

In-Person versus Zoom/Online Teaching

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In the contemporary educational world, millions of students, educators, instructors, and faculty have become aware of greater emphasis on online teaching and learning. Online education is the form of “distance education” which offers courses asynchronously mainly involving internet-based teaching and learning to students in their own time. On the other hand, traditional or in-person teaching and learning is a synchronous form of education offering courses in real-time in a physical classroom setting. In the digital setting, an educator or instructor can also offer real-time teaching to their students but it is only possible through the use of the internet via online Zoom meetings involving learning management systems and other technologies. Zoom Video Communications, the technology software, has always been in this transition game in the academic realms as a useful online conferencing tool to enhance online education. Building on the need and importance of online education, this paper delves into the intriguing discussion surrounding in-person versus Zoom or online teaching in the context of education.

Background of the Transition: Traditional Education vs. Online Education

In the year 2020, the worldwide pandemic, COVID-19 stunned the globe which resulted in governmental lockdowns bringing a significant halt to all the world’s businesses and systems. The halt to the global operations also included face-to-face or in-person traditional classes in the field of education. This was the year when educators and students became aware of the need and importance of distance learning via Zoom, Google, Skype, and other credible learning management systems as well as online platforms including Khan Academy, Udemy, Duolingo, Coursera, and many others due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To bring a new “coherence to the integral” dimensions of education including virtual learning and teaching, Zoom adopted many innovative technologies that focus on student-centered teaching which are incorporated while adjusting to the paradigm shift from a traditional realm of teaching and learning to an online education system. The severity of the adversity during the pandemic has pushed the educational realm to adopt online education via Zoom as it accommodates diverse learners without any geographical constraint to help students manage their schedules and learn at their own pace (Barbosa & Barbosa, 2019). The effort to incorporate online education methods into the world of learning and teaching allows accessibility, self-directed learning, effective instructional delivery, global reach, and technology integration. Online courses also allow educators and students to manage their time management skills, familiarity with technological and digital tools, and develop self-discipline to prepare instructors as well as learners for the modern workforce.

Empowering Student Autonomy: The Choice Model

Since the tragedy of COVID-19 and the worldwide lockdowns, all aspects of human life have been affected including the education system causing closures of education facilities around the globe. So, in the contemporary educational realm, schools, colleges, and universities worldwide have shifted abruptly to online teaching methods despite educators struggling with how to evolve instructional delivery. The abrupt transition from in-person or face-to-face teaching and learning to online teaching emphasizes that this transition represents a seismic shift within higher education to revert entirely to pre-digital course delivery models. Through the incorporation of technology systems in the education and teaching realm, students as well as educators can now decide whether to attend classes in-person or via Zoom. Moreover, the ability to choose their mode of attendance empowers students, especially during their stressful times.

Students through online learning management systems learn better in online classes which contributes to the increased accessibility of online classrooms compared to traditional classrooms. However, individual choices and experiences may vary as some students thrive in traditional classroom environments preferring face-to-face interactions with educators and peers while others prefer online environments. Some students find no difference between asynchronous or online learning modes and synchronous or face-to-face teaching and learning in terms of delivering knowledge, knowledge acquisition, and skill development. Thus, both modes of education have their merits as well as demerits and the choice depends on factors like course content, teaching style, learning style, and student or educator preferences.

For non-traditional students and educators, online education is best suited because it extends an opportunity and flexibility to those who have family or work commitments. In addition, it is best suited for students who belong to the older adult age group as they can attend classes through digital mediums, gauge understanding of the course content, engage in activities related to the course, and provide their complete input and feedback in their own time from the comfort of their home. Online education, therefore, is more instructor-driven and collaborative than traditional face-to-face educational practice as online workers work independently according to their own comfort and abilities (Chisadza et al., 2021). Contrary to that, traditional educational practice is more beneficial for learners who lack discipline in learning and are not self-sufficient when it comes to education in their required time frame traversing a wide range of age groups. However, the research found that instructors who teach courses through digital mediums via Zoom or other learning management systems and students who attend online classrooms outperform learners in traditionally instructed educational courses.

Zoom Video Communications Conferencing Tool

Zoom, a video communications conferencing tool, is an audio and video digital tool and an

educational software program that is used primarily for collaborative conferences in order to facilitate interactions between students and educators. Through this tool, educators can upload educational content in the form of images, diagrams, videos, worksheets, and live meetings. It is an “internet-based data storage” tool that allows users for discussion, content sharing, live meetings, and synchronous voice as well as video conferencing. Based on its integrity, flexibility, and inclusivity, Zoom has quickly emerged as a “staple” in the field of online education as the platform largely caters its products to customers around the world based on their needs. Zoom not only hires market professionals with years of expertise in educational technology, but the workers in its workforce also ensure the best service delivery and usage of products through feedback and comments. This strategy informs the effective design of the products Zoom offers to its customers and future decision-making to further enhance Zoom’s usefulness (Krome, 2020).

This tool was known to educational realms prior to the pandemic and lockdown hitting the globe but the severity of the challenging time during COVID-19 halted all the educational operations resulting in the complete closure of the in-person classes. However, the challenging situation during the pandemic has recognized this educational software platform as a useful tool for the dissemination of academic information. The educational institutions upon cancellations of face-to-face interactions had to find novel and interactive ways to attract and instruct learners remotely. Educators and instructors are then forced to move from in-person interactions and classes to an entirely different online platform to educate learners in all aspects of their academic careers while offering integrity, flexibility, and comfort (Stefanile, 2020). Thus, Zoom became a critical tool in an effort to revive education during the trying times of the pandemic.

Face-to-Face Classroom Environment and Online Classrooms: A Brief Comparison

While in-person classroom environments offer a structured teaching/learning environment and direct interaction, online classrooms provide flexibility, a wider opportunity to access course materials, and global accessibility. There is a common perception that face-to-face classrooms are shut down due to the pandemic. However, each modality of teaching/learning has its own distinctive characteristics, advantages, and challenges. The choice between a face-to-face education method and an online teaching method depends on the preferences, needs, interests, learning styles, and other external circumstances of the individual. On one hand, in-person classroom environments offer a structured environment, the physical presence of both educators and students, social interaction, hands-on activities as instructors evaluate students’ performance through group projects, labs, or practical demonstrations, and real-time interaction.

Contrary to face-to-face teaching methods, online classroom teaching facilitated by digital platforms and tools connects instructors and students via internet-based platforms such as Skype or Zoom. This mode of education offers a virtual presence of educators and students, flexibility in choosing study

hours, global reach, and technology-driven tools (Ananga & Biney, 2017). The online platforms of education offer asynchronous classes through pre-recorded sessions or synchronous class experiences through live educational meetings that are accessible to learners worldwide. In a nutshell, online education may have a time delay while interacting with a bunch of students at a specific time period but the face-to-face teaching method allows immediate interaction. Both modalities offer integrity but online education offers more flexibility than traditional classroom teaching methods. However, the choice depends on students' needs, educational goals, and the context in which learning occurs.

Conclusion

In sum, although online education has come into play in the education realm for a decade, the future of education lies in a hybrid approach to education combining the best of both worlds that create dynamic and student-centered learning experiences that foster growth and empower autonomy. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has left the educational world with no other option than adopting and incorporating online education post-lockdown to help students in their performance, a hybrid approach consisting of both traditional and online practices to education is the need of the hour as affordable and accessible internet and data tariffs are not available to all across the world.

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