

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS IN PANDEMIC CONTEXT – ONLINE VS. ONSITE

Bogdan Gabriel GEORGESCU¹

Abstract

The nowadays transition to online or blended education has challenged teachers in all educational institutions in their attempt to interact with their students in a new or lesser-known environment. At the opposite pole, students went through the educational process into a familiar environment where they are certainly in the comfort zone. The aim of the present study was to evaluate the perception of students regarding the formation of language skills (English language), within the context of using communication platforms. Beyond the pros and cons of outside the virtual classroom, there are two parties directly involved in the education process (student and teacher) that should be listened to.

Keywords: *virtual classroom, on-line teaching, student, language skills, challenges.*

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Introduction

Within the past two years, education, like any other field of activity, has undergone major changes and challenges. The transition to online or blended education has challenged teachers in all educational institutions in their attempt to interact with their students in a new or lesser-known environment. At the opposite pole, students went through the educational process into a familiar environment where they are certainly in the comfort zone. However, the efficiency of this education type remains a topic open to debates with its pros and cons. During the pandemic many studies were conducted in different countries with different purposes and adopting different perspectives. Some of the researchers were focused on the existence of national educational infrastructure and the capacity of teachers' using this infrastructure, others were focused on identifying the most effective methods and tools that can be used in teaching – learning process, but also on online learning efficiency and effectiveness. Anyway, the students were introduced only slightly in these researches. Thus, the aim of the present study was to evaluate the perception of students regarding the formation of language skills (English language), within the context of using communication platforms, as a support for the teaching-learning activity. Also, the survey participants evaluated certain aspects of teaching-learning English, having a double reporting perspective that is on-site vs. on-line. In adopting teaching methods and strategies, respectively the management of the class / group of students, teachers must start from this feedback type that leads to quality increasing of online teaching, beyond the pros and cons of outside the virtual classroom where there are two parties directly involved in the education process: student and teacher.

¹ Bogdan GEORGESCU, University of Pitești, E-mail: georgescu_b2002@yahoo.com

Online teaching: A global challenge

Online education and blended education represent two systems that support the flow of teaching-learning processes that have become more and more important during the past 10 years as a consequence of ICT development and also as a need for flexibility and increased autonomy in the teaching-learning process.

Still, this development came with a lot of challenges for teachers, learners and for the entire educational system (Stockwell & Reinders, 2019). On the other hand, in the pandemic conditions the education has become a distance type one, providing the requested social distance. Online education procedures are titled by different terminologies such as “distance education”, “e-learning,” “virtual learning and teaching,” or “online learning and teaching”, all of these are based on methods of content dissemination through the application of information technology and Internet (Zhou et. al, 2020). According to Melnyk (2020), distance learning is a combination of computer, pedagogical, and telecommunication technologies that allow you to conduct training remotely from an educational institution. E-learning represents the use the technology applied in education in the form of cyberspace and a new form of pedagogy for teaching-learning in the 21st century (Hanum, 2013). Gonzalez & Louis, (2018) presented online learning as learning carried out from a distance assisted by electronic devices as tablets, smart-phones, laptops and computers which require internet connection. Karataş & Tuncer (2020) underlined that in the last two years educational systems around the world entered into state of emergency distance education (EDE). Anyway, the integration of new technologies within the teaching process also brings some opportunities and barriers. The most important strengths of the online version presented in the international literature were:

The educational resources availability - many researchers (Luhach,2016, Han, 2018) supported that online education brings many resources that are available and can be used in order to enhance language learning. Thus online notes, scripts, online references, video resources represent learning content with strategic cognitive role in facilitating students’ foreign language learning.

The attractiveness and interactivity of educational resources – also, during the time, in many studies, online resources were presented as more attractive for learners than the traditional ones.

The flexibility of education and increased autonomy of learners – many studies presented the fact that learners appreciated the flexibility of online education considering that they can reach classes from any possible location and anytime. If learning in the classroom promotes human interaction, online learning allows the learner to plan in time and space their own student activities and the pace of learning (Mouenis & Mohammed, 2021). Online language learning is inherently linked to the development of autonomy, while scaffolding plays a role in language development (Stockwell & Reinders, 2019). As Maican & Cocoradă, (2021) sustained language teaching and learning has become more flexible and individualized in online and that it may trigger an increase in attendance and engagement.

Regarding the distance learning method of foreign languages Yekimov et al. (2021) sustained that it provides an opportunity to: (1) develop listening, reading and translation skills; (2) Develops the ability to communicate in writing; (3) Gives you the opportunity to replenish your vocabulary, (4) Promotes successful memorization of grammatical and lexical constructions.

On the other hand, we can find in the international literature many aspects regarding the challenges in online education (online learning, distance learning, emergency online learning) as follow:

The usage of technology, internet connection and technical skills of both, teachers and learners. For instance Tudor & Popescu (2020) sustained that Romanian teachers admit the importance and necessity of new technologies in educational process, but these means are barely used in the teaching-learning activities. The benefits of online language education can be diminished by the technical and personal problems, such as students’ and teachers’ low self-efficacy for online learning or computer use (Artino, 2010).

The digital educational resources availability – according to Tudor & Popescu (2020) e-inclusion and access to technology represented a great challenge especially in the developing countries. Thus, many learners from different communities could not access the online classes.

Understanding online instructions and teachers' presentations – in many researches conducted in pandemic context, learners reported some difficulties in understanding instructions and exercise solving instructions. For instance, in Indonesian context, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) reported that some students have low literacy in general. They cannot understand the teacher's instruction well although it has been written clearly.

Research Methods

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the perception of university and high school students regarding the formation of language skills (English language), within the context of using communication platforms, as a support for the teaching-learning activity. Also, the survey participants evaluated certain aspects of teaching-learning English, having a double reporting perspective that is on-site vs. on-line. The survey was conducted through the Google Forms application. The data were collected in Arges county, from a sample of 159 participants, out of which: (1) 84.7% university students; 15.3% high school students. The data were statistically analyzed using the SPSS program.

Empirical findings

According to the research results, university students and high school students appreciated that during the teaching process through online communication platforms, they acquired language skills and abilities to a relatively high extent. Thus, a majority of 60.4% considered online training effective and very effective.

Most research participants (63.5%) appreciated the fact that the English teacher managed to teach in online courses/classes at the same level of quality as in the case of on-site classes. It is interesting that 20.7% of the participants in the study appreciated that in the online environment the quality of the courses / classes increased.

It is observed that, in the opinion of university students and high school students, teachers did manage very well the usage of online platforms and resources (87.4%).

A positive aspect of online education is the diversification of teaching-learning resources used by English language teachers, according to the perception of students. Thus, it is observed that 63.5% of the study participants underlined this fact.

Although most students perceive that the duration of the online course is the same as that of the onsite course, there is a significant percentage of 35.2% among research participants who perceive a longer duration of the online courses vs. the onsite ones. Thus, a significant challenge for teachers is to keep the interest and attention of students during English language courses/classes.

The difficulty of assessments during online courses / classes has decreased, according to the perception of students. Thus, the decrease of teachers' evaluation standards will affect the quality of the education.

For assessing the quality of online English classes, some features were selected and assessed, as follow: (1) understanding the grammar notions taught, (2) use of communication platforms, (3) keeping the attention during the course / class, (4) understanding the pronunciation (phonetics) of the teacher, (5) understanding of explanations and work instructions, (6) solving team communication exercises in pairs or groups with other colleagues, (7) understanding the vocabulary terms taught, (8) sound reception when audio teaching resources have been used, (9) visual reception when video teaching resources have been used, (10) understanding the teacher's emotions (satisfied / dissatisfied, joy, etc.). Thus, some items were related to writing – reading - pronunciation (phonetics) aspects, some of them were related to technical aspects and usage of communication platforms and some of

them were related to the class management. The survey results are displayed in table no. 1.

Table no.1: The students' difficulties – mean value

Assessed features	Mean Value
understanding the grammar notions taught	2.1161
understanding the pronunciation (phonetics) of the teacher	1.8301
understanding the vocabulary terms taught	1.7843
understanding the explanations and the work instructions	1.9869
solving team communication exercises in pairs or groups with other colleagues	1.9869
sound reception when audio teaching resources have been used	1.9013
visual reception when video teaching resources have been used	1.7778
use of communication platforms	1.7857
keeping the attention during the course / class	2.0258
understanding the teacher's emotions (satisfied / dissatisfied, joy, etc.)	1.7386

According to the study results, students considered that understanding the grammar notions taught, represented the most difficult aspect related to the reading-writing-speaking activities in online English classes. On the second place, there were aspects related to the communication between students in the pair-practicing tasks or groups with other colleagues, but also understanding the explanations and work instructions. Still, all these were not assessed as high difficulties. In the technical part, students consider that keeping the attention during the online course / class was difficult as also sound reception when audio teaching resources have been used by teacher.

Finally, when the correlation analysis was conducted, some certain relationships were identified. Thus, there is a positive correlation on medium intensity between skills acquirement and online educational resource usage by teachers / teachers' ability to use online platforms. This shows that the higher usage of different online teaching resources, the higher level of students skills acquirement. Also, the capacity of teachers to use communication platform influences directly the students' skills acquirement.

Table no.2: The correlation analysis

		Correlations			
		skills acquirement	online educational resources usage by teachers	teachers ability to use online platforms	the teaching quality
skills acquirement	Pearson Correlation	1	.373**	.388**	.424**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	159	159	159	159
online educational resource usage by teachers	Pearson Correlation	.373**	1	.476**	.476**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	159	159	159	159
teachers ability to use online platforms	Pearson Correlation	.388**	.476**	1	.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	159	159	159	159
the teaching quality	Pearson Correlation	.424**	.476**	.359**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	159	159	159	159

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the perception of students regarding the formation of language skills (English language), within the context of using communication platforms.

For this purpose, a survey was conducted in Arges County and the data were collected from a sample of students that experienced online English classes. The results emphasized that during online classes, there are some certain difficulties for the students like grammar notion understanding, implementing group communication exercises and work instruction understanding. It is obvious that new methods for communication skills should be used, but also combining traditional exercises with online soft and online resources should be introduced for English teaching classes. Study participants stated that the evaluation standards decreased and this could affect the overall quality of English classes. The study results emphasized that most students perceive that the duration of the online course as being longer than the on-site ones. This is a challenge for teachers that should find new methods in making classes more attractive and interactive.

Bi-variate data analysis shows that the acquisition of English language skills is directly influenced by the teacher's ability to use communication platforms and the use of diversified learning resources. But the most intense connection was identified between teaching quality and skill acquisition. Thus, the more students appreciated that teaching was of better quality, the more they appreciated that they acquired communication / reading / writing skills in English.

Although there is a lot of debate regarding lack of empathy and direct interaction between teacher and students, it seems that only a minority of students appreciate that in the online environment it is difficult to understand the emotions of the teacher / course participants.

Surely, the future will combine more virtual elements with classic elements in the teaching process. New methods, techniques, resources will be developed to keep up with the generation Z students.

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The author

PhD. Bogdan – Gabriel Georgescu, E-mail: georgescu_b2002@yahoo.com

Position: PhD. Lecturer at Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Sciences and Psychology, University of Pitești.

Competences: foreign language teaching and training, language translation and interpreting, educational sciences, entrepreneurial education, project management,

Teaching & research activity: Communication Language Courses, Oral and Written Communication Technologies, English and Romanian Language Teaching. The main research interests: Foreign Language Teaching/Learning/Training Methods – Young Learners vs. Adult Learners, English Language Teaching/Learning for Latin speakers, Latin Languages Taught to Foreign Students, Business English for Adults, Entrepreneurial Education, Project Management.

Experience: educational sciences, young education, adult and entrepreneurial education, corporate training, European projects (Erasmus+, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, LLP, Grundtvig, European Social Fund).