

## Online Teaching and Learning: A Boon or Curse?

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### Abstract

*COVID-19 has had a tremendous effect on the way teaching is carried out almost all over the world. This has caused students to study via the Internet. As a new experience in the field of teaching, conducting tests, mutual communication between teachers and students alike, many advantages and disadvantages have risen in the teaching and learning arena. To fathom the legibility of this new method of teaching, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among (22) first year male and female students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences- the Sultanate of Oman. What we have reached is that online teaching, though beneficial, has many weak points that radically affect the teaching process. Discussion, recommendations, and applications will be highlighted throughout the article.*

**Keywords:** Communication, COVID-19, distance learning, Internet, online teaching and learning, students, technology.

### Introduction

Online teaching and learning is accomplished over the Internet. It is a sort of teaching that has recently spread internationally because of COVID-19. It has become a practical alternative for face- to- face teaching that helps people who cannot join academic institutions-schools, colleges, and universities- get certificates, experience, knowledge, etc. Students can choose their timetables, courses, and teachers to learn. This paper sheds some light on online teaching and learning processes and focusses on the advantages and disadvantages for both students and teachers.

### Literature Review

“Online learning is a form of distance learning that takes place over the Internet. It is interchangeable with the term e-learning. Online learning can include online courses, exams, gamified quizzes, and certification training. (Anna, 2020, Para. 1).

Distance learning is the kind of education that is conducted beyond physical space and time and is aided by technology. Online educational tools allow students and instructors to interact synchronously or asynchronously and give endless training opportunities with distance learning courses or hybrid courses. (Papadopoulou, 2020, Para.5).

Whether it is distance or online learning, it is –at least nowadays-the ultimate and only substitute for face- to- face process. This way of teaching has been adopted by many prestigious universities around the world so as to extend their benefits beyond the physical campus. This helps all levels of students, especially the poor, to join the programmes offered. “The University of London for example wanted to offer lower higher education costs to financially weaker students.”(Papadopoulou, 2020, Para.2). For curious people, joining online courses helps them obtain certificates and get promoted without leaving their jobs or places of work on one hand, and broaden their knowledge and experience on the other hand. In both programmes of learning- Online or Distance - students have to do their best and be committed, depend on themselves, and use their time effectively. This is different than the nature and environment of traditional classrooms.

In the traditional classrooms, the teacher and his students feel more relaxed in a vivid and live situation: students ask direct questions about the material at hand, participate, whether in groups, pairs, or individually, and take parts in competitions in a very social atmosphere.

When you imagine a traditional classroom, lively group discussion, and students raising their hands to ask the instructor questions likely comes[s?] to mind. Admittedly, these moments do not arise as naturally in online learning. For some individuals, these face-to-face interactions are a must to bring the material to life. Nevertheless, it is possible to bring more social interaction to online learning through competition, scheduled Q&A sessions with an instructor, and discussion channels. (Anna, 2020, Para. 8).

Online learning has its supporters as well; it is not as expensive as physical learning. Moreover, it has the same flexibility and gives more academic opportunities for students. There is a chance for distance learners on campus to enjoy their time following mixed, or blended, instructions with online learning.

Both recent high school graduates and nontraditional learners can take advantage of online classes. Online courses offer flexibility, affordable tuition, and a variety of academic opportunities. Distance learners who want to experience learning on campus can enroll in hybrid courses, which blend classroom instruction with online learning. (Broderick, (n.d), Para. 1).

The advantages of online learning are many, and they suit almost all students around the globe, provided that there is a reliable Internet connection, a proper and quiet place, no matter whether it is a café, a corner in a library, or on the roof. “With the ability to study anywhere, online learners can complete coursework at home, a coffee shop, or a library. (Broderick, (n.d), Para. 7). “The online learning system, with its range of options and resources, can be personalized in many ways. It is the best way to create a perfect learning environment suited to the needs of each student”. (Gautam, 2020, Para. 9). Do online learners, sometimes, get distracted?

With the tremendous wide -spread of the social media, not only students, but also many people cannot focus well, and easily get distracted. Online learners encounter challenges while joining online lectures. Teachers should make sure that they-learners- pay much attention and participate actively and stay focused all the time. If possible, the teacher should ask students to open their cameras during the class so that he can observe them well. In some conservative societies, normally in coeducational institutions, cameras should be off during the class.

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 distracted by social media or other sites. Therefore, it is imperative for the teachers to keep their online classes crisp, engaging, and interactive to help students stay focused on the lesson. (Gautam, 2020, Para. 10).

For both teachers and students who prefer to not be available on campus and dislike physical restrictions, or have health problems, normally prefer the online way of teaching and learning. “Online learning is free from a range of physical restrictions that impede face-to-face teaching. Students – and lecturers – with certain physical and health conditions often find online learning more accessible than campus-based activities”. ( Lee, 2020, Para. 2). There are a number of things that can enhance the ease of learning, especially for students who miss, or are unable to understand the lesson well while in class. Technology has made it easier for them; recorded lectures. At the College where the researchers teach, it is mandatory that lecturers record lectures in case students need to go across them later on. These recordings remain for a specific period of time on the site – around twenty days- before they disappear.

Well-produced learning content such as recorded lectures can enhance the ease of learning – particularly for students who, for whatever reason, may find it difficult to pick up new information in real time from one-off lectures. ( Lee, 2020, Para. 3).

Though seem similar, online and correspondence courses have major discrepancies, normally the way interaction takes place between students and teachers. In the correspondence courses, interaction occurs few times as when the teacher gives some remarks or feedback on students’ work, or sends them some material, which is normally sent via the email. Moreover, pair or group work do not happen because the courses are normally self-paced. On some rare occasions, students can interact as a team through discussion boards.

Two of the most popular types of online education include correspondence courses and distance learning. While they’re similar in many ways, there are a few major distinctions between the two, including delivery, pacing, and interaction between instructors and students. (Weitzel, 2020, Para. 1).

Moreover, in the correspondence courses, the academic institutions normally send the materials required before the academic semester starts. “In correspondence

courses, learning materials are provided by the school to the students prior to the start of the course”. (Weitzel, 2020, Para.2).

In distance learning, the majority of the course material is delivered by the instructor, rather than self-taught by the student. Students attend a lecture style session and follow along with the instructor’s presentation. Instead of receiving learning materials in the beginning and being expected to teach themselves from provided material like in correspondence courses, students in distance learning courses are taught incrementally by instructors, much like in in-person classes. (Weitzel, 2020, Para.2).

All online teaching and learning processes depend on the good and reliable Internet connection. Any problem with the connection spoils everything. Students living in remote villages or places between high mountains do suffer from this problem. “Not everyone has access to a good internet connection. So if students are unable to access the content, it will make the whole thing rather useless”. (Kotobee, 2020, Para. 20). Large numbers of students in class also suffer and face difficulty. “Another **disadvantage** refers to the fact that online courses cannot cope with thousands of students that try to join discussions. Also, online learning can be difficult, if it is meant for disciplines that involve practice”. (Armstrong, 2013, Para. 6).

To wrap up, Armstrong (2014, Para. 7), summarizes the whole process of online teaching in his own words:

In conclusion, online learning should be seen as a complement and extension of classical forms of learning. Not even the best online course can fully replace the personal contact with a teacher, or the human relationships that develop in a group. So, traditional classes shouldn’t be replaced with online learning.

### Questionnaire Analysis

In order to gather more information about the topic, a survey was conducted among (22) Year one students enrolled at Ibri College of Applied Sciences. The study is conducted by means of a questionnaire that consists of (10) items. The first part contains (5) (Yes/No) questions, while the second consists of (5) (agree/ disagree) questions.

The survey seeks to investigate students' perceptions of online learning and highlights some of the challenges that they have been facing. The findings of the survey have revealed that (54.5%) of the participants prefer face- to -face learning to online, while (45.5%) opt for online learning. In addition, (59.1%) of the students feel that online studying is an excellent experience for them, while (40.9%) of them believe it is not. However, only (45.5%) of the respondents would strongly recommend online learning.

On the positive side, it has been found that the majority of the students (59.1%) admit that online learning makes them feel that they are part of their class, not isolated. In addition, (59.1%) of the students believe that their teachers are so helpful and do their best to make them understand the lesson. Furthermore, a significant percentage of the respondents (81.8%) admit that when their teachers give them an online task, they do it on time, without any delay.

On the other hand, one of the major challenges that the students are struggling with when learning online is network connectivity and, according to the survey's results, the vast majority of the participants (95.5%), declare that sometimes they miss classes because the Internet is down. Moreover, (81.8%) of the respondents sometimes feel frustrated when they cannot deal with the technology used in online learning. This study has also revealed another major challenge as most of the participants (86.4%) admit that studying from home is challenging, as sometimes they cannot concentrate because of the noise and certain family issues.

## Appendix

Figure 1

1. Personally, I prefer face- to -face learning to online. انا شخصيا افضل الدراسة وجها لوجه وليس اونلاين.  
22 responses

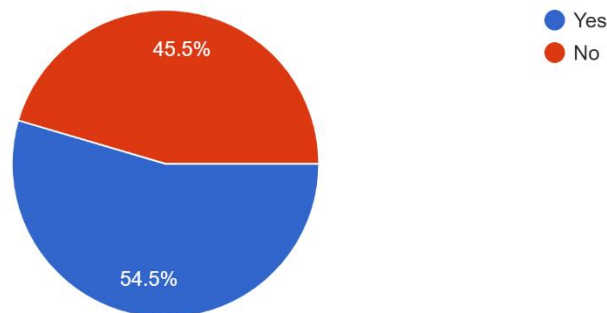


Figure 2

2. Online learning makes me feel that I am part of my class, not isolated. الدراسة اونلاين تجعلني جزءاً لا يتجزأ

من الفصل الدراسي ولست منعزلاً

22 responses

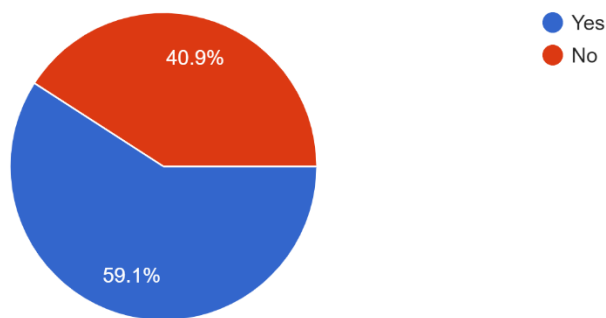


Figure 3

3. When my teacher gives me an online task, I do it on time. حينما يعطينا المدرس واجبا، فأنني أقوم به في الوقت المحدد

المحدد

22 responses

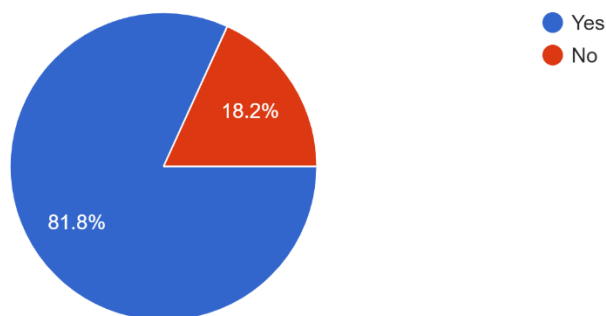


Figure 4

4. Sometimes I miss classes because the Internet is down. أحيانا تفوتني بعض المحاضرات بسبب الشبكة.

22 responses

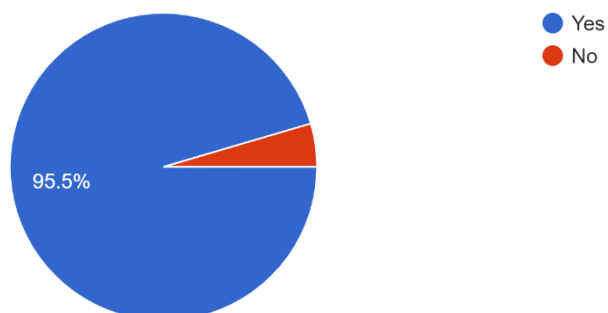


Figure 5

5. I feel that online studying is an excellent experience for me. اشعر بان الدراسة اونلاين هي تجربة ممتازة بالنسبة لي

22 responses

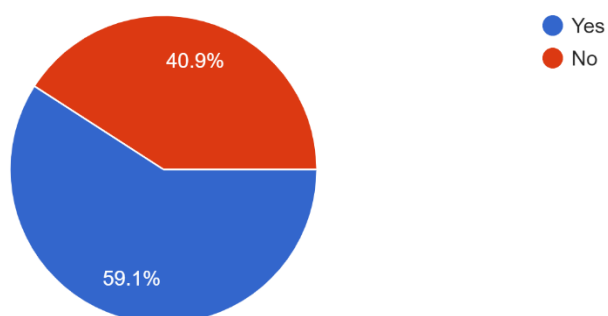


Figure 6

6. My teachers are so helpful and do their best to make me understand the lesson. ان المدرسين يعملون ما

بوسعهم لاستوعب الدرس

22 responses

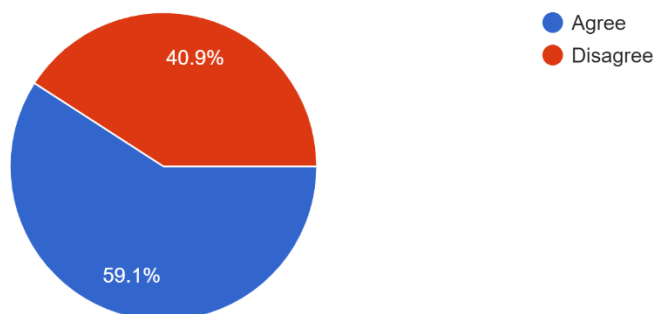


Figure 7

7. Studying from home is challenging: sometimes I cannot concentrate because of the noise and certain family issues. الدراسة من البيت لها مشاكلها، احيانا لا استطيع التركيز بسبب الازعاج ناهيك عن امور عائلية اخرى

22 responses

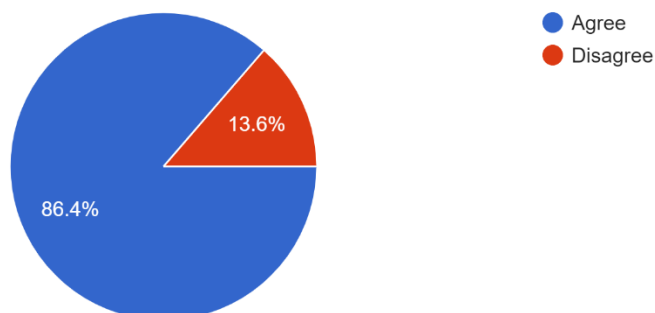


Figure 8

8. Sometimes I feel frustrated when I cannot deal with the technology used in online learning. أحيانا

ينتابني الاحباط حين لا اوفق باستخدام تقنية الانترنت المسخرة للتدريس

22 responses

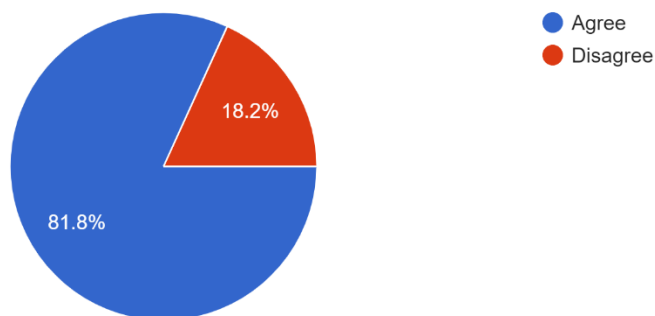


Figure 9

9. I would strongly recommend online learning. اشجع وبقوة الدراسة اونلاين

22 responses

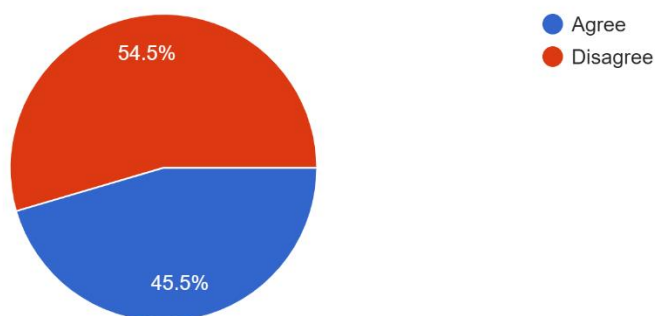
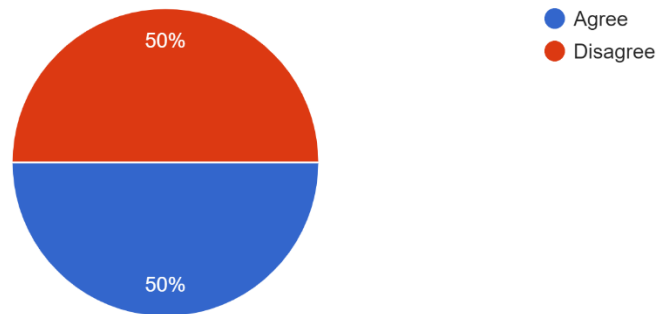


Figure 10

10. My parents are satisfied with my performance via online learning. اهلي فرحون للمستوى الذي حققته في

الدراسة اونلاين

22 responses



### Recommendations

-it is necessary to provide both teachers and students with the essential skills and experience how to deal with this method of teaching, and consider any suggestions and ideas that might be of help in this arena.

-academic administrations should encourage students to think seriously about taking part in creating useful activities they like or admire; this keeps them attendant all the class-time.

-parents should be major participants and supporters for their children: they can help them, not only in technology, but also in preparing the class material, if need be.

-teachers should update parents with their sons' and daughters' levels and ask about any problems they have in speaking and listening.

-teachers and students should be patient when tackling some technological issues such as bad Internet connections or power cut off; missing stuff which should be repeated the next day.

-teachers can give students the chance to talk freely with their colleagues during the group discussion to see how vigilant and careful they were during the class.

-teachers may take courses on Online Teaching and preparing courses. This gives them much confidence in performing their job properly.

## Conclusion

In fact, online teaching and learning method –at least nowadays- has become the only possible way of delivering classes, which means it is almost unlikely to go back to teaching in the same way as used to be before COVID-19, or create similar environments with practical activities that benefit students. Scholars should think of possible and necessary ways to develop students' abilities in some fields: critical thinking, innovation, creativity, working in a co-operative way. This should be accompanied by educational strategies for teachers and students alike, not to mention collaboration with families.

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## About the researchers

Dr Mohammed Al Ghafri is a full-time lecturer of English at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences at the English Department at Ibri College of Applied Sciences- Oman. He holds a PhD in teaching English (TESOL) from the University of Leeds where he also got his MA in Education. He has had different positions: assistant dean, English supervisor and head of follow-up and training in Oman. His research interest is classroom interaction and participation, identity, classroom context and teachers' supervision.

Amal Al-Lamki is an English Language instructor at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Department of English- Ibri College of Applied Sciences, Ministry of Higher Education- the Sultanate of Oman. She holds a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English Language. She has been teaching English for EFL undergraduate university students for more than ten years. Her research interests include academic writing, and challenges in EFL education.

Mr. Younes Audeh is the head of the translation committee and a lecturer at the Department of English at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri College of Applied Sciences - the Sultanate of Oman. He is an M.A. holder in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania- USA. He has been teaching English as an ESL/EFL for a long time. He has taught at a number of colleges and universities in different countries: Jordan, Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. His research interest is —academic writing.

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## Appendices

### Questionnaire

Hello all,

The following is a questionnaire that highlights an important issue; online studying. It is conducted for one group in the First Year IT majors, (22 male & female students), at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri College- Sultanate of Oman. This questionnaire consists of two kinds of questions (Yes/ No /Agree/Disagree). You don't have to write your names.

#### **Yes / No questions**

1. Personally, I prefer face- to -face learning to online.

-Yes

-No

2. Online learning makes me feel that I am part of my class, not isolated.

-Yes

-No

3. When my teacher gives me an online task, I do it on time.

-Yes

-No

4. Sometimes I miss classes because the Internet is down.

-Yes

-No

5. I feel that online studying is an excellent experience for me.

-Yes

-No

#### **Agree / Disagree**

6. My teachers are so helpful and do their best to make me understand the lesson.

-Agree

-Disagree

7. Studying from home is challenging; sometimes I cannot concentrate because of the noise and certain family issues.

-Agree

-Disagree

8. Sometimes I feel frustrated when I cannot deal with the technology used in online learning.

-Agree

-Disagree

9. I would strongly recommend online learning.

-Agree

-Disagree

10. My parents are satisfied with my performance via online learning.

-Agree

-Disagrees