

B6 Comparisons (Unit 2.4)

1 Comparison essay

Read the essay below carefully and find:

- (a) a definition
- (b) an example
- (c) a generalisation
- (d) a phrase expressing cause and effect
- (e) a passive
- (f) a phrase expressing caution
- (g) three synonyms for 'internet-based teaching'

Title: Compare classroom learning with internet-based teaching. Is the latter likely to replace the former?

Since the late 1990s internet-based teaching (also known as e-education) has emerged as a potential rival to traditional classroom learning. It normally involves having access to a secure site on the internet where a graded series of lessons are available, and having assignments sent and returned by email. Although online courses are now offered by many institutions, it is by no means clear that they offer real advantages compared to classroom education. Little research has been done so far on their effectiveness, but this essay sets out to examine the advantages of both approaches and attempts to draw conclusions from them.

Two main advantages of internet use in education are generally put forward. Firstly, it is seen as more economical, since once a course is prepared it can be used by large numbers of students. The savings made by not having to employ so many teachers should be reflected in cheaper course fees. The second benefit is convenience; instead of having to attend classes at fixed times and places, students are free to study when they choose and progress at their own pace. Furthermore, by studying from home there is no need to travel to the college or university, saving both time and money. A student living in a small town in China, for example, can now study a course at an American college without the worry of travelling, accommodation or homesickness.

Despite the considerations mentioned above, classroom learning shows no signs of being replaced by e-learning. It seems that face-to-face contact with a teacher is still widely regarded as the best way for students to make progress, despite the expense and inconvenience involved. Not only the personal contact with a teacher, but also the support and encouragement gained from being part of a class may be one reason for this. Membership of a group may also create a useful spirit of competition, which stimulates learning.

Given the increasing pressure on university places in many countries, internet-based teaching is often seen as a convenient development. However, e-learning eliminates personal contact and travel from education, which are possibly the aspects many students value. Sitting at home working on a computer may be economical, but clearly cannot replace the social experience of attending courses. However, there are many people who are unable, either through work or family commitments, or due to lack of funds, to go to classes, and who would clearly find internet learning beneficial. Online courses can also be used to support taught courses, for instance by providing access to extra materials. In many ways these kinds of courses are similar to 'universities of the air', such as Britain's Open University, which have successfully developed distance learning in the last 40 years.

Faced by growing demand for university places, more institutions are likely to develop online courses, but the apparent benefits of e-learning may be less than are generally believed. Students seem to value the personal contact of the classroom highly, despite its cost and inconvenience. There may be a role for internet-based courses to supplement teacher-taught ones, and certainly for people with other commitments they will be the only practical option. There is an urgent need for research on the effectiveness of this type of learning, which should help maximise its advantages in the future.

(Approximately 550 words)

2 Essay Structure

Suggest a suitable heading for each paragraph of the essay.

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