is as diverse as traditional face-to-face classes' design. Distance learning is online learning, where the whole process is based on the Internet. Here the student studies independently, participates in online or offline classes, and passes all independent and practical work, tests, written assignments in accordance with the academic calendar of the university [1].

In online learning, teachers and students can actively use shared content through the Internet. This eliminates the dependence of the educational process on time or place (room) [2].

There are 3 different forms of organization of distance learning: online (synchronous) and offline (asynchronous), and the third most common type of webinar. Online learning is a form of organization of learning with the help of Internet resources, currently viewing the teacher's screen at a certain distance. Offline learning is a form of learning that allows the exchange of information between teacher and student through Internet resources (e-mail). A webinar is a form of conducting seminars and trainings via the Internet [3].

Online learning facilitates interaction between a teacher and student, as well as provide access to instructional materials. Online learning is a form of distance education in which all instruction and assessment are carried out using online, Internet-based delivery[4].

As the popularity of online programs continues to expand, interest in the study of online learning, various methods, platforms increases. In this regard some research has shown that "the experience of teaching online influenced instructors' thinking, planning, and enactment in their teaching practice", some studies identified 'systematic approach to content design' and 'online course assessment and evaluation', some researchers proposed 'a necessity for online presence in online courses', investigated 'the experience of online educators at institutions of higher education', examined 'the benefits, potential challenges and drawbacks of online courses' [5], [6],[7],[8],[9].

Distance learning has given new opportunities for teachers and students, that is, to achieve excellent education anytime, anywhere. The transition from face-to-face class work to a virtual world requires new ways of thinking and teaching, and teachers need to adjust their methodology to effectively organize distance learning.

Since distance learning is only being introduced in our country, it has many advantages, as well as disadvantages that need to be studied. Firstly we would like to analyze some scholars' works. According to foreign scholars one of the benefits of online learning is that online courses have been found to be convenient to learners who prefer 'self-regulated learning' [10].

Matuga defines 'self-regulated learning' as the learners' ability to plan, control and evaluate their own activities. But the author considers that 'self-regulation' is not enough alone. Motivation is the inseparable factor for successful result in online courses. Motivation is the main tool to use 'self-regulation strategies' [11].

Consequently students who are not self-disciplined and organized may demonstrate 'academic procrastination' and may not achieve their academic goals[10].Some of the positive learning outcomes are improved learning as measured by test scores, student engagement with the class material, improved perception of learning and of the online format, stronger sense of community among students, and reduction in withdrawal or failure[12]. Wildana Wargadinata et.al pay attention to the issue that 'online learning is a complement that combines some of the best aspects of conventional learning (face-to-face) and online information and communication

technology-based learning' [13]. Ratcliff B. suggests that online classes give opportunity to have 'a one-on-one teacher-student relationship rather than a teacher having to spread their focus amongst thirty other students' [14]. Sadeghi M. categorizes the following disadvantages of distance learning: high chances of distraction, complicated technology, no social interaction, difficulty staying in contact with instructors, job markets do not accept online degrees. High chances of distraction means if a student needs any support and explanation distance learning is not a good idea. Distance learning requires learners to be highly self-motivated and organized. As for complicated technology it is not a secret that during the distance learning a teacher and a student totally depend on a range of technologies including computer, stable internet connection, webcam and different platforms [15]. Students will always study isolated and it causes 'many complexities and depressing experiences' [16]. When learners are distance learning, they can not have any chances to get in touch with their teachers. Students can e-mail about any issues but this type of interaction can not replace face-to-face communication with teachers.

In this study, questions were asked participants and the results were analyzed. The survey was conducted on the website Survey monkey (<https://ru.surveymonkey.com/dashboard/>). In total, 40 students and 10 teachers of Valencia University and L.N. Gumilyov National University took part in the survey. Due to the quarantine situation, students took full 2- month online courses and took the exam online. They did exercises and tasks online that were uploaded through the virtual classroom. The purpose of the survey was to identify the benefits and difficulties faced by teachers in conducting online lessons, as well as to determine their recommendations and to identify the students' views about studying online. Firstly, students were asked to answer some questions. The results of the questionnaire are presented in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1 – Participants' questionnaire results

No	Question	Answers	% (No students)
1	Do you like online learning?	a) I really like it	70
		b) I really like it	12.50
		c) I doubt I can't say for sure	15
		d) I don't know	2.50
2	How effective is online learning compared to face-to-face learning?	a) My online learning achievements are better than class work	25 (10)
		b) Face-to-face learning is more effective	32.5 (13)
		c) Equally effective	37.50 (15)
		d) Other ideas	5 (2)

3	How do you assess the quality of online teaching in comparison with face-to-face teaching in the classroom?	a) The quality of classes has improved	50 (20)
		b) The quality of classes decreased	22.50 (9)
		c) There is no help from the teacher	5 (2)
		d) Other ideas	22.50 (9)
4	Name please some advantages of online learning	a) at home, don't go to university	40 (16)
		b) save time	57.50 (23)
		c) other	2,5 (1)
5	Name please some limitations of online learning	a) I can not force myself to study, I need control	22.50 (9)
		b) I copy all tasks from the Internet	10 (4)
		c) other	67.50 (27)
6	Do you do the tasks yourself, on your own?	a) Yes, I study everything thoroughly	90 (36)
		b) No, I find ready-made answers	0
		c) other	10 (4)
7	Foreign language lesson suggestions	a) Enriched my knowledge	87.50 (35)
		b) Didn't understand anything	0
		c) The teacher is strict	7.5 (3)
		d) The teacher is not competent	0
		e) other	5 (2)

To learn students general impressions of online classes we asked the question "Do you like distance learning?". 70 % of students give positive answer. The next question was "How effective is online learning compared to face-to-face learning?". 37.5% of students answer that online lessons and classroom lessons are equally effective, while 32.5% chose classroom lessons. 20% of respondents chose an online class. Analyzing the answers, we can see that there are supporters of the traditional face-to-face classes, and at the same time prefer the online learning. Respondents' answers to the question 'How do you assess the quality of online teaching in comparison with face-to-face teaching in the classroom?' were also different. In addition, students commented that "I had to search and understand the material myself", "I did not understand the material at all, I asked my group mates",

"I can not say", "We do not have the experience of online learning", "I thought I would relax, I would not prepare for classes", "I would not meet a strict teacher face to face, but it did not happen", "Online learning helped me to feel free and independent" etc.

Students name as online learning advantages, that they do not need to go anywhere, they stay at home, thereby saving money on travel, food and time, online learning is convenient, and they learned to be self-disciplined. However, the disadvantages of online learning were much greater. 'I do not have the willpower, I need strict control of the teacher'; 'I downloaded the tasks from the Internet, but the teacher detected it as the plagiarism; "because of weak internet connection, I had some problems", "Time is limited", "I can't prove my opinion to the teacher and raise my grade", "I need a separate room for online learning", etc. The reviews report many unresolved issues of online learning. But the respondents unequivocally stated that they enriched their knowledge, as well as the teacher's toughness or too softness, objectivity in assessment, more or less tasks.

10 teachers were asked to provide a brief overview of the general online teaching experience, the challenges and benefits. Summarizing the teachers' responses who took part in the Q&A, we received the following answer: it took two or three times more time to prepare for an online lesson; I was online all day; I have had no problem; it was easy; all you have to do is give the student a good grade, and no problem; on the contrary I relaxed; I have mastered many new technologies; learned to work on new platforms; I participated in many seminars on behalf of the administration and learned different ways of teaching online; There were difficulties in assessing student progress;

Teacher 1: I have had more coordination meetings by videoconference; I have received many emails with guidelines from the University and the Faculty; I have had difficulty with tutorials. Before the students came to the office during tutoring hours, now they write at any time and this means that we have been connected 24 hours per day and it has been difficult to reconcile family life and work.

Teacher 2: I like the online lesson. First, it helps me to save time and plan without going anywhere. I organize instructions for students via WhatsApp and conducted online classes according to the schedule. Second, I've learned to teach on many online platforms, in addition to ZOOM and Moodle, Webex, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Calameo, Edpuzzle, You Tube, etc. I have mastered many new technologies. I think the lessons are much newer than before. I listened to the student orally, and they submitted self-work tasks in writing.

Teacher 3: I had a hard time. I learned to work on one or two platforms for online classes. I think the real classroom is right. Even low-achieving students began to receive good grades for their written answers.

Teacher 4: There is a limited time for online classes, students read the material, download it from the Internet, there is a problem with assessment. There are many differences from the traditional lesson. I had to schedule online lessons again.

Teacher 5: For me the hardest thing has been the administrative work we have had behind, modifying the academic guide, modifying the syllabus, explaining all the changes online, answering all the doubts of the students via email. It has been a very hard few months with a lot more work.

In conclusion, the obligatory start of the coronavirus pandemic has become a powerful incentive for teachers and students to new perspectives, new opportunities, innovative teaching technologies, self-improvement, learning new and, finally, solution of unsolved challenges. As a result

of online training, students received freedom of behavior, self-organization, independent research and study, academic freedom. Of course, lack of face-to-face interaction, technology difficulties, the authenticity of a student's work requires some positive implications, assessment tends to be based only on knowledge, and not necessarily practicality-based. Universities have had to adopt measures in a hasty manner and move from face-to-face mode to an online mode or emergency remote teaching. The contents of the face-to-face classes had to be adapted to online classes through videoconferences and online tutorials. This has created an excessive workload on the teachers as well as students.

As a result of 'compelled' online classes universities and teachers had to increasingly incorporate different online learning programs into their syllabus. It is important to understand and try to solve above mentioned benefits and limitations of online learning.

In general, the results of a student survey and teacher interviews show that online classes have clear benefits and outweigh the problems students and teachers face. It should be noted that problems in a wide range of students and teachers are necessary. The respondents to this survey answered questions within the online lesson on one subject. Extensive data on online learning can be given in future research.

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