

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Consecutive Interpreter Training from Students' Perspectives¹

Hossein Bahri²

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed new demands on the global educational system and many classes are currently being held online. Based on Kelly's (2005) evaluation framework, the present study is an attempt to explore the advantages and disadvantages of online interpreter training from students' point of view. To do so, 24 students who had successfully passed an online consecutive interpreting course completed a questionnaire, which was developed by the researcher. The responses to the questionnaire items were analyzed and codes and themes were extracted. The results indicated that two thirds of the students were dissatisfied with online implementation of the course mainly due to technical and psychological problems they had experienced. However, a third of students were satisfied with online interpreter training via Adobe Connect, citing several educational, personal, and psychological benefits they gained from the course. Based on the congruity between the identified themes and the main tenets of constructivism, it was found that the online course was more compatible with cognitive rather than social constructivist principles. Finally, the pedagogical implications of the findings were discussed.

Keywords: Adobe Connect, consecutive interpreting, constructivism, course evaluation, online training

1. Introduction

Currently, many classes are being held online because of the risks posed to the participants by the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation presents new avenues

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2. Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran; email: hbahri@khu.ac.ir

and challenges to both the teachers and the students. For interpreter trainers, these changes have increased the need to develop new strategies and to adapt the presentation and organization of interpreting classes. Nowadays students have also more access to online resources and material, which can help them develop their interpreting skills and competences. Online training, however, has its own strengths and weaknesses. The present paper is an attempt to explore the advantages and disadvantages of online interpreter training from students' perspectives.

2. Literature Review

As human agents in the process of learning, trainee translators and interpreters have attracted the attention of researchers (González Davies, 2004; Gouadec, 2007; Kelly, 2005; Kiraly, 2000; PACTE, 2005). The following section is a brief review of the developments in this area of research.

Traditional translation and interpreting education were previously characterized by a focus on the product rather than the process as teachers transferred knowledge to passive learners (Colina, 2003). Many scholars have criticized such an approach for many years (Kiraly, 2000; Klimkowski, 2015; Pym, 2011; Stewart, 2008). As Kiraly (2000) believed that training is a collaborative knowledge-building and transformative process, he proposed the social constructivist approach to translation education, and it was implemented in the training of translators. Kiraly (2000) stated that the goal of this type of training is personal growth. Of course, such growth can be hindered by technological stress, especially when trainees are encountered with new digital tools and the online digital platforms in which they are used (Pietrzak & Kornacki, 2020).

Moreover, an online environment adds new dimensions to the concept of collaboration, especially in an interpreter training course. Fortunately, recent changes and new market demands have already contributed to the integration of online collaborative technologies into the translation classroom (Jiménez-Crespo,

2017). Another study by the PACTE group suggested that when the tools provided by the university cannot be deployed in the online classroom, the trainer should investigate the technical abilities and potentials of the trainees and provide tasks and activities to inspire and develop the required skills (see PACTE, 2005).

Pym (2000) stated some of the problems he faced in online classes, including the investment of resources, student distress, heterogeneous learners, and low motivation that can hinder online learning. In another study of interpreting students, Ibrahim-González (2011) mentioned the instability and limited Internet connectivity, access to the computer and some technical problems as disadvantages of online learning in her interpreting classes.

The implementation of online classes and e-learning is often not merely an educational choice but rather relies on institutional policies and the availability of required tools and technologies in the institution because of various economic and cultural settings (Ko, 2008).

Regardless of the requirements for the COVID-19 pandemic, given that modern translation and interpreting highly rely on technology (PACTE 2005, Doherty 2016, do Carmo et al. 2020), it is reasonable for the interpreting trainers to include an online environment in their classes (Class & Moser-Mercer 2013; Sandrelli & de Manuel Jerez 2007).

Based on the above literature, one important issue is the scarcity of research on the advantages and disadvantages of new apps and mediums of online training in an interpreting environment. Hence, the present research is an attempt to explore the strengths and weaknesses of an online consecutive interpreting course via Adobe Connect from students' point of view. Hence, the following research questions were raised:

1. *What are the advantages of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from students' perspectives?*

2. *What are the disadvantages of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from students' perspectives?*
3. *To what extent is online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect congruent with the basic tenets of cognitive or social constructivism?*

3. Methodology

The current study is a participant-oriented course evaluation research (Kelly, 2005; Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014) which used an open-ended questionnaire developed by the researcher. The theoretical framework of the study, course description, participants, instrument, and the procedure are explained respectively in the following sections.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Researching the delivery and implementation of a course/program falls within the realm of Illuminative evaluation (Hamilton, 2005; Richards, 2001). Hence, the researcher adopted Kelly's (2005) evaluation framework as the theoretical foundation to carry out the present investigation. The steps taken for conducting the study are stated in the procedure section below.

Constructivism was another framework adopted in the analysis phase of the current study. Based on Hartman (2012) and Powell & Kalina (2009), there are two major types of constructivism called cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. Table 1 summarizes the main differences between cognitive and social constructivism in the classroom. These characteristics were used as the criteria for evaluation of the consecutive interpreting course.

Table 1. *The main differences between cognitive and social constructivism in classroom (adapted from Hartman, 2012 and Powell & Kalina, 2009)*

No.	Cognitive Constructivism	Social Constructivism
1	students' individual experiences	students' social interactions
2	intrinsic motivation	extrinsic motivation
3	individual discovery learning	socialization into professional community

4	individual practice	meaningful collaboration with peers
5	doing authentic tasks	realistic and genuine translation projects

3.2. Course Description

Interpreting (II) is an obligatory two-credit undergraduate course offered in 16 sessions (24 hours). It consists of two parts. The first part deals with theoretical aspects of consecutive interpreting, such as an introduction to the terms and concepts, familiarity with working conditions, etc. and in the second part, students practice listening, notetaking, memory retention skills, attention-sharing exercises, prediction, closure, sight translation and consecutive interpreting with/without notes. The textbook used for the course was *Handbook of Interpreter Training* (Bahri & Gholami, 2012).

The course was conducted online because of the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The students had access to the Internet, which was available through their home Wi-Fi or mobile data connections and the students used their laptops, PCs, or smart phones to connect to the Internet. The online course was conducted on the Learning Management System (LMS) using Adobe Connect (with no video feed available for technical reasons) and the instructor remotely used the system for educational, monitoring, and assessment purposes. Moreover, a side group on WhatsApp was created by the teacher to send instant messages to students and as a backup in case the students could not access the LMS temporarily.

In the introductory sessions the trainer and the trainees had a brief discussion of the theoretical aspects of consecutive interpreting, which lasted about 15 minutes. This was followed by another 15-minute listening practice (audio file). Then, interpreting skills were practiced for 30 minutes. Finally, an unseen text file of an authentic speech was read by the teacher and the paragraphs were consecutively interpreted by individual students. This activity lasted about 30 minutes. In the

intermediate and final sessions, the initial 30-minute phase of class was also allocated to interpreting practice.

3.3. Participants

The total number of students in the course 'Interpreting II' was 30, and most of them were juniors from Islamic Azad University, Qazvin Branch, of whom 28 students participated in the study. However, the total number of participants who successfully completed and emailed the questionnaire, was 24 giving a return rate of 85.71 percent.

3.4. Instrument

The instrument used was a two-part questionnaire called the Students' Perspectives Questionnaire (see the Appendix) developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was developed based on the instructions in Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) and its content validity was checked by an informed colleague. Part A dealt with the demographic information. In part B the participants were asked to answer three items, which consisted of two clued open-ended questions concerning their experiences of attending the online consecutive interpreter training course (Interpreting II) via Adobe Connect and a third "yes/no" question about whether they were, overall, satisfied with the online mode or not.

3.5. Procedure

The following steps were taken to conduct the present research:

1. Designing the questionnaire along with the required instructions for the participants.
2. Sending the WORD file of the questionnaire to the WhatsApp group of the course to obtain students' written consent as well as their responses via their emails.
3. Analyzing demographic data along with the texts of participants' responses to the questionnaire open-ended items to extract codes and themes.

4. Identifying the distributions of the extracted codes and themes in the textual analysis phase of the study.
5. Determining the frequency of recurrence of the extracted codes and themes.
6. Classifying the most relevant codes and themes based on their frequency of recurrence under the emerging factors.
7. Verifying the advantages and disadvantages of the course according to the emerged factors and their implications for the study.
8. Double-checking the results including the congruity between the identified themes and the basic tenets of cognitive/social constructivism.

4. Results and Discussion

In this phase of the study the researcher first analyzed demographic data and then used an iterative, cyclical, and inductive (data driven) procedure to analyze the participants' responses to items 1 and 2 of the questionnaire to extract codes and themes. To do so, following the approach adopted by Duff (2008) and Yin (2009), the researcher repeatedly went through the texts of the responses to identify salient points such as sentences or phrases and then summarized them as "codes" for words/short phrases and "themes" for longer phrases/sentences. Finally, the research questions were investigated.

4.1. Demographic Data

Factual data about the participants such as name, age, gender, and number of semester were analyzed. It was found that the mean age of participants was 21.5. There were 5 male (21%) and 19 female (79%) students. Almost all students were juniors (semester 6 of their studies) except two seniors who were semester 7. This indicated that they had passed all the basic and general courses and hence qualified for the consecutive interpreting course.

4.2. Code and Theme Extraction

During the process of extraction, the more prominent codes/themes took the central position, while the less salient ones took the peripheral positions, and a

hierarchy of themes based on their recurrence was created. As the coding process is usually subjective on the part of the coder, the researcher first asked a trained colleague to code 20% of the data (texts belonging to the responses of 5 randomly selected participants), and then conducted inter-coder reliability checks (Mackey & Gass, 2016) using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26), the result of which is depicted in Table 2. The table illustrates a high inter-coder reliability, suggesting consistency between the two coders.

Table 2. *Inter-coder reliability index*

Coders	Sample%	N _{codes}	Sig. (2-tailed)	Correlation Coefficient	Inter-Coder Reliability Index
2	20	48	.000	.714**	.833

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3. Investigating Research Questions

To answer the first research question, the researcher investigated patterns or associations among the extracted themes to classify them under the emerging factors. Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of extracted codes/themes for the advantages of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from students' perspectives.

Table 3. *Frequencies and percentages of extracted codes/themes for the advantages of online interpreter training*

Factors	Codes/Themes	Frequency	Percentage
	improvement in taking notes and memory skills	10	6.84
	more effective/in-depth learning	9	6.16
	greater focus on learning topics/lessons	8	5.47
	more students' participation in online classes	7	4.79
	focused more on asking/answering questions	4	2.73
	similarity to real environments for the student	4	2.73
	more active student participation	3	2.05
	everyone in the class was treated fully and equally	3	2.05
Educational	interpreting sentences with more focus/speed	3	2.05
	increased listening ability and accuracy	2	1.36
	better continuous assessment in each session	2	1.36

	individual learning	2	1.36
	transfer of virtual learning experience in online platform	2	1.36
	more student practice	2	1.36
	doing homework and presentations better	1	0.68
	the teacher could better respond to the students	1	0.68
	practicing distant interpreting	1	0.68
Financial	saves money/less cost	6	4.11
	very ideal and unique for working students	2	1.36
	can pay for college expenses	1	0.68
	can support student's family	1	0.68
Personal	participation of students with health problems	2	1.36
	access to home water or food	2	1.36
	no need to commute	2	1.36
Psychological	less stress	10	6.84
	more confidence	6	4.11
	more peace and comfort and private space	5	3.42
	proximity to one's home/family	3	2.05
	(healthy) competitive environment among students	2	1.36
	more motivation to progress	2	1.36
	relied only on oneself/greater autonomy	2	1.36
Technological	ease of access/it is not limited to the place and time	11	7.53
	listen to the recorded class and review it later	6	4.11
	accessing dictionaries, applications, and interpreting aids	5	3.42
	using different files to share the content	1	0.68
	making the most of your time/time management	9	6.16
Temporal	less time for transporting and preparing for classes	4	2.73
	Total	37	146
			100

The above table indicates that according to the participants, "ease of access regardless of time and place" is the biggest advantage of online interpreter training followed by "improvement in taking notes and memory skills" and having "less stress". The students also referred to "more effective/in-depth learning" and "time management" as other important benefits of online interpreter training.

Based on the findings, the advantages of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from students' perspectives were categorized into "educational", "financial", "personal", "psychological", "technological", and

“temporal” factors. Figure 1 illustrates the percentages of the above-mentioned factors. Educational factors (44%) constitute the major advantage of online interpreter training followed by psychological (20%), and technological factors (16%) respectively. Together, these primary factors account for 80% of the advantages of online interpreter training.

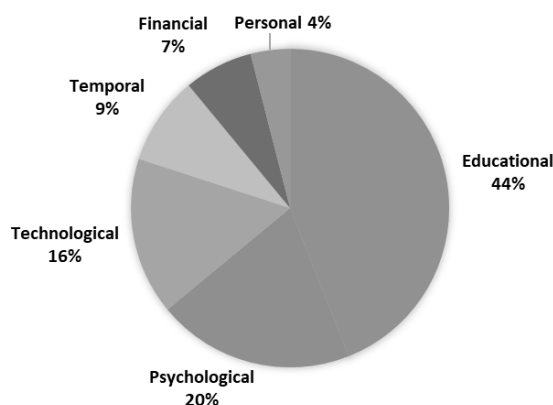


Figure 1. Percentages of factors emerged from advantages of online interpreter training

The second research question deals with the disadvantages of online interpreter training. Table 4 demonstrates the frequencies and percentages of extracted codes/themes for the disadvantages of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from students’ perspectives.

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of extracted codes/themes for the disadvantages of online interpreter training

Factors	Codes/Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Educational	less learning in online environments	8	5.79
	less student participation/group activity in online classes	5	3.62
	some students’ unfamiliarity with the online education	2	1.44
	less student practice to pass each unit in online classes	2	1.44
	the artificiality of online interpreting	2	1.44

	students may cheat in online exams	1	0.72
	dependency on Google Translate diminishes learning	1	0.72
	failing to do in-class activities and losing scores	1	0.72
Financial	increasing costs of Internet packages and equipment	4	2.89
Personal	some students are engaged in other activities in class	1	0.72
	less emotional contact between students and professor	11	7.97
Psychological	stress resulting from communication problems	6	4.34
	losing focus of attention because of stress	5	3.62
	online classes were very boring	2	1.44
	home environment has no classroom discipline	2	1.44
	loss of confidence due to less online interaction	1	0.72
	frequent disconnection/low quality of the Internet	21	15.21
	student/teacher failed to hear what the other was saying	14	10.14
	problems with the main LMS system of the university	6	4.34
	class time is lost adjusting the sound, noise, and delays	6	4.34
	lack of proper infrastructure	5	3.62
	power outages and the need to charge laptops/phones	5	3.62
Technical	sometimes impossible to be a regular participant in class	3	2.17
	problems with student's microphone and portal entering	3	2.17
	losing focus with the notification of a message	3	2.17
	difficulty of online assessment due to interruptions	3	2.17
	students were thrown/kicked out by Adobe Connect	3	2.17
	the only means of communication is audio & text	3	2.17

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students have difficulty asking questions	2	1.44
no face-to-face interaction and eye contact via the app	2	1.44
sudden problems/hanging of a laptop or phone	2	1.44
Adobe Connect is more compatible with laptops	1	0.72
problems with hearing files played on teacher's laptop	1	0.72
difficulty of simultaneous discussion among students	1	0.72
Total	34	138

Table 4 indicates that while the students reported some minor problems, which could be linked to their low technological competence, the pressing problem seemed to be more technical than technological. For example, “frequent disconnection and low speed of the Internet” could prevent the “student/teacher from hearing what the other was saying”, and this, in turn, would lead to a “less emotional contact between students and the professor”, which is a psychological problem. Another outcome of the above situation could be “less learning in online environments” and “less student participation/group activity in online classes” as these were among the most recurrent themes mentioned by the participants. Figure 2 depicts the percentages of the emerged factors according to the relevance of codes and themes. Technical factors (61%) constituted the major disadvantages of online interpreter training followed by psychological (19%), and educational factors (16%), respectively. In sum, these key factors accounted for 96% of the disadvantages of online interpreter training.

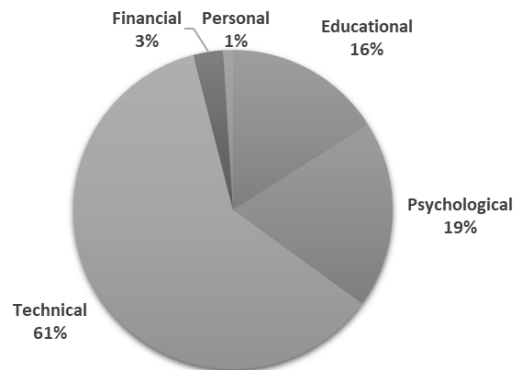


Figure 2. Percentages of factors emerged from disadvantages of online interpreter training

Figure 2 shows that most problems in online interpreter training have a technical or psychological nature. The above example also indicates how technical problems could be the source of most psychological and educational problems. Other types of problems are so trivial that they can be ignored.

The result of the responses to item 3 of the questionnaire revealed that 16 participants were dissatisfied with the online course “interpreting II”. An analysis of their responses to other items confirmed that the dissatisfaction could be due to numerous technical problems they encountered during the online course. However, a third of students were satisfied with online interpreter training via Adobe Connect because of several educational and psychological benefits they gained from the course. An analysis of the personal factor revealed that working students and mothers having babies were among those satisfied with online interpreter training.

To investigate the third research question, the researcher compared the extracted themes belonging to educational and psychological factors in both the advantages and disadvantages of online consecutive interpreting (Tables 3 and 4) which were compatible with the characteristics of either cognitive or social constructivist approaches depicted in Table 1.

The results (see Table 5) indicated that from students’ perspectives, the online interpreting course included more themes of cognitive constructivism than social

constructivism, and this could likely be a reason why more students were dissatisfied with the course.

Table 5. *Frequency and percentage of cognitive vs. social constructivist themes*

Theme	Cognitive Constructivism	Social Constructivism
1	individual learning	more students' participation
2	more student practice	similarity to real environments
3	relied only on oneself/greater autonomy	more active student participation
4	less student participation/group activity	more motivation to progress
5	artificiality of online interpreting	-----
6	less emotional contact	-----
7	less online interaction	-----
F_t	25	16
P_t	17.83%	10.93%

Note. F_t = Total Frequency; P_t = Total Percentage.

5. Conclusion

The fact that most advantages of online interpreter training were educational (44%) and most of its disadvantages were technical (61%) indicated that while most participants were dissatisfied with the online course, there is a chance that through elimination of technical problems, more and more participants might become satisfied with the online course.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic various new tools and applications have been developed to promote online learning. However, not all these tools are suitable for interpreter training. For example, in the studied case, the students mentioned that Adobe Connect, when used through cellphones by students with low Internet connections and without access to the video can be frustrating, especially for interpreter training. Future researchers can study teaching interpreting via Adobe Connect with access to video feed or investigate other similar applications.

The present study evaluated a single course, which should not be generalized to other courses. However, other online interpreting courses with similar contexts can benefit from the study findings to help students develop individual learning methods such as discovery learning, and social interactive activities to promote peer collaboration and learning. The findings revealed that both cognitive and social constructivist approaches are indeed complementary and should be adopted in online interpreting classes, probably with more emphasis on collaborative aspects.

As the findings of the present study confirmed, online interpreter training has distinct advantages such as a stress-free environment at home, time savings, more concentration, ease of access, and improvements in notetaking. However, it also has major drawbacks. For example, when the participants don't have access to and familiarity with the tools, it can be time-consuming, stressful, and even tedious. To prevent such problems the trainers should rationalize the resources, make their courses collaborative, promote teamwork, create a community of online learners, and vary their pace of instruction to meet heterogeneous learners' needs and abilities.

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Appendix

Students' Perspectives Questionnaire

Welcome and many thanks for your willingness to participate in this study. I am collecting data for my current research on the advantages and disadvantages of online interpreter training from students' perspectives. The aim of my research is to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the online course "Interpreting II". Therefore, in this questionnaire you will be asked about your learning experiences, specifically the benefits you gained or the problems you encountered in this course. For each question I have provided a clue to clarify the question and stimulate more explanations.

Please take note that all information collected from you will be kept strictly confidential. I will not use your name in this manuscript or any manuscripts or presentations resulting from this research. All personal data will be stored in safeguarded conditions and will be immediately destroyed after analyses. Kindly send your responses to this questionnaire to@gmail.com.

I highly appreciate it if you answer the questions 1 & 2 in Part B in as much detail as you can. Wherever possible please provide examples, events or behaviors. Thank you.

***Consent: By ticking the box, I give my full consent for participating in this research.

Part A: Demographic Information

First Name: Family Name: Age:

Gender: Male Female

No. of Semester:

Part B: Questions

1. What are the main **advantages** of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from your point of view?

(Clue: Are there any educational/financial/personal/psychological/technological benefits?)

2. What are the main **disadvantages** of online consecutive interpreter training via Adobe Connect from your point of view?

(Clue: Are there any educational/financial/personal/psychological/technical problems?)

3. Overall, were you **satisfied** or **dissatisfied** with the online mode of delivery of the course "Interpreting II"?

(Choose only one!) Yes, I was **satisfied**

No, I was **dissatisfied**

I am very grateful for your participation in this study. Your input is highly valued.

مزایا و معایب تربیت برخط مترجم شفاهی پیاپی از دیدگاه دانشجویان^۱

حسین بحری^۲

چکیده

همه‌گیری کووید ۱۹ مطالبات جدیدی را بر نظام آموزشی جهانی تحمیل کرده است و بسیاری از کلاس‌ها در حال حاضر به صورت برخط برگزار می‌شوند. براساس چارچوب ارزشیابی کلی (۲۰۰۵)، پژوهش حاضر تلاشی برای بررسی مزایا و معایب تربیت برخط مترجم شفاهی از دیدگاه دانشجویان است. برای انجام این کار، ۲۴ دانشجو که درس برخط ترجمه شفاهی پیاپی را با موفقیت پشت سر گذاشته بودند، پرسشنامه‌ای را تکمیل کردند که پژوهشگر طراحی کرده بود. پاسخ‌های آنها به سؤالات پرسشنامه مورد تجزیه و تحلیل قرار گرفت و عبارات و مضامینی از آن استخراج شد. نتایج نشان داد که دو سوم دانشجویان از اجرای برخط دوره عمدتاً به دلیل مشکلات فنی و روانشناختی که دچار شده بودند، ناراضی بودند. با این حال، یک سوم دانشجویان از تربیت برخط مترجم شفاهی از طریق ادوپی کانکت با استناد به چندین مزیت آموزشی، شخصی و روانشناختی که از این دوره کسب کردند، رضایت داشتند. بر اساس تطابق بین مضامین شناسایی شده و مبانی ساخت گرای، مشخص شد که این دوره برخط با مبانی ساخت‌گرایی شناختی بیش از مبانی ساخت‌گرایی اجتماعی سازگار است. در نهایت، کاربردهای آموزشی یافته‌ها مورد بحث قرار گرفت.

واژه‌های راهنما: تربیت برخط، ترجمه شفاهی پیاپی، ارزشیابی درسی، ساخت‌گرایی، ادوپی کانکت

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۲. استادیار، گروه زبان‌های خارجی، دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه خوارزمی، تهران، ایران؛ پست الکترونیک: hbahri@khu.ac.ir