



## **Teachers' Attitude Toward On-line Courses During the Pandemic: A Multinational Study**

**Nahid Zarei**

Department of English, Maragheh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran

### **Abstract**

Although digital learning had started way before the pandemic in various educational settings throughout the world, the pandemic made the use of this mode an obligation rather than an option even in the countries in which it had not been tried before either because of educational practitioners' resistance or poor technology-related facilities. This study set out to explore university teachers' beliefs about the efficacy of this mode in presenting the course content during the pandemic. For this purpose, 15 university lecturers, assistant professors and associate professors from the United States, Canada, France, Sweden, Kuwait, Italy, Malaysia, Lithuania, Australia and Iran participated in the study. The teachers were contacted via the social networks- Facebook, LinkedIn- or e-mail. An open-ended questionnaire including six questions was sent to the participants and they were requested to express their personal experience concerning the use of technology during this period. After gathering the questionnaires, the answers were read carefully and content analysis was conducted. The results showed that the teachers found this method of presentation a mixed blessing. The results of the study have implications for the curriculum planners and material designers of modern day system of education, educational practitioners and technology providers.

**Keywords:** *Learning management systems, Advantages, Disadvantages, Online classes, Technology*

### **1. Introduction**

When Covid 19 broke out, it disrupted every aspect of social life including education. Although it was a threat to both local and global economy, education was the main source of concern because it is a prerequisite for every aspect of human life in the modern world. Thanks to technology it did not take long for the education to restart in its new form and on-line teaching and learning replaced the physical face-to-face classes from primary studies to post graduate ones throughout the world.

This evolving system of teacher-student interaction motivated a plethora of research to evaluate the efficiency of on-line courses. The results of these studies have shown that this system of education have both benefits and downsides. Kebritchi et al.'s [1] review of literature reported that learners' identity change and poor participation, communication problems arising from computer mediated teaching, some teachers' lack of interest in technology were some of the challenges of this medium. Boothe [2] conducted a multinational study of on-line learning and found out that this medium of education afforded an easy and efficient way of learning; however, there were some concerns regarding the quality of teaching and learning, lack of socialization and interaction, lack of technological devices for financially disadvantaged students, teachers' lack of preparation, and easy and unchallenging content. Similarly, Bordet's [3] study revealed that in spite of providing an efficient way of learning, it caused some challenges, such as communication and interaction problems between the teachers and students and connection problems.

Whilst recent studies have investigated the role of on-line classes in teaching-learning endeavor, very few of them have delved into this issue internationally. Therefore, this study set out to understand the views and experiences of university teachers from around the world toward computer mediated teaching during the pandemic. Investigating teachers' attitude is critically essential in our understanding of the effectiveness of this medium of education if it is going to be a dominant approach to education today and in future.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**



Participants of the study were 15 lecturers, assistant professors and associate professors of the universities from Australia, Malaysia, France, Canada, Lithuania, Kuwait, Italy, USA, and Iran.

## 2.2. Instrument

An open-ended researcher made questionnaire consisting of six questions was used to gather the data. The questions addressed the type of learning management system and the application used, the problems the teachers faced during their teaching, their previous experience of on-line learning, how useful they found the new system of teaching, if they would like teaching on-line and their overall evaluation of the medium. The questionnaire also included demographic information, such as teachers' nationality, workplace and age.

## 2.3. Procedures

After the questionnaire was designed with reference to the related literature, it was proofread and checked with a colleague for any possible wording and content problems. It was then sent to 100 participants from different countries via the e-mail. Unfortunately, just 15 teachers whom the researcher had already met and known completed and returned the questionnaire.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

The answers provided by the teachers were read several times and content analysis was carried out inductively following Creswell's [4] method of content analysis. Three main themes positives, negatives and teachers' general evaluation and some subthemes of on-line education emerged as a result of the analysis.

## 3. Results

Different applications and softwares were used to deliver the courses on-line. According to the teachers some of these softwares ran smoothly and were satisfactory; however, the teachers experienced a few problems with some others. (see table 1)

*The Applications and Softwares Used by University Teachers during the Pandemic*

Country	Application	Satisfaction
Kuwait	SharePoint/OneNote	No problems
France	Zoom/TEAM	
Canada	Zoom/Google Classroom	
	Avenue. Ca	A few problems
Lithuania	Microsoft TEAMS	
	Moodle Platform	No problems
Malaysia	Zoom/Google docs	A few problems
USA	Blackboard/Canvas	Constant glitches
Australia	Not mentioned	No problems
Iran	Adobe Connect	A few problems
Italy	Microsoft Teams,	
	Big Blue Button, Moodle	No problems
Sweden	Zoom	No problems

Three main themes emerged as a result of the content analysis.

(1) Advantages of on-line teaching, (2) Disadvantages of on-line teaching, and (3) Teachers' overall evaluation

### Advantages



#### *Availability and Feasibility*

Some of the teachers (96%) believed that this medium of delivery was convenient because it could reach their students every time and everywhere. It also allowed the education not to stop when the world faced a lockdown. Boothe (USA) noted that “graduate students appreciate asynchronous courses that allow them to work at their own pace and time period.” One of the lecturers asserted “These courses are perfect for moms with little children, seniors and people with physical disabilities who cannot commute every day” (Reyhane, Canada). Another lecturer said that it was the best way to break geographical borders and teach students from other countries (Mina, Iran). Luisa, an experienced and qualified online language teacher, from Italy believed that “Online courses provide greater work/life balance and flexibility and financial savings from not having to travel to work.”

#### *Creative ways of delivering the lessons*

Some of the teachers thought that presenting the lessons on-line was very easy (81%) because they were able to use the affordances of the multimedia, such as sound, image and text together. They could share power point slides without experiencing the technical problems of overhead projectors in their physical classes. They also noted that they could share the websites with their students when necessary especially in Master and Doctorate classes. Rana from Kuwait asserted “students can customize their both learning experience and expression.” “It is very effective since it employs technology which is the need of the hour.” She also added “online education allows synchronous and asynchronous monitoring of students.” Reyhane, from Canada, noted “students had unlimited online resources to use.” “The e-activities were more interesting to them than the previous paper worksheets.”

#### **Disadvantages**

##### *Interaction and Communication Problems*

As the interaction between teachers and students is mediated in on-line system of delivery, it may cause a friction in interaction pattern (98%). As Adrian (Australia) said the main problem is the “lack of real contact.” “Language is a contact thing.” He added “Language proceeds better face to face.” “Reactions are responded to.” Another lecturer emphasized that teaching crowded classes did not let all students become involved and most often the teacher was the sole speaker (Guller, France). Nazila (Iran) complained “as there is no eye contact with students, you can’t notice whether they’ve got what you teach, you also can’t make sure they are really present in the class or not.”

##### *Discipline Related Problems*

Most of the teachers (82%) emphasized that this way of presentation caused more problems than face-to-face classes. The teachers complained about absenteeism, students’ engagement with other activities during the class, lack of concentration, their joining late to the class, and their leaving the class without permission. One of the assistant professors said

Fortunately, our university switched to on-line teaching only after a month and sent educational videos to the teachers to learn how to use the system. However, our main problem, especially in undergraduate level, was the students wouldn’t join the class. They didn’t take it seriously at all. The university had to contact them individually to persuade them. Finally, out of 20 students four attended the classes (Sima, Iran).

Reyhane (Canada) complained about the quality of assessment “The problem was the authenticity of the assessments.” “I didn’t have full control of what was happening on the students’ side.” “They could cheat if they wanted!” Reza (Iran) said “the students lost their self-discipline and would even go on a picnic while attending the class!” One of the teachers (Farnaz, Iran) admitted that some students wouldn’t turn on their cameras because they were joining the class from their beds in their pajamas!

##### *Students’ Motivational Problems*

Another serious problem which concerned teachers was students’ lack of motivation or low motivation. Some teachers (64%) said most of their students were passive and silent and wouldn’t participate in class activities. Anna (Sweden) said “Students’ motivation gets spoiled – quite a few students left their educations, or took a break during the pandemic.” Another teacher complained that as the exams were on-line and the students had the chance of cheating even in master levels, they didn’t take the classes very seriously (Sima, Iran).

#### **Teachers’ Overall evaluation**

Some teachers found adaptation to the new mode of delivery difficult and some others expressed their satisfaction with it. 53.8% preferred face-to-face teaching. Adrian (Malaysia) stated “I think that I wasn’t making best use of what the technology had to offer, and the classes were just the same as they would have been, except that they are on-line.” Another teacher asserted “Even though I enjoyed staying in my



home office and working in my comfort zone, frankly talking this wasn't what I wanted" (Guller, France). An associate professor criticized "On-line mode of delivery is commodification of education and in the long run it may ruin the education irreversibly" (Davud, Iran). Anna (Sweden) emphasized "On-line courses cannot replace on-site education." However, some other teachers (38.4%) preferred hybrid mode. "I would like to teach blended classes; some days online and some days in class to take advantage of the benefits of both" (Reyhane, Canada). Olga (Lithuania) stated "I would prefer BLENDED teaching/learning – just to keep up the HUMAN constituent of the process."

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of this study revealed both the negatives and positives of on-line classes. Although the results are similar to the previous studies, it also shed light on the issue from multinational perspective. As revolutionary changes are happening in the world, education cannot be an exception. However, when it comes to education especial care is required in order to make better use of technology to motivate the future generation to gain knowledge. The results of this study has implications for technology designers and manufactures for educational purposes, curriculum designers and material developers to make necessary adjustments for the new mode of teaching and learning and protect this important aspect of modern life (education) from any possible threats.

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