FACE-TO-FACE TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE PROBLEM OF QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the traditional format of teaching and learning from the point of view of its quality, in particular the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face education in comparison with online training. The purpose is to check whether the classroom training process is of better quality than online teaching and learning on the basis of the real case of

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teaching English at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University. The **tasks** are to find out the pluses of offline training in comparison with the online format; to reveal the minuses of the traditional educational form in comparison with the online format on the basis of real teaching experience; and to check whether the pluses or the minuses of offline training have a greater influence on intermediate students’ learning results.

The investigation **methods** are empirical methods (surveys, observation) and general theoretical methods (analysis, syntheses and comparison).

The **results** exposed the following: 1) benefits of face-to-face training: real-time interaction, improvement of social skills, collaboration, organization, motivation, accessibility, and better assessment; 2) cons of face-to-face training: processing a smaller capacity of programme material; problems with discipline; impossibility of listening to the lesson material repeatedly if necessary; problems with access to learning material from the internet; and the tendency of some students to have a psychological barrier to speaking a foreign language “live” in front of other students; and 3) the intermediate students’ learning results demonstrated that offline students have worse academic progress than the students studying online.

The **conclusion** is that the minuses of offline training have a greater influence on students’ learning results than the pluses do. In order to conclude which format of education is of better quality, it is necessary to continue investigating the problem.

**KEYWORDS:** Face-to-Face Education, Teaching and Learning Formats, Online Training, Education, Quality of Education.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The long-lasting, destructive, and bloody war unleashed against Ukraine in the twenty-first century in the middle of Europe by the aggressive leadership of the neighbouring state has changed educational processes in the country significantly and launched a number of new pedagogical topics for research. These topics differ greatly (Holubnycha et al., 2022b; Kostikova et al., 2023a; Sytnykova et al., 2023) but all of them are connected to the search for the most optimal ways to provide quality educational services by Ukrainian education institutions, in particular higher education, in these exceptional conditions.

Today, the optimal ways to teach and learn in different parts of Ukraine vary greatly. In particular, the organization of the educational process in higher education institutions located in different regions of Ukraine differs depending on their distance from the war zone. The country has a large territory (603,628 km², which makes Ukraine the second largest country in Europe), and regions in the east and south of the country are temporarily occupied (about 20 %), so in this territory there are military clashes.

Therefore, it is natural that higher education institutions located in the specified territories have been evacuated to the safer western regions, where it is possible to teach students in university classrooms or by using a mixed format. In order to ensure the safety of the students and academic staff, those higher education institutions that are located in the territories close to hostilities provide online educational services.
In August 2022 the State Service for Quality of Education in Ukraine conducted an anonymous online survey among educators, scientific-educational workers, and students from higher education and vocational institutions. Its aim was to assess the readiness of participants in the educational process for possible forms of organizing teaching in the academic year 2022/23. The results were published on the official government portal. In total, 24,000 individuals participated in the survey, making its results representative and reliable.

Notably, among respondents representing the higher education system (69.4%), the majority expressed readiness to reinstate a face-to-face educational process in the stated academic year. Every tenth respondent reported that their educational institution plans to start the new school year with in-person instruction. However, a significant number of higher education institutions opted for a combined approach, with a rotation of in-person and distance learning interactions.

It is interesting that 80% of all respondents (students and teachers) consider the implementation of distance education effective during the state of war in the country (What, 2022).

It is also important to note that, despite Russia’s extensive war against Ukraine, domestic higher education institutions continue to organize classes for international students and invite applicants from other countries, applying special admission rules for foreign students. This aspect confirms the importance of distance learning as a compromise solution for both sides.

However, it is normal for both students and professors to want to work face-to-face. So, in the 2023/24 academic year, several higher education institutions in Kharkiv (situated nearly 200 kilometres from the military clashes), which have deep and spacious basement premises and the possibility of converting them into bomb shelters with classrooms suitable for teaching and learning, offered their students the opportunity to study offline.

Thus, at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, where a certain number of classrooms were equipped in bomb shelters, almost half of the first-year students (49%) chose to study in a mixed format, with both remote (online) lectures and offline practical and seminar classes. The remainder of the first-year students (51%) chose to study online completely. So the teachers got an opportunity to compare different aspects of online and offline education while working in parallel: face-to-face and distantly.

Today there is a widely held opinion that online education is of a lower quality than classroom learning. Academic staff members’ experiences of teaching may either support or refute this idea. So the problem under study here is rather topical.

Analysis of recent research demonstrates that due to the coronavirus pandemic interest in studying online teaching and learning is very widespread among scholars. Various instruments for providing online teaching and learning, as well as different methods related to the technology of teaching, were investigated by Holubnych & Baibekova (2020), Chetveryk (2023), Hontarenko (2021), Akinwumi & Itobor (2020), Kolbina & Oleksenko (2020), and Nahaev & Hrynova (2020).
Another group of researchers considered the advantages and disadvantages of online education (Holubnycha et al., 2022a; Jackson, 2021; Manea & Gări-Neguț, 2021; Shevchuk, 2021). Some scientists compared the experiences of different countries in providing online education (Aksu, 2020; Nalyvaiko et al., 2021; Rebukha & Polishchuk, 2020). There are also works devoted to the attitude of subjects of the educational process to distance learning, with an emphasis on their psychological state during online teaching and learning (Holubnycha et al., 2021; Moralista & Oducado, 2020; Nariyati et al., 2020).

Nowadays, during the war, researchers are studying similar aspects of teaching and learning as those studied as a result of the pandemic. Changes in the educational system caused by warfare have been described by Anishchenko et al. (2023); Banyoi et al. (2023); Bohomaz et al. (2022); and Lavrysh et al. (2022). The psychological state of the educational process on subjects has been studied by Chaikovska et al. (2023); Kostikova et al. (2023b); and Tverdokhliebova & Yevtushenko (2023).

Investigation of these works has shown that they are dedicated to the specifics of distance education and reveal both positive and negative characteristics (Rajab, 2018). The advantages and disadvantages of both face-to-face and distance teaching and learning during the war were studied by Horbatiuk & Polishchuk (2022).

However, traditional forms of training usually were not considered in comparison with the online format in order to identify both desirable and undesirable factors.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to assess whether the classroom training process is of a higher quality than online teaching and learning on the basis of the real case of teaching English at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University.

The tasks are: 1) to find out the pluses of offline training in comparison with the online format; 2) to reveal the minuses of traditional educational forms in comparison with the online format on the basis of real teaching experience; and 3) to check whether the pluses or minuses of offline training have a greater influence on intermediate students’ learning results.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methods used for achieving this purpose and undertaking the tasks of the study were at both the empirical and general theoretical level.

Empirical methods included surveys of the academic staff (20 respondents) of the Foreign Languages Department of the stated university, who worked in parallel, both online (with 51% of first-year students) and offline (with 49% of first-year students), in order to get feedback about the received teaching experience, as well as observation of offline and online classes. This helped uncover failures in the organisation of face-to-face training in comparison with the online format.

General theoretical methods, such as analysis synthesis and comparison, were necessary to compare the aforementioned formats of teaching and learning and determine the reasons for the revealed advantages and disadvantages.

**RESULTS**

Face-to-face training has a very long history. It is the oldest format of education. It has been developing for centuries of human civilization. There is little doubt about the
effectiveness of such an approach, and it has had practically no opponents. But new methods and forms of teaching are always appearing, as well as progressive pedagogical technologies that lead to better-quality results.

When coronavirus broke out and online teaching and learning became widespread, scholars who investigated this style of teaching indicated its weak points and noted a great number of advantages of face-to-face classes.

Scientists insist that the benefits of in-person classroom teaching encompass not only the learning process itself but also professional-practical, social, psychological, motivational, and scientific aspects. Classroom teaching contributes to the development of key skills that are crucial for a student to make a valuable and active contribution in various areas of social life (Horbatiuk & Polishchuk, 2022).

Analysis of recent research has shown that scholars single out a number of pluses of classroom education:

- One of the advantages mentioned by the scientists is real-time interaction. Classroom teaching provides the opportunity for an immediate exchange of ideas and information between the student and the teacher, as well as among the students themselves. This is particularly important for those who learn better through collaboration and group work. Asking questions, receiving real-time answers, and completing tasks on the spot create a conducive environment for quality interaction among participants in the educational process (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

However, it is necessary to note that all the specified opportunities have students not only in face-to-face classes but also in online classes, using, for example, Zoom, Google-Meet, etc.

- Another significant highlighted benefit is the improvement of social skills through participation in classroom lessons. During classroom teaching, self-confidence and collaboration are developed. It is very important to state that they are essential for successful functioning in society. These skills include the ability to speak in front of a group, resolve conflicts, and develop oratorical and organizational skills (Yaremna et al., 2021).

- Regarding collaboration, group work is an integral part of the traditional learning process, and a lack of collaboration skills can impact students’ professional competitiveness (Nogai, 2021).

To tell the truth, there is also remote collaboration and certainly it is possible online. Moreover, in the global world, online collaboration is widespread.

- Organization. The importance of this advantage lies in the availability of a clear schedule and set deadlines, requiring students to have time management skills and respect for the time and attention of others. Effective time management is a crucial factor in an individual’s success, involving the harmonious combination of learning/work skills with personal time/family/leisure.

Beyond the regular lecture schedule, students sometimes find it challenging to self-organize, and online distance interaction and asynchrony add additional negative
elements that can impact the quality of understanding the educational material (Shelestova, 2021).

Moreover, we suppose that long periods of distance learning have significantly influenced students' skills in self-organizing.

- **Motivation.** The traditional atmosphere of educational interaction in the classroom serves as a strong source of motivation for students, contrary to virtual classrooms where procrastination until tomorrow can become a frequently occurring phenomenon. This applies not only to students but also to teachers, whose motivation in the context of online learning often escapes the attention of researchers. The traditional form of teaching creates an immediate orientation of “here and now” for the entire educational process (Shelestova, 2021).

- **Accessibility.** Face-to-face learning can be the most suitable method for those who avoid interaction with information and communication technologies or who do not have access to technical devices (Finlay et al., 2022).

However, this advantage loses significance in the conditions of armed conflict and global digitization, as discussed earlier. During periods of wartime, the maximum coverage for participants in the educational process is usually achieved through a hybrid format, where each student can choose a learning format that best suits their needs. But hybrid educational interactions raise numerous questions regarding the equality of knowledge, the development of competencies, the role of the teacher, and the tariffication of their work (how to ensure, simultaneously, two learning formats for different students), etc.

- **Better assessment.** Auditorium classes give academic staff the opportunity to watch their students all the time during lessons. First, they reduce academic dishonesty. Second, a teacher can better assess not only the student’s activity and level of knowledge and skills but also how hardworking, diligent, or motivated the student is (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Moreover, if the teacher notices that certain students need some help, the teacher can direct them or just support them.

All of these advantages are really essential and testify in favour of face-to-face teaching and learning.

However, the experience of teaching a foreign language in parallel online and offline formats during the first semester of the 2023/24 academic year allowed the authors to discover that both formats have positive and negative aspects, as well as to compare intermediate learning outcomes in order to determine which format provides better-quality education.

An oral survey of the academic staff of the University Foreign Languages Department allowed us to find out the respondents’ general impressions about the peculiarities of offline teaching and learning organisation (influencing the quality of education) in comparison with the online format, and its influence on intermediate results. On the next step we revealed the weak points of face-to-face training.
Most of the teachers who went through the aforementioned experience pointed to the following negative aspects of the organization of the educational process in the offline classroom in comparison with the online format:

- In one double period (80 minutes) in the classroom, an academic group under the guidance of a teacher manages to process a smaller volume of programme material than in the same period of time when working online.

The teachers see the following as possible reasons for this deficiency:

1) the need to move to the bomb shelter when an air raid is announced (up to five minutes are lost for the entire group of 23–25 students to move). In addition, after the interruption of the class, the group has to readjust to continue working. Please note that in the online classes we no longer interrupt work during an air raid alert;

2) raising the general emotional background when performing game exercises, creative tasks, group work, etc., and the need to calm emotions after them, then gather and focus on more serious programme material. When conducting an online class using the same activities, students’ emotions do not interfere with continuing work because all students are disconnected, their microphones are turned off and the emotions of one student do not affect the other students;

3) loss of time because students must go to the blackboard and return to their seats when performing certain tasks, while in online classes a screen is used instead of a blackboard;

4) the need to observe discipline (after long-distance learning during the quarantine and the year of war, students missed “live” communication with their peers), especially if students are not highly motivated to learn a foreign language. It is clear that there is no such problem in an online class.

Ultimately, it may be presupposed that consistently performing a lower volume of training tasks results in insufficient mastering of certain programme material.

- The problem of discipline in individual groups. Over the years of online education, students (younger student who had never studied in classrooms before) were not even used to the fact that during class one cannot walk around the classroom, leave it and enter it without permission, communicate with classmates, use the phone, eat, etc. Only near the end of the semester did students get used to the need to observe discipline in class.

It is natural that these behaviours take up time in class, distract the attention of both the teacher and other students, and hinder other students from concentrating, not to mention the fact that sometimes students do not understand the teacher’s remarks and feel negative emotions, which can affect the attitude to the subject as a whole.

We consider the aforementioned shortcomings crucial to the perception of programme material by the student group. This in turn affects the mastery of the academic subject.

- When working in the classroom, students cannot listen to the lesson material again, whereas in online classes, students who missed classes or were distracted during them have the opportunity to listen to the class again in a recording.
Moreover, the possibility of listening to some difficult points of the lesson repeatedly can improve the quality of learning.

- Sometimes there are problems with access to learning information (if the internet is necessary). Notably, this happens more often in offline classes. Since in a face-to-face lesson all the students are at the same place if the internet connection is bad, this concerns everybody.

- In auditorium classes some students are embarrassed to speak English in front of the whole group. They feel insecure and afraid of the reaction of their classmates if they perceived themselves as being at a lower language level. There is no such problem in online classes. Probably these students feel more comfortable sitting at home. Maybe they do not notice facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal cues of their peers and this gives them a certain self-confidence.

We proposed that teachers express their opinion on all of the listed shortcomings. The results can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*General results of the teachers’ survey about the disadvantages of face-to-face training in foreign languages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question-Statements</th>
<th>Agree, %</th>
<th>Neutral, %</th>
<th>Disagree, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processing a smaller volume of programme material in offline classes in comparison with online ones.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem of discipline in offline classes in comparison with online ones.</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossibility of listening to the lesson material repeatedly if necessary.</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with access to learning material from the internet.</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students have psychological barriers to speaking a foreign language “live” in front of other students</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is natural that the aforementioned positive and negative aspects of the organization of offline training should affect the intermediate results of training (results of training during the semester—semester credit). Specifically, we have discovered that not all students in the groups that studied in the classrooms received a credit within the specified time. So, 10–15% of offline students had to finalize the semester’s material and pass the assessment separately.

Note that in groups with an online form of study, although there were students (5–10%) who were lagging behind the group and had certain academic deficits during the semester, problems with obtaining credit on time affected only 0–5% of students.
Even if we admit to the possibility of academic dishonesty in the groups with the online format of studying, we have to agree that those students know what kind of information should be looked for, what is important, and where it can be found.

Thus, the intermediate educational results demonstrate that online students have better academic progress than offline students.

**DISCUSSION**

It is interesting to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online and face-to-face training analysed from the perspective of student results, which are presented in most research. By contrast, we have studied the perception of these formats by the academic staff.

However, a number of scientists have found that, based on students’ learning experience, face-to-face education has a wide range of shortcomings. Liyen Lim, Hen Toong Tai, and Yee Ping Liew (2023) found the following: students who are already familiar with the convenience and flexibility of online learning, state that online learning helps them more than face-to-face learning to manage their time and can connect students from different places easily. Moreover, they claim they feel more comfortable with online learning because they can interact with lecturers and friends virtually.

Nikolopoulou (2022) revealed the following faults of classroom learning, as defined by students: a more demanding timetable; minimal or no use of technology; less free time; distractions and noise in class; the danger of viruses spreading; lessons being lost. Two of these disadvantages (distractions and noise in class; lost lessons) were also named by the academic staff in our research.

Riaz et al. (2023) exposed such additional weak points of offline learning difficulty in waking up after the renewal of auditorium learning (51%); feeling tired (77%); feeling unhappy after starting offline lessons again (63%); and difficulties in getting to the college (45.8%). Considering different teaching and learning methods, students identified the following disadvantages of in-person education: difficulty with time management (52.5%); difficulty in concentrating (57.5%); feeling less comfortable (70.8%); feeling less alert (59.2%); and feeling less satisfied and believing they get worse exam scores (83.3%). Moreover, 85.5% of respondents would choose online learning and 71.7% prefer to follow the online format in future studies.

However, we are not sure that all of the listed points really contribute to improving the quality of education. In our opinion, some of the ideas are caused by the students’ reluctance to overcome learning difficulties.

The results of an investigation conducted by AlMunifi and Alfawzan (2023) revealed a positive assessment of face-to-face learning by students. Specifically, they singled out better comprehension of learning material; the convenience of engaging in discussions; greater opportunities for seeking assistance from fellow students; fostering university life; easier interactions with academic staff and peers; the overall quality of educational experience; the ability to utilize downtime between lectures for collaborative work with classmates; and the development of social skills through communication and interaction with both peers and teachers.
Although, according to the authors, the students claim that they experience greater satisfaction and comfort in acquiring knowledge and learning through the online format and that this leads to improved exam scores.

We completely agree both with the advantages of face-to-face education and with getting better academic progress.

CONCLUSIONS
Thus, in the course of this study of face-to-face teaching and learning, with regard to quality, we have found out that:

First, there is no doubt that the classroom training process has a number of advantages in comparison with online teaching and learning, including real-time interaction, improvement of social skills, collaboration, organization, motivation, accessibility, and better assessment. What is more, both teachers and students highlight the pluses of offline training in comparison with the online format, assessing this form of education rather positively.

Second, it is natural that offline education also has disadvantages, including processing a smaller volume of programme material; the problem of discipline; the impossibility of listening to the lesson material repeatedly if necessary; problems with access to learning material from the internet; and the psychological barrier that some students have in speaking a foreign language “live” in front of a group.

Third, the intermediate students’ learning results demonstrated that students who were engaged in offline training had worse academic progress than the students studying online.

On balance, we believe that the minuses of offline training influence students’ learning results more than the pluses do. But we must assume that in order to conclude which format of education is of higher quality, it is necessary to continue investigating the problem.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS
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REFERENCES


АНОТАЦІЯ / ABSTRACT [in Ukrainian]:

ОЧНЕ ВИКЛАДАННЯ ТА НАВЧАННЯ: ПРОБЛЕМА ЯКОСТІ

У статті розглядається традиційний формат викладання та навчання з погляду його якості, зокрема переваги та недоліки очного навчання порівняно з онлайн навчанням.

Мета – перевірити, чи є аудиторний навчальний процес кращим за якістю, ніж онлайн викладання та навчання на основі реального досвіду викладання англійської мови в Національному юридичному університеті імені Ярослава Мудрого. Завдання: виявити переваги офлайн навчання в порівнянні з онлайн форматом; виявити недоліки традиційної форми навчання порівняно з онлайн форматом на основі реального педагогічного досвіду; перевірити, що більше впливає на результати навчання студентів: плюси чи мінуси офлайн навчання.

Методи дослідження мають емпіричний (опитування, спостереження) та загальнотеоретичний рівень (аналіз, синтез і порівняння).

Результати виявили: 1) переваги очного навчання: взаємодія в реальному часі, покращення соціальних навичок, співпраця, організованість, мотивація, доступність, краще оцінювання; 2) недоліки аудиторного викладання та навчання порівняно з онлайн форматом: опрацювання меншого обсягу програмного матеріалу на офлайн заняттях порівняно з онлайн форматом; проблема дисципліни на офлайн заняттях у порівнянні з онлайн заняттями; неможливість у разі потреби повторно прослухати матеріал заняття; проблеми з доступом до навчальних матеріалів з Інтернету; деякі студенти мають психологічний бар’єр говорити іноземною мовою "наживо" перед групою студентів; 3) проміжні результати навчання студентів продемонстрували, що офлайн-студенти мають гірший академічний прогрес, ніж студенти, які навчаються онлайн.

Висновок полягає в тому, що недоліки офлайн навчання більше впливають на результати навчання студентів, ніж переваги. Отже, щоб дійти висновку, який формат навчання є більш якісним, необхідно продовжити дослідження означеної проблеми.

Ключові слова: очна освіта, формати викладання та навчання, онлайн навчання, освіта, якість освіти.