Students' Perceptions of Online Learning versus Face-to-Face Learning: A Comparative Study in Libyan Higher Education

Enas Omar Elwahab *

English Department, Faculty of language, Elmergib University, Alkhoms,

*Email: eoaelwahab@elmergib.edu.ly

تصورات الطلاب حول التعلم عبر الإنترنت مقابل التعلم المباشر: دراسة مقارنة في التعليم العالي في ليبيا

ايناس عمر الوهاب *

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات، جامعة المرقب، الخمس، ليبيا .

Abstract

This study examines Students' perceptions of face-to-face (Traditional learning) and online learning at Libyan collages and introduces a comparative analytical study between them. This topic gained great importance in recently year, especially after Corona-COVID inside Higher education sector with a focus on academic achievement, time management, level of interaction, and overall student satisfaction. This study was based on the descriptive analytical method. The data were collected through a questionnaire directed to a sample of 100 second-year students from the English Department at the Faculty of Languages, Elmergib university, and these results showed that Traditional education promotes understanding, interaction, and academic achievement, whereas Online learning promotes digital skills and flexibility.

Keywords: online learning, face-to-face learning, Traditional learning, Corona-Covid.

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة تصورات الطلاب حول التعلم المباشر والتعلم عبر الإنترنت، وتقدم دراسة تحليلية مقارنة بينهما. اكتسب هذا الموضوع أهمية كبيرة في السنوات الأخيرة، خاصة بعد جائحة كورونا-كوفيد في قطاع التعليم العالي، مع التركيز على التحصيل الأكاديمي وإدارة الوقت ومستوى التفاعل ورضا الطلاب بشكل عام. استندت هذه الدراسة إلى المنهج التحليلي الوصفي. تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان موجه إلى عينة من 100 طالب من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية اللغات المرقب ، وأظهرت هذه النتائج أن التعليم

التقليدي يعزز الفهم والتفاعل والتحصيل الأكاديمي بينما التعلم عبر الإنترنت يعزز المهارات الرقمية والمرونة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم الإلكتروني، التعلم المباشر، تعليم التقليدي، جائحة كورونا.

Introduction

The higher education sector has changed a lot because of technology. The world's educational systems have made huge shifts in recent years learning from internet is no longer a secondary option; nowadays, but it become a major competitor to traditional education. This transformation accelerated after the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing universities worldwide to fully transition to online learning to ensure the continuity of the educational process. Despite the relative success of this shift, debate continues regarding the effectiveness of online learning compared to traditional education, particularly in countries with weak technological infrastructure.

In Libya, the integration of online learning into higher education is still developing. Many universities face challenges such as limited technological infrastructure, unstable internet access, and lack of training in digital teaching tools. Therefore, examining students' perceptions of online learning compared to face-to-face learning is essential for improving the quality of higher education in Libyan institutions.

The problem of this study

Does online learning achieve the same level of effectiveness as in face to face learning in terms of academic achievement, interaction and motivation among university students?

The aim of this study

1- Comparing the level of academic achievement in the two systems.
2- Measuring the level of interaction between students and faculty members.
3- Assessing the level of motivation and overall satisfaction.
4- Analyzing the challenges facing each educational model.

Research Questions

Are there statistically significant differences between online and face to face learning in academic achievement?

1-Which mode fosters greater engagement?
2-How does each mode affect student motivation?
3-What are the main challenges associated with each mode?

Literature view

1- The meaning of online learning and face to face learning?

We can distinguish between online learning and face to face learning by clarifying the concept of each term as follows.

Face to face learning

This is the type of education that takes place in classrooms, face-to-face between the teacher and their students, under the teacher's supervision. This type of education includes the use of printed curricula, textbooks, and traditional teaching aids such as blackboards. And it marked by direct interaction between teachers and students, which allows for immediate dialogue and exchange of ideas, and encourages the building of strong personal relationships between teachers and students. The teacher is the primary source of information in this method, and assessment is conducted in writing or orally under the teacher's supervision.

"Is also called customary education or traditional education. The main motive of traditional education is to pass on the values, manners skills and the social practice to the next generation which is necessary for their survival. In traditional education, the student learns about the customs and tradition of the society in which he lives. This type of educated is mostly imparted to the students by the means of oral recitation. There is very less written work or practical work. The students simply sit down together and listen to the teacher or another who will recite the lesson. The traditional does not include written tests but it includes some oral tests which are not very formal. Traditional education is very far from the use of science and technology. Neither the education about the sciences we study today in a great detail is imparted in the traditional education system. Traditional education system basically included the knowledge about customs, traditions, and religions. That is why it is called traditional education."

Online learning

It is other type of education where the learner is in a different place from the teacher, the learning material, or the other learners. And it depends on the use of technology to transfer information by the Internet.

Online learning allows students to study anytime, anywhere, providing them with great flexibility to fit their schedule.

Online learning is the use of the Internet to access educational resources, engage with instructors, other students, and content, receive assistance during the learning process, acquire knowledge, develop personal meaning, and evolve as a result of learning experiences .The communication mediums produced by technology, such as computer-based communication networks, are more important to online learning than the technological items themselves .Takengon IAIN itself has never implemented one semester of online learning; the primary reason for this is the issue of an unreliable internet connection. **(Nasution et al.,2021,p.3)**

Several researchers have explored the effectiveness of online learning compared with face-to-face learning(traditional learning) .

As stated by Allen and Seaman (2017), online learning provides flexibility and accessibility that allow students to learn at their own pace and schedule. Students who have responsibilities to their families or careers will especially benefit from this flexibility.

According to Means et al. (2013) said that online learning can be as active as traditional learning when appropriate instructional design and technological support are provided. Their meta-analysis revealed that students in online learning environments often perform slightly better than those in traditional classrooms.

However, other studies highlight challenges associated with online education. Bernard et al. (2009) suggest that lack of direct interaction may reduce student engagement and motivation. Similarly, Hrastinski (2008) emphasizes that communication and collaboration are critical elements of successful learning environments.

In higher education, face-to-face instruction is still important since it promotes immediate feedback and real-time engagement. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) assert that group projects and class discussions increase students' critical thinking abilities and expand their comprehension of the subject matter.

Table 1: Comparison Between Online Learning and Traditional Learning

Aspect	Online Learning	Traditional Learning

Flexibility	Study anytime, anywhere	Fixed schedule, location-specific
Cost	Often more affordable (no housing costs or travel)	Generally higher due to tuition and infrastructure
Interaction	Virtual- forums, emails, webinars	Face-to-face- immediate feedback and social engagement
Interaction	Virtual- forums, emails, webinars	Face-to-face- immediate feedback and social engagement
Access	Global reach- 24/7 access	Limited by geography and admission capacity
Resources	Online tools, videos, downloadable materials	Labs, libraries, campus services

https://uniathena.com/online-learning-vs-traditional-learning

The advantages of face to face learning

1- Traditional education hones students' social skills through face-to-face interaction with their teachers and peers.

2- Students learn discipline and punctuality; traditional education creates a routine that students must follow, and this discipline is reflected in their behavior both inside and outside of school.

3- Traditional education provides classes that include workshops, laboratories, or any form of practical training, and offers access to equipment and materials that help students better understand the lessons.

Advantages of online learning

1- Flexibility in time and place allows students to learn at a time and place that suits them, without being bound by school hours or having to attend school in person. This feature also helps solve the problem of school closures due to weather conditions, for example.

2- In online learning, the teacher is not the only source of information. Students can obtain information from multiple sources, such as websites, educational platforms, and even books and scientific journals.

Disadvantages of face to face learning

1- The lack of flexibility in traditional education is a major drawback. Because classes are held at specific times and locations, many students are unable to engage in other important activities during their studies, such as work.

2- It also wastes time and effort, as the requirement to attend classes in person consumes a significant amount of time and energy.

3- The high cost is the most significant disadvantage of traditional education, encompassing expenses such as food, transportation to and from school or learning centers, and other related costs.

Disadvantages of online leaning

1- The lack of direct, one-on-one interaction between teacher and student. In the long run, remote teacher-student interaction requires considerable effort. Although communication is easy through methods like email and social media, it can be superficial and may not convey information effectively.

2-The unavailability of all specializations and courses, or the inability to learn them remotely. This includes all specializations and courses that require practical training, the use of equipment, tools, etc.

3-The lack of proof of the credibility of online institutes, schools, or universities. Many students may fall victim to fraud by bogus institutions.

Previous studies

UNESCO reports (2021) indicated that in-person learning enhances social skills and reduces educational isolation.

World Bank reports (2022) also confirmed that online learning contributed to ensuring the continuity of education during crises, but revealed clear digital divides between countries.

Recent studies have concluded that the effectiveness of online learning depends heavily on:

1-Infrastructure readiness

2-Students' technical skills

3-Faculty training

4- Course type

To sum up, face-to-face "traditional "education is based on direct interaction between teachers and students within a structured classroom environment, which promotes communication and collaborative learning skills, whereas Online education relies on digital platforms and virtual communication, allowing for flexibility in terms of time and location.

Material and methods

The current study follows a quantitative approach, using a closed-ended questionnaire to investigate students' perceptions of online learning versus face-to-face learning. The study sample consists of 100 second-year students from the English Department at the Faculty of Language in Al-Khoms, Libya. The study is conducted in 3 months in the academic year 2026-2025.

Descriptive statistical methods, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to analyze the collected data.

Results and discussion

This item discusses and explains the results of the data analysis in the study that has been carried out from 100 university students. In the discussion section, the researcher discusses the data gained from the questionnaire.

Results

The items of the questionnaires were analyzed by calculating the frequency and percentage of the responses.

Participants' Gender.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	40	40
female	60	60
Total	100	100

The table (1) shows that the majority of the students 60.0% were female students whereas just 40.0% of them were male students. The total number of the students were 100 (100.0%).

Table 3: Students' Preferred Learning Mode

No	Item	Online learning		Traditional classroom learning		Blended learning	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Which type of learning do you prefer?	25	25	40	40	35	35

It appears that 40% of students prefer traditional learning, the highest percentage. This is attributed to their feeling that in-person attendance enhances understanding and focus. Meanwhile, 35% prefer blended learning, indicating a significant number of students' desire to combine the flexibility of online learning with the interaction of traditional education. While Only 25% prefer fully online learning, demonstrating that complete reliance on it remains undesirable for the majority.

Table 4: Learning Method that Enhances Understanding

NO	Item	Online learning		Traditional classroom learning		Both equally	
		Frequency%		Frequency%		Frequency%	
2	Which learning method helps you understand lessons better?	20		50		30	

 The second point indicates that the 50% stated traditional learning improves understanding, 30% chose both equally, and 20% chose online learning.

Table 5: Evaluation of Student–Teacher Interaction in Online Learning

No	Item	Excellent		Good		Weak	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
3	How would you evaluate student–teacher interaction in online learning?	60		30		10	

The third point appearances that the 60% rated online interaction as weak, indicating limited engagement in virtual environments, and 30% as good while just 10% as excellent

Table 6: Evaluation of Interaction in Traditional Classrooms

No	Item	Excellent		Good		Weak	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
4	How would you evaluate interaction in traditional classrooms?	80		20		-	

The fourth question shows 80% of students rated interaction in traditional education as excellent or good, and 20% as weak.
This indicates that the classroom environment promotes dialogue and participation, creating stronger communication between students and teachers.

Table 7: Learning Method that Promotes Student Discipline

No	Item	Online learning		Traditional classroom learning		Both	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
5	Which learning method helps you stay more disciplined?	62		10		10	

At fifth point a clear majority (62%) considers that traditional education is more conducive to discipline. In contrast, 18% say that online learning is more conducive, and only 10% say that both are equally conducive.
This is due to the fixed schedule, mandatory attendance, and direct supervision by the teacher.

Table 8: Learning Method that Increases Student Motivation

No	Item	Online learning		Traditional classroom learning		No difference	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
6-	In which learning method do you feel more motivated?	22		58		0	

The sixth point shows 58% of students feel more motivated in traditional education, while only 22% feel motivated in online learning. This reflects that the traditional university environment plays an important psychological role in motivating students.

Table 9: Impact of Learning Type on Academic Achievement

No	Item	Yes, traditional learning improves it		Yes, online learning improves it		No clear effect	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
7-	Does the type of learning affect your academic achievement?	55		20		25	

The results of seventh point indicates that 55% of students believe that traditional education has a positive impact on their academic achievement, reflecting greater confidence in the classroom environment in terms of understanding and comprehension. Meanwhile, only 20% believe that online learning improves their performance, which may be related to their ability to review lectures and organize their time. The remaining 25% did not notice a clear difference, indicating that the impact of the type of education may depend on individual learning styles.

Table 10: Role of Online Learning in Developing Technical Skills

No	Item	Yes, significantly		Moderately		Not at all	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
8	Does online learning develop your technical skills?	75		-	-	25	

The results showed that 75% of students say that online learning contributes to varying degrees to the development of their technical skills.
This indicates that the digital environment promotes the use of educational platforms, presentation software, and electronic communication tools.
However, 25% do not see any noticeable improvement, which may reflect a lack of practical interaction or limited use of advanced digital tools.

Table 11: Learning Type that Develops Communication Skills

No	Item	Online learning		Traditional learning		Both	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
9	Which learning type develops your communication skills more?	18		60		22	

The results showed that 60% of students believe that traditional education contributes more to the development of communication skills, due to classroom discussions and direct participation. whereas, only 18% believe that online learning enhances communication skills, perhaps through forums and digital discussions. while, 22% believe that the two methods are complementary.

(Open-ended question)
10- **In your opinion, what are the main advantages and disadvantages of online learning compared to traditional learning?**

First advantages

The results showed that flexibility was the most commonly stated advantage (70%), with students quoting the ability to study from home and organize their time according to their personal conditions.

Sixty-five percent also emphasized the savings in time and effort connected with transportation, which is an important factor, especially for students who live far. from the university.

These results indicate that students view online learning as a practical and convenient option, especially from a logistical standpoint.

Second disadvantages

The most commonly mentioned negative point was the lack of direct interaction with the teacher (75%), confirming the previous quantitative results in the questionnaire.

Sixty-eight percent also pointed to the difficulty of concentrating during online lectures due to the home environment and distractions.

Technical infrastructure issues (55%) emerged as a factor affecting the effectiveness of online learning, especially in environments with poor internet connectivity.

Discussion

The new findings confirm what previous data has shown:

Traditional education is still seen as having a greater impact on academic achievement and communication skills development.

In contrast, online learning excels at developing technical skills.

This indicates that there is functional integration between the two styles, with each serving a different aspect of the educational process.

General academic conclusion

By analyzing quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 100 students, it can be said that:

Traditional education promotes understanding, interaction, and academic achievement.

Online learning promotes digital skills and flexibility.

The optimal educational model—according to the sample's opinions—is the blended learning model, which combines the strengths of both systems.

Conclusion

The study concluded that both models have strengths and weaknesses, and it cannot be said that one type of education is absolutely better than another, as it depends on each student's needs and circumstances. If you prefer direct interaction and learning in a social environment, traditional education may be the best option. However, if you need flexibility in your schedule

and want to learn from anywhere, distance learning is the ideal choice for you. Ultimately, the decision is yours based on your lifestyle and educational needs. And it is impossible to determine which one is superior. The success of any educational system depends on the quality of implementation and technical and pedagogical support.

To have a deeper understanding of the impact of various learning modalities, future research should incorporate larger samples and examine the viewpoints of both instructors and students.

Recommendations

1-Adopt a blended learning model.

2-Develop digital infrastructure.

3-Train faculty members on active online learning strategies.

4-Provide ongoing technical support to students.

5- Proposals for future research

6-Conduct a comparative study of online learning in Arab countries.

7-Measure the long-term impact of blended learning.

8-Analyze the relationship between self-regulation skills and achievement in online learning.

9-Study the impact of artificial intelligence on the development of digital learning environments.

References

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2017). Digital learning compass: Distance education enrollment report.

Awal Kurnia Putra Nasution et al 2021 J. Phys.: Conf. Ser. 1783 012112

Bernard, R. M., Abrami, P. C., Borokhovski, E., Wade, C. A., Tamim, R. M., Surkes, M. A., & Bethel, E. C. (2009). A meta-analysis of three types of interaction treatments in distance education.

Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education.

Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and synchronous e-learning.

Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K. (2013). The effectiveness of online and blended learning.

https://uniathena.com/online-learning-vs-traditional-learning

UNESCO. (2021). Education in a post-COVID world. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

World Bank. (2022). The state of global education. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications..

Article published on web on 19 sep 2018 https://targetstudy.com/articles/traditional-education-vs-modern-education.html

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.