


Normality of online learning - Jacqueline Zammit

Opinion

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Education

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Online learning comes with both benefits and challenges for adults

“I hope the colours of my top and my pants match!”. “I hope I won’t face a lot of traffic.” “I hope I’ll be lucky to find a parking spot nearby.” “I hope I won’t be late for class.”

Thanks to online learning, all these hopes are a thing of the past. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many educational institutions, private lessons and adult evening courses to embrace

online teaching and learning between March and June. Some learners, especially adults and those vulnerable to COVID-19, have continued to make use of remote learning after June. However, online learning comes with both benefits and challenges for adult learners.

A shift from the traditional classroom to online teaching and learning might be ideal because one can study anywhere and at any time. Students may even access lesson content if they miss a live session with an educator as there is also the benefit of recording the online lesson. Adults may watch recorded lessons online at their convenience for clarification of a concept taught or a missed lesson. It is convenient and practical for everyone to focus more on the lesson's content rather than on the typical problems synonymous with a traditional classroom.

There is the misconception that online learning does not provide teacher-student or student-student interaction. That is not the case nowadays with improved online resources that promote close virtual engagement between the students and the teacher. There are digital tools, such as video conferencing tools of Zoom, Teams, Skype, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, which include break-out rooms, group and meeting chats, content sharing and whiteboarding that online teachers can select and use to engage their learners. Learners now have an opportunity to ask questions and participate in their lessons. They do not feel isolated in a synchronous environment because they virtually discuss with one another and present their work. Learners can also engage through interactive online games, such as quizzes, charades, and Quick Draw.

“ *There is a surge in demand for online learning for adult learners because of the immense benefits* ”

They can also explore platforms that allow them to video call and chat. Those teachers who tend to forget their learners' names can now address their learners by name since their image appears on the screen. Considering all these benefits, it is prudent that educators must be pedagogically trained for remote teaching, and learners must familiarise themselves with online education.

Owing to online learning, working adults can now pursue their education with little effect on their present lifestyle. Apart from wearing a shirt and a blazer over their cosy trouser pyjamas and house slippers while sipping coffee, adult learners and teachers can take advantage of online learning, sparing themselves from the inconvenience and potential back pain while carrying laptops and other resources to their classrooms.

Although online learning has become the norm for most adult learners, some potential challenges are evident. These include dropout rates for adult online classes. Online learning also segregates those adults who have access to the internet and technology from those who do not. Another problem concerns adults who are not technologically literate and who do not feel at ease with computers.

Motivation is also a significant concern for adults who, like anyone else, might be afraid, anxious, and stressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and have a plethora of issues that get in the way of learning. Some people live in households in which they cannot find a peaceful place to learn because of their children, pets, construction noise from nearby buildings, and so on.

Additionally, it is reported that there is a weaker sense of connectedness and belongingness, which several adult learners often enjoy when meeting in classrooms. The quality of peer interaction on online platforms cannot be compared to that of a traditional classroom.

Nevertheless, there is a surge in demand for online learning for adult learners because of the immense benefits, especially in its flexibility, comfort and convenience for balancing work, study and family. Hopefully, the option of online teaching and learning won't go away if we ever get back to 'normal' after the COVID-19 pandemic!

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