ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

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Abstract- When comparing online and in-person courses, most students find that online courses are less successful than in-person sessions. Only a few studies have looked at the impact of online classes on elementary and secondary school pupils, and even fewer have examined the "gold standard" technique of comparing the outcomes of students who were randomly assigned to online or physical classrooms. Jessica Happen of the American Institutes for Research and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research promptly allocated students who failed second semester Algebra I to face-to-face or online credit recovery courses during the summer.

I. INTRODUCTION

School closures and the rapid growth of online education have been necessary due to the changing times. Is it possible to substitute online lessons for classroom time?

However, online learning cannot be a substitute to physical classes in terms of social class interactions and active class participation but how much will online classes help with student learning? The research so far has helped us understand to a certain degree and also tells us what we should be doing to help students who are more likely to fail in an online environment.

In recent years, the number of students taking virtual courses has increased dramatically. Also in the United States, every school student is required to take at least one online course. There are many types of online learning available. People often think about Open Online Courses, in which a large number of students watch a tutorial online and either complete questionnaires or take tests based on the lectures.

However, majority of online classes, especially those aimed at school students, follow a style that is very similar to in-person classes. The instructor facilitates virtual discussions among students, assigns assignments, and monitors individual students' progress. In all cases, the instructor is expected to come up with innovative ways to keep the students engaged in the subject, and students are expected to communicate virtually with one another in most cases.

Taking online courses can be beneficial to students. Students who do not have access to all classes in school may be able to learn them through immersive classes. If a child does not pass math, they will be able to make up the lost time by taking online classes in the evenings or during the summer, without interrupting their schoolwork. As a result, online courses almost always provide some form of assistance to students.

When comparing online and in-person courses, however, most students discover that online courses are less effective than in-person classes. Just a few studies have looked at the effect of online classes on younger and secondary school students, and far fewer have tested the "gold standard" method of assessing the results of students that were randomly allocated to online or physical classrooms. Jessica Heppen and colleagues from the American Institutes for Research and the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research immediately assigned students who failed second semester Algebra I on either face-to-face or online credit recovery courses during the summer. Students' credit-recovery success rates were lower, as were their algebra test scores, in the online world. Students who had the option of taking their class online rated it as more difficult than those who had the option of taking it in person.

The majority of the literature on online classes for school students has relied on large-scale administrative records, examining students who were otherwise identical in both environments. June Ahn of New York University and Andrew McEachin of the RAND Corporation conducted one of these reports on Ohio charter schools, while I conducted another with colleagues on Florida high school coursework. Both researchers discovered evidence that online learning was ineffective.

It's no surprise that face-to-face classes are more successful on average. When students interact with teachers and other students in person, they experience social pressures and incentives that can encourage them to participate. Some students perform nearly as well in online classes as they do in in-person courses, if not better, but to look at a more general populous, students who have a hard time with in-person classes, they usually have a harder time with online classes.

Individuals who do not do well in physical classes are expected to have a harder time with online classes. Though research on virtual schooling in school education does not specifically answer these differences, a research on college going students that was conducted by a researcher fellow researchers from Stanford showed relatively little difference in learning between online and physical classes for high-performing students. Lower-performing pupils, on the contrary, fared far poorer in online courses than in traditional classrooms.

However, just because students who fail in face-to-face classrooms, it is probable for them to have a harder time with online classes doesn't mean it's a foregone conclusion. Less-engaged students would need extra attention from online professors, who will need to work hard to involve them. And if online classes have not already worked for these students, they will be able to make them work in the future.

Online classes, including those taught in traditional schools, include a solid curriculum and pedagogical methods. Teachers must be aware of what students know and do not know, as well as how to assist students in learning new content. What's different with online classes is that students can face more distractions and fewer supervision, which may lower motivation. The instructor would need to develop engagement standards that are distinct from those in the in-person environment, like asking classmates to engage with their fellow classmates and answer to their classmates on a regular basis.

While online classes are not as effective as physically receiving education in classrooms, they are surely preferable to none at all. Individuals, especially those with less resources at home, do not have a high learning curve with online classes, according to a considerable data base established by Karl Alexander at Johns Hopkins University and several others. Digital classes currently enable students to view lectures and activities while also encouraging them to engage with instructors in ways which would have been unlikely if an illness had shut down educational institutions even a decade or two ago. So, while we might be wary of online education, now is the time to welcome it and strengthen it.

One of the most often used terminology in the wake of the pandemic has been "new normal."[i] The increased use of online teaching tools has become the new educational norm. The corona virus pandemic has inspired new educational approaches. Online learning modules and softwares like Zoom are being used by educational institutions all across the world to help them continue their mission of educating students. The new standard is now a reimagined concept of schooling, centred around online learning. For students and schools all over the world, digital learning has become a vital medium. Many public educational institutions have been forced to accept this situation of switching to online classes. Online learning is now used not only for academic reasons, but also for students to learn from extracurricular activities. The need for online learning has risen sharply in recent months and is expected to continue.

Online teaching, like most teaching methods, has its own combination of pros and cons. Understanding and utilising the pros and cons of online learning will help institutions in creating an agenda and action plan for providing lessons in the most efficient manner and ensuring that students have an uninterrupted learning experience.[ii]

II. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE LEARNING?

A. Efficiency & Flexibility

Teachers will deliver lessons to students in a more versatile way using online learning. Teachers have to update themselves technologically to keep up to this new way of teaching through online mediums like videos, podcasts, etc. Teachers have seen more success as instructors by integrating these online mediums into their lectures in addition to school textbooks.

The most significant benefit of taking an online course is that a student is connected to their teacher and classes are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The only reason for skipping class is that you are unable to connect to the internet. Aside from that, you have complete access to everything. You will get notifications, access notes, check homework, take practise quizzes, discuss questions, talk with classmates, and study whenever you want. You have your own timetable for meeting the course's standards, with the exception of some due dates.[iii]

B. Accessibility of time and place

Another benefit of online learning is that it allows individuals to take classes from anywhere in the world. It even lets schools to branch out to a wider range of students instead of being limited by geographic restrictions. It is even possible to log, download, and share online lectures for later viewing. This helps individuals to use the educational materials as it is most appropriate for them.

As a consequence, online education helps students to study at their own pace and from any place.

The online environment can pique the interest of children. When an online student is browsing the internet, their parents may be looking over their shoulder. In other words, everyone in the family participates in studying. It is more likely that you will excel if you have the love of your family and friends.

C. Cost-effectiveness

Reduced financial risks are another benefit of online learning. Contrary to physical/in-person education, online courses are available to a wider strata of students. This is due to the fact that online schooling reduces the expenses of student housing, meals, and, most significantly, hostel fees. Furthermore, all study and educational modules are accessible online, which has resulted in a paper free educational experience that is both more cost-effective and environmentally friendly.[iv]

D. Improved rate of student attendance

There is a lesser possibility of students missing classes since online classes can be taken from anywhere in the world.

Since you have a clear e-mail line to the teacher, you will get immediate answers to your questions. For fear of being ignorant, often students are unable to ask questions in class. Hopefully, the Internet would make the anxiety obsolete. Many times, you will get an idea for a question after class or while researching. You should send an e-mail to the teacher instead of having to remember to ask it or failing to ask it. Your learning opportunities have increased.[v]

E. Adapts to a Wide Range of Learning Methodologies

The way a person comprehends information varies from person to person. Some individuals prefer to learn through film, while others may prefer to comprehend information through class lectures. Similarly, some individuals thrive in a classroom environment, while other individuals might work well when they study by themselves and find a big classroom overwhelming in terms of asking questions or answering them.

The online learning experience can be customised in a numerous ways owing to the multiple ways it has to offer. It's the most efficient way to build the optimal learning environment for each individual.[vi]

F. Promotes Self-discipline

Procrastination is perhaps the most common problem of online education. Most of the people, including instructors, procrastinate before the last possible moment. When it comes to school, the last possible time to understand is the toughest possible moment. The lesson is often learnt the hard way, in the form of a negative grade on an exam or task. However, you excel in the end and you understand the significance of completing tasks on time, if not ahead of schedule. An individuals' success in an online education is taken forward by this self-awareness. There's no one pushing you to study or attend. There's no one forcing you to ask questions or respond. You are the one that inspires you to enrol in an online class. It's referred to as "student-centred" or "involved" learning. The online student assumes responsibility for their studies and develops into an individual who places a high emphasis on learning and achievement. In other words, your success is entirely dependent on you.

Anything that we acquire in class is forgotten in a short period of time at the conclusion of the semester. Knowing how to search content online and having a spark of curiosity ensures that you will still be able to access what you are researching. One can look things up online if a subject interests them, whether because of something you see, read, or hear about it. You'll have honed your ability to gather enough information about a topic that will stay in your long term memory.[vii]

G. It connects you to the rest of the world.

The Internet is the first technological development in human history to bind people all over the world. Although there is already a significant divide between technologically developed and under developed countries, the fact that all of us can interact with people all around the world demonstrates the significance of this medium. Many of the websites you will access as part of your course will be located in another world.[viii]

III. WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE LEARNING?

A. Inability to Focus on Screens

For certain individuals, the most challenging facets of online education is the failure to focus on a laptop for an elongated stretch of time. While reading online, an individual might be distracted by various social media apps. Due to which, the goal for professors is to keep their classes short, engaging, and interactive to keep students interested.

In an online course, procrastination can rip you to shreds. There is no one to remind you to be on schedule for class. There is no one to tell you when your tasks are due or when your tests are approaching. In an online world, it's very tempting to put off reading and tasks. A web-based course necessitates for the student to know how to manage his time. If one doesn't manage his time properly, they'll find themselves trapped beneath an insurmountable mountain of coursework, as is the case with most things. To complete online classes, you must have the self-discipline to set aside blocks of time. This means that a student should give the same amount of importance to online learning as he/she would have given to physical classes and other activities of the day should not become a hindrance to learning. It can necessitate making tough decisions at times.

B. Problems with Technology

The lack of internet access is still a major problem for online learning. Even though there has been immense development with connectivity worldwide and technology has grown manifold, it has still not properly reached remote towns and cities. Hence if someone belongs to place that does not have good connectivity, it can affect the child's education. Furthermore, it has a negative effect on the educational environment.

C. A feeling of loneliness

There is no one on one with a student and a professor physically in an online setting which can create a feeling of loneliness and isolation. It is critical that the school allow for alternative means of contact between pupils, peers, and teachers in this case. This can include things like online messaging, emails, and video conferencing, which allow for physical contact and minimise feelings of isolation.

D. Teachers' training

To teach online, professors need a basic understanding of how to use modern modes of learning. This isn't always the case, however. Teachers frequently have only rudimentary technological skills. They will not always have the necessary technology and tools to teach online courses.

To address this, educational institutions should make sure that they have provided updated training to their faculty that can aid in their job as facilitators of online classes.

E. Keeping track of screen time becomes difficult

Many parents are concerned about the health hazards involved with their children spending extended periods of time on a laptop. It causes major strain to their eyes and it can also acquire students to get corrective lenses. The growth in screen time is one of the most serious issues and disadvantages of online learning. As a result of sitting hunched in front of a screen for long periods of time, students may experience bad posture and other physical issues.

Providing frequent screen breaks for students to refresh their minds and bodies will be a constructive solution to this issue.

F. It is more time consuming than lectures on campus.

A student will inevitably have to spend more time understanding and completing a task in online lessons as compared to physical classes, believe it or not. The online course is more of a text-based environment. You must write messages, post responses, and interact with other students using your fingers to communicate with your teacher and other students (i.e., through typing). Typing is slower than shouting, which you would possibly imagine. (Try reading each word as you write it to see if it differs from what you might say if you were speaking the same thing.) On a similar vein, it has been proven that the brain retains better and faster when it listens as compared to reading. No matter how attentive you are in a lecture, there is always a chance to miss a chunk of information that has been said by the professor. It's normal for people to zone out for short periods of time. If you forget anything when reading, you will have a propensity to go look through the notes, which will take more time. The argument is that you will almost certainly learn more in an online world, but you will have to put in more time to do so.

IV. IS THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL GOING TO BE ONLINE CLASSES? CAN ONLINE LEARNING TAKE THE PLACE OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION?

Physical classes have evolved over the years, particularly as technology has infiltrated more and more facets of the learning experience. From projectors to smart screens, and all in between, technology has changed the way we learn in the classroom. Our standards for learning environments, methods, and experiences are evolving as a result of online learning. Many of the benefits of traditional classrooms, as well as a few additional features, are now possible via eLearning network platforms. The populace's enthusiasm for online learning has only increased over time, with 46 percent of recent graduates having taken an online course. The wide variety of eLearning platform capabilities, reliability, lower costs, and global access to high-quality education are all contributing to this development. Despite the fact that the best online learning programme is still up for discussion, both services provide distinct benefits to students who register in their courses.

G. The Evolution of Online Education

Companies who want to educate their employees, experts that want to up-skill, and skilled professionals that want to switch industries are all major advocates of online learning. 75 percent of professionals prefer to benefit from online education materials, and 68 percent of professionals value their chosen online learning platform, according to HubSpot.

For professionals who wish to grow in their jobs, online learning is important. They will achieve these goals while keeping their present jobs and routines thanks to online learning. Learners who study online will go at their own pace and keep track of their success for future use. They receive education and expertise when doing their duties within the organisation in this manner. Companies would not need to develop their own eLearning systems in order to educate their employees; instead, they can invest in an eLearning programme for businesses to achieve a more professional workforce.[ix]

V. REASONS WHY WE SHOULD CONTINUE WITH ONLINE EDUCATION EVEN AFTER THE END OF THE PANDEMIC

Many, if not all, of these boxes can be checked by the best eLearning tool. So, if you're a student looking to learn or a business looking to build an eLearning programme, prepare yourself with knowledge so you can make the best decision.

A. Convenience is a benefit of online learning.

Since they couldn't accommodate studies into their work schedules, most experts found themselves unable to pursue their study or upskilling. Many that switch to online learning sites would find that it provides ease and versatility in terms of scheduling and speed, enabling them to train at their own pace. Many online classes have stringent submission and deadline deadlines; however, those who choose to brush up on their skills can use tips and videos in between jobs to get the best of both worlds.

B. Interactions with students and tutors of the highest calibre

Higher-quality connections between students and tutors are possible with online learning. This is due to the fact that tutors have a variety of instructional techniques at their hands. They will also devote a lot of attention to particular students than they can in standard classrooms. The number of students who will participate in most online learning classes that use live streaming has a limit, making sure that each student receives enough attention and advice from their mentor.[x]

C. More students can enrol at once.

Students can sign up for an infinite number of online learning courses that rely on pre-recorded videos and exams. Today, many common classes have thousands of students enrolled at the same time, and since actual classrooms and seats are no longer needed, more students will enrol in a single course at the same time.

D. Web-based learning will grow in popularity.

It's predicted that online learning will grow in popularity as social distancing rules become more tangible in daily life. Live streaming, video-on-demand, conferences, webinars, chat shows, podcasts, and other types of web-based learning are just some of the options. Regardless of the communicator's preferred style, it's a given that web-based learning will become more common in the coming years due to its simplicity and versatility.

E. A more enjoyable learning environment

Online learning can have a greater learning environment because students can learn at their own speed and are able to achieve hands-on experience rather than memorising textbooks. It also helps that students can take classes from areas where they are at ease, which encourages them to view learning with enthusiasm. Students have the energy to take online courses when they are not under the burden of commuting, class times, or personal schedules.

F. More cost effective

Online courses are less expensive than conventional university courses and are well worth the investment. Accommodation, textbooks, supplies, groceries, transportation, and other aspects that lead to a complete academic environment in conventional education are often not included in the fees. Any of these expenses are cut in half or less for online learning, allowing students to take advantage of the low rates they have charged. Small prices do not imply lower quality; they guarantee that a broader demographic has access to colleges and courses that were once only available to people with larger budgets.

G. There is a Higher Retention Rate

Online instruction, according to surveys, has a higher completion rate than conventional university classes. This is most certainly due to the absence of the stressors and stresses that characterise formal schooling. Students will read and exercise at their own speed, and their course materials will be available to them for the rest of their lives in case they need to revisit their memories.[xi]

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Any leading eLearning platform provides students with distinct advantages over conventional classrooms. If your organisation has been considering ways to develop an eLearning site, now is the most convenient time to get started.

A. Contrary opinion

Some people believe online learning should not be adopted for future use. A crisis, as the saying goes, is a terrible thing to waste, and the tech utopians have not wasted a single moment to promote online education as a permanent way of educating students even after the pandemic has ended.

Tal Frankfurt, a technology expert and Forbes magazine columnist, said that the emergency substitution of conventional classrooms with automated ones should be regarded as a "kind of "bypas button" for the normal sluggish speed of educational reform. Frankfurt says, "Now that we're all online, let's sit there." Over all, immersive learning is superior since it allows students to "achieve greater heights while avoiding the constraints of a fixed range of circumstances."

Frankfurt isn't the only one. Hans Taparia argues in a recent op-ed for The New York Times that online education, which was once considered a "hobby," may be the magic bullet that saves higher education from the financial ravages of the coronavirus pandemic. A number of politicians have boarded the train as well. Governor Andrew Cuomo, flanked by Bill Gates, questioned whether we need all these buildings because we have technology, and Jeb Bush declared that online learning is the "future of learning." The governor said that "the old model" of a classroom is no longer true. It's time to "reimagine" education by putting computers and laptops "front and centre." Although these are aimed at school students, the plan to replace "all these houses, all these physical classrooms" with immersive environments is similarly applicable to higher education.

B. However, what do students think of the disparities between online and formal education? Do they see online learning as the "future" in education?

The debate about the relative merits of online and face-to-face education still hits a stumbling block: students should not take the same course twice (assuming they pass).

Students will equate the digital and analogue copies of their courses due to the abrupt transition to online instruction in the middle of the semester. Furthermore, since each student takes three to five classes, they have had exposure to a variety of online learning modalities, ranging from Zoom meetings to entirely asynchronous courses delivered through videos and podcasts. "I took the course both directions, and here's what I think," a student will tell for the first time. While it's true that many professors hurried the move, don't underestimate how many created feasible online classes that included anything from Zoom to completely synchronous (more on that word below) classes with all the bells and whistles.

An instructor wanted to know what his students thought, so he asked them to write an evaluation of their online education experiences. They are the essence of diversity: conventional, non-traditional, male, female, LGBTQ, first-generation college student, not first-generation college student, single parent, person of colour, various faiths, international (one student hails from Germany), those with a learning disability, and veterans. Many of them, though, are "digital natives," or people who grew up with their phones and screens. As a result, there is no presumption of prejudice or unfamiliarity with the digital world.

Despite their discrepancies in age, gender, race, sexual identity, citizenship, and academic preparedness, they all agreed on one thing: they despised online learning. They repeatedly said that there is no comparison between the two. One student expressed her dissatisfaction with the fact that she only received 10% of the daily class. "I haven't learned anything since we went online," one person wrote. A third said, "It seemed too easy." "I didn't feel challenged in the same way I had in the first half of the semester, and I thought the rate of learning had dropped significantly." "I watched the lectures that were shared, but I wasn't studying the material," one person said. Moving online resulted in a "profound sense of loss," according to the author.

The pandemic's forced idleness contributed to a portion of the issue. With in-person classes cancelled, work vanishing, and shelter-in-place orders in effect, the system that many students used to plan their days had vanished, leaving many students feeling lost and adrift. "[I] now existed in a world of chaos, with no definite end in sight," as one student put it. Prior to the pandemic, the requirement of arriving at a certain time and location shaped their days and "established an atmosphere in which my attention was entirely adapted to my education." Many students indicated that without the "consistency" of having to wake up at 11 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, it was easier to let classes slide and not take them as seriously as before. There are also the distractions of having to live at home, share room and screen time with parents and siblings, not to mention pets, for certain people.

Taking online courses also ensures that the internet's distractions are right in front of their eyes. One student writes, "The main advantage of in-class learning is that the classroom eliminates obstacles," but now, "I have the largest outlet of gaming, shopping, and socialising right in front of my face."

However, there is a deeper explanation for their distaste for online learning, and it is, ironically, the main selling point of online education.

A synchronicity, or "anytime, anywhere learning," is a huge benefit of online learning.

Lectures are not held at a certain time and are either captured as videos or podcasts. Computers are used to complete assignments, and computers are frequently used to rate them. Since you are not confined to a classroom, there are no restrictions

on how many people you will participate. The number of students in a class is no longer restricted by the capacity of the classroom; instead, it can expand to accommodate any number of students.[xii]

In fact, this ensures that the pupil is in control of his or her own education. There is no direct contact between the lecturer and the teachers, nor between the students themselves. It's just a pupil in front of a computer screen, and that's what my students detested the most: "We practically have to educate ourselves." It's the equivalent to paying for tuition to stream YouTube videos." "I do not pay the hefty tuition for online classes," one student said, "and I feel for all the students spending thousands and thousands of dollars to attend colleges when in fact they are trapped behind a computer screen." A third was also more specific: a prerecorded video is "by far the least effective and useful [mode of learning]." Students have no opportunity to ask questions or participate in class discussions while they are watching pre-recorded videos."

Students, ironically, reaffirmed Plato's critique of writing as a substitute for face-to-face debate. Socrates claims that if you ask an inanimate entity a question, such as a piece of writing or a drawing, you will not receive an answer. Instead, it keeps "telling you the same thing over and over again." You would not get an answer if you ask a question to a video or a podcast. You can't indulge in in debate, which, as Socrates points out, is where true teaching takes place: teasing out ideas, questioning them, arguing and counter-arguing.

Any answer reiterates the same main point: students were missing out on human contact. The main distinction is that during a normal semester, "the lectures are delivered in person rather than on a screen." This is important because it assists me and others with paying attention while the instructor is in the same room as us. When you can see their body language, you can get something out of what they're doing, because it's a more intimate experience."

The chance to learn "from other students" was taken away as the transition from face-to-face to online occurred, and splitting into smaller communities or commenting on each other's writing was no substitution for the real thing. One student in a traditional classroom says, "There is this degree of familiarity that just cannot thrive in an online environment." The importance of developing human relationships is central to the college experience. As one sensible student put it, "schools are like small cities." There's a lot more about studying than sitting at a desk, and watching classes go online takes away a lot from the student experience." The more a class moved away from face-to-face instruction, the fewer students enjoyed it and the less they learned. On the other hand, the closest a class came to resembling a typical school, the better. For two accounts, students liked Zoom classes (despite their drawbacks).

To begin, they were able to "restore a sort of order and structure" to their lives by converting classes into Zoom meetings that began and finished at the same time as the normal class. One student expressed her gratitude for the "normalcy" that the recurring class sessions provided.[xiii]

But, most importantly, Zoom brought alive, although in a diminished way, the conventional classroom's exchanges, back-and-forth, and human encounters. "It feels more personal" so students can communicate with each other and the professor in real time. I become more open to answering questions and participating." The best way to put it was as follows from one of the students:

Smaller classes in which the professor and students build a sense of confidence with one another have become some of the best courses I've taken during my college career. Person-to-person communication is the best way to build this trust. There's a certain degree of connection that can't be established in an online environment. Having human relations is at the heart of the college experience.[xiv]

The zoom feature isn't flawless. The sound quality can be poor, and there are significant concerns about privacy. Despite its flaws, Zoom aids in the restoration of the "real ties" lost in simulated classrooms, which is why some students suggested that everyone's camera be turned on during the workshop. It's not just about hearing each other; it's also about seeing each other.

Many teachers are concerned that after the pandemic has passed and normalcy has returned, officials may attempt to keep as many classes online as possible. After all, online is expected to be the future, according to Bush and Cuomo.

However, since most students dislike online courses, the reverse would most likely occur. There is no urge, no groundswell, to make the transition permanent after having gone virtual once and seeing various modalities. Students and faculty, on the other hand, are eager to return to the conventional classroom as soon as possible now that they have seen both. To be sure, online learning has its place, especially for students who would otherwise be unable to attend college, and given the health hazards, it is the only way to teach before COVID-19 is cured or a vaccine is developed.

Online education, on the other hand, is not the way of the future. There was no anything like it. It would never happen. From the perspective of a student, this is not what we see the future of education to be. [1]

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