

## **Online English Language Learning Activities and Academic Achievement: Experiences of First Year Students and Their Teachers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The central objective of the study is to address the following question: what are the perceptions of students and their teachers about the impact of using online English language learning activities on students' academic achievement in the Preparatory Year Programme at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University? The study combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data about these perceptions. The main instruments were students' and teachers' questionnaires and interviews, and classroom observations. In total, 1696 students and 52 teachers completed the questionnaires, 16 students and 6 teachers participated in the interviews and 16 e-learning classes were observed. The findings indicated that online English language learning activities enabled students to practice independently outside classrooms, which in turn was perceived to have a positive impact on academic achievement. Furthermore, participants believed that online learning promoted the development of vocabulary, listening and grammar skills. Also, online learning activities were seen to increase students' readiness to move to the next level of study.

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to learn effectively, learners engage in practical work through various strategies and activities, and since the beginning of this century, instructional designers have developed new learning management systems, such as online learning platforms, to enhance the learning process. Alfehaid (2018) argued that “online-supported language learning resources are plentiful, and the main challenge now is to find a way to organize instruction through this medium”. Many have found online learning to be an indispensable aid to instruction. However, the place of online learning is controversial and has polarized many educators into two advocates, i.e. those who support online learning and those who support face-to-face learning.

Despite the fact that there are mixed results in some studies, many researchers have found that learners are able to asynchronously and synchronously take part in online courses (Hrastinski, 2008). Molchanova (2015) found out that online courses were most effective for students, with regard to improved linguistic competence, when used over an extended period of time. She added that students also found online courses more instructive, motivating and helpful with respect to gaining proficiency and independence. The major question is how and why online learning can be effective. Unlike previous studies which focused on the differences between, or strengths and weaknesses, of online learning and face-to-face learning, the present study attempts to explore English

language learning processes when mediated through online activities. The novelty and significance of this study lie in its purpose which focuses on assessing the relationship between online learning activities and the students’ actual academic achievement with regards to the English language.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining exactly what online learning entails is somewhat of a challenge. Moore et al. (2011), for example, considered the concept of online learning difficult to define because scholars concerned had not come to an absolute definition of online learning. Online learning may be thought of as a form of distance education based on the latest generation of technologies (Keegan, 1996). In the context of language learning, according to Hockly (2015), online learning “refer[s] to language learning that takes place fully online via the internet, with no face-to-face component, within the context of both formal language courses and more informal learning scenarios.” This means that online learning is only made available and accessible through an internet connection. Although scholars define online learning differently, most agree that online learning makes full use of the Internet and other digital technologies; and makes course material accessible anytime and anywhere. For the purpose of this study, online learning is defined as an internet-based learning *environment* designed for students to provide them with a variety of learning resources and activities that add to their knowledge and learning experience (at

their convenience). Felix (2003) explained that there were two main forms of online learning:

On the one hand there are stand alone online courses that strive to operate as virtual classrooms, in which the technology acts both as tutor and tool. High quality examples are still very rare in languages. On the other hand, there are add-on activities to classroom teaching or distance education courses in which technology is used primarily as a tool and communication device. Teachers are present to varying degrees in both forms

The current study is concerned with the second form where online language learning activities are used and integrated within the curriculum as a pedagogical component to enhance English language learning. As the world is witnessing a major revolution in information technology, online learning seems to be natural because it can enable learners to get adapted to and meet their learning needs (Thorne, 2003).

The use of online technology-based activities for the purpose of learning English language has become prevalent in many higher education institutions. Garrison and Vaughan (2013) noted that many universities implemented online learning in order to enhance students' learning outcomes. In this context, online activities can offer different opportunities for English language learning. Felix (2003) maintained that online activities "have the potential to engage students either singly or in groups in authentic settings in which to foster one or more language skills, depending on how activities are structured, integrated and monitored." It is necessary,

however, to take into account the differing views and beliefs of students and teachers when introducing these online activities in order to avoid any resistance that may lead to reluctance and ineffectiveness on the part of the participants, i.e. students and teachers (Stracke, 2007). For this reason, the current study specifically concentrates on the perceptions of students and their teachers about learning English through online activities.

Djiwandono (2013) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of online learning on EFL learners' mastery of vocabulary and their opinions about this experience. Results showed that the online learning approach made a significant impact on the learners' mastery of vocabulary, and students reflected positively about the authentic materials they were reading during the semester.

Geta and Olango (2016) further investigated the impact of online learning on the development of students' English writing skills through a quasi-experimental research design. The study also investigated instructors' attitudes towards the use of online platforms in teaching writing skills. Results showed a significant difference in favor of online learning which proved to be a good support for students to perform better in the writing course.

In a recent study, Isti'anah (2017) used a variety of online learning activities and investigated the extent to which these activities helped students learn English grammar. It was concluded that they were indeed effective in assisting students to learn

English grammar and students' achievement was consistent in post-test and online assignments.

No doubt, the above studies taken together enforce the idea that online activities can help improve English language learning. It is also evident that learning and achievement, to a certain degree, can improve when online learning activities are incorporated into English language learning. However, these studies tend to present a direct comparison between online learning and other modes of learning. The question that needs to be addressed is "how technology is used" in language learning (Blake, 2009). That is to say, there is an absence of research investigating the actual process of learning through online platforms. Moreover, most of the studies concentrated on a limited number of students and neglected the voices and practices of their teachers. In contrast to the above studies, the purpose of the current study was to explore the students' and teachers' experience of using online learning activities and to identify to what extent participants perceived it impacted students' academic achievement.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Improving students' level of English is an important aim within universities in Saudi Arabia. During the preparatory year programme (PYP), students are required to extend their level of fluency in English (the required exit level depends on the students' track). All courses after the PYP are then conducted in English. Enabling students

to improve their level of English alongside their degree specialism (track) is a major challenge in Saudi universities given the time constraints of what needs to be covered during the PYP (Alfehaid, 2015).

At the end of the PYP, students qualify to different colleges according to their Grade Point Average (GPAs). Students' level of English contributes 10 credits to their GPA - about one third of the total. The online component, from which online activities are used during the PYP, contributes 5% of students' total final assessment grade in each of two courses: General (Academic) English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Grade distribution in the online component comprises: quizzes (3%), discussions (0.5%) and practice tests (1.5%). Two contact hours are allocated for online learning during the first and the second semester. Students are responsible for completing their online learning activities during their free time and must meet the deadlines set by their teachers. In total, 2.5% of the attendance time is allocated to participating in practice tests, which give students the opportunity to practice mock tests on the online learning platform and revise information before taking the final graded assessment.

The textbook series used in the PYP, published by Oxford University Press, is called *Q: Skills for Success*. This series offers an integrated approach comprising printed published materials and an online component to be used in conjunction with face to face classes. The published materials include: printed Student Books in Reading and Writing, and Listening and Speaking,

which provide explanatory learning content focused on academic skills and activities for students; Teacher's Guides supplied in PDF format, which provide suggested activities for teaching and lesson delivery; an online component for use in both lessons and home study; and the iTools component, which is a classroom presentation tool for use by teachers to present the Student Book material to the class. The current study focuses on the online component and, in particular, the online learning activities.

### The Online Component

The online component provides online practice activities to help students develop skills in: reading, writing, listening, critical thinking, grammar, vocabulary, speaking and pronunciation; and comprises the following components:

- Practice activities (including vocabulary games, grammar games and videos)
- Vocabulary skills activities
- Student Book audio
- Discussion board
- Email feature
- Progress reports
- Writing Tutor

### Methodology

This study employed quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data. The mixed-method study attempts to provide a detailed picture of the use of online activities for English language learning based on participant perceptions using quantitative and qualitative methods

of inquiry. The primary purpose is to gain better understanding of the issue by triangulating quantitative and qualitative data. A further aim of a triangulated mixed-method approach is to enhance the study's reliability and reliability. While qualitative data provides in-depth information about the online learning context and perceptions of participants through excerpts, quantitative data will provide descriptive information through statistical analysis.

### Participants

A random selection of male and female classes were selected from across three different established tracks and three levels of study from IAU, comprising:

- each track (science/engineering/health)
- each level (beginner/intermediate/advanced)
- each group (male/female class groups).

At the time of research i.e. the end of second semester, all teachers and students in the sample had been using online activities in lessons and outside of class during the PYP academic year (September 2017 to May 2018). The age of the student respondents ranged from 18 to 19. The age of the teacher respondents ranged from 25 to 50, with the mean age being 40. Data collection included:

- an online survey questionnaire circulated to 2391 students and 102 teachers (completed by 1696 students and 52 teachers);
- classroom observations of 16

teacher-led classes (with a duration of 30 minutes duration);

- in-depth interviews with 16 students and 6 teachers.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

#### **Interviews with Students and Teachers.**

Interviews with teachers and students followed a semi-structured interview schedule (i.e. a document that outlines the main questions to ask). A semi-structured schedule offered more flexibility than a more rigid structured schedule and provided the opportunity for the interviewer to ask additional follow-up questions.

Questions focused on the following key themes:

- background about teachers' and students' perceptions of online learning activities and how they are used in practice;
- impact of the use of online learning activities upon students' understanding of language skills, academic achievement and readiness to move to the next level of study; and
- teachers' and students suggested improvements to maximise the impact of online learning activities.

The interviews were conducted individually in person at an agreed time convenient for teachers and students, with each interview lasting between 30 and 40 minutes.

#### ***Online Survey Questionnaire for Students and Teachers***

The online survey questionnaire was circulated to teachers and students at the end of the second term. This means that they had gained one academic year experience in using the online learning activities (56 hours in total). Participation was voluntary. It was made clear that survey responses would be anonymous and, as such, it would not be possible to identify individual participants.

The main purpose of the online survey was to document the students' and teachers' perceptions of the online activities and gauge the extent to which they use them for English language learning. The survey questions focused on the following key themes:

- background about teachers' and students' usage of online activities and how useful each component is for them
- impact of online learning activities upon students' understanding of language skills, academic achievement and readiness to move to the next level of study
- access to online learning activities
- technical issues

#### **Classroom Observations**

According to Gruba et al. (2016), classroom observation can help to "improve teaching and learning practices, to assess the use of instructional materials, and to assess teachers and students' interaction with technology". The 16 classroom observations (30 minutes in length, on average) were

conducted by the researcher. It was made clear that observations were not conducted to evaluate teaching quality in any way but, rather, to observe how the online learning activities were being used in practice inside English language classrooms. Observation notes were focused on the following key themes:

- technical issues and Internet access
- integration of online learning activities (e.g. how the use of the online activities links to the use of the printed materials, i.e. textbooks)
- usage of online learning activities in the classroom (time spent, technology used, how students work together and tackle activities).

### **Data Analysis**

As noted, a series of in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with teachers and students in person to enable the participants to speak freely about their views and perceptions, and for the interviewer to probe for further details. Therefore, this aspect of the study was a 'perceptions of impact' study and the resulting evidence is 'descriptive'. For a broader context about the way in which online learning activities are used in the classroom and at home, a series of classroom observations were carried out as well as an online survey questionnaire circulated to teachers and students. A study of this type allows an exploration of, for example, the nature of perceived impact; the scale of perceived impact (i.e. has change occurred for one individual, a few or many); and the perceived reasons for any

impact. Teachers and students participating in the in-depth interviews and online survey questionnaire gave a retrospective view of the impact of the use of online learning activities.

All interviews were transcribed. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) principles of thematic analysis, I identified, analyzed and reported specific themes within the interview data that addressed the research question. The students' and teachers' responses to the survey questions were analyzed using frequency counts to identify frequency of use of online activities. Percentages were also provided to determine the level of agreement with the issues related to the impact of the use of online activities. The notes in the classroom observations were analyzed manually to present themes including: frequency of use in lessons, time spent doing the online learning activities, how students worked together and the teacher's role.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Common patterns across the interviews, online Survey questionnaire and classroom Observations were isolated through a descriptive, thematic analysis as mentioned above.

### **The Survey Questionnaire**

**Frequency and Focus of Use of Online Learning Activities.** Overall, there is a strong consensus from teachers and students that using online activities should be recommended to fellow teachers and students. Of the students surveyed

who used the online practice activities ‘often’ or ‘always’, 85% reported they would recommend online activities to other students. Of the teachers who used the online practice activities ‘often’ or ‘always’, 97% would recommend them to other teachers. A majority of teachers also reported that using online vocabulary and grammar games during lessons had increased their students’ readiness to move to the next level of study. Generally, these results are consistent with those reported from previous studies (e.g. Chen, 2012), which indicate that entertainment-related online activities such as games help increase student motivation and participation because students “considered English learning should be an activity for pleasure”. Farrell et al. (2007) further asserted that the impact of using technology for learning should be measured by the extent to which it enhanced the excitement of learning.

Further to this, results show that responses from teachers and students who used the resources more frequently were more positive. With regard to Practice activities (vocabulary and grammar games, and videos), of the teachers surveyed who use the practice activities ‘often’ or ‘always’, 97% agree or agree strongly that the practice activities are beneficial for their students’ learning. Likewise, of the students surveyed who used the practice activities ‘often’ or ‘always’, 90% agreed or agreed strongly that the practice activities were beneficial for their learning in comparison. Teachers and students who used the online activities more frequently found it more

beneficial and were more likely to say that they would recommend it.

Importantly, students participating in the online survey rated the Writing Tutor significantly more highly than teachers did. The Writing Tutor is highlighted by teachers as having a particularly positive impact on students’ language skills specifically. A large majority of students reported that they used the model assignments from the Writing Tutor before writing their own assignments, and a large number of students and teachers noted that the Writing Tutor had helped students develop their writing skills. This result is consistent with the findings of Xu et al. (2019) confirming that online learning has the potential to support EFL students’ writing. In addition, a majority of teachers report that the Writing Tutor helps them to provide effective feedback and saves them time in providing feedback.

In addition to the effective use of the online platform for providing feedback, a high majority of teachers (75%) reported that they found the progress reports useful for checking students’ progress. Likewise, the majority of students reported that the progress reports were useful for checking their own progress. In other words, results show how online learning can help make students aware of their own learning. Awareness of learning progress may help increase student participation in online activities.

Teachers and students were asked which skills online activities helped students to develop. Consistently, teachers and students highlighted vocabulary, listening and

grammar skills the highest. These findings are in line with those reported by Ayres (2002), and Verdugo and Belmonte (2007).

Teachers and students were also asked to rate how frequently they used online activities. 55% of all teachers and 35% of all students surveyed reported that they used the practice activities 'often' or 'always'. 65% of all students and 45% of all teachers, reported that they used the practice activities 'sometimes' or 'never'. Of the 35% of students who used the practice activities 'often' or 'always', the most frequently used components were the practice activities (100% often or always), vocabulary skills activities (64%), writing tutor (48%) and student book audio (46%). In contrast, of the 65% of students who used the practice activities 'sometimes' or never', the most frequently used components were the vocabulary skills activities (20% often or always), writing tutor (19%), student book audio (17%) and progress reports (14%).

Of the 55% of all teachers surveyed who use the practice activities 'often' or 'always', the most frequently used components were the practice activities (100% often or always), grammar games, videos and student book audio (each 72%), and writing tutor (69%). In contrast, of the 45% of all teachers surveyed who used the practice activities 'sometimes' or never', the most frequently used components were the writing tutor (33%), discussion board (30%) and student book audio (20%).

### **Familiarity with the Online Activities and Technical Issues.**

Results indicated

that students and teachers had easy access to the online platform and related activities. This finding is in agreement with Sagarra and Zapata, (2008) who also found that students and teachers had easy access to online environments. When asked about technical issues in the questionnaire, the majority of teachers and students report that there are technical issues 'sometimes' or 'never'. A high majority of teachers (71%) using the online platform 'often' or 'always' reported that they found the online activities 'user friendly'. This finding is not surprising given the fact that the majority of teachers and students were experienced with online activities because they had used them for a long time and were an important requirement for assessment.

### **The Interviews**

Teachers and students interviewed further reported that the online activity most used in class was the Writing Tutor (particularly with lower level students). Most commonly, teachers show students the example writing model and explain the different features. In particular, they draw attention to the highlighted areas. The Writing Tutor is most commonly used during the 'E-learning hour' at university where students use their devices (mobiles, laptops or tablets) to do listening, reading comprehension and work with the Writing Tutor. A possible reason why the Writing Tutor was commonly used is that students were frequently asked by their teachers to use the writing samples provided by the Writing Tutor. While there is no direct evidence of this, some teachers

stated that the programme administrators had instructed them to focus on the Writing Tutor.

Importantly, the majority of teachers interviewed perceive the online platform and activities as a support system designed for self-learning, rather than a resource that was fully integrated into classroom teaching:

*'It is a website for online learning. It facilitates learning and enhances the learning experience. It is like an interactive text book, it is good for extra practice.'* (T02)

Most teachers interviewed reported that they predominantly recommended online activities to students for online practice at home, and that they did not use much online practice in the classroom. Likewise, the most frequent comment from students interviewed was that online activities were for extra practice outside lessons. A large number of students reported that they were mostly used for review and self-assessment:

*'It is a platform with exercises and quizzes to practice and review everything you learn in class. You can self-assess through submission which is useful for your weaknesses. You can practice grammar, vocab, listening, reading and do the Writing Tutor.'* (S11)

### **Impact of using Online Activities on Students English Language Learning**

During in-depth interviews, teachers reported on their own experiences of using online activities in the classroom and their

students' use of online activities outside classes. Overall, teachers were positive about the online activities. In particular, teachers commonly reported the following perspectives of positive impact on students' learning:

With regard to enhancing students' understanding of language skills, the majority of teachers reported a positive impact on students' understanding of language skills. Teachers, in particular, highlighted a particularly positive perspective with regard to the Writing Tutor:

*'The model is really useful as it gives the students an idea of what they have to write; they can see the level and get ideas from it. We use these models in class, the highlighter shows them different features of the essays and they can use some of the phrases to help them. It helps me that there is a model provided so I can save time and not have to write one or find one myself. Students find writing so difficult and if we can scaffold the task for them, it really helps with their confidence and morale.'* (T03)

The data shows that online activities enable students to practice independently outside the classroom, which had a positive impact on academic achievement. Most teachers reported a positive impact on students' academic achievement when they use online activities to practice outside the classroom:

*'It's very useful for students to recycle language from the classroom, they are studying so many other subjects that they forget what they have learned quite quickly.'*

*They really need to consolidate learning at home. Using a different medium of study is good for them as it makes it less boring and young people respond well to digital learning.*' (T03)

A further finding from interviews is that the majority of teachers interviewed reported a positive impact on students' readiness to move to the next level of study and to prepare for exams. Teachers commented on the appropriate level of the materials of online activities, and several teachers commented positively on the way in which the level was easier than the textbook:

*'The level is good for the students. It's quite easy compared to what they do in the book, and that is a good thing. Students are more likely to try activities if they are straightforward, and to begin with, we need them to be motivated to do the practice. It will definitely help them next year, as long as they use it more.'* (T02)

A number of the teachers interviewed felt online activities were particularly supportive with weaker students who required extra practice in certain areas. One teacher felt they were most impacting with intermediate students who were more motivated but also required extra practice.

The above findings represent perspectives from teachers with regard to how online learning may impact students. Students also reported four key ways in which they felt they benefited from the online platforms.

Most students interviewed reported a positive impact on academic achievement

when they used online activities. Broadly, the greatest impact reported is the extra practice before exams. No doubt, exam results are often a great source of motivation:

*'I always use online activities for improving in tests and I think it is always good to have extra practice to keep my GPA up (grade point average).'* (S03)

*'At the moment it only really has a positive impact on extra practice and review for exams. This is especially good if you are finding some part of English difficult because you can go away and just practise that area.'* (S14)

The interview data indicates that online activities enable students to practice and develop their writing skills independently. Like teachers, the students interviewed highlighted a particularly positive perspective with regard to the Writing Tutor and their understanding of language skills:

*'The Writing Tutor helps me to see different features of the model writing, such as useful vocabulary and organisation of ideas.'* (S05)

*'I think the Writing Tutor has had a positive impact because we will have to do more academic style writing next year when we do our degrees.'* (S14)

A number of students highlighted the impact on their academic achievement of practicing listening using online activities:

*'It has definitely had a positive impact on improving listening – it has helped with my pronunciation. By using the listen and repeat at home, I feel I am improving. I find it useful to see the words and then listen to a*

*native speaker saying them so I can see the link between how the words look and how they sound.'* (S07)

A number of students interviewed also highlighted how the online activities supported grammar and vocabulary:

*'Online activities are good for vocab and grammar to prepare for the exams. Exams are important because if you don't do well, you can't study the subject you want for your degree.'* (S08)

The above findings are in agreement with previous empirical studies which indicate that online learning promotes listening skills in addition to grammar, vocabulary and writing (Al-Otaibi et al., 2012; Cobb, 2007; Djiwandono, 2013; Geta & Olango, 2016; Huang, 2016; Isti'anah, 2017; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Sagarra & Zapata, 2008; Yang et al., 2013).

Students were also asked about the impact of online activities on their readiness to move to the next level of study. Understandably, students were unsure. Students often see their own progress across one year of study while teachers see student progress across various years and groups. Comments from the students interviewed included:

*'Yes, [I] agree to some extent because of the exercises to improve basics of what you need in English – grammar and vocabulary. For me, it has not had any significant impact to move through the levels I have studied so far.'* (S11)

*'Possibly it helps really establish new language because of the extra practice it gives and you need to be sure of what you*

*have learned in one level before you move to the next level.'* (S15)

### **Barriers to using Online Activities.**

Throughout the interviews, one strongly recurring theme from the majority of teachers interviewed was time pressure on students in the PYP as a common barrier to using online activities for online practice outside classroom time:

*'The problem is that if it is not compulsory, not everyone does it. Teachers and students feel a lot of time pressure in the prep year and unless activities are compulsory, they don't tend to get done which is a pity.'* (T05)

Crucially, the majority of teachers perceived online activities as predominantly a tool for students' additional practice during their own time in order to prepare for exams and tests. A few teachers commented that they should be used more during classroom teaching to better integrate it in teaching and encourage further use outside the classroom:

*'It would have been better if teachers had the opportunity to blend the online practice with the book.'* (T05)

Likewise, students interviewed reported that they would be happy to do more online practice. While they liked – and enjoyed – this medium of studying, they did not feel they had time as the degree programme stood at present:

*'If you have time yes and if you need it I would strongly recommend it; if not save your time for other subjects. There is just too much to do in the prep year.'* (S16)

A number of students interviewed perceived examinations and their GPA as the most important area of study during the PYP. If what they are doing does not impact their GPA, their motivation drops considerably. They need a good GPA to go on to study their chosen subject next year:

*‘If the university really wants students to use online activities more, they should incorporate everything into the GPA. Students would definitely do it then.’ (S16)*

As students do a writing portfolio that is assessed, they do not see that they can really afford the time to use the Writing Tutor often. According to some students, combining the portfolio writing with the Writing Tutor may be useful.

Finally, from informal conversation prior to this study, it was expected that technical quality would be perceived as a barrier to using online activities. However, this was not the case. Teachers and students interviewed were asked, *‘How would you describe the technical quality of the online activities platform?’*. The majority of teachers reported no problems other than a slow internet speed on occasion. A number of students described online activities as *‘easy to access’* (S02) and easy to sign into. One teacher reported occasional launching issues (a time delay or shut down). One teacher commented that the screen for activities was small: *‘It would be better to see it all on one screen and not have to scroll down – especially when students are using mobiles’* (T06).

## **Classroom Observations**

### **Application of Online Activities in Class.**

Data collected from observations indicated that the majority of teachers displayed the online activities via the Smartboard or multimedia projector at the front of the class; of these, most used the Smartboard. Some teachers did not use a Smartboard or projector and instead asked students to access online activities via their own personal devices (i.e. mobiles, laptops or tablets). Most commonly, teachers used the Smartboard or projector to introduce an activity and then asked students to complete it using their personal devices. In the majority of observed classes, all students had access to a device. In a small number of classes, students needed to share devices. In a few classes, students did not use any device.

With regard to how students were organized, the majority of teachers set up paired or individual activities; with a large number using both forms of activity. Several teachers set up group activities. Use of online activities was commonly followed or preceded with whole-class feedback from the teacher and whole-class discussion. Naturally, textbooks were not used during the few observed ‘E-learning hour’ classes, i.e. classes which focused on students’ practice of the online platform and related activities.

**Familiarity with the Online Activities and Technical Issues.** During the 16 observed classes in which online activities were used, the students generally seemed familiar

with the online activities. The students also appeared focused and motivated when using them. Of these classes, only a few groups of students encountered technical issues. One group had problems watching an online video via their personal devices and instead viewed it via the multimedia projector. Another group encountered a delay with accessing the Wifi connection.

Teachers encountered a number of technical issues during the observations. This is expected since “technical problems have long created challenges with the use of technology for learning” (Song et al., 2004).

Moreover, during the 16 observed lessons in which online activities were used in class, the students generally seemed familiar with online activities and only a few groups of students encountered any technical issues. In contrast, a number of technical issues were encountered by teachers during the observations.

**Summary of Results.** In addition to the main conclusions about the perceived impact of online activities, the findings from the interviews, online survey questionnaire and classroom observations also indicate a number of key trends in teachers’ and students’ general level of satisfaction with online activities. Overall, there is a strong consensus from teachers and students that using online activities should be recommended to fellow teachers and students. The teachers and students surveyed consistently rated the email feature as the least beneficial component.

The teachers interviewed reported that the Writing Tutor was the component most used in class and during the e-learning hour. They reported that the Writing Tutor had a particularly positive impact on language skills, especially writing skills. A large majority of the surveyed students reported that they used the model assignments from the Writing Tutor before writing their own assignments. A majority of the teachers surveyed reported that the Writing Tutor helped them to provide effective feedback and saved them time in this respect.

A very high majority of teachers surveyed reported that they found the progress reports useful for checking students’ progress. Likewise, the majority of students surveyed reported that the progress reports were useful for checking their own progress. Teachers and students surveyed highlighted that online learning supported the development of vocabulary, listening and grammar skills in particular.

## CONCLUSIONS

Findings from interviews, questionnaires and classroom observations provide valuable insight into students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the impact of online learning. Both students and teachers at the PYP perceived online activities to have had a positive impact on learning.

It is important to note, however, that the present study has a number of limitations. While teachers and students identified some evidence of assessing academic achievement and readiness to move to the next level, this is limited to teachers’ and students’

perceptions. In order to make valid claims about impact on attainment specifically, a larger-scale quantitative study would be required, gathering comparative evidence, i.e. comparing data for users engaged in online activities versus non-users, or comparing data before and after engagement with online activities. Moreover, given the qualitative nature of part of the methodology and the small sample at a single institution, it is not possible to generalise from the findings. Care needs to be exercised when making claims about the impact of online learning activities based on the findings. It is not possible to claim that the use of online learning activities alone caused the perceived impact described in this study.

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