E-learning vs Traditional Learning – Students' Recommendations on Enhancing the Online Business English Learning

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Abstract

Instructors are frequently confronted with different challenging issues in the classroom; however, the outbreak of COVID-19 brought a different set of obstacles that emerged due to the inevitable online teaching. The Macedonian educational system had to adjust to the new teaching-learning environment, and professors had to quickly find the answer to a crucial question, how to teach online as effectively as face-to-face. This study is part of more extensive research based on students' perceptions of the E-learning process at the Faculty of Economics – Prilep in the academic year 2020-2021. The paper analyses and discusses the recommendations of forty-five Business English students, which were part of the survey. Although most of the participants in this research prefer traditional learning, they believe that blended learning can stimulate a higher quality educational process and provide suggestions on improving the E-learning process. Student recommendations include conveying minimal information, using simple fonts, avoiding stylistic elements in the presentations, using mobile apps, and using virtual reality with flexible lesson plans. Most recommendations are general and thus not limited to Business English courses only; therefore, instructors should consider implementing them for different courses.

Keywords: e-learning, blended learning, teaching methods, business English

1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 saw a massive increase in online teaching as many educational institutions shifted from traditional learning to mitigate and reduce the spread of disease. Whether students from institutions participated in incorporating online education is a rhetorical question that can be answered truthfully only by the students. However, students' perspectives and suggestions on the new teaching approaches and methods, especially the use of technology, remain fundamental and vital in such matters. Their view is essential because some courses are not suited for certain teaching approaches [4]. In addition, through the students' feedback, the management can recognise and implement practical and functional teaching methods.

However, despite an increase in empirical studies on E-learning and traditional learning, the concepts and aspects explored and studies on student perspectives and suggestions regarding the Macedonian higher education are mostly non-existent. On the same note, minimal empirical research has focused on business English students' perspectives and suggestions on E-learning. Therefore, this paper focuses on filling the research gaps and proposes recommendations for improving the Business English course based on business English students' general experience on the E-learning process at the Faculty of Economics - Prilep.

2. Literature review

Student's perspectives and suggestions on the quality of learning are discussed in numerous research papers. Researchers have based their arguments on the quality and effectiveness of the learner's instruments such as mobile phones [5], and the 2020 research by Lange [7], which was based on improving online video lectures. Other studies [6], [9] have examined the students' perspective and experience but have mixed the non-quality factors with teaching factors making it challenging to comprehend the role of instructors and context in quality. Others like Anderson [1] in 2016 and Cleveland-Innes et al. [3] failed to offer enough insight to practitioners.

According to Cable and Cheung [2], for any E-learning to be effective, students and teachers must follow the eight principles of effective online teaching. These principles include; diversified learning, active learning, collaborative learning, student-faculty contact, technology application, prompt feedback, time on task, and high expectations. Apart from active hearing and immediate feedback, these principles are less likely to be witnessed in traditional learning. Razeeth et al. [8] argue that students in higher education institutions that encourage traditional learning can gain interactivity, be

motivated, and become more organised. Interactivity leads to more communication between the teacher and the student, and as a result, students grow their workgroups and clear their doubts promptly. That means, in traditional learning, there is a high level of student engagement with teachers and students. Interactivity and motivation are less experienced in E-learning because the teacher only provides the knowledge and does not get a chance to motivate the students. The negative impact of traditional learning includes high costs, learners only depend on teachers, and students can engage in bad groups.

3. Methods

Participants in this quantitative study were forty-five business English students from different semesters. Participants were provided with an online questionnaire aiming to determine students' perception of the E-learning process at the Faculty of Economics – Prilep, as well as their recommendations on enhancing the process. The online self-regulated questionnaire had six sections, and this paper only analyses and discusses students' recommendations section. The questions were answered using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4. Data analysis and discussion

Business English students had different opinions in enhancing the learning methods, especially the E-learning, and they can all be implemented in teaching business English online. 46.7% compared to 17.8% of the students recommend that E-learning should be visually simple with less extraneous graphs, text and images. This student recommendation meant that the instructor should simply focus on conveying minimal information. For example, it would be easier to comprehend information in a PowerPoint presentation with key points and few words than the one with three to four paragraphs. Furthermore, it would be easier for students to comprehend concepts if the information is presented in a summarised manner using clear graphs or tables. On the same note, 51.1% compared to 13.2% of the students recommend that the font and colours used in E-learning be straightforward with less or no stylistic elements. In some instances, the instructors may feel to include varying fonts and mix-up of colours in presentation, which may seem presentable to them; however, this is not the case for the students. Such presentations distract the students, and they thought it would be beneficial to them if their instructors use simple fonts and colours during the E-learning sessions. In addition, the majority of the participants in this study (60%) argue that the instructor should present information in small chunks through applications and mobile devices for easy understanding. However, most of the students (48.9%) were unwilling professors to use social platforms such as Twitter badges for E-learning. The students (51.1%) also proposed the inclusion of virtual reality with flexible lessons plans. For effective learning, it is also essential for institutions to ensure that there are result-oriented assessments to examine the comprehension of concepts and insights gained by students, as claimed by 48.9% of the participants.

	E-learning should be visually simple with less extraneous graphs, text, and images		The font and colours used for e-learning should be simple with no distracting stylistic elements		Instructors should ensure that they present information that is in small chunks to the students through apps and mobile devices		Gamification and social platforms such as Twitter badges should be added and incorporated into the e-learning		Inclusion and implementation of virtual reality with flexible lessons plans should be present		Result-oriented assessments should be implemented	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	2.2	1	2.2	1	2.2	5	11.1	1	2.2	0	0.0
Disagree	7	15.6	5	11.1	1	2.2	8	17.8	3	6.7	3	6.7
Neutral	16	35.6	16	35.6	16	35.6	22	48.9	18	40.0	20	44.4
Agree	18	40.0	18	40.0	23	51.1	9	20.0	20	44.4	18	40.0
Strongly Agree	3	6.7	5	11.1	4	8.9	1	2.2	3	6.7	4	8.9

Table 1. Students' recommendations based on the questionnaire

In addition, students were also asked to provide their comments on the topic. Although they generally agreed that traditional learning is better than E-learning, they suggested that there is great potential in blended learning. Thus, one participant said, "I think that combined lessons are better…I think that more challenges for our society are on the way to come, and everyone had to have in their minds not to forget using online and e-learning." Another student also talked about the potential of online learning and stated: "…I have to say, there is a potential in using online devices outside of the face-to-face classes. For example, doing homework online can be more fun and effective than in the traditional way."

Some of the students also raised the question of the preparedness of the professors for online teaching. Also, they questioned that not all courses are easy to learn through online teaching. Hence, one student claimed, "I noticed some professors are handier with E-Learning and computers compared to others, resulting in high gaps between levels of presenting…". Another student stated, "My experience is that it really depends on the professor and the course as well. There are some professors good in online teaching, but some aren't able to present the topics well. Also some courses, such as math or accounting are more difficult to learn online". Students also suggested that the practical lessons could be performed online for specific courses, and the consultations with the professors if online could be more effective: "The classes for exercises potentially could be better if they are done online, but it depends on the subject. Communication with the professors can be easier in this way." Therefore, training for online teaching, according to students, is inevitable for the teaching staff. Such training will not only prepare and educate the professors for the different teaching methods required for E-learning but will also give them insights into motivational skills to stimulate and help students for the E-learning experience.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The COVID-19 pandemics accelerated online teaching dramatically and thus presented the advantages and disadvantages of E-learning and created the need for implementing effective E-learning in the Macedonian higher educational institutions. This research discussed the recommendations given by the students on improving the E-learning based on their experience.

Learning institutions need to do a gradual and slow transformation when changing the mode of teaching, which will encourage the students to feel that their classroom environment is not being taken away from them. An abrupt change from one mode of learning is likely to affect the student performance and capability to cope with the new environment. Therefore, learning institutions can implement the two systems together. We also propose that the instructors do not overlook any learning guidelines when using E-learning and especially implement students' recommendations in their methods. In conclusion, the field of education is evolving and changing as technology advances; therefore, it is important to further research other study fields and specific courses as well in order to understand students' views on different modes of learning.

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