

**The advantages and disadvantages of online delivery and learning**

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August 2020

**Introduction**

My research project has been based around the topic of online learning. Online learning is quite a broad topic and is a relatively less popular learning and teaching method in the UK than traditional face-to-face teaching and thus there is less known about it and so I set out to learn more about this method of delivering education. I had to complete research on different aspects of online learning. The four questions I was asked to to investigate were:

• What is online learning and what are the different approaches used?

• What are the benefits of online learning for students and teachers?

• What are the barriers to online learning for students and teachers?

• How has COVID-19 impacted online learning?

Due to the arrival of COVID-19 and lockdown being implicated in the UK, schools have shut as a result and online learning has instead been used to deliver lessons to students and keep their education going until the end of the academic year. Being a sixth-form student myself, I already had a good idea about what online learning was as I have been experiencing it myself first-hand for the past few months and that is what drew me to make this particular topic the centre of my research. To start off, I read around the subject and skimmed through research journals and articles to try and better my understanding on what online learning was and find an exact definition for it. In the beginning, I was struggling to find relevant information regarding online learning and the research questions I was looking to answer so my project supervisor Dana helped me find a starting point by providing me with some links to different articles to help kickstart my research into online learning. From this point, I managed to find the information needed to start building gup my research.

**Abstract**

My research was focused around online learning. I searched for what exactly online learning was by finding a definition for it as well as some of the approaches taken with online learning and the tools used to deliver it. I also looked into the benefits and drawbacks of online learning experienced by both teachers and students and how COVID-19 had impacted online learning and the effects it has had on it. During my research on this topic, I’ve learned a lot a about online learning and in this report I will share my findings with you. Not a lot of research has been done into online learning compared to face-to-face learning as most education takes place in person instead of over the internet but recently there has been more research done on this learning and teaching style.

**Methodology**

Due to COVID-19, my options for my method of research were narrowed. My research methods consisted of mostly desk-based research, where I used the internet to find the information I needed. I had to take precaution to not take information from websites that were not reliable sources of information so I had to be careful where I took my information from and make sure that it was completely accurate. To tackle this issue, I mostly used search engines such as google scholar to find journals and articles which would provide me with trustworthy and accurate pieces of data and information. Another method of collecting information that I used was interviewing people who are knowledgeable in the field of online learning. Since, due to social distancing measures and related circumstances, I could not carry out interviews in person so instead, I emailed an expert in the field a few questions I had for her and received some answers over email, essentially still getting some helpful new data.

**Results and Discussion**

Definition and different approaches:

To start my research, I tried to find a definition for the term online learning. I found that there are several synonyms for it such as e-learning and distance learning. I also found that online learning is quite a general term and that there is no exact definition for it but there are many different interpretations on what it means to different people. One example of a definition is:

Term online distance learning is defined as any course, at any HE academic level, delivered to students at a distance from the host institution, which has a significant component delivered to students online.(Terry Anderson :48)

Online learning can be broken down into three separate categories: synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid learning. Synchronous online learning is when the instructor or teacher and their students interact simultaneously through live text, audio and video chats in a manner similar to a live webinar. Students are actively participating in the lesson in real time and it is the most similar style to face to face learning as the students and teachers are able to converse at the same time and if video chats are used, students and teachers can interact almost exactly how they would in a normal classroom setting. Asynchronous learning is the opposite of synchronous learning and it is when students don’t participate in lessons in real time and instead, they are provided with content and assignments by their teachers or instructors and are given a timeframe to complete and submit the work. Interactions happen over platforms such as discussion forums, bogs and wikis. This online learning style is more effective for students with busy schedules as they can complete their classwork around any other work they have to do, like working at a part time job for example. During my experience of online learning, this is the method that my school chose to use and it worked well for me. Hybrid learning is a learning environment that is a combination of face-to-face and online learning

There are several different online platforms used for online learning aswell. Examples of these include:

-  [BYJU’S](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/gadgets-news/byjus-adds-free-live-classes-for-students-amidst-covid-19-lockdown/articleshow/74971274.cms), a Bangalore-based educational technology and online tutoring firm founded in 2011, which is now the world’s most [highly valued edtech company](https://www.rediff.com/business/interview/how-byju-built-the-worlds-highest-valued-edtech-company/20190116.htm). Since announcing free live classes on its Think and Learn app, BYJU’s has seen a 200% increase in the number of new students using its product, according to Mrinal Mohit, the company's Chief Operating Officer.

- [Lark,](https://www.larksuite.com/) a Singapore-based collaboration suite initially developed by [ByteDance](https://www.bytedance.com/en) as an internal tool to meet its own exponential growth, began offering teachers and students unlimited video conferencing time, auto-translation capabilities, real-time co-editing of project work, and smart calendar scheduling, amongst other features.

- Media organizations such as the BBC are also powering virtual learning; [Bitesize Daily](https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2020/education-teachers), launched on 20 April, is offering 14 weeks of curriculum-based learning for kids across the UK with celebrities like Manchester City footballer Sergio Aguero teaching some of the content.

Benefits and drawbacks:

There are several benefits to using online learning. E-learning is a much more flexible style to learning and teaching compared to in-person learning, especially in regards to asynchronous learning.. Asynchronous online learning means that students and teachers can study and work around their busy schedules and this allows more flexibility as they can balance their school work and other work and responsibilitites that they have, whereas this is not possible whilst learning and teaching in a classroom environment. It is also ideal for situated learning and it is facilitated as learners can complete online courses in their own space or while working on the job and can contextualise the learning. In terms of benefits for teachers, online learning Makes it easier for teachers to give students appropriate information based on their needs. This means that online learning systems can help teachers see their students’ strengths and weaknesses in the course so they can pinpoint where their students are struggling and give them material to best attend to their needs so that students can better understand any topics they find difficult which will lead to them excelling and getting better overall grades.

A study was carried out in the US to see if there was a difference in performance of students studying using online learning environments compared to face-to-face learning.

The meta-analysis of 50 study effects, 43 of which were drawn from research with older learners, found that students in online conditions performed modestly better, on average, than those learning the same material through traditional face-to-face instruction. Learning outcomes for students who engaged in online learning exceeded those of students receiving face-to-face instruction, with an average effect size of +0.20 favouring online conditions.( U.S. Department of Education, 2010) This study shows that online learning is beneficial and can be just as effective, if not even more effective, than in-person learning. However, it is important to take into consideration the different conditions of online and in-person learning, such as how much time students spend studying.

Kock's media naturalness hypothesispredicts that synchronous communication increases psychological arousal. Similarly, Robert and Dennis'scognitive model of media choice predicts that synchronous communication increases motivation. This is another benefit as if synchronous learning increases motivation, students will work harder and put more effort into their work, thus resulting in better grades. Online learning knows no time zones, specifically asynchronous learning, which means that students can still learn and participate from anywhere in the world.

Limitations:

On the other hand, where there are benefits, there are still drawbacks. Since there is not a classroom setting and the students do not really interact with each other and with the teacher, issues related to the fair treatment of students by distant faculty could arise. Also, with online learning, it is difficult for students to contact people to ask more detailed questions about their work in person and get more detailed explanations to their questions. There are also complications and problems with the way students and teachers interact online compared to in person. The quality of student participation remains a point of concern, particularly when students run out of ideas and start repeating their peers’ thoughts, or when they choose not to participate at all. In a normal classroom environment, students would be encouraged to share their own individual ideas and all students would have to participate but in online learning, this is not the case and this is especially true with asynchronous learning as students and teachers do not communicate in real time, thus making communication between them slightly more difficult if one party is unwilling to interact with the other.

If e-learners seldom meet face-to-face and teachers mainly rely on asynchronous e-learning, students might feel isolated and not part of learning communities, which is essential for collaboration and learning. When learning in a classroom environment, students are able to communicate with each other in person and this helps build their social and communication skills, which are very important life skills to have As humans communicate with each other on a daily basis. On the contrary, when learning over the Internet it is more difficult to learn and build these necessary skills. It also seems more difficult to get discussions going with pupils doing asynchronous online learning as students are studying at different times and may not all be available at the same time to form discussions.

From my own personal experience with online learning, I have experienced many of these benefits and limitations. I used asynchronous learning and one of the biggest benefits was being able to learn in my own time and I really like the flexibility aspect of online learning. As well as this, It was convenient not having to travel to school every morning as I would usually have to during normal classroom learning and travel issues like traffic for example we're no longer an issue I had to face. That being said I did also experience quite a few disadvantages. For starters, Doing practical work and experiments was no longer possible and they were parts of my subject curriculum that I really enjoyed so I was disappointed that I wouldn't be able to do them. Another setback I faced Whilst doing asynchronous learning was that Communication with my teachers was more difficult. Getting Answers to any questions that I have Is a lot easier when doing classroom learning Compared to online learning, where getting an answer for my questions could take days instead of minutes. Furthermore, Online learning is heavily dependent on the Internet and technology and even a few days Of learning missed because of technical issues will heavily impact your education. During my experience with online learning I found that the number of students turning up to lessons was less then when we had face to face learning, Which could have been because of technical issues or because students were unmotivated to attend lessons. motivation was also something I struggled with during online learning and I find myself being a lot more motivated in a classroom setting around people who are also doing work than when I am alone doing work from home.

Impact of Covid 19:

The arrival of COVID-19 has greatly impacted the education sector im many countries as schools have all shut down due to enforced social distancing measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Because of this, over 1.2 billion children worldwide are now out of the classroom. As a result, after the lockdown iof schools, there has been a surge in the use of online learning to teach students and deliver education so that students are not missing out on any work. There has been research done into online learning which suggests that online learning has been shown to increase retention of information, and take less time, meaning the changes coronavirus have caused might be here to stay.

**Evaluation**

Due to the presence of COVID-19, this report was not completed to the absolute best standard possible, and regardless, there is always room for improvement. If this research project was to be continued, more information should be gathered. To do this, you could do more interviews and get the chance to speak with more experts on this topic to gain more knowledge from their findings. Also, something that should be further pursued and looked into is the impact of COVID-19 on online learning. The pandemic hasn’t ended yet so not all the impacts have presented themselves yet. When the pandemic is over, the overall impact on online learning in the coming months should be observed like if the number of students and teachers using online lessons to have lessons has increased or decreased or remained constant compared to before the start of the pandemic. Also, more evidence for the effectiveness of online learning should be looked for. Instead of doing desk-based research like I did, information could be gathered in a more practical manner by carrying out studies and looking at statistics from school and government records related to education.

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**Acknowledgements**

Working on this research project was such an enjoyable experience and I learned so much on this journey and I would like to say a big thank you to the people who make that possible. To the Nuffield research foundation, thank you for presenting me with this wonderful opportunity and allowing me to be the one to work on this project. Thank you to the Edge foundation for taking me in and letting me carry out this research for them. A big thank you goes out specifically to my project supervisor Dana for showing me the ropes and for encouraging me and supporting me the whole way through my project and always being up to answering any of my questions, no matter how silly or insignificant I may find them. Also thank you to Gaia for allowing me to ask her some questions and for taking the time out of her day to provide me with some really useful answers for my research and my report. And a final thank you to my friends and family for motivating me to keep going and looking for answers when I hit dead ends and for giving me the push I needed when I wasn’t feeling very motivated. I could never have done this without all your help.