



Title	Examining Ways to Improve Virtual Learning
Author(s)	Hirata, Tomoko
Citation	With Corona or Post Corona : The Opportunities and The Challenges for Virtual Learning and International Exchange. 2021, p. 31-33
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/84838
rights	
Note	

The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

Examining Ways to Improve Virtual Learning

Tomoko Hirata

BA 4th year, Philosophy, Thought, and Culture,
School of Letters, Osaka University

Introduction

Hello. my name is Tomoko Hirata, and I am a student at Osaka University. I study German philosophy and am enrolled in the 4th year of my undergraduate education. Today, I will discuss some elements that are important for the improvement of virtual learning. We faced an extremely difficult situation last year. We were forced to remain at home and could not enjoy normal lives. University students particularly confronted major changes when lectures became virtual instead of face-to-face. I experienced this transformation during my study in Germany as an exchange student. I thus discovered the merits and demerits of virtual learning.

Discussing the Features of Better Virtual Learning

I would like to discuss the features of better virtual learning with you from the following point of view. It is my recommendation that two aspects must be addressed.

First, a virtual space should be created for students to communicate with their classmates. In my opinion, loneliness denotes the principal difficulty for students who undertake virtual education.

Students can communicate among themselves before and after lectures delivered using the face-to-face format and can often understand the lecture more intensively through their conversations with peers. Students who are unable to grasp the content of a lecture can also ask their peers for help. This kind of interaction becomes problematic in virtual learning.

I have also experienced the loneliness of virtual learning. I took courses in German when I was in Germany. Sometimes, I could not fully apprehend the content of lectures delivered in German. I felt a little panicky when I did not understand what the teacher had said at the first instance because I could not interrupt the lecture and ask her. I felt the loneliness more strongly in such instances. I felt as if I was learning German from not a human teacher but from my computer.

I therefore suggest the construction of a virtual space where students can communicate freely with each other. For example, we can make a board on the university website or create a group on a messaging application. If such a platform is created, students can easily ask each other about the virtually-delivered lecture. I think it is also a good idea for each student to report the events of their day. Such interactions are important for students to stop feeling alone during the course of virtual learning.

A place where students can communicate with each other also requires members to create the added element of a personal icon such as a selfie or avatar for the board or chat group. Students often turn their web cameras off during virtual learning sessions. Such acts cannot be avoided, in my opinion. I also do not want my room to be seen. But when every camera is turned off, I can know only the names of my fellow students. In virtual learning, we are often granted opportunities of talking with other students. I was also accorded such opportunities during my virtual German class, but I felt that I was talking to the name on the application display than to my classmate.

Therefore, each student should have a personalized icon. Students can feel like they are acquainted and familiarize themselves with each other through their icons. At least, they would not feel like they were talking to the display. The most important requirement for the realization of such conversations through icons is the creation of a safe virtual space for students to communicate. Second, we must try to remain healthy, both physically and mentally. At this juncture, I must relate another personal experience in Germany. The University of Goettingen was still shut down in April, and all lectures were delivered in virtual mode. I thought at the beginning that I would perform well through virtual learning because I had already taken virtual lectures in Goettingen during the spring vacation and had passed the exam.

However, the virtual lectures that began in April were extremely difficult for me. First, I was very depressed, primarily because I was confined to my room almost through out the day. I went out only when I needed to buy food from the supermarket. Besides, I was not used to life in Germany at that time, and the strangeness also made me feel heavy-hearted.

Second, I often could not follow the lectures. It was difficult enough for me to understand lectures delivered in German. In a face-to-face lecture, teachers can notice when students cannot comprehend understand the lecture by the expressions on their students' faces. This becomes problematic in virtual lectures. You may believe that I should have interrupted the lecture to ask the teacher to clarify what I did not grasp. However, I was not brave enough and my German skills were not honed enough to articulate my queries. Thus, I became demotivated and depressed.

I did not know how to take care of myself psychologically. Thankfully, my flatmate helped me.

He invited me to visit the lake. Goettingen has some lakes where many people go during their holidays and relax. I did not really want to go when he asked me to go there with him because I did not think that going to the lake would be very pleasurable. However, I could not refuse him, so I accompanied him to the lake. There is a large field filled with flowers around the lake. People were walking or sitting in this field, so I also sat down there and talked with my flatmate.

I talked to him about the difficulty of learning in a foreign language and my feelings of depression. He listened to me and encouraged me to express myself by talking about his own experiences. I gradually became calm as I sat in the field and talked to him. I was able to settle down and rediscover my motivation. I then understood the importance of mental health. Therefore, I suggest that we should all try to stay healthy, both physically and mentally. In addition, I can recommend two effective ways of remaining mentally healthy from my own experience. First, we must allay our negative feelings by talking to someone or writing down our unconstructive emotions and ideas. Second, we should try to immerse ourselves in nature, which soothes and refreshes us.

We can now revisit my two suggestions for better virtual learning. First, I recommend the construction of a virtual space where students can communicate with each other. Second, I advise trying to remain healthy, both physically and mentally. You may think that my suggestion is not very novel, but I believe such fundamental elements take on the greatest significance even during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The situation we are now undergoing is unusual, but we do not have to perform only unusual acts to combat it. I think virtual learning presents much potential. It may be normal in the future for students to join exchange programs via virtual learning. I hope that virtual learning continues to advance and to offer us an abundance of advantages.

