ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING: NEW DIMENSIONS

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Abstract

The article focuses on the variables of foreign language teaching and learning online vis-à-vis traditional classroom methods. Aspects to be discussed range from the subjective factors for both students and tutors that can be motivating (mobile access, swift feedback, automated marking, individual tasks, etc.) or demotivating (technical glitches, lack of technical support, extra work for lecturers, etc.), to objective factors that facilitate online learning in general (increase in student attendance, fast internet, the 'digital natives' generation, among others). Some synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid language learning online platforms will be highlighted with an emphasis on the different possibilities that they present and the weighing of their advantages and drawbacks. This essay will also touch upon the emergence of online education, examining its key drivers, advantages, challenges, and the implications for the future of learning.

Keywords: online education, motivating factor, demotivating factor, online learning platform

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A brief overview of online education

In recent years, online education has revolutionized the way we perceive and engage with learning. This transformative shift from traditional classroom settings to digital platforms has been driven by advancements in technology, changing societal needs, and a growing recognition of the benefits that online education offers. The dawn of online teaching demonstrated a significant new stage in the history of education. The roots of online education can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the start of correspondence courses. Universities like the University of Chicago and the University of London began offering courses through mail, allowing students to study remotely. These early distance learning programs laid the groundwork for future developments by demonstrating the feasibility of education beyond the traditional classroom.

The mid-20th century saw the introduction of televised courses, which represented the next step in distance education. In the 1950s and 1960s, some higher education institutions, for instance Stanford University and the University of Wisconsin, used television to broadcast lectures to a wider audience. This approach expanded access to education but was to a large extent limited by the one-way nature of the medium. The 1980s marked the beginning of computer-based learning. The development of personal computers and early networking technologies enabled universities to experiment with computer-assisted instruction. In this vein, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign launched the PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) system, which was one of the first generalized computer-assisted instruction systems. PLATO provided a platform for interactive learning and set the stage for future online educational innovations.

The advent of the Internet in the 1990s revolutionized online education. The ability to connect computers globally opened new possibilities for remote learning. Universities began to explore web-based courses, which allowed for greater interactivity and flexibility compared to previous methods. In 1993, the University of Phoenix became one of the first institutions to offer fully online degree programs. This move demonstrated the potential of the Internet to provide comprehensive education entirely online. By the late 1990s, many universities, including prominent institutions like MIT and Stanford, began to offer online courses and degrees.

The early 21st century saw the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which further transformed online education. MOOCs offered free, high-quality courses to anyone with an Internet connection, democratizing access to education on an unprecedented scale. In 2012, platforms like Coursera, edX, and Udacity were launched by prestigious universities, including Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, making courses from these institutions accessible to millions of learners worldwide. MOOCs introduced new pedagogical approaches, such as video lectures, interactive quizzes, and peer assessments. They also fostered a global learning community, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to collaborate and learn together. While the initial hype around MOOCs has tempered, they have left a lasting impact on the online education landscape and have been integrated into various hybrid learning models.

The late 2010s and early 2020s witnessed the mainstream adoption of online education by universities worldwide. Advances in technology, such as high-speed internet, cloud computing, and mobile devices, made online learning more accessible and effective. Universities increasingly incorporated online components into their curricula, offering blended and fully online programs. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 accelerated the adoption of online education. With campuses closed and in-person classes suspended, universities had to pivot to online learning almost overnight. This global shift highlighted the importance of digital literacy and the need for robust online learning infrastructure. While the transition was challenging, it also demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of higher education institutions.

Several factors have contributed to the rise of online education. First and foremost, technological advancements have played a crucial role. The proliferation of mobile devices, and sophisticated e-learning platforms has made it easier than ever to access educational content from anywhere in the world. These technologies have not only improved the accessibility of education but also its quality, with interactive and multimedia-rich content enhancing the learning experience. Another significant driver is the increasing demand for flexible learning options. In today's fast-paced world, many individuals seek educational opportunities that fit their busy schedules. Online education provides the flexibility to learn at one's own pace and convenience, making it an attractive option for working professionals, parents, and anyone looking to balance their studies with other commitments.

Online Education: Motivating and Demotivating Factors for Students and for Faculty Members

The full or partial shift to online education in universities has introduced a range of motivating and demotivating factors for both students and faculty. Understanding these factors is crucial to creating an effective and engaging online learning environment. There has been an extensive body of research that has found online teaching and learning effective in a number of ways (cf. Benta et al. 2014, Hakim 2020, Filipova & Yuleva-Chuchulayna, 2022).

One of the most significant motivating factors for students is the **flexibility and convenience** that online education offers. Students have the possibility of mobile access and retrieve course materials and complete assignments at their own pace in accordance with their own schedule. They can also receive swift or instant feedback on the tasks they have completed, e.g. quizzes, assignments, and assessments, helping them understand their progress and areas for improvement. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for students balancing their studies with work, family responsibilities, or other commitments.

Online education platforms provide **access to resources** of a wide array, including recorded video lectures, interactive simulations, and digital libraries which enhance the learning experience. This abundance of resources allows students to explore topics in greater depth at their own pace, enhancing their learning experience. Students from remote areas can access quality education without the need to relocate. This democratization of education ensures that learning opportunities are not confined by geographical boundaries. At the same time studying online reduces the consumption of resources and decreases costs, which is considered a beneficial aspect of online education (Joosten et al., 2021; Pelletier et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2020).

Studying online also offers a more convenient mode for introverted students who might feel shy or uncomfortable in an open classroom. Therefore, learning from home can create a more comfortable and stress-free environment for students. This comfort can reduce anxiety related to classroom dynamics and increase focus and productivity. A study of the impact of online learning and assessment on student well-being found that "for some students, pedagogical unfamiliarity, extended timings of assessments and availability of resources have significantly increased the task demands", requiring a greater cognitive effort, while others felt that spending more time on university tasks increased their well-

being (Slack & Priestley 2023: 346). Therefore, the fact that there was no considerable correlation between well-being and online assessment could be explained by the diverse approaches at separate higher education institutions.

Online platforms often incorporate adaptive learning technologies that tailor educational content to individual student needs. This **personalized approach** can help students master difficult concepts more effectively and feel more engaged in their learning. Such forms of teaching can provide immediate feedback to students and result in better achievements, enhancing student autonomy (Lee et al., 2011; Wandler & Imbriale, 2017; Martin & Bolliger, 2022).

Despite its numerous benefits, online education presents several challenges. One of the primary issues is the **digital divide,** which refers to the gap between individuals who have access to modern information and communication technology and those who do not**.** Not all students have reliable access to high-speed internet or the necessary technological devices, thus students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds can be prevented from participating fully in online learning. This disparity exacerbates existing educational inequalities.

Also, **technical problems**, such as software glitches, platform outages, and user errors, can disrupt the learning process. Not all students are technologically adept: some may face difficulties in navigating online platforms, leading to frustration and a decrease in the overall effectiveness of the educational experience. A demotivating factor for some can also be the strict deadline that is imposed on uploading certain tasks, possible technical errors in a test, or incorrect automated marking, among others.

Another challenge is the **lack of face-to-face interaction**, which can affect the learning experience. Maintaining student engagement and fostering interaction in a virtual environment can be challenging. Unlike physical classrooms, online platforms may struggle to replicate the social dynamics and immediate feedback mechanisms that facilitate active learning. The lack of face-to-face interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement among students.

Online learning requires a high degree of **self-discipline** and effective time management skills. Students who struggle with these skills may find it challenging to keep up with coursework and meet deadlines, leading to frustration and decreased motivation.

For lecturers, embracing online education offers numerous motivating factors that enhance teaching effectiveness, broaden their reach, and provide flexibility. Some of the motivating factors for faculty at higher educational institutions coincide with those for students, such as **accessibility and reach**. Online education allows lecturers to transcend geographical boundaries, offering their expertise to a global audience. This expanded reach benefits both lecturers and students in several ways. For instance, online platforms attract a diverse group of students from different cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity enriches the learning experience and fosters a more inclusive educational environment.

The **flexibility** and convenience of online education are significant motivating factors for faculty. Traditional classroom settings often impose rigid schedules and physical constraints that can limit both teaching and learning experiences. Online education offers several advantages in this regard: flexible scheduling, remote teaching and resource management. That means that faculty can accommodate their schedules to balance teaching with research, administrative duties, and personal commitments; online education eliminates the need for physical presence, enabling lecturers to teach from anywhere, especially those with personal or professional obligations that require frequent travel or relocation. Also, online platforms streamline administrative tasks such as grading, attendance tracking, and content distribution, freeing up time for lecturers to focus on teaching and interacting with students. Therefore, similar to students, faculty benefit from the flexibility of online education. The ability to record lectures and conduct virtual office hours provides instructors with greater control over their schedules, allowing for a better work-life balance.

Online platforms offer a variety of **innovative teaching tools** that can enhance teaching, such as multimedia presentations, interactive quizzes, and discussion forums. The possibility of constantly uploading additional resources and upgrading materials can make teaching more dynamic and engaging, which can be highly motivating for faculty.

Adaptive learning technologies enable lecturers to tailor content to individual student needs, providing individual feedback and support. This **personalized approach** can improve student outcomes and satisfaction. The design of courses can be geared towards catering to diverse learning styles and needs, setting individual tasks, using

various multimedia tools to create engaging and interactive content. In addition, the possibility exists for monitoring students' behaviour, so that is an added bonus for faculty.

While online education offers numerous advantages, there are several factors that can discourage lecturers from adopting this mode of teaching. These factors range from technical challenges and increased workload to concerns about the effectiveness of online education and general resistance to change.

Some of the demotivating factors for faculty overlap with those for students. One of the primary demotivating factors for lecturers is the **technological barriers** associated with online education. The transition to digital teaching requires proficiency with various tools and platforms, which can be daunting for some educators. Faculty may face technical challenges when teaching online. Issues such as software glitches, platform limitations, and lack of technical support can be frustrating and time-consuming. Not all lecturers are comfortable with the technology required for online teaching. The need to master new software, troubleshoot technical issues, and adapt to different digital tools can be overwhelming, especially for those with limited technical skills.

The availability of **technical support** can significantly impact a lecturer's willingness to engage in online teaching. Insufficient support can lead to frustration and demotivation, especially when technical issues disrupt the teaching process.

The **absence of personal interaction** in online education is another major demotivating factor. Traditional classroom settings offer direct, face-to-face engagement, which many lecturers value. Face-to-face teaching allows lecturers to use non-verbal cues to gauge student understanding and engagement. In an online environment, the absence of these cues can make it challenging to adjust teaching strategies in real-time. Personal interactions foster a sense of community and connection between lecturers and students, so building relationships between students and faculty is more difficult in a virtual setting. Lecturers may feel that they cannot provide the same level of support and guidance to their students online as they can in person.

Online education often demands a significant increase in workload compared to traditional face-to-face teaching. This increased burden can demotivate lecturers in several ways. Developing an online course requires substantial **time and effort**. Lecturers must create digital content, design interactive activities, and adapt materials for an online

format, which can be more time-consuming than preparing for traditional classes. Providing timely feedback and grading assignments in an online environment can be more challenging. The need to use digital tools for assessments and monitor student progress adds to the workload.

In addition, online courses often necessitate **constant engagement** with students through discussion boards, emails, and virtual office hours. This continuous interaction can lead to burnout and stress, particularly when managing large classes.

A more common than not concern is the **efficacy of online education,** and it can also dishearten lecturers from adopting this teaching mode. These doubts may stem from various factors, such as the perception that online education cannot match the quality of face-to-face instruction with regards to the depth of learning, the effectiveness of virtual interactions, and the ability to assess student understanding. Another aspect is that maintaining student engagement in an online environment can be challenging. Faculty may worry about the lack of face-to-face interaction, which can make it difficult to gauge student interest and participation.

Resistance to change is a natural human tendency that can demotivate lecturers from adopting online education. This resistance can find manifestation in various forms. Many faculty members are accustomed to traditional teaching methods and may be reluctant to change their established routines and practices. The perceived complexity and unfamiliarity of online teaching can exacerbate this resistance. Also, the culture of an educational institution can influence lecturers' willingness to embrace online education. In institutions where online teaching is not prioritized or supported, lecturers may feel less motivated to adopt it. Thirdly, some lecturers may question the long-term value and sustainability of online education. If they perceive online teaching as a temporary trend rather than a viable and enduring mode of education, they may be less inclined to invest time and effort in it.

And last but not least, ensuring **academic integrity** in online assessments is a significant concern for faculty. The potential for cheating and plagiarism can undermine the credibility of online education and discourage lecturers from fully embracing it. Ensuring academic integrity in an online environment is challenging and can be a source of stress for faculty. The need to implement and monitor proctoring solutions, coupled with concerns about cheating and plagiarism, can detract from the teaching experience.

A recent study (Aikina & Bolsunovskaya, 2020) of attitudes of lecturers towards online education found that what they considered as the most motivating factors were automatic checking of tests, the possibility to post information for students and upload additional materials, set individual or group tasks depending on the objectives and class dynamics and monitor student behaviour. What they found demotivating was the additional work required of faculty, actual and potential technical problems, and plagiarism.

Another study, in which 249 respondents took part, all of whom university lecturers from two medical universities in Bulgaria, concluded that the drawbacks of online training were weakening of the link between faculty and students, diminishing student responsibility in class, and turning students into more passive participants in the process. The benefits of online study were better appreciated by faculty with higher academic rank – associate professors and full professors, as well as by lecturers who were involved in theoretical subjects, compared to those who were in clinical and preclinical departments (Tarnovska et al., 2022).

When evaluating university online education, **objective factors** are also essential for ensuring a smooth and felicitous process of learning. One of the effects of online classes is an increase in student attendance due to the ease of access and the lack of geographical location restraints for participation in lectures and seminars. Another objective factor to be taken into account is that students are digital natives – most young people feel at home using digital technologies in their studies and that fact is positively exploited. Online teaching and learning allow for faster students to not be held back by slower students since everyone can work at their own pace. Lecturers are more disciplined as well, because their participation in a particular course can be tracked. And to add an important ingredient to the mix: the fast internet that makes all of the above possible.

Despite the numerous advantages of online university education, a significant drawback persists: the lack of social contact and the diminished sense of academic community. These issues have profound implications on students' educational experiences and outcomes, affecting their emotional well-being, academic success, and professional development.

Social contact plays a critical role in the educational process. Traditional in-person education provides students with numerous opportunities to interact with peers, engage in discussions, and build relationships. These interactions are crucial because they

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provide emotional support, which can be vital for students facing the stress and challenges of academic life. Collaborative learning activities such as group activities and collaborative projects enhance learning by allowing students to share perspectives and knowledge. In addition, building a network of peers and professors is invaluable for future career opportunities and professional growth.

Online education, however, often lacks the spontaneous interactions that occur in physical classrooms and campus social spaces. Virtual classrooms and discussion forums do not fully replicate the immediacy and depth of face-to-face conversations, leading to a sense of isolation among students.

An academic community fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose among students and faculty and this community is characterized by regular interactions with professors and academic advisors who guide students through their educational journey; participation in academic events, seminars, and extracurricular activities that stimulate intellectual curiosity and growth; the development of a strong affiliation with the university's culture and traditions.

In online education, the absence of a physical campus can undermine these elements. The lack of informal interactions with faculty and peers can make it difficult for students to feel connected to their institution. Additionally, virtual participation in academic events often lacks the engagement and immersion that in-person attendance provides.

To address these challenges, online education providers must proactively foster social interaction and community building. Some strategies can be the use of advanced communication tools and platforms to facilitate more engaging and interactive virtual meetings and discussions; combining online and in-person learning experiences to provide the benefits of both modalities; organizing virtual social events, study groups, and clubs to encourage interaction among students and providing robust academic and emotional support services, including virtual office hours, counseling, and mentorship programs.

While online university education offers flexibility and access to a broader range of students, the lack of social contact and academic community presents significant challenges. Addressing these issues requires innovative approaches to create a more

interactive and supportive online learning environment. By enhancing virtual interactions, promoting community-building activities, and offering strong support systems, online education can strive to provide a more holistic and fulfilling educational experience. After all, "online active learning practices and an online learning climate that fosters peer communication and collaboration are course elements over which instructors can provide much influence" (Cole et al., 2021, p. 878).

The modes of online learning can be broadly categorized into three forms: synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid. Each of these forms has distinct characteristics, advantages, and challenges, catering to different learning needs and preferences. Synchronous online learning involves real-time interactions between instructors and students. Classes are conducted through live video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Big Blue Button. This mode closely mirrors traditional classroom settings but in a virtual environment. One of the advantages is real-time interaction since students can participate and receive immediate feedback, facilitating dynamic discussions and active learning. There is knowledge sharing in real time and immediate access to the lecturer with the possibility to ask questions and get answers. However, students in different time zones or with other commitments may find it challenging to attend live sessions. Also, dependence on stable internet connections and functional devices can pose problems. The fixed schedule may not suit all learners, particularly those with varying availability.

Asynchronous online learning allows students to access course materials and complete assignments at their own pace. This mode uses platforms such as Moodle, Blackboard, Canvas, Langblog, Tandem where lectures, readings, and assessments are uploaded. When studying asynchronously, students can learn at their own pace, making it ideal for those with busy schedules or who need to balance education with other responsibilities. Course materials are always available, accommodating learners from different time zones and with varying availabilities, therefore students can spend more time on challenging topics and less on familiar ones, personalizing their learning experience. An important aspect of the learning process - shyness and fear of the lecturer is reduced and some students feel more comfortable. Since student reaction is not spontaneous and their reply is pushed back in time, they can apply critical thinking more. The challenge that might arise with these types of platforms is that the learning process

can be hindered by deferred responses to questions and delayed feedback. Also, as mentioned above, strong self-motivation and time-management skills are needed so that students stay on track without regular class meetings.

Hybrid, or blended learning, combines elements of both synchronous and asynchronous learning. It offers a balanced approach by integrating live sessions with self-paced study and tries to remedy some of the challenges posed by the above two forms of study. Hybrid learning offers a balanced approach combining the flexibility of asynchronous learning with the engagement of synchronous sessions. It provides a variety of ways of interaction and learning, catering to diverse learning styles and preferences and offers the structured environment of live classes and the flexibility of accessing materials at any time. Some researchers have advocated the use of blended learning. For instance, Amiti (2020) has indicated that although there can be preferences for either synchronous or asynchronous learning, if both methods are merged this can lead to more felicitous results.

Hybrid teaching and learning does not come without its challenges, however. It requires more complex planning, demanding careful coordination of synchronous and asynchronous components. It may need more resources and support from both faculty and students to manage the different modes effectively and students may struggle to keep track of live sessions and self-paced assignments, leading to confusion and missed deadlines.

The three primary forms of online learning—synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid—each offer unique benefits and challenges. Synchronous learning fosters real-time interaction and a sense of community, while asynchronous learning provides unparalleled flexibility and accessibility. Hybrid learning aims to blend the strengths of both, offering a balanced and versatile educational experience. The choice of mode depends on individual learner needs, course objectives, and the resources available. As technology continues to evolve, these forms of online learning will likely become even more refined and tailored, ensuring that education remains adaptable and inclusive for all.

The pedagogical benefits of online learning are quite clear and agreed upon by many authors: they provide innovative teaching methods, offer interactivity, heighten motivation and create an environment for student autonomy. At the same time, it offers the opportunity to further develop and practice all language skills, assuring access to

different language situations, and different uses of the language and thus leading to development of communicative skills.

The development of online learning and teaching has transformed education, offering new opportunities and challenges. Technological advancements and pedagogical innovations have paved the way for more accessible, flexible, and personalized learning experiences. As we move forward, addressing the challenges and leveraging the benefits will be crucial in realizing the full potential of online education. The future of learning is undoubtedly digital, and it promises to be more inclusive and dynamic than ever before.

Despite initial scepticism and resistance, online teaching has proven to be a transformative force, reshaping the educational landscape and paving the way for future developments in digital learning. As technology continues to evolve, online teaching will undoubtedly play an increasingly vital role in providing quality education to learners around the world. And the flexibility and learning possibilities are likely to shift the expectations of students and educators, diminishing further the line between classroom-based instruction and virtual learning.

Higher educational institutions experienced a swift global transition from traditional to online studies. Elaborating long-term online learning strategies is a crucial aspect that universities need to tackle in order to provide good quality education (Johnson et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Online education has emerged as a powerful force in the realm of learning, driven by technological advancements and the need for flexible, accessible, and personalized educational opportunities. While it offers numerous advantages, including accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and personalized learning, it also faces challenges such as the digital divide and the need for quality assurance. As we look to the future, the continued evolution of technology and the integration of innovative tools will shape the landscape of online education, making it an indispensable part of the educational ecosystem. The history of online education at universities is a testament to the transformative power of technology in expanding access to education. From early correspondence courses to the widespread adoption of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the evolution of online education reflects the changing needs of learners and the innovative spirit of

higher education institutions. As technology continues to advance, online education will play an increasingly vital role in shaping the future of learning.

While online education in general offers many benefits, several demotivating factors can discourage lecturers from adopting this mode of teaching. Technological barriers, increased workload, doubts about efficacy, lack of personal interaction, and resistance to change are significant challenges that need to be addressed. To encourage more lecturers to embrace online education, institutions must provide robust technical support, offer professional development opportunities, recognize and address concerns about the effectiveness of online learning, and foster a supportive and adaptable institutional culture. By mitigating these demotivating factors, the potential of online education can be fully realized, benefiting both educators and students.

Implications for the Future

The emergence of online education has profound implications for the future of learning. As technology continues to evolve, we can expect online education to become even more immersive and interactive. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies, for example, have the potential to create engaging and hands-on learning experiences that were previously unimaginable. Moreover, the integration of artificial intelligence can further enhance personalized learning by providing real-time feedback and support to students. AI-driven analytics can help educators identify learning gaps and tailor instructional strategies to meet individual needs effectively.

The rise of online education also calls for a rethinking of traditional educational models. Hybrid learning, which combines online and in-person instruction, is likely to become more prevalent. This approach can leverage the strengths of both modes, offering flexibility while maintaining the benefits of face-to-face interaction.

Looking ahead, the future of online education at universities is poised for continued growth and innovation. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality hold the potential to create more immersive and personalized learning experiences. These advancements will likely enhance student engagement and outcomes, further bridging the gap between online and in-person education. The integration of data analytics will enable institutions to better understand student needs and tailor educational offerings accordingly. The focus on lifelong learning

and the increasing demand for upskilling and reskilling in a rapidly changing job market will drive the expansion of online education.

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