COVID-19: DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE LEARNING TOWARDS VISUAL ARTS PRACTICED-BASED NATURE

Mohd Fauzi Sedon[1], Che Zalina Zulkifli[2], Mohd Zahuri Khairani[3],

Abu Bakar Sabran[4], Abdul Aziz Zalay[5]

[1,2,3,4,5] Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

Email : mohd.fauzi@fskik.upsi.edu.my, chezalina@fskik.upsi.edu.my, mzahuri@gmail.com,
abu.bakar@fskik.upsi.edu.my, abdul.aziz@fskik.upsi.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper discusses the disadvantages of online learning in the context of studio practice -based that focuses on practical skills. Discussions are made by looking at various angles of teaching and learning toward online method and its implications for the field of Visual Arts. Among the aspects discussed are social isolation, limited feedback, focus on theory rather on practice, lack of flexibility and lack of transformational power. In general, online learning can only serve as a supporting method to the field of Visual Arts that focuses on the construction of practical skills, where conventional learning method which is characterized by practice-based learning is more appropriate and effective.

Design/methodology/approach: Review approach.

Findings: The best practices for online learning courses are still evolving and are much more difficult to implement especially in terms of learning methods that would be suitable and effective for all areas. Direct training, standard methods, approaches and processes through practice-based are the best practices and are much more established, well understood and more effective for teaching and learning in Visual Arts.

Practical implications: Developing a truly effective online learning course requires time, money, and a huge amount of expertise. Good online learning courses involve multimedia, specialized web development, technical support, and strong user interaction design. If done incorrectly, it will disrupt and negatively impact the learning process because the lack of time concentrations and space limitations

Originality/value: This paper is original.

Paper type: This paper can be categorized as a viewpoint

Keyword: COVID-19, Disadvantages, Visual Arts, Online Learning, Practice-based.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven schools, higher education institutions (HEIs) and various online training providers to work closely to ensure that effective learning continues. While various forms of online technology can facilitate the seamless migration of face-to-face learning to virtual platforms since access to high-quality digital content is critical to gain effective learning. All universities have started conducting their online classes to minimize and prevent the spread of infections especially during the Movement Control Order (MCO). This situation is expected to continue for a longer period to ensure the safety and well-being of all parties.

Online learning is the best alternative way to enable teaching and learning to run smoothly. However, online learning has some aspects of weaknesses and disadvantages, especially for courses with practical training skills such as Visual Arts which focuses more on the development of new skills or skill sets that comprise some

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of the highest forms of human creativity. Visual Arts learning is reliant on a complex system of perceptual, higher cognitive, and motor functions, thus suggesting a shared neural substrate and strong potential for cross-cognitive transfer in learning and creativity (Tyler & Likova, 2012). High-quality Visual Arts (art and design) education should engage, inspire and challenge students, equip them with the knowledge and skills to experiment, and build their creativity to create their artwork, craft and design while also being able to think critically and develop their understanding contextually and conceptually. In other words, the ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty during the creative process is an important mental trait. Besides, they should also know how art and design reflect and shape our history, and contribute to the culture and heritage.

Studio-based characteristics are as follow:

1. To observe – to see with acuity (observation skills - analyze);
2. To envision – to generate mental images and imagine (representation);
3. To express – to find their voice (expression, style and uniqueness);
4. To reflect – to think meta-cognitively about their decisions, make critical and evaluative judgments, and justify (self-reflection and critique session);
5. To stretch and explore – to take risks, "muck around," and profit from mistakes (exploration and experimentation);
6. To develop artwork (the making process – practical skills);
7. To understand art – demonstrate the kinds of thinking skills (reasoning ability).

II. DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning is an increasingly popular approach based on the latest technological advances that are considered simple and can be done without time and location restrictions in general. However, this approach still has certian disadvantages on areas that lead to practical skills such as the field of Visual Arts which involves learning in a practical studio approach. Among the disadvantages of online leaning toward Visual Arts practice-based nature are as follows:

A. Social isolation – no face to face interaction

The online learning methods currently practiced in education sector tend to make participating students undergo self-contemplation, remoteness, and lack of physical interaction - spending a lot of time on online allows them to experience social isolation due to the lack of physical communication/interaction between people in their lives (face-to-face) - often creates stress, anxiety, and negative thoughts. Rovai, Wighting, & Liu (2005) suggests that strong communication and active social life interaction significantly related to both high persistence and learning satisfaction.

Visual Arts use practiced-based method as a pedagogical strategy where a small group of students learn under the close supervision of a skilled master. Brocato (2009) says practiced-based learning is a shared learning environment in which ambiguous problems are addressed iteratively through multimodal analysis, proposition, and critique. Meanwhile, in Brocato (2009) explains,

…focus on developing self-regulation of learning, not just short run behavioral compliance; develop and work through personal teacher-student relationships rather than impersonal bureaucracies; become a caring socializer rather than a remote authority figure; emphasize ethics and ideals rather than rules and sanctions; emphasize cueing before the fact rather than nagging after the fact.

Studio approach through practice-based learning is a complex system that requires seamless interaction between students and lecturers as well as sharing experiences with fellow students to gain artistic expression. Sjöholm (2013) mentions the studio offers insights into making and knowledge that is investigating and experimental; into the practices and skills visual artists need in order to transform initial plans, ideas into material work. The concept of learning by doing is the foundation for the development of understanding and skills that is rooted in the process of producing works through discussion and presentation in critique sessions. Therefore, the effectiveness of this method can only be achieved through face-to-face (studio approach) learning that is fundamental to the development of creativity, critical thinking and expression where cognitive skills is used for decision-making in complex but logical situations, or for solving 'ill-structured' problems (Braund & Reiss, 2019).

B. Feedback is limited – lack of input from the trainers

Online learning is still having a problem with student/lecturer feedback. Students will often have problems with periodic assessment and become dissatisfied when they experience a lack of immediate feedback and

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efficiency. In general, traditional face-to-face methods provide quick and direct feedback without much of a hassle, and more importantly, increase student motivation. Skilled lecturers and subject matter experts are at their best when they teach physically and interact with their students face-to-face. Therefore, in the context of online learning, such interactions are largely absent.

Visual Arts use critique sessions as a means of developing understanding and skill development based on the sharing of ideas and suggestions between lecturers and students. Suggestions and critiques received during the critique sessions will contribute to the development of the artwork from time to time. It aims to revisit and rethink the work produced in accordance with the relevant suggestions received. Critique sessions also invite review and reflection on making informed decisions in studio experiments, and are critical to the art-making process. The suggestions, revisions and reflections in the critique sessions can be based on material and technique selections, composition, size and colour determination and many other aspects of art fundamentals (elements of art and principles of design) and concept. Through a review of the critique session, ideas and suggestions will eventually come to a deeper level in which inquiries can be resolved and formed. Thus, critical sessions are important in the production of artwork that resembles cognitive and reflection to build and shape subjective ideas into reality. Utaberta, Hassanpour, Utaberta, Hassanpour, Ani, & Surat (2011) explains,

…face them students to new situations that expect them to expose themselves to other critique and learn how to find creative solutions, and their success will access in this way too. The expectation of facing to routine professional critique and this question that what happens within an individual's mind and what happens between two people that lead to different results make the critique sessions more important.

Therefore, discussions and critic sessions are based on the production process and the actual work is very important in describing the accuracy of representation and impression. Picture or digital image evaluations invite many of the confusion and ambiguity that make it difficult to appreciate properly and effectively.

C. Focus on theory rather on practice

While these weaknesses in online learning have begun to be addressed and corrected by some of the more innovative online learning platforms through a combination of various technologies and applications, they have not been fully resolved. The problem is that most online learning training providers choose to focus largely (in most cases) on developing theoretical knowledge, rather than practical skills because it is too difficult and complex to realize that requires a combination of various areas of expertise in addition to its effectiveness in question and doubtful.

The field of Visual Arts is very broad, encompassing forms of art created especially for visual perception. How meaning is constructed and read from visual texts is a fundamental skill developed through the practice of visual arts (learning by doing). Sjöholm (2013) says skill and creativity in the studio is seemed rely on the productive and ambiguous tension based on the knowledge practices of contemplation and elaboration, thinking and bodily engagement, instruction and improvisation by which the studio is a personal laboratory. In the studio practical experimentation, every process of making artwork will go through the process of manipulating, transforming, improvising and reconstructing the idea through the use of materials and techniques. In this context, the development of practical skills depends on the production of artwork under the close supervision of lecturers through face-to-face and hands-on learning methods.

The various forms of practice skills (hands-on) involved in handling materials and equipment are complex because they not only involve technical skills but are directly related to expression. Therefore, it is impossible to achieve the effectiveness of this practice skills through online, as it requires close contact between students and lecturers through the sharing of their experience and skills as a field specialist.

D. Lack of flexibility – limited to certain disciplines

Online learning can be great for learning specific skills and for knowledge that needs to be transferred in the context of theory (or those with high practice skills). However, with more complex skills and competencies, it is very difficult to effectively assemble an online learning program. Learning is best when students find their way (self-reflection) by experimenting, asking questions and explaining. So, in this context with online learning, it is difficult, if not impossible, to do. As Arkorful (2014) argues not all fields or discipline can employ the e-learning technique in education especially the fields that include practical skills cannot be properly studies through e-learning.

A variety of skills set that students need to acquire in visual arts programs include practice, cognitive, expression and communication. According to NCCA Curriculum (n.d.) the key skills are as below:

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Table 1 – Variety of skills set in Visual Arts program

Key skill	Example of a key skill element	Examples of associated student learning activities
Being creative	Exploring options and alternatives	Students experience and experiment with visual art processes such as observing, imagining, making and investigating through a wide range of media including digital methods.
Being literate	Expressing ideas clearly and accurately	Students demonstrate through conversations, discussions, and presentations of and about their work or the work of others that they understand and can interpret the artistic processes involved.
Being numerate	Developing a personal disposition towards investigating, reasoning and problem-solving	Students develop their ideas and work using their knowledge, skills and personal experiences, e.g. measuring and estimating materials for three-dimensional work.
Communicating	Performing and presenting	Students present a range of explorations from their work that best describes and supports their ideas and finished work in a variety of ways, e.g. exhibition, installation, performance art, e-Portfolio, Visual Art sketchpad.
Managing information and thinking	Thinking creatively and critically	Through observational drawing, students learn to record and analyse what they see, either as an end in itself or for use in developing work.
Managing myself	Being able to reflect on their learning	Students, through the development of their work, reflect on their artistic choices and decisions both at the time of creation and at the end of the process itself.
Staying well	Being safe	Students, within the safe space of the art class, can explain, use and understand appropriate content, tools and materials in an ethical and responsible way.
Working with others	Contributing to making the world a better place	Working collaboratively within a cultural context and with members of their wider community, students use their artistic skills to improve the spaces they inhabit for all.

These complex combinations of skills are extremely difficult and almost impossible to achieve through virtual learning online. The learning concept of Visual Arts that based on experiential learning (or learning by doing) involves several processes which are preparation, incubation, intimation, insight, verification and elaboration to achieve a high level of artwork production. Therefore, the absence of physical human connectivity and limitation of interactive digital media does not allow for the effectiveness of learning visual arts through online methods.

E. Lack of transformational power

Online learning is useful for implementing the training process and for teaching specific categories of knowledge in theory. However, the real learning begins through direct contact with more qualified experts through face-to-face physical interaction. It is through commitment and interaction that this real revolution takes place and students become more effective and move on to the next level of performance. Learning in the context of knowledge sharing and practical skills (studio approach) are very important in visual arts learning which involves a specific process of description, analysis, interpretation and judgement.

Most of the lecturers involved in higher education are artists or designers who are active in the creative industries arena and they have involved in various projects and have undertaken various research projects. Thus,

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in this context, physical education (face to face) becomes the primary means of sharing experiences and skills that are rooted in the reputation of artists and designers as sources of inspiration and role models for students. According to Pringle (2020) says the artist functions as a role model is fairly widely acknowledged, particularly being able to refer to their background within their practice which their experiences can provide insights into their working lives.

The sharing of experiences by lecturers who also have careers as artists or designers is of great significance in helping to improve the quality of learning as well as enhance students' interest in focusing and developing their practice of cognitive and cognitive skills, perception and expression more effectively. As Peggie (1991) explains about the contribution of an artist in a learning environment,

…by talking about their working lives, to their learning about the arts. Projects focusing on learning in the arts involve artists in helping pupils to develop artistic skills or in sharing insights into the process of making and presenting the arts. Artists working through the arts use the arts as a medium to explore other areas such as history, science and technology, or issues such as racism, gender or disability.

Meanwhile, Pringle (2020) argues artists can function as role models in terms of how they approach problems within their working practice and connections can be made between artistic practice and teaching itself.

III. CONCLUSION

Developing a truly effective online learning course requires time, money, and a huge amount of expertise. Good online learning courses involve multimedia, specialized web development, technical support, and strong user interaction design. If done incorrectly, it will disrupt and negatively impact the learning process because a lack of time concentrations and space limitations of online learning Lu & Yang (2018). Therefore, the best practices for online learning courses are still evolving and are much more difficult to implement especially in terms of learning methods that suitable and effective for all areas. Direct training, standard methods, approaches and processes through practice-based are best practices and are much more established, well understood and more effective for teaching and learning in Visual Arts.

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