Online versus face-to-face: Motivating and demotivating factors in an EAP writing course

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Although motivating and demotivating factors have been established for second language learners in face-to-face classes, it is not clear how these factors relate to students in online learning contexts. By analyzing open-ended questionnaire responses, we examined similarities and differences between students' self-reported motivational factors in online and face-to-face versions of the same undergraduate EAP writing course. We discovered four major differences: social/interaction, convenience and flexibility, the new/fun/interesting/ easy expectation, and the frustration factor.

Introduction

Online learning at the university level has been growing in popularity in the past two decades with many educational institutions emphasizing the convenience, flexibility and interactive nature of online courses. As the prevalence and effectiveness of these online programs has increased, the intersection of online learning, English for academic purposes (EAP) programs, and motivation has been studied from a number of perspectives. These studies have revealed much about the ways in which these areas of interest interconnect.

Online learning has many benefits for language students. Past research has demonstrated that online ESL writing courses can increase student participation (Casanave, 2003; Koyama & Oh, 2006; Warschauer, 1996a), increase student autonomy (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), increase the quantity of writing produced for a given task (Braine, 2002), and improve writing quality (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1996a). Studies have also shown that online **235**

learning can provide a less stressful environment for **ESL** writing students (Casanave, 2003; Koyama & Oh, 2006). There is also evidence that technology-based language instruction can be as effective as traditional classroom instruction. In a meta-analysis of research on technology and language education, Zhao (2005) found "an overwhelmingly positive effect of technological applications on language learning" for second language learners (p. 30).

It seems that web-based language learning is also a motivating influence for **ESL** learners. Son (2007) found that **ESL** students respond positively to the Internet's potential for interactive feedback, independence, and access to resources. Others have found that Internet-based **EAP** courses tend to promote intrinsic motivation and foster autonomy in **EAP** students (Cervera, Ramos, & Macià, 2005; Warschauer, 1996a). Daoud (1998) looked at using the Internet as a tool for long distance cross-cultural communication to teach **ESL** academic writing and foster student motivation.

While it seems that online learning has the potential to increase **ESL** students' motivation and to help students overcome common obstacles seen in face-to-face classes (Casanave, 2004; Lam, 2004; Warschauer, 1996b), it is also important to critically examine the relationship between technology and motivation in language teaching. Chapelle (2001) warns against jumping to hasty conclusions about technology's effectiveness as a teaching medium. Some studies show that the quality of communication online and student motivation are influenced by a variety of factors involving individual abilities such as language proficiency (Belz, 2002; Lee, 2004; Warschauer, 2000). Others caution that online course designers and teachers need to carefully consider the motivational needs of their students (Artino, 2008; Savenye, Olina, & Niemczyk, 2001). Still others recommend concrete methods to increase the motivation of online learners (Beffa-Negrini, Cohen, & Miller, 2002; Keller, 2008).

Researchers have established motivating and demotivating factors for second language (**L2**) learners in face-to-face classes. Williams and Burden (1997) posited twelve motivating factors for educators ranging from professional development (e.g. "Recognize the complexity of motivation," and "Develop internal beliefs") to the practical, (e.g. "Discuss with learners why they are carrying out activities," and "Give feedback that is informational") to the inspirational, (e.g. "Build up individuals' beliefs about themselves," and "Enhance intrinsic motivation") (pp. 141–142). Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) asked two hundred English teachers from various language teaching institutions in Hungary to rank 51 motivational teaching strategies and compiled a list of ten motivational macrostrategies including the following: "Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom," "Present the tasks properly," "Develop a good relationship with the learners," "Make the language classes interesting," and "Promote learner autonomy" (p. 215–217).

The question then arises as to whether these motivating factors hold true for distance or web-based learning classes as well, or are distance learners motivated in different ways? To our knowledge, no previous study has directly compared **ESL** students' motivational factors in online environments with those in face-to-face environments. This paper will analyze motivating factors in an online and a face-to-face **EAP** writing course.

Research questions

By analyzing questionnaire responses, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there similarities between students' motivation in an online and a face-to-face version of the same undergraduate **EAP** writing course? If so, what are they?
2. Are there differences between students' motivation in an online and a face-to-face version of the same undergraduate **EAP** writing course? If so, what are they?

Method

Participants

Expository Writing is a three-credit, graded course offered through a university level **EAP** program that serves matriculated **ESL** students in a large state university in the United States. This course is required for undergraduate international students with **TOEFL** scores between 500 (173 on the computer-based **TOEFL**) and 600 (250 on the computer-based **TOEFL**) who do not take the equivalent English class designed for native speakers of English. The course's major writing assignments are informed by the types of writing that undergraduates typically encounter at universities in the United States: narrative essays, argumentative essays, response papers, and longer research papers. The main course elements (i.e. activities, modules, lectures, readings, homework, freewriting exercises, peer review sessions, and group presentations) are designed to support the writing assignments listed above.

The course is offered in two versions: face-to-face and online. Students can register for either version of the course at the beginning of the semester. These two versions are equivalent in terms of course goals and objectives and can be considered analogous. They are both one semester long (16 weeks), and use identical textbooks, comparable assignments and materials. Due to the difference in these two modes, most class activities differ in practice but are similar in design and purpose. For example, in both sections, students complete a weekly "freewrite" where they are asked to exploratively write about a relevant topic for 10 to 15 minutes. The face-to-face class completes this task while sitting at a desk in class, handwriting in notebooks and immediately sharing their writing directly with a peer, while the online class does so by typing independently and posting results in a class forum for peer comment later in the week.

All students registered for the course during the fall semester of 2008 were asked to participate in the study. This consisted of two face-to-face sections (N = 37) and one online section (N = 12). Participants were 18 male and 31 female first-year undergraduate students, 18 to 21 years of age, from Korea, Japan, China, Thailand, Polynesia, and Europe.

Instruments

Using Kleinginna and Kleinginna's (1981) definition of motivation as an internal state or condition that activates, guides, and maintains or directs behavior, an anonymous three-question survey was designed to elicit motivating and demotivating factors from students regarding their experience in the course (see Appendix).

The survey asked students to name three elements of the course that they liked and three that they disliked and explain the reasons behind their answers. We reasoned that elements of the course that students liked could be considered motivating factors, while those that they disliked could be considered demotivating factors. Then, in hopes of ascertaining information about the nature of their motivation, students were asked to state three specific **237**

reasons why they were taking the course. It was expected that by asking participants for multiple answers to this question, they would be able to provide explanations that extended beyond surface reasons such as "to improve my writing skill."

Procedures

In the two face-to-face classes, participants were asked to anonymously complete the surveys by hand in class. In these classes, the survey replaced a 15-minute freewriting activity in Week 6 of the 16-week course. For the online class, the survey was administered in Week 7 via a weekly assignment using an Internet-based online survey tool. All participants were asked to spend about 15 minutes answering the survey. In total, 43 surveys were collected, 11 from the 12 online students and 32 from the 37 face-to-face students.

Method: Analysis

After collection of the data, stable and exclusive categories were developed in an emic manner by repeatedly reviewing participants' responses to the three questions and allowing themes to organically emerge. Raw frequencies of answer types were then calculated for each question and for each mode of learning (face-to-face and online). Responses were then rank ordered, and raw frequencies and rank-order lists were analyzed for similarities and differences. As a rule of thumb, we considered a difference over 10% to be worth noting, but we were also alert to similarities and differences in the rank order of categories that were mentioned by both groups. Not all participants answered every question, which resulted in varying numbers of responses totaling 100 percent.

Results and discussion

The results related to Question 1 can be seen in Table 1. There were 31 comments in the online section and 81 in the face-to-face section. Raw numbers and percentages are displayed in rank order according to frequency of responses for the face-to-face class.

Table 1: Students' responses to survey question 1; Elements that students like and why

	Count (%) face-to-face	Count (%) online
Useful/educational	41 (51%)	12 (38%)
Social/interaction	23 (28%)	3 (10%)
New/fun/interesting	7 (9%)	1 (3%)
Environment	6 (7%)	–
No exam	4 (5%)	–
Schedule (time)	–	7 (23%)
Convenient (place)	–	5 (16%)
Easy access (info, website)	–	3 (10%)
Total number of responses	81 (100%)	31 (100%)

Figures 1 and 2 show responses to survey Question 1 regarding elements that students liked, and the reasons why.
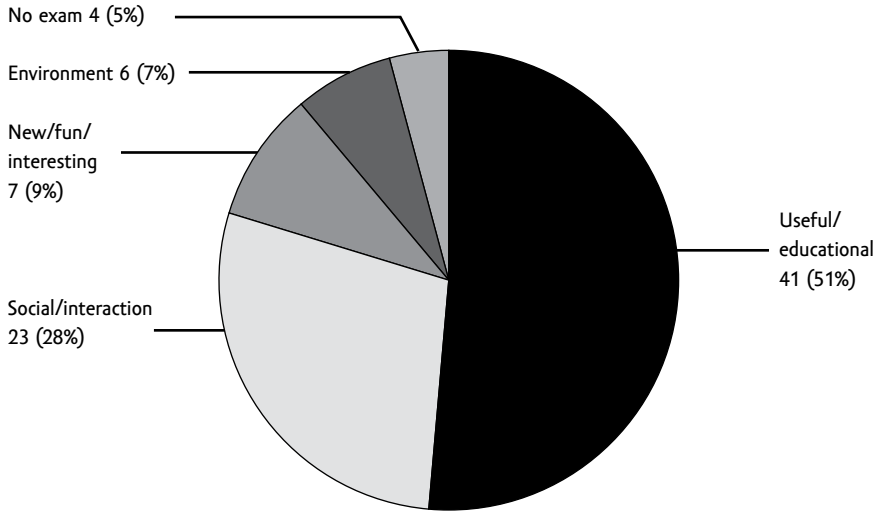
No exam 4 (5%)

Environment 6 (7%)

New/fun/
interesting
7 (9%)

Social/interaction
23 (28%)

Useful/
educational
41 (51%)

Figure 1. F2F likes (out of 81 responses)

Easy access (info, website)
3 (10%)

Convenient (place)
5 (17%)

Useful/
educational
12 (38%)

Schedule (time)
7 (23%)

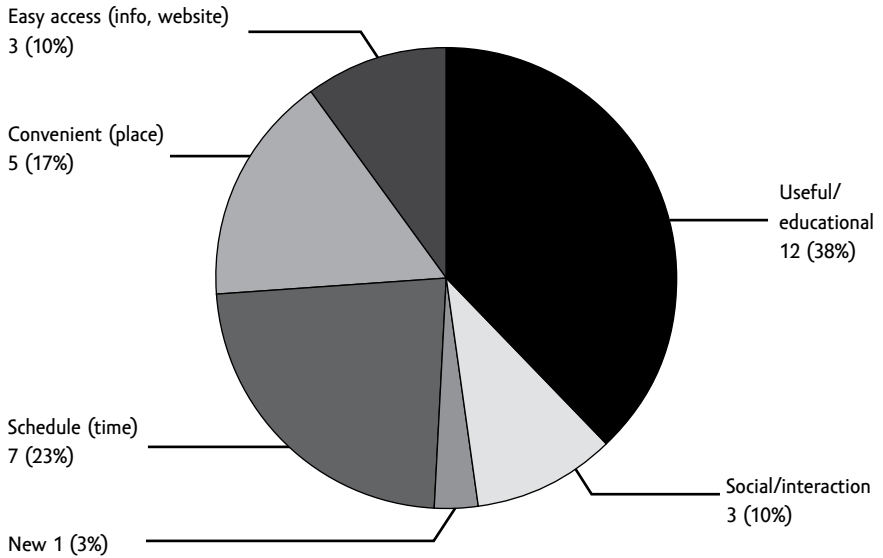New 1 (3%)

Social/interaction
3 (10%)

Figure 2. Online likes (out of 31 responses)

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Similarity: Both sections found the class useful/educational

In both versions of the class, the most common response to Question 1 regarding what students liked was that the class contained elements that were useful and/or educational. In the face-to-face classes, 41 out of 81 total responses (51%) fit into this useful/educational category, whereas in the online class, 12 out of 31 responses (38%) fit into this category. For example, students in both sections mentioned that feedback and peer review helped them improve their writing and that freewriting increased their writing fluency, confidence, and efficacy.

Difference: Face-to-face classes liked the social or interactive aspects of the class

Both groups responded that they liked the social and interactive aspects of the course, although the numbers were rather disparate. In the face-to-face classes, over one-fourth of all comments, 23 out of 81, mentioned liking the social or interactive aspects of the course. For example, a student in one of the face-to-face classes wrote, "I like close interaction between students and teacher because we can get to know each other and become comfortable with matters like asking questions and presenting projects." Another student wrote, "I made new friends in this class which is one of motivation to come class [sic]." Other comments from students in the face-to-face classes mentioned that they enjoyed talking to friends in class to share ideas, as well as working in teams for the group presentation and group activities because they enabled them to share ideas, opinions, and information.

On the other hand, in the online class, only 3 out of 31 responses (10%) mentioned social or interactive aspects. Although the online class did not have group discussions, they did have other activities that enabled them to share ideas. For example, one student replied, "This class provides interaction between classmates by posting response [sic] to each other." Another wrote, "I like the fact that we work as a big team, when we write a paper, we know someone else in the class will read it and tell us about it." A third student wrote, "Peer review: It helps a lot when it is time to review it creates relationship between each of us. We care about others." These comments from the online students demonstrate that they appreciated the activities in which they interacted with their peers, such as giving and receiving peer feedback. However, it is important to note that there were a significantly higher proportion of comments from the face-to-face classes that mentioned liking the social/interaction aspect.

Difference: Face-to-face classes liked that their class was new/fun/interesting

The third most common comment in the face-to-face classes had to do with the classes being new, fun, and/or interesting. Seven out of 81 comments from the face-to-face classes (9%) fell into the new/fun/interesting category, whereas only one comment out of 31 (3%) in the online class mentioned that the class was new.

Difference: Face-to-face students like the physical environment

The fourth most common response for students in the face-to-face classes, with six out of 81 responses (7%), mentioned liking the environment of the classroom for reasons such as the layout of the classroom itself, the comfortable chairs, and the convenient location on campus.

Difference: Online students liked freedom of time and location

There were a few other categories that appeared in the online survey responses that were not mentioned by students in the face-to-face classes. For example, a significant number of students' comments in the online class, seven out of 31 responses (23%), indicated that students liked the schedule because they had freedom in completing and submitting their assignments. In addition, five out of 31 comments (16%) from the online students mentioned that they liked the convenience of being able to do their work wherever they wanted. One student's response that mentions both convenience of time and place is as follows:

> My favorite element about this online class is the flexibility. Without having to go to class or in reality needing material in a specific room I'm free to do my work wherever I want. Whenever I find myself with free time I just take out my **PDA** and finish a quick assignment I could do like the **WWE** [Weekly Writing Exercises] or the discussion assignment for the week. Sometimes when I don't have anything to do at work I type out different paragraphs of my **MWA** [Major Writing Assignments].... Just being able to do the assignments on my own timeline is my favorite part.

The second question on the survey stated: "Name three elements of this class that you don't like and explain why you don't like each of them." These results can be seen in Table 2 and Figures 3 and 4.

Table 2: Students' responses to survey question 2; Elements students don't like and why

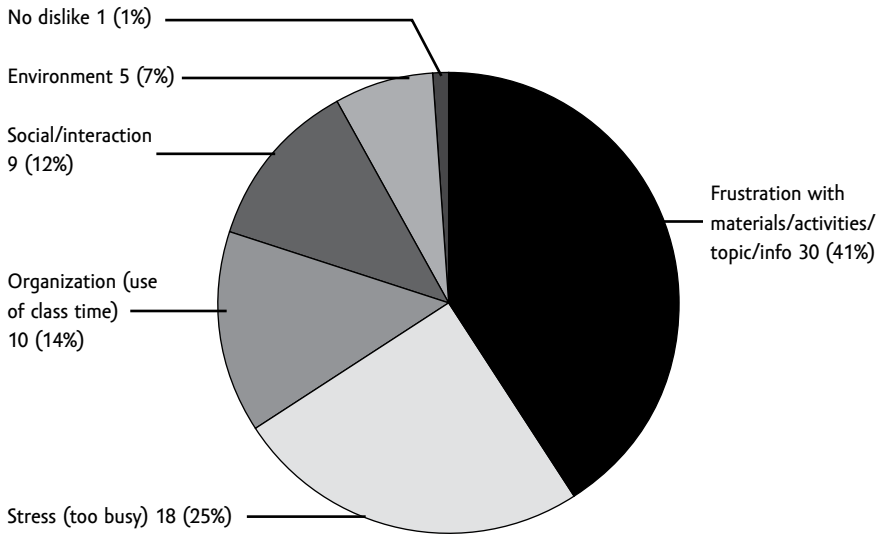|	Count (%) face-to-face	Count (%) online
Frustration with materials/activities/topic/ instructions	30 (41%)	3 (12%)
Stress (too busy)	18 (25%)	4 (15%)
Organization (use of class time)	10 (14%)	–
Social/Interaction	9 (12%)	10 (38%)
Environment	5 (7%)	–
No dislike	1 (1%)	–
Technical difficulties	–	5 (19%)
Not enough feedback from teacher	–	2 (8%)
Peer feedback (not useful, not negotiated)	–	2 (8%)
Total number of responses	73 (100%)	26 (100%)

No dislike 1 (1%)

Environment 5 (7%)

Social/interaction
9 (12%)

Organization (use
of class time)
10 (14%)

Frustration with
materials/activities/
topic/info 30 (41%)

Stress (too busy) 18 (25%)

Figure 3. F2F dislikes (out of 73 responses)

Paper feedback (not useful,
not negotiated) 2 (8%)

Frustration (instructions)
3 (12%)

Not enough feedback
from teacher 2 (8%)

Stress
(too busy)
4 (15%)

Technical
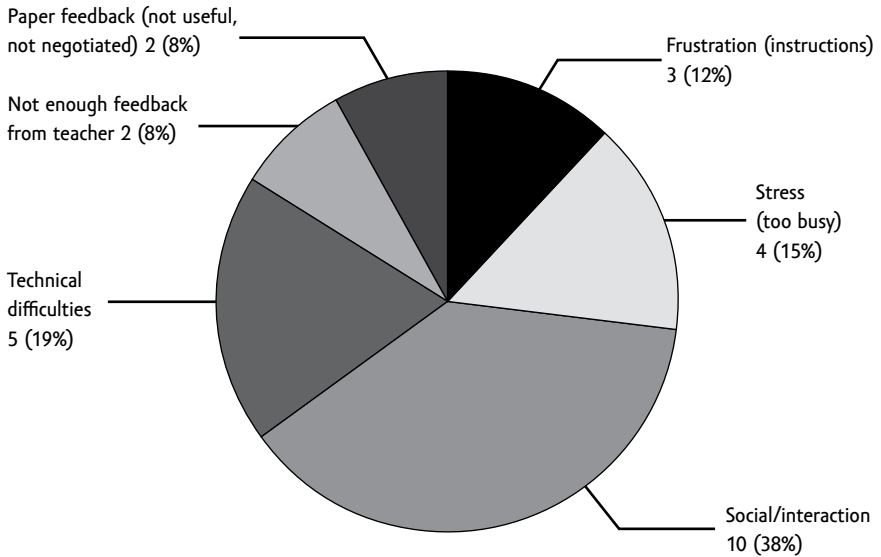difficulties
5 (19%)

Social/interaction
10 (38%)

Figure 4. Online dislikes (out of 26 responses)

Difference: More students in face-to-face classes expressed frustration with materials, activities, or topics

The biggest proportion of students' comments in the face-to-face classes, 30 out of 73 comments (41%), related to frustrations encountered in the class. For example, nine comments had to do with the textbook, e.g., not wanting to read so many pages in the textbook or not finding it useful for improving their writing skills. Furthermore, nine comments mentioned that there were too many handouts and/or instructions. A few students also wrote that they did not like the topic of education, which they had to write about. Finally, a few students mentioned not liking specific class activities. In comparison, in the online class, only three out of 26 responses (12%) mentioned frustration with course elements.

Similarity: Stress of course workload

The second biggest group of responses, 18 out of 73 (25%), in the face-to-face classes mentioned stress, i.e., feeling too busy because they had so much to write with tight deadlines throughout the semester. Somewhat similarly, in the online class, four out of 26 responses (15%) mentioned stress. Interestingly, this finding is similar to Casanave's (2004) and Koyama and Oh's (2006) findings that online courses may be less stressful than their face-to-face counterparts.

Difference: Face-to-face class dislike of organization (use of class time)

The third biggest group of responses was about dislikes for the face-to-face students. Ten out of 73 responses (14%) related to organization (i.e. use of class time). For example, some students mentioned that the instructor tried to teach too many things in one class. This issue was not mentioned by students in the online class.

Difference: Online students discontented with amount of social/interaction

The biggest number of dislikes from the online students was related to a lack of social/interaction opportunities. Ten out of the 26 responses from the online students (38%) mentioned this. For example, one student wrote, "I don't like that we don't see each other except for the [orientation lesson in the] first week of school." Another student wrote the following:

> While not having to interact with peers allows me to be more critical, without the interaction there is also no discussion on the writing process. One writer cannot defend their style or the inclusion of why they included a section of the paper when a peer reviewer finds it necessary or a hindrance to the paper. More than not, the original writer will either ignore the comment and not make that part more understandable or strike it completely from the paper.

Another issue raised by some students in the online class was having to wait for classmates to submit their writing before being able to complete their peer review of two classmates' papers. One student wrote:

> Writing is a process and revision is a necessity, however, when I have to wait for classmates to submit their writing before I can peer review it, that is a little troublesome. **243**

I have to keep checking in to see if they have turned it in or not, and sometimes they turn it in late or don't submit at all. There's really nothing that can be done as it is the responsibility of the writer to post up their assignments on time and there are already prevailant [sic] consequences on submitting late work.

Another student from the online class also expressed discontent about this issue when he/she wrote,

I don't like that you depend on other students work [sic]. So, whenever somebody doesn't post his work, you can't reply too [sic], even though you should. And, what is worse is, that sometimes you should get two feedbacks for your work, but you get only one or not even one...than [sic] you get no feedback at all...even though you want to hear some opinion.

In the face-to-face classes, nine out of 73 responses (12%) included comments that they did not like some aspect related to social interaction. For example, a few students wrote that they did not want to share their freewriting, and some mentioned that the class was too quiet.

Regarding the lack of social interaction in the online class, one online student expressed dislike in having to "understand and interpret the problem by myself without a face-to-face lecture."

Difference: Online students' dislike of technical difficulties

The second biggest area of complaints for the online class with five out of 26 responses (19%) was technological difficulties such as the course website sometimes being slow.

Difference: Online students displeased by quantity and quality of feedback

The remaining four comments from the online students were about their dislikes. Two out of 26 responses (8%) indicated that students did not receive enough feedback from the teacher. Two students said that the peer feedback was not useful.

Difference: Face-to-face class dissatisfaction with physical environment

In the face-to-face classes, five out of 73 responses (7%) indicated that students disliked something about the physical environment (e.g., the location of the building, the desks, the seating arrangement, or the smell of the room).

Finally, the third survey question asked students to name and explain three specific reasons why they were taking the class. Table 3 and Figures 5 and 6 show the students' responses.

Difference: Responses stating requirement as reason for taking course

In the face-to-face classes, the largest number of responses, 34 out of 77 total (44%), stated that students were taking the course because it was required. This was mentioned in nearly half of all responses from the face-to-face classes, and only two out of 28 responses (7%)

in the online class.

Table 3: Students' responses to survey question 3; Why you are taking this class?

	Count (%) face-to-face	Count (%) online
Required	34 (44%)	2 (7%)
Improve English Writing Skills	31 (40%)	5 (18%)
Social (friends)	7 (9%)	–
New/fun/interesting/easy	3 (4%)	4 (14%)
Like/Dislike certain skills	2 (3%)	–
Convenient (place)	–	9 (32%)
Schedule (time)	–	8 (29%)
Total number of responses	77 (100%)	28 (100%)

Like/dislike certain skills 2 (3%)

New/fun/interesting/easy 3 (4%)

Social (friends)
7 (9%)

Required
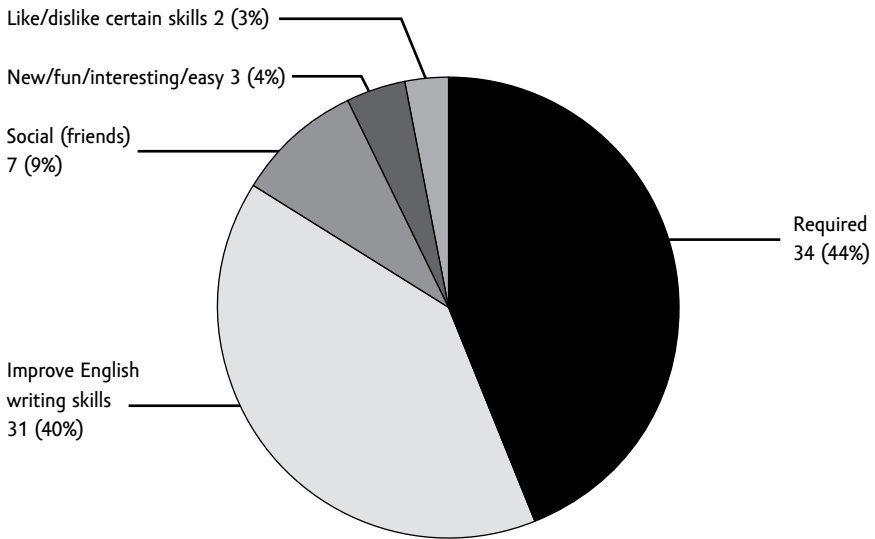34 (44%)

Improve English
writing skills
31 (40%)

Figure 5. F2F why (out of 77 responses)

Similarity: Students in both classes wanted to improve their English writing skills

Students in both the face-to-face and the online classes mentioned that they wanted to improve their English writing skills. However, a higher proportion of the face-to-face students (31 responses out of 77, or 40%), versus five out of 28 responses from the online class (18%), addressed wanting to improve their English writing skills.
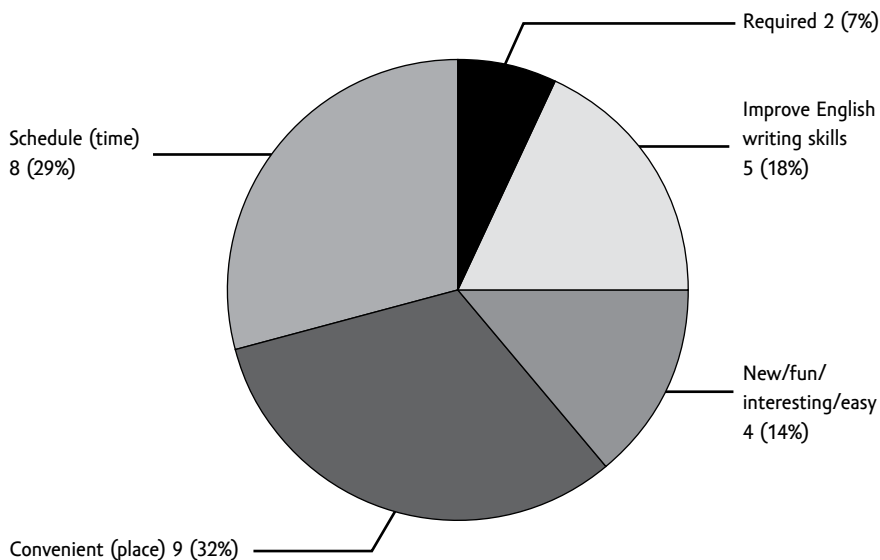
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Required 2 (7%)

Improve English writing skills 5 (18%)

Schedule (time) 8 (29%)

New/fun/ interesting/easy 4 (14%)

Convenient (place) 9 (32%)

Figure 6. Online why (out of 28 responses)

Difference: Some face-to-face students wanted to meet international students to make friends

There are several significant differences between these two groups' responses about their reasons for taking this course. In the face-to-face sections, seven out of 77 responses (9%) mentioned that they wanted to take this class to meet other international students and make friends. Nobody in the online section mentioned anything about friends in response to this question.

Similarity: A few students in both face-to-face and online sections expected the course to be new/fun/interesting/easy

In the face-to-face classes, three out of 77 responses (4%) mentioned they were taking the course because they expected it to be new, fun, interesting, or easy. In the online class, four out of 28 responses (14%) included similar comments.

Difference: Opting online for convenience of time and location

In the online class, nine out of 28 responses (32%) indicated that a benefit was the convenience of being able to complete course work wherever the student wanted. Furthermore, in the online class, eight out of 28 responses (29%) showed that students were taking the course because of freedom concerning time.

Conclusion

After examining and interpreting our results, we will now highlight the major findings, limitations, and implications for teaching, and offer suggestions for future research. In analyzing the similarities and differences between the face-to-face and the online classes, we discovered four major differences: social/interaction, convenience and flexibility, the new/fun/interesting/easy expectation, and the frustration factor.

Social/interaction

Looking at Figures 1 and 2, which represent students' likes in the face-to-face versus the online class, we found that a much greater proportion of students in the face-to-face classes mentioned liking activities that were social and/or involved interaction, while only a few students in the online class mentioned this. The same issue also stands out when we examine Figures 3 and 4, which show students dislikes. The most common dislike in the online section had to do with lack of social interaction. This difference also appeared when we asked students why they were taking the course. While not a drastic difference, seven out of 77 responses (9%) of the face-to-face students mentioned that they were taking the course for reasons such as to make friends. Interestingly, no students in the online class mentioned this.

Beffa-Negrini, Cohen, & Miller (2002) recommend promoting interaction as a strategy to increase the motivation of online learners. For example, to increase interaction, online teachers might consider offering interactive activities such as synchronous online chat sessions, virtual office hours, discussion boards, and collaborative writing activities. Instructors, however, should consider strategies which increase interaction, but do not diminish the convenient and flexible aspects of an online course. Some online students felt that interactive activities such as peer review were frustrating when they had to wait for classmates' feedback.

Convenience and flexibility

When looking at students' responses to Question 1 about their likes and Question 3 about why they were taking the course, we found that substantial proportions of responses by the online students had to do with flexibility and convenience in completing assignments. While it is not necessarily surprising that online classes were seen as flexible and convenient, it is interesting to us that these factors were mentioned so frequently by online students.

The new/fun/interesting/easy expectation

Looking at Question 1 about likes and Question 3 about reasons for taking the class, we discovered differences in the proportion of comments mentioning that students or thought they would like the class because it would be new, fun, interesting or easy. Seven out of 81 responses (9%) of the face-to-face students wrote that their class was new, fun, or interesting compared to only one out of 31 responses from the online class (3%).

Looking at survey Question 3, we saw opposite results, with 14% of responses in the online class versus only 4% (three out of 77 responses) in the face-to-face classes making comments that they thought the class was new, fun, interesting or easy. What is it that **247**

makes an **EAP** class new, fun and interesting to students? This question of how enjoyable online classes are for students could be an interesting avenue for future research.

The frustration factor

As for Question 2 about their dislikes in the face-to-face classes, the biggest proportion of students (41% or 30 out of 73 responses) mentioned feeling frustrated with the textbook, activities, and topics. On the other hand, only three out of 26 responses (12%) from the online students expressed frustration due to instructions not being clear.

Because both versions of the class used the same textbook, writing topics, and similar activities, we found these results to be counterintuitive. We wonder whether students in face-to-face and online classes had different expectations and whether those who chose to take the online class were more willing to work autonomously. This is another topic that future research could explore more thoroughly.

Limitations

This study is limited by the scope of the participant numbers and the design, which used self-selecting, intact classes. For these reasons, we do not claim that the findings are generalizable to broader contexts. However, at the same time, we feel that comparing students' responses can provide insight into how students interact with analogous coursework in different contexts. Future studies could expand the scope of this study in order to control for variables.

Another limitation may have resulted from an interpretation of the questions and the marked nature of the online course context. When analyzing the data, we realized that some online students may have interpreted survey Question 3 as "Why are you taking this online class?" In other words, they might have been reacting to the marked characteristic of the novelty of online learning. While our design does not allow for us to understand how students interpret the questions, this misinterpretation of the question would surely influence the participants' answers.

Concluding thoughts

We can conclude that learning contexts do seem to matter. While these course sections were analogous in their materials and approaches, students in the online and face-to-face contexts seemed motivated and demotivated by different factors. It is through understanding these contexts, as well as their similarities and differences, that we can deliver effective, enjoyable, and motivating instruction.

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

Near Mid-term Survey

This is an anonymous survey: please do not include your name. There are 3 questions; the survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Please answer as completely as possible. Thank you for your cooperation and your honesty; it will help me to better understand and improve the class.

1. Name three (3) elements of this class that you like and explain why you like each of them.

2. Name three (3) elements of this class that you don't like and explain why you don't like each of them.

3. Name and explain three (3) specific reasons why you are taking this class.