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The use of online tools: Examining the changing attitudes of academic staff towards their use in the classroom as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic

This article discusses the implications that the move to online teaching has had on lecturers' teaching practices by using interview responses from lecturers in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool. In particular, it examines how lecturers have adapted to using online tools during the move to online teaching and how their attitudes towards these tools have changed. It concludes that there is a split between those lecturers who intend to continue using online tools in future teaching and those who remain hesitant to use them despite a year of their use during online teaching.

Keywords: online tools, COVID-19, online teaching

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 forced universities into a difficult position. The sudden and abrupt change to online teaching happened almost instantaneously in many institutions and forced staff members to adapt to a radically different teaching method than they were used to (Cutri, Mena, & Whiting, 2020; Pastae, 2020). The move to online teaching came about at a time when the landscape surrounding higher education was becoming volatile (Jensen & Krogh, 2017). Since the raising of tuition fees to £9,000, universities have been perceived as businesses as opposed to educational institutions (O'Byrne & Bond, 2014). In addition to this, University College Union's (UCU) strikes in 2019 and 2020, alongside teaching moving wholly online but students paying for accommodation, has caused discontent from some students who do not feel that university is currently value for money (Brignall, 2021).

Online courses are not new. They have been popular for a great number of years because they give greater accessibility for those who do not wish to be physically present on campus (Al-araibi, Mahrin, & Yusoff, 2019; Ayres, 2014; Carbonell, Dailey-Hebert, & Gijsealers, 2013; Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe, & Williams, 2014; Ramsden,

2004). This research aims to examine how lecturers and university teachers feel about the use of online tools during the pandemic by examining three research questions to see how, or if, their attitudes towards them have changed over the course of the pandemic:

1. Did members of staff use online tools prior to the move to online teaching? If so, how did they use them and why? If not, why was there a reluctance to use them?
2. How have members of staff used online tools during the move to online teaching and what is the perception of their application?
3. Will members of staff continue to use online tools when in-person teaching resumes? If so, why? If not, why not?

Existing literature (Johnson et al., 2014; Nicolle & Lou, 2008) has demonstrated that there is a hesitancy towards online tools. This research therefore aims to discover if this hesitancy has been overcome as a result of being forced to adapt to using online tools and if their use will be continued once in-person teaching returns by answering the three research questions.

Some scholars have attempted to define what is meant by online tools, with Hepworth, Mensing & Yun (2018) defining them as the following: 'The terms "online tools" is used to refer to a wide range of multiplatform tools that allow online access to full functionality, including blogging, bookmarking, content management, data collection, file storage, media production, and social media' (p.256). Furthermore, this article will encompass online whiteboards, interactive polling, and quiz tools to be included within the definition of online tools as these have been tools that have proven to be popular during the online teaching phase in the pandemic, as this article shall explain.

Firstly, this research will consider the existing academic literature in relation to the challenges of implementing online tools into learning. Following on from this, there will be the methodology. Interviews were conducted with twelve members of staff in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool to gauge their perspective on the use of online tools. The results from these interviews will be examined and tentative recommendations will be made as to what steps can be taken in using online tools going forward as in-person teaching increases alongside some digital delivery.

Literature review

Arguments have been made that the future of academia consists solely of online teaching to cut down on staff costs and provide flexibility to students to study remotely (Al-araibi et al., 2019; Carbonell et al., 2013; Cutri & Mena, 2020). Indeed, some lecturers have even expressed concerns that due to the sudden move to online teaching, they fear that their role might be reduced in academia. As Watermeyer, Crick, Knight, and Goodall (2021) noted in their study:

> Moreover, while the current context of online migration arguably provides for only the very slimmest and superficial of encounters for academics with digital pedagogy, its introduction at a time of extreme stress and uncertainty is fixing a

> highly reductive and recusant view in many cases limited to a notion of 'posting things online' and of technology causing role-invalidation. (p. 638)

Simply put, the aforementioned quote provides an understanding that academics are concerned with using online tools widely because they fear that they could cause their role to become invalid. Hence, some academics are choosing not to integrate online tools to a great extent and are choosing simply to 'post things online', as by choosing to do this and not integrating digital tools as effectively as they perhaps could, their role is still needed, i.e. they cannot be replaced by the online tools. Jisc (2021a) also raised this as a concern from educators: that the pandemic changed their role.

However, the demand for face-to-face interaction is still present, as evidenced through an increased demand for places at universities offering face-to-face teaching in academic year 2020 to 2021 (UCAS, 2020). Indeed, research has also indicated that students perform better when taught face-to-face as opposed to being taught solely online (Al-araiabi et al., 2019; Ayres, 2014; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Despite this, the fact remains that the move to online teaching has seen educators forced to use new online tools, with some academics claiming 'that the online revolution is here' and 'institutions of higher education cannot ignore the new disruptive online education phenomena' (Pastae, 2020, p. 18). Dhawan (2020) has also gone so far as to state: 'This catastrophe will show us the lucrative side of online teaching and learning' (p. 8). Indeed, a number of academics have noted how using online tools can 'shake up the current status quo of the educational system' (McQuiggan, McQuiggan, Sabourin, Kosturko & Shores, 2015, p.9).

However, in order to benefit from this disruption, educators need open minds alongside preparatory time to implement online tools successfully, something that was lacking at the start of the pandemic (Hamilton, 2015; Hepworth et al., 2018; Sprenger & Schwaninger, 2021). Jisc (2020) also support this position, noting in their reporting that digital tools will need to be embedded in university culture due to the fact that blended learning is becoming even more popular.

The fact is that for online tools to be successfully implemented, lecturers need time to plan well in advance for how they will use online tools in their sessions (Jisc 2020; 2021a; Recker et al., 2007; Wali & Popal, 2020; Yildirim, 2017). It has also been stated that educators should be given technical support too as some may not know the best way to use online tools or, in fact, which tools are available (Hew & Brush, 2007). Preparation time and technological support were lacking at the start of the pandemic, with many educators forced to move to online teaching with little to no time to prepare (Cutri et al., 2020). This move to online teaching forced educators to engage in 'emergency remote teaching' (ERT) (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020; Mohmmed, Khidhir, Nazeer, & Vijayan, 2020; Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia, & Koole, 2021; Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021). Scholars have been keen to point out that ERT is very different to 'online learning and teaching' (OLT) because the former is used simply in emergency circumstances, such as a pandemic, and its main goal is solely to provide reliable access to course instructions and to perform synchronous online teaching (Xie et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2021; Manfuso, 2020). In addition to this, ERT

was foisted upon lecturers, many of whom had no prior experience of teaching solely online (Meishar-Tal & Levenberg, 2021). OLT, on the other hand, is prepared with more time and is carefully designed to offer flexibility in teaching with a 'carefully designed learning environment' (Rapanta et al., 2021, p. 716).

This move to ERT has been examined by Scherer, Howard, Tondeur, and Siddiq (2021) in a study where they discovered that there were three particular profiles that described how ready educators were for the move to online teaching. The first category comprised those who were not prepared, the second those who were inconsistently prepared, and the final category those who were very well prepared. As Rapanta et al. (2021) noted on the study:

> Membership in one profile or another was shown to be dependent on a variety of characteristics such as prior online teaching experience, the number of days spent for preparation for the online teaching shift and the number of days into online teaching after the shift. These characteristics suggest that the more immersed teachers were in the online teaching and learning experience, the readier they felt about making the shift. (p. 718)

As can be noted from this statement, the fact remains that in order for educators to feel comfortable using online tools, they need to be given time to understand them alongside technological support in some cases (Jisc, 2021a; Recker et al, 2007; Wali & Popal, 2020).

There are a number of benefits for students to using technology in the classroom. For example, online tools can encourage active learning (Ayres, 2014; Mason & Rennie, 2006) alongside 'creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration' (Pastae, 2020, p. 16; see also Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015; White, Williams, & England, 2014). Jisc (2021a) also acknowledge how the use of online tools helped students to maintain relationships beyond class, alongside allowing students to participate in a range of ways within their course, e.g. students who do not usually speak up could use the chat function to share their ideas.

Additionally, Jensen & Krogh (2017) and Keppell (2014) have stated how the use of technology in classrooms can be beneficial as students today are much more accustomed to using technology: 'They are users of digital technology, as ICT has always been part of their lives. They think differently. They simply accept technology, adapt to it, and use it. They like choices' (Jensen & Krogh, 2017, p. 2). However, this might be considered to be a particularly generic statement. This idea that students are 'digital natives' has been discredited by other academics, such as Johnson (2015) and not all students are comfortable using online tools. In addition to this, Iglesias-Pradas, Hernández-García, Chaparro-Peláez, and Prieto (2021) have noted that simply because students might be competent using digital technology, this does not mean that they 'have developed the necessary skills to succeed in an e-learning context, or that they have the necessary resources to even follow an online course'. This concept of students being digital natives and therefore able to thrive using technology in a learning environment is one that has been debated and dispelled by a number of academics (Gallardo-Echenique,

Marqués-Molías, Bullen, & Strijbos, 2015). However, one benefit of using online tools in the classroom is to help students develop their digital fluency, which is beneficial for them following university as many career options require students to be computer literate, something that Jisc (2021b) have noted. Hence, it is important for institutions to offer them training should they be uncertain on how to use online tools.

Another challenge is that students might not have access to Wi-Fi or to the technology that is needed to use the tools (Cho, Lee, Joo, & Becker, 2018; Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021; Yildirim, 2017). In their report concerning teachers' reactions to online teaching, Jisc (2021a) found that there were numerous issues, such as 51% of respondents to their survey stating that they had poor Wi-Fi connection alongside 16% stating that students did not have a suitable computer/device. In addition to this, consideration needs to be given to the practicalities of using technology in the classroom, for example, ensuring that the room has plug sockets and Wi-Fi (Keppell, 2014; Salmon, 2011).

The way online tools are used also deserves attention. Using online tools can be distracting, with some students not using them for their intended purpose (Kulesza, DeHondt II, & Nezlek, 2011; McQuiggan et al., 2015) and some staff overlooking the purpose behind using them. For example: 'Excessive attention to the tools gives them a status that distracts from the principles underpinning their use, and may promote the tool for its own sake rather than adding something useful and meaningful for the learner' (Bennett, Burton, Iredale, Reynolds, & Youde, 2014, p. 160). One way to overcome the problem of tools becoming a distraction would be to set appropriate guidelines for how devices should be used in the classrooms (Hew & Brush, 2007). The culture surrounding the use of technology in classrooms also varies in different institutions, with some discouraging students from using their own devices to access online tools (White et al., 2014). However, McQuiggan et al. (2015) have suggested that a culture of accepting the use of technology should be pursued because of the benefits that digital tools bring in encouraging active learning

Indeed, with higher education now returning to face-to-face teaching after conducting ERT, it has been noted that there are certain benefits to using online tools within the classroom. Many of the challenges faced using these can be overcome through effective classroom management and an emphasis on tools being used to enhance learning. This research paper shall now progress to examine the barriers and motivations for colleagues to use online tools in the classroom going forward as in-person teaching resumes.

Methodology

In order to examine the use of online tools and how they are used by members of staff, interviews with twelve members of staff within the Communication and Media Department at the University of Liverpool were conducted. Interviews tend to be one of the more popular methods for conducting qualitative research (Mason, 2002). The interviews were semi-structured to give the respondents the opportunity to discuss their

use of digital tools within the classroom and to expand on certain points when necessary (Edwards & Holland, 2013). One concern about this methodology is the number of interviews that were to take place. The twelve interviews represented approximately 40% of the department, which is in the range of a dozen and sixty, a number that Adler & Adler state is suitable for research projects (Baker & Edwards, 2012). The research has ethical approval that is covered by a collective ethics approval as part of a postgraduate module on pedagogic research. Interviewees were given an information sheet to examine. Consent was gained via the reading of the information sheet and email exchanges when the participant agreed to the interview. All responses are anonymous as individuals often feel more comfortable discussing their own personal views when they are anonymous.

Research surrounding the use of online tools during the COVID-19 pandemic has been conducted in other academic studies, with the use of surveys being a popular method to allow questions to be reproduced on a mass scale and more people to be surveyed, making it ideal for larger departments and in order to gain institution wide results (Cutri et al., 2020; Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021; Kerr-Simms & Baker, 2020). Nonetheless, this study conducted interviews in order to hold a deeper analysis and to allow the researcher to probe deeper on some issues that might be raised by the interviewee by adopting a semi-structured approach (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Furthermore, because the interviews were confined to just one department, this was the best method to use in order to gain more depth from respondents.

The research was conducted to ask questions concerning the use of online tools in three stages in order to answer the three research questions posed. The first stage examined the use of online tools pre-online teaching to discover how members of staff used them during their in-classroom sessions. The second stage focused on how they used online tools during the online teaching environment. Finally, the third stage asked staff members to reflect on the online teaching environment and whether or not they would change anything when in-person teaching resumes. The questions focused on staff's feelings about the use of online tools, alongside the obstacles they faced in their use and if they were overcome. They also asked staff members to consider if their use benefitted students' learning.

Interviews were recoded and then transcribed. The data was analysed through the use of thematic analysis, which simply put means identifying themes from within the data set that has been collected (Clarke, Braun, Frith & Moller, 2019; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Indeed, interviews were conducted and then the data was coded and used to 'represent the researcher's interpretations of patterns of meaning across the dataset' (Byrne, 2021). In this instance, the coding focused on lecturers' feelings and attitudes toward online teaching and the use of online tools. General themes began to appear throughout the interviews, for example, themes including uncertainty and hesitancy towards technology continuously surfaced. The results section shall go into further detail and discuss the themes that were discovered.

Results

The results shall be broken further down to focus on the three stages that were mentioned above. Firstly, there shall be consideration of the use of online tools prior to online teaching.

The use of online tools pre-online teaching

One common theme that was found when it came to using online tools prior to online teaching was that of hesitancy from some members of staff. This echoes the existing literature that has been discussed above, particularly in relation to Nicolle & Lou's (2008) study. Staff members expressed hesitancy towards online tools because they feared that things could go wrong, with S1 openly declaring this and showing a fear that time would be wasted trying to solve technological issues or that students would become frustrated with this. In addition to this, staff members also expressed accessibility concerns, with S4 noting that some rooms did not have internet access and S5 and S7 also noting that not every student had the necessary technology to access online tools. Again, this echoes existing literature towards the hesitancy about using online tools that has been discussed (Keppell, 2014; Salmon, 2011).

However, while hesitancy was one theme that was examined, this was the minority view, with the majority feeling that they had to push aside this hesitancy and employ online tools because students benefitted from their use. This was a common theme that was recognized in interviews, with lecturers feeling that the use of online tools, such as Menti, Poll Everywhere, and Kahoot, benefitted students. For example, S7 stated:

> I think they benefitted from having a bit of a break in lectures [by completing online polls]. I think it can be very passive learning a lot of the time and it can be hard and having the polls throughout kind of breaks it up and it's active learning and it gets them to think.

This benefit of applying active learning was also echoed by S6 and S10 who stated that '[i]f nothing else [using online polls] demands their engagement – it's like a call to action. It switches them from sitting there passively listening to you to having to engage with what you're talking about'. Certainly, this demand for students to engage with course material and the session echoes what the literature review has noted about the benefits of using online tools in sessions, namely that they promote students to be proactive in their learning (Ayres, 2014; Mason & Rennie, 2006).

Another theme that was noted was that of allowing students to use technology because some lecturers viewed students as 'digital natives' – a phrase which has been discussed in the literature review. For example, S6 noted how using online tools was possible because '[e]veryone has a phone, they're dying to be on their phones in the classroom and it's a way to have them do that'. This statement was also echoed by S3 who observed that they chose to then integrate online tools into their sessions because of students seemingly always using their phones. They stated: 'I decided after

a while to turn it from a negative to a positive'. It seems clear that certain members of staff perceive that students are digital natives and therefore will take to using technology in classrooms with ease. However, caution should be urged in this section as not all students have the available technology or are adept on how to use it in relation to online tools in a learning environment (Gallardo-Echenique et al., 2015). The former issue was noted by some members of staff, as discussed earlier in the section. However, most of the concerns seemed to be on access to technology as opposed to how students might struggle to adapt to using online tools in the online teaching environment, which has been noted by scholars as a potential issue.

Another interesting, and perhaps niche, theme that was observed in the interviews was that of staff feeling they sometimes had to use technology because they taught in a Communication and Media department. For example, S4 and S5 noted how they used interactive text tools in their modules because of the nature of what they taught. S2 also stated that this was the case when teaching about mobile phone technology. This proves to be quite the contrast to the earlier theme of hesitancy in the interviews conducted with other members of staff. It is perhaps down to the training that some members of staff have had as opposed to others, with those expressing a willingness to use online tools admitting that they took time to learn how to use them and how to implement them into their sessions. Again, this is a clear echo of the literature review where it is stated that in order for online tools to be successfully implemented into teaching sessions, staff members need to have time to develop their skills in using them (Hepworth et al., 2018; McQuiggan et al., 2015).

Overall, pre-online teaching, there was a mixture of how staff members would use online tools. Nonetheless, once the pandemic hit and all members of staff were forced online, they had to adapt to using them in order to deliver teaching sessions. Hence, the following section shall examine the use of online tools during the online teaching environment and how staff members have adapted.

The use of online tools during online teaching

All members of staff found themselves using online tools during the online teaching phase. One common theme from some members of staff was that of recognizing the benefit that online tools provided in active learning for students. In particular, staff praised their collaborative elements. For example, S6 detailed their experience of using tools to do this:

> I think especially some of them [students] like the use of these digital whiteboards. I think they create some amount of peer pressure for students to participate because they are having to do something so it is different to just letting students go to a breakout room and hypothetically have a discussion which they may or may not do, so when I send them to a breakout room I send them with a task that is deliverable… such as a whiteboard or shared document.

S8 and S1 provided a similar response when discussing how they used Google Jamboards. There is a belief from S1 that because the tools allow anonymity, they give

students who might not be confident in speaking in class a chance to write down what they are thinking. Again, this mirrors what White et al. (2014) mentioned in the literature: namely that online tools can encourage collaboration and, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration was important to try and encourage students to talk to each other and engage with their cohort, especially when meeting in person was not permitted. The use of online tools to push students to work together during the pandemic was something that they also found beneficial (Jisc, 2021b). Furthermore, this response from lecturers recognizes how students learn differently and how online tools can be beneficial in helping them with this. Lecturers also noted how online tools, such as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), have been used even more during the pandemic. For example, S4, S7, and S6 stated that they uploaded more resources for students to look over, such as podcasts and videos. Due to the fact that during the pandemic the majority of students were studying at home (Jisc, 2021b), lecturers felt a push to provide even more materials than they usually would because students, in some cases, had more time to look deeper into topics that they had studied.

While the majority of lecturers agreed that online tools had been useful during the pandemic, there was an overwhelming sense that the majority of lecturers would not solely want to rely on using online tools during their sessions. In fact, the majority expressed their desire to return to in-person teaching where they could have conversations with students face to face. This is because lecturers feel that in-person teaching provides a better experience for teachers. As S4, S9, S11, and S12 noted, you are able to read the room a lot better when engaged in conversations and looking at students' faces. S5 also noted this, stating that: 'In a normal setting you would feel the floor by picking up on body language so you do get the feeling of speaking alone and that is quite difficult to overcome'. Indeed, S10 went so far as to say that solely relying on online tools, such as Zoom, for teaching is difficult because you are not able to develop a 'genuine connection with them' like you can in person. Such comments strongly echo the points made within the literature review, namely that in-person teaching is still in demand and that it is also proven to be more beneficial than solely learning online (Al-araibi et al., 2019; Ayres, 2014; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Indeed, S7 has also stated that there is perhaps a desire to go back to how we taught pre-pandemic because of all the time it has taken to learn how to use the online tools to create active learning environments, noting that: 'I don't think people have time to do too much and to learn too much'. This is also an interesting point to observe because, as has been noted in the literature, there are different categories of individuals who felt prepared for online teaching, with those who had used online tools feeling confident and those who had not feeling less confident (Scherer et al., 2021). This is reflected in the findings of the interviews, as those who were interviewed who used a range of tools online expressed that they had been grateful they had been able to use them prior to the move online, due to the fact that they had been able to engage in OLT prior to the pandemic (Manfuso, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2021). Those who had been apprehensive to use them before, such as S5, confessed to needing to spend more time getting to grips with their use as well, showing that ERT

took place within some modules in the department, simply because educators had not had a chance, or desire, to look into the use of online tools prior to the move to online teaching (Meishar-Tal & Levenberg, 2021).

Another thing that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that a number of individuals were also facing their own individual circumstances during the move to online teaching that impacted how they used online tools. Some staff members, as S7 noted, did not have the time to learn how to use online tools because they had other commitments, such as looking after vulnerable members of their family or home-schooling their children. These are also reasons as to why individuals might have struggled to adopt using online tools during their teaching (Meishar-Tal & Levenberg, 2021). All of these factors could contribute to a negative perception of using online tools during the pandemic, but, perhaps if given time and proper training, confidence might increase and a willingness to use online tools be seen to grow (Jisc, 2021a; Recker et al, 2007; Wali & Popal, 2020). As Kerr-Sims & Baker (2021) have noted: 'the development of online courses in higher education does not just happen overnight' (p. 347).

While the use of online tools, such as collaborative tools, VLEs, and video platforms, have been utilized by members of staff, it is clear that there is a genuine concern that these online tools can never replace the classroom environment and all members of staff who were interviewed stated that they did want to return to the classroom and in-person teaching. Therefore, the following section shall examine any reflections that staff members have on using digital tools both in online and in-person teaching alongside any changes they would implement when returning to in-person teaching.

The use of online tools post-online teaching

The government announced that face-to-face teaching could resume in universities in England with no restrictions as of 19 July 2021, and so lecturers returned to the classroom to teach (Morgan, 2021). There are two common themes concerning the use of online tools in teaching since this return. Hesitancy is a theme that still persists despite the fact that online teaching had been in place for over a year. In particular, S6 and S3 were concerned about overloading students with online tools once they returned to the classroom because they missed the face-to-face interaction of discussing topics with students. S2 also agreed, concerned that students might have spent too much time staring at a screen during the online teaching phase and that they would benefit more from actually talking to a human and not using online tools in sessions. These concerns most certainly are not unfounded, with Jisc (2021b) asking students for their opinions and finding from their survey that students had feelings of isolation and loneliness from online teaching, alongside feeling that they missed out on the university experience and being able to talk to lecturers and peers in person. This is echoed by Abas (2021) who noted that the online environment will never 'fully replace students' need for meaningful in-person connections' (p. 42).

On the other hand, the second theme that was noted was the complete opposite, namely willingness. Some members of staff expressed a desire to continue using online

tools to promote active learning (Mason & Rennie, 2006). For example, S9 stated that: 'Students are becoming more familiar with these tools like Zoom, Teams, and so on, maybe we could encourage them to work with them and prepare group activities by using these programmes'. This again emphasizes how online tools can promote collaboration. Again, S1 has also highlighted how they intend to keep online tools, such as Google JamBoards, when they return to the classroom because of the anonymization they provide, allowing the shyer students to participate in class (Jensen & Krogh, 2017). They noted how prior to online teaching, it would be the same students who spoke up when such online tools were not used in their sessions, but now there is an opportunity for all students to be involved and their answers anonymized, but their voices still heard by the tutor reading out their response. Moving forwards and continuing with this approach of adopting online tools in the classroom seems to be something that will be beneficial in the future (Jisc, 2021b) as it promotes a hybrid working environment and can encourage participation and collaborative work. Nonetheless, Jisc (2021b) has urged caution against overloading students, noting that during the online teaching phase, students felt overwhelmed by the use of a range of digital technologies. Tentative steps perhaps are needed, for example, working alongside students and gaining their feedback as to what tools they feel work best, or felt worked best during online teaching, as a way to decide which tools to incorporate into in-person teaching.

Lecturers were predominantly split on whether or not to use more online tools during their teaching when in-person teaching resumed. Those who already used online tools prior to online teaching stated that they would continue using them when they returned back to the classroom. Again, this emphasizes Jisc's (2021a) survey where they also discovered that, while many educators were keen to return to in-class teaching, they found that the use of online tools could be beneficial for the aforementioned reasons, i.e. promoting collaboration so long as training was provided on the best way to use them in an OLT environment (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The majority of those stated that they would not increase the use of online tools because they were apprehensive about overloading students, acknowledging the importance of face-to-face discussions that in-person teaching has, echoing how students feel about this as well (Jisc, 2021b). However, for those who did not use online tools prior to online teaching, some have stated that their use during the pandemic has been beneficial and they intend to keep using them, such as S1 with Google JamBoards. On the other hand, others such as S3 stated that they would not change anything based on their experience of online teaching because they claim that 'it was better when it was face-to-face'. While this might have been the case, it is clear to see that institutions perhaps might have to adapt to a more hybrid working model and include the use of digital tools due to their benefits and also because the argument has been made that the nature of teaching has changed and there is now a call for online tools to be integrated into courses (Al-araibi et al., 2019; Carbonell et al., 2013; Cutri & Mena, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Jisc, 2020). Certainly, the results have been mixed within the interviews, but it is clear to see that, for some, their teaching practices have changed and how they use online tools has also changed.

Conclusion

Overall, the summary of findings from interviewing staff members on their use of online tools seems in line with previous academic findings, particularly those that state that time is a necessity for online tools to be successfully implemented into teaching. While some members of staff spent a year using online tools and intended to adopt them more into their teaching practices, others were adamant that they would not use them and wanted their sessions to go back to how they had been when they did not use them. In particular, it is interesting that this hesitance to adopt the use of online tools still persists despite the fact that lecturers spent over a year using them in order to deliver sessions. Indeed, those who used online tools prior to the pandemic intended to continue using them in their teaching practices, but were wary of overloading students with too many tools when they returned to the classroom. This places the student at the heart of the learning experience and also shows an expression of concern that not all students are digital natives.

Online tools, as the literature suggests, can be a way of promoting collaborative and active learning, something that staff members have used them for in the Department of Communication and Media. It is one of the main reasons why those who adopted their use prior to, and during, online teaching intend to continue using them in classroom. Nonetheless, the fact remains that none of the interviewees shared concerns that online tools could ever replace their jobs, suggesting that future implications for further practice will still have an element of online teaching. Online tools provide numerous benefits, as the Jisc (2020) study noted; however, this does not mean that they will make an educator's role redundant as students still want that face-to-face teaching, in addition to sometimes needing training on online tools themselves (Jisc, 2021a; 2021b). This research, overall, suggests that lecturers will continue to use online tools during in-person teaching, but for those who are hesitant, there are clear suggestions from literature that they will need to become more comfortable with their use as universities seek to integrate them further into learning practices and adopt more of a blended learning approach towards university (Jisc, 2020).

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