# 'I have been kicked out of the class!' COVID-19 move to webinars in higher education: a process evaluation

Rabeya Khatoon (University of Bristol) and Steven Proud (University of Bristol)

Friday 3 September, 09:10-10:40 BST

The pandemic forced large lectures in higher education to video conferencing during the 2020-21 academic year. Except for a few in-person small group sessions, all teaching took place online in a Russel group university. We adopted two platforms for video conferencing- Blackboard Collaborate, a browser-based, and Zoom, a cloud-based web conferencing tool. Our research focuses on the user experiences of online teaching both from the students and the staff's perspectives in several undergraduate and postgraduate units.

We analysed the connectivity issues during the webinar lectures. To our knowledge, there is no systematic research comparing connectivity issues using the two platforms, other than some customer review-based software comparisons (e.g., Software Service, Mohammadi, 2021). The web conferencing user data gives us the number of joins everyone had to make to a specific lecture. Some of the units used Blackboard Collaborate for all the sessions, while others used Zoom. Comparative summary statistics imply that a Zoom unit on average has marginally fewer joins than a Blackboard collaborate unit. The average number of joins in a Blackboard collaborate unit is 1.44 (PG 1011), while the figure for a Zoom unit is 1.14 (UG 10024). One unit (UG 20011) used almost half of the sessions using each platform, giving us a comparative picture within the unit. Combining different sessions, we form a student-lecture panel data for each unit under consideration. We found that a Zoom session has approximately 0.51 extra joins with a fixed-effects estimate than a Blackboard collaborate session.

We also attempt to analyse the effect of connectivity issues on exam performance. Based on some summary statistics, there is a slight negative trend in median marks with increasing numbers of joins. Controlling for the duration of connection and previous (pre-COVID) scores, our work-in-progress research so far identified no significant effect of the number of joins on student exam performance.

We organized two focus group discussions regarding student and staff experience to complement the quantitative information. The focus group discussions identify some benefits of blended learning: improved student engagement in large lectures with the availability of the chat function, online submission of assessments, and online office hours. Like other studies (e.g., Strelan et al. 2020), we found that students generally like activities as a flipped content rather than pure videos. Regarding connectivity issues, some students mentioned being 'kicked out' from classes using either platform without noticing much difference between them. Others highlighted the flexibility in using Zoom, which allows them to join in using mobile devices. On the staff side, there were perceived benefits of a Zoom session compared to a Blackboard collaborate session regarding better connectivity, seeing many participants, and the ease of sharing a screen or joining with an iPad. The major issue staff

mentioned was some inappropriate chat messages using Zoom, due to the sessions perceived as informal and/or the flexibility of the students joining in an unidentifiable format.

References:

Mohammadi, G., Pezeshki, F., Vatanchi, Y.M. and Moghbeli, F., 2021. Application of Technology in Educating Nursing Students During COVID-19: A Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Health Informatics*, *10*(1), p.64.

Strelan, P and Osborn, A and Palmer, E (2020). The flipped classroom: A meta-analysis of effects on student performance across disciplines and education levels. In *Educational Research Review*.

Software Service. https://www.softwareadvice.com/video-conferencing/blackboard-collaborate-profile/vs/zoom/