


The Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning Online: A Study on HUFU's English-majored Students

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: teaching and learning online, teaching and learning during COVID-19, benefits of online teaching and learning, challenges of online teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning any courses online used to be considered ineffective in most educational institutions in Vietnam. However, during negative impacts of COVID-19 on education, teaching, and learning online should be an effective alternative solution. This study aims at the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning online via the course *Introduction to Linguistics* for English-majored students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFU). Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied in this study. Data collected shows that teaching and learning online has its own strengths; nevertheless, to maximize its benefits, positive cooperation between lecturers and students should be a need. Furthermore, lecturers should perform the virtual classroom management roles positively via appropriate online tasks and assignments in order to help students avoid boredom in gaining knowledge and skills. The study also draws out some suggestions aiming to help maximize the benefits that teaching and learning online may have.

Introduction

With the assistance of technology in modern society, there are many opportunities for lecturers and students to gain effectiveness in teaching and learning, among which should be online classes. Not only do students have access to printed materials, they now can use abundant resources so as to maximize the knowledge they long for as well as perform the assignments more persuasively and attractively (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Alexander et al., 2012; Nicole et al., 2019; Yuhanna et al., 2020). The convenience of teaching and learning online should be proved during the spread of COVID-19 worldwide. However, teaching and learning online also faces challenges such as professional development for lecturers, training for learners, teaching methods for online courses, technical support, time pressure, and course design for online

teaching and learning (Cavanaugh, 2005; Chametzky, 2014; Crawley et al., 2009; Hung et al., 2010; Kebritchi et al., 2017; Luyt, 2013). Hence, maximizing the benefits of online teaching and learning while minimizing its drawbacks is a must.

Like many other countries globally, to protect learners from the danger of COVID-19, educational institutions in Vietnam have been experiencing online teaching and learning. If online teaching and learning were previously believed to be ineffective during the COVID-19 pandemic, it must be a saver for education. To ensure the training programs for students, HUFU has also applied learning courses for students. Experiencing teaching various courses online, including the course named *Introduction to Linguistics*, for HUFU's English-majored students, it must be clearly that teaching and learning online has both advantages and disadvantages. Thus, this study aims to determine the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning online to come to effective suggestions for online teaching and learning.

Literature review

Online teaching and learning

As it is simply defined, online teaching and learning can be understood as education taking place over the Internet, which online learning can be referred to as a type of distance education or as web-based learning, digital learning (Matthew et al., 2018). It can also be defined as using different devices such as iPads, smartphones, laptops, and Internet access in synchronous or asynchronous environments (Pham & Vo, 2021). With the development of the Internet, online courses have now become an integral part of higher education (Kebritchi et al., 2017; Luyt, 2013).

Allen and Seaman (2007) defined courses into four groups called traditional courses, and web facilitated courses, blended or hybrid courses, and online courses. These authors based on the proportion of content delivered online in order to classify types of courses as in Figure 1.

Proportion of Content Delivered Online	Type of Course	Typical Description
0%	Traditional	Course with no online technology used — content is delivered in writing or orally.
1 to 29%	Web Facilitated	Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. Uses a course management system (CMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments, for example.
30 to 79%	Blended/Hybrid	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has some face-to-face meetings.
80+%	Online	A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings.

Figure 1: Types of courses
(Source: Allen and Seaman, 2007, p.4)

There are various definitions of online learning. Expressly, online learning can be understood as the teaching and learning process between lecturers and students involving such digital mediums as 'Zoom,' 'Ms. Teams', 'Google Classroom'. (Zulaikha et al., 2021). As Allen and Seaman (2007) suggested, based on the actual situations, different educational institutions can apply online learning in various ways.

It can be said that online teaching is a challenge (Daniel & Andrea, 2020); hence, in order to bring success to online teaching, Matthew et al. (2018) suggested various principles, including: “(1) encourage student participation, (2) encourage active learning, (3) encourage student reflection, (4) encourage active learning, (5) encourage social reaction, (6) address individual differences, (7) emphasize time on task, (8) provide hands-on activities, (9) communicate high expectations, (10) avoid information overload, (11) motivate the students, (12) create a real-life context, (13) give prompt feedback, and (14) respect diverse talents and ways of learning.”

Benefits and challenges of online teaching and learning

Under the advancement of the Internet, online education offers both lecturers and students numerous benefits.

Media diversity can be considered one of the benefits that online teaching and learning brings to lecturers and students (Yahanna et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2022). Students can use various resources from libraries and databases all over the world. Furthermore, students may have more opportunities to exchange ideas and work in groups and pairs via different applications, software, and websites. This may make teaching and learning more enjoyable, and students may have more opportunities to widen their knowledge in each specific field.

Next, online teaching and learning must be convenient for both lecturers and students. Lecturers and students may not pay much attention to dress, worry about getting stuck in traffic congestion, or to face bad weather (Alexander et al., 2012). In addition, both lecturers and students have their own freedom in choosing comfortable places for teaching and learning. This may make the process of transferring and getting knowledge more effective.

Then, low cost is also a benefit that online teaching and learning offers to lecturers and students (Yahanna et al., 2020). This may help students reduce the burden of related fees while getting convenience in their studies.

Another point is that students can have more chances to review the lessons via the recording of each lecture (Zulaikha et al., 2021). This can be considered a positive side of learning online, in which students can prepare better for final tests.

Besides the benefits that online teaching and learning may offer, there are still negative impacts that need to be considered.

First, not all students are ready to attend online courses (Hung et al., 2010; Luu, 2022; Pham et al., 2022). This may have a negative impact on their final result. Thus, how to help these students be willing in online courses must be in the hand of online lecturers (Kebritchi et al., 2017). Lecturers offering online courses must pay attention to five dimensions to assist these students, including self-directed learning, learner control, computer and Internet self-efficacy, motivation for learning, and online communication self-efficacy (Hung et al., 2010).

Second, in order to attract students to online lectures, lecturers should diversify teaching methods and teaching materials. This may be a challenge to lecturers due to the burden of time and workload (Hartman et al., 2000; Cavanaugh, 2005; Li & Irby, 2008; Kebritchi et al., 2017).

Third, lecturers have not been provided with proper training and support when teaching online (Kyei & Keengwe, 2011). Dynamic presentations, simulations, conceptual discussions, interaction, and collaboration with students are considered suggestions for improving online lecturers' teaching effectiveness (Juan et al., 2011).

Last but not least, students may be distracted by other online content; thus, they may not actively engage in-class activities (Daniel & Andrea, 2020; Pham et al., 2022). To solve this problem, lecturers must be trained to have effective virtual classroom management skills (Tran & Pham, 2021).

Research Questions

The following research questions are used to address the mentioned issues:

1. Is teaching and learning online as effective as teaching and learning offline?
2. What are students' opinions and expectations toward teaching and learning online?

Methodology

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

There are 115 English-majored students from two classes joining this study. The first class, called class A, includes 55 students, and the second class, class B, includes 60 students. These participants are in the second semester of the second year. They all passed compulsory courses in English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To prepare these students for English linguistics courses, students are required to take a 2-credit compulsory course named Introduction to Linguistics, which would provide students with fundamental concepts in various aspects of English linguistics.

Students in class A studied this course 100% offline, whereas students in class B studied this course 100% online due to the negative impacts of COVID-19.

As it is designed by HUFU's Foreign Language Faculty teaching staff, the required material for this course is *The Study of Language* (4th Edition), written by George Yule and published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. There are 20 chapters in this book; however, only the first nine chapters are covered in this course due to limited time.

In order to pass the course, students must get an average score of 5 based on a GPA out of 10. Students must sit for two tests, including a Mid-term test and a Final test, each of which accounts for 50% of the final score.

Design of the Study

The instrument of this study is the Mid-term written test, the contents of which are those from chapter 1 to chapter 7 in the required material. The Mid-term test is limited to 60 minutes, and all materials are allowed, not except for information on the Internet.

The purpose of not using the Final test as an instrument for this study is that because class A studied this course offline, the Final test is in multiple-choice format; instead, class B studied this course online; thus, the Final test is designed in a type of assignment. In order to ensure the reliability of this study, Mid-term tests are used.

The range of points used for later analysis is divided into five groups: 0-4,9 (below average), 5- 6,9 (average), 7-7,9 (good), 8-8,9 (very good), and 9-10 (excellent).

Moreover, interviews are conducted to figure out whether students find it interesting to study online and students' thoughts about studying online. 10 out of 60 students in class B (online class) are randomly chosen for these interviews. The participants are informed about the purposes of the interviews, and their private information is kept in privacy. All ten chosen students are willing to join in these interviews.

Data collection procedures

To reach the aim of this study, the following steps were conducted:

First, both classes A and B studied all required contents designed for this course by HUFU's teaching staff.

Second, after finishing the first seven chapters of the textbook, students are asked to sit for a Mid-term written test. The format and the test contents for both classes were the same. Time-limited to 60 minutes for the test, and students can use all materials for references.

Third, the lecturer would collect all test papers, give marks, and transform the collected data into percentages using Microsoft Excel. Then, information gained from collected data was used for practical analysis later.

Last but not least, 10 out of 60 students in class B were randomly chosen for the interview. Each separate 10-minute interview was conducted for each student. The answers from the interviews should be meaningful in figuring out the opinions and expectations of students about teaching and learning online.

Findings

Research question 1: Is teaching and learning online as effective as teaching and learning offline?

To figure out the answers for research question 1, collected data from the result of the Mid-term written test will be analyzed.

With the same test format, test contents, limited time, and usage of all materials for references, the test results for both class A and class B were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mid-term test results

	Class A (offline)		Class B (online)	
	Number of respondents	Percentage	Number of respondents	Percentage
0-4,9 (Below average)	5	9,1%	8	13,3%
5-6,9 (Average)	21	38,2%	28	46,7%
7-7,9 (Good)	17	30,9%	14	23,3%
8-8,9 (Very good)	10	18,2%	8	13,3%
9-10 (Excellent)	2	3,6%	2	3,4%
Total	55	100%	60	100%

The percentage of students who cannot succeed in the test accounts for 9,1% in class A, and 13,3% in class B. Those who can pass the test are in a high percentage, 90,9% in class A and

86,7% in class B. This percentage can imply that teaching and learning the course of *Introduction to Linguistics* online may be effective.

Among those who can pass the test, the percentage for excellent performance may be similar, 3,6% in class A and 3,4% in class B, the difference is not too much.

A good and very good performance, it seems that class A is better than class B. 49,1% of the students in class A (including 30,9% at good performance and 18,2% at very good performance) while only 36,6% of the students in class B (including 23,3% at good performance and 13,3% at very good performance) gain from 7 to 8,9 points. The proportion of the former class is higher than that of the latter one by 12,5%.

Regarding average performance, class B is in higher percentage than class A, 46,7% compared to 38,2%; the difference is 8,5%.

From the findings above, it can come to a brief conclusion that although teaching and learning *Introduction to Linguistics* online may not so effective as it is taught and learned offline, the output via test results can be acceptable, with more than 85% successfully passing the test.

Research question 2: What are students' opinions and expectations towards teaching and learning online?

To determine the answer to Research question 2, ten participants will conduct ten separate interviews.

Ten out of 60 students studying *Introduction to Linguistics* online were invited to sit for short interviews (called interviewees), which aimed at students' opinions and expectations towards teaching and learning online, and the results were as follows:

First, most interviewees (90%) believe in teaching and learning online convenience. The interviewees may not travel a long distance to join the class. Additionally, it is not so time-consuming to prepare everything before going to school. Also, it is cost-saving to study online: students may not spend many fees when studying online at home, agreed 85% of the interviewees.

Second, 80% of the interviewees think that it is possible to integrate online courses into the English language training program. They think that others can be taught and studied with 70% online and 30% offline, except for courses aiming at skill development. Students can ask lecturers to clarify content in the courses that are hard to understand during offline periods, with the integrated online and offline. In addition, lecturers and students may have opportunities to discuss various interesting aspects of the courses so as to help students enrich the knowledge related to such courses.

Third, about the drawbacks of teaching and learning online, 95% of the interviewees agree that investment in infrastructure for teaching and learning online should be a must. Unstable network transmission lines and unpredictable events in connection with the Internet cause a lot of trouble for the interviewees studying online. Hence, 90% of the interviewees think that HUFU must take these two mentioned problems into good consideration before the beginning of online

courses. Moreover, lecturers should pay attention to online classroom management. 75% of the interviewees state that tasks must be appropriate to teaching and learning online, and teamwork or group discussions to avoid boredom while studying online is a need.

Fourth, regarding expectations towards online courses, most interviewees think that the integration of online and offline courses may bring more benefits with the advancement of technology. 85% of the interviewees would like to study some courses online during a semester in order to save time and related costs. However, in order to take advantage of studying online, 75% of the interviewees agree that educational institutions must put more investment in infrastructures for online courses.

Last but not least, 90% of the interviewees think that the cooperation between lecturers and students as well as learner autonomy are two key factors bringing the success of teaching and learning online. Thus, most interviewees hope that lectures should diversify online teaching methods so as to stimulate students to maximize essential knowledge of the course.

Discussion

Via the findings from the Mid-term written test result and the interviews, the answers to the above research questions are revealed.

First, the findings are consistent with discussions stated by Alexander et al. (2012), Yahanna et al. (2020), and Zulaikha et al. (2021). Students can access various resources online. This can help them deepen their knowledge more effectively. The quality of teaching and learning online and offline is not so much different, which is proved by the high percentage of students who can successfully pass the Mid-term test. Furthermore, both lecturers and students have more freedom in selecting an appropriate location for their teaching and learning. The convenience that online teaching and learning offers can be a factor in making the teaching and learning environment more relaxing and enjoyable, leading to the effectiveness in the process of transferring and getting knowledge. Additionally, online courses may help both lecturers and students save related costs, reducing the burden of finance.

Second, challenges that lecturers and students must face to is unavoidable. Due to the fact that online teaching and learning is still new to lecturers and students, they are not in good preparation for teaching and learning online. Normally, lecturers fail to get support in online infrastructure as well as online teaching methods from educational institutions. Therefore, lecturers may lack confidence in performing online lectures. About Students, not all of them are willing to join online classes because they may lack self-directed learning or find no motivation for learning (Luu, 2022). This can be a key factor leading to bad results in the final exam. Additionally, without positive cooperation between lecturers and students through effective activities in online classes, students get bored easily, which may negatively impact the effectiveness of teaching and learning online.

Hence, in order to maximize the benefits of online teaching and learning, there are some suggestions:

Firstly, lecturers must have good skills in using various technologies to teach online. Educational institutions should provide training courses in applying technology for online teaching and learning. Furthermore, with the advancement of the Internet, lecturers can learn various applications useful for teaching via Youtube and similar channels. Mastering how to use different applications useful for teaching can be considered one of the factors leading to success in the teaching in the technology age. Pham & Vo (2021) suggested that lecturers combine Moodle and online-meeting tools with Google Meet and Zoom to conduct the learning effectively.

Next, lecturers should save time by carefully preparing the lesson for each lecture. Different from traditional classes, the diversity in designing lesson plans with various online teaching methods can help lecturers encourage students actively take part in-class activities (Tran & Pham, 2021). Studying individually for a long period of time may make students feel bored and distracted; thus, delivering teamwork or pairwork with the management of the lecturers must be essential. Lecturers can use the function of "break-rooms" or other additional applications to manage the work of students in teams or in pairs. Besides, balancing between theory and practice during the duration of each lecture is also necessary. This may help students become more concentrated in the lecture and maximize their knowledge as expected.

Then, encouraging students to overcome barriers to studying online is also a need. To gain success in this, lecturers must learn how to build a good relationship with students. With positive cooperation between lecturers and learners, students may find it interesting to join the course; hence, they may actively take part in activities during the lectures, and learn autonomy may be gradually formed.

Last but not least, to keep track of students' progression, tasks and assignments should be appropriately designed. Students working in groups or as individuals may be challenged to integrate different materials on the Internet so as to perform a more persuasive presentation or discussion in each lecture. This can also help students learn how to select reliable sources on the Internet as well as learn how to summarize and integrate different sources of information.

Conclusion

Online teaching and learning are now proven to be effective education solutions, thanks to their numerous benefits. Not only do online teaching and learning bring conveniences for both lecturers and students, but online teaching and learning are also cost-saving. As it is proved from this study, online teaching and learning, if applied appropriately, may bring similar quality to training compared to offline teaching and learning. However, due to specific characteristics of the online environment, challenges caused by online teaching and learning cannot be avoidable. Thus, to maximize the benefits of online teaching and learning, both lecturers and students should consider the suggestions mentioned above.

The effectiveness of online teaching and learning has been discussed via numerous studies by researchers all over the world. However, limiting the drawbacks of online teaching and learning to maximize its benefits should still be a puzzle. Although there are certain limitations in this current study, like a small number of participants as well as simple statistical methods, suggestions from findings should be meaningful for effective online teaching and learning.

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