

# Online Versus Face-to-Face Education

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## **Abstract:**

*This paper explores the benefits and disadvantages of online and face-to-face modes of education. Throughout the paper, I discuss whether online courses provide the same level of education as face-to-face courses without the nurturing, attentive, and physical aspects. Based on extensive reading on the topic, as well drawing on my personal experience, I argue that online and face-to-face education can have both positive and negative effects on students' learning. However, I conclude that online courses do not provide the same level of education that face-to-face courses do, based on the nurturing, attentive, and often physical aspects that traditional education provides. I provide what I hope is an argument that will help others appreciate that face-to-face courses provide a more effective and helpful way for students to have a successful academic career.*

Students must consider many factors before deciding to take an online course. The attraction of cheaper prices, flexible timetables that work around their schedules, and the simplicity of completing the course while sitting in the comfort of their own home, are all extremely attractive features of online learning. However, it is important for students to understand the motivation and self-discipline that are required for this type of learning, and how the absence of a traditional classroom setting can be detrimental to their learning.

Many believe that good teachers, who are likely to be charismatic and passionate about their subject, have a great impact on the motivation and achievement of their pupils. So, we can argue that online or distance learning is predominantly suitable for people who already have achieved higher education, or for those who do not have face-to-face teaching as a viable option (for example, people who live in remote areas or who suffer from social phobias or physical disabilities). In my opinion, because of the determination it takes for one to complete an online course to the best of one's ability, one must have achieved a certain level of education before online learning can be effective. We can also note that humans are social creatures and need each other for encouragement and support, and for praise and accomplishment, which furthers the argument that traditional methods of teaching far outweigh online learning.

It can be argued that prior academic achievement can sway the results of online and face-to-face learning, suggesting that perhaps online learning does not provide the nurturing aspects of teaching that students require. Carlos Asarta, a professor of Economics, whose work focuses mainly on economic education, demonstrated that prior academic performance can affect how one may embrace online learning (Asarta 2016). He concluded that "at low grade point averages, performance was higher in the traditional version" (38), which suggests that that blended or online courses may not in fact, provide the same level of academic achievement as face-to-face learning.

This is just one of many studies that compare online to face-to-face learning. Some of them take into consideration factors such as age, gender, and learning preferences, as well as the opinions of the instructors themselves. For example, Elizabeth Stacey (2007) examined how Canadian and Australian instructors viewed online and face-to-face learning. She concluded that "[even] though teachers expressed a preference for teaching face-to-face..., they all recognised and believed in the potential of the online environment"

(19). She suggested that students are becoming “more self-directed and independent” (19), meaning that traditional learning may be a “thing of the past” and teachers should be prepared for teaching online courses. This does not necessarily imply that online education is more or less beneficial to students, and the teachers she studied still preferred the face-to-face ways of teaching because of the “practical and active potential [in] establishing better social and personal connections” (17).

Suzanna Sheffield (2015), a director of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, argued that whether teachers like it or not, ever-changing technology is becoming part of education. As a result, Dalhousie has created a certificate program that entails a 12-week course designed to expose educators to the changes to learning that will occur in the future. It has become a requirement for new teachers to take this course, which among other things, helps them understand how to use the technology efficiently to keep students engaged with the material. It also shows them how display a caring attitude in an online environment, as this has also been shown to be important for student success. Although Sheffield’s article on the use of blended learning does not discuss students’ perspectives on online and face-to-face learning, it does describe how teachers must understand how to present themselves in an encouraging and caring way, in order to help students achieve academic success, whether it be in an online or traditional course.

Based on personal experience, I found that an online course was not as effective, or as enjoyable, as sitting in a classroom among friends, and being taught by a teacher who is physically present. For example, I took the first half of an introductory psychology course with a teacher who was located in Wales, UK, and the second half with a teacher present in the same room as my classmates and me. I found that my final grades reflected how I performed in each part of the class: I went from a C to a high A. While taking into

consideration participation and interest from my end, it was still clear to me that the distance learning portion of the course did not have the same effect as the traditional education portion, and that the nurture and involvement of the face-to-face teacher made a huge contribution to my learning and academic success.

While many people insist that the benefits of the low cost, convenience, and flexibility provided by online courses outweigh the benefits of traditional courses, we sometimes neglect to consider that students who wish to take these courses must be extremely self-disciplined and motivated. Often, it is difficult for young students to adapt to this way of learning because, as Arleen Bejerano (2008) states, it “takes greater initiative to access, learn, and understand the material” (2). Not only do online courses make it more difficult for students to achieve academic success, but the distance aspect can also affect their educational experience and desire to strive for that success:

“In essence, students who take online courses miss out on the on-campus experiences that connect them with faculty and students and that help them through their college career. Without these retention factors, students may be less likely to persist in school and complete their degrees. In addition, students feel isolated and alienated” (2).

This article reinforces the argument that face-to-face learning is more beneficial to those having a strong desire to complete their degrees, since face-to-face students have accessibility to fellow classmates, professors and on-campus learning centres. It also suggests that online courses do not provide the necessary support for students, and that they prevent teachers from expressing verbally, and through gestures and facial expressions, their passion and excitement to their students. It is much more difficult for these emotions to be delivered to students through non-verbal means of communication.

Online courses undoubtedly have many positive features to them, including low cost, convenience, and, of course, keeping up with the times. However, based on my reading of research articles that consider the benefits and detriments of online and face-to-face learning, I suggest that traditional courses are more likely to lead to a successful educational career. Despite technology making it easier for online courses to be accessible and affordable, proponents of online courses sometimes fail to recognize the importance of having a physical teacher present in the room to provide the attention and encouragement that help students strive for excellence. Overall, the research I examined suggests that even teachers prefer the “old-fashioned” methods of teaching, adding to the argument that communication via the internet leaves students unable to establish meaningful relationships with their professors and peers; the impersonal nature of online education makes it difficult for some students to make the effort required to obtain a degree.

### **Works Cited**

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