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## An Investigation into Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Aspects of Online Learning

**Judith McKeon**

MKLC, 1 Canon Harnett Court, Warren Park, Wolverton Mill,  
Milton Keynes MK12 5NF  
*judith@mklc.co.uk*

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**Abstract:** *Interaction between online tutor and learner is significant as it impacts on successful learning outcomes. The level of that interaction may require extended online availability from the tutor. However, the full potential of peer interaction has not yet been realised and this could benefit the tutor/learner relationship. Although most online learners are intrinsically motivated, this motivation may be strengthened by rapid feedback and friendly contact from the tutor as well as peer contact.*

**Keywords:** *online learning; relationships; motivation; feedback*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the dynamics of the online teacher/learner relationship and investigates the factors leading to motivated and successful learning outcomes. Online learning is becoming more popular as technology improves and becomes more accessible, but the teacher/learner relationship is paramount to any learning environment. Existing literature indicates that the factors which influence online learning are interaction, support and motivation. There are consequently three main areas of concern which this paper addresses: one is the level and nature of interaction online; the second is the support and speed of response from tutors; and the third is the degree to which the tutor is a motivational force for learners. It is agreed that a high level of interaction is required but there is little indication of the level, nor the nature, of that interactivity, which is what this study sets out to explore. In particular it is investigating in what ways an online relationship differs from a face-to-face teacher/learner relationship.

Feedback is an integral part of any teacher/learner relationship and can often take place informally in a classroom, so that learners feel encouraged and supported. Learners can also feel motivated by other learners in a classroom as they can measure their own level and progress against their peers, even subliminally; they are all part of a classroom community. The study investigates the value of any online peer interaction, whether the learners feel adequately supported on their learning journey, and whether responses from the online tutor makes a difference to their online experience.

One of the main motivators in teaching and learning, however, is the relationship between tutor and learner. There is a perception that face to face relationships are more successful because of other indicators such as body language, but this paper investigates whether an online relationship can be just as rewarding. It explores the perception learners have of the level of support and guidance available and whether online teachers are a motivational force.

The participants in this study emanated from a wide range of learners who were all identified through online contact; the prerequisite for participation was that they had undertaken an online learning course, and that they had experience of classroom learning.

### 2. CONTEXT

While much of the existing literature focuses on barriers to online teaching and looks at benefits and disadvantages, there has been even more written about ways of improving online participation [1]. Key to this is the interaction between tutor and learner [2]. The interactivity with a tutor is significant as it impacts on the perception a learner has of both the quality and success of a course [3]. Higher levels of interaction between online teachers and learners are positively related to increased learner

satisfaction [4,5,6]. Satisfaction with a learning environment leads to more motivated learners, and ultimately contributes to successful implementation of a learning programme [7]. Attitudes towards online learning can also impact on motivation, especially perceptions on lack of interaction [8,9]. Peters, Barbier, Faulx and Hansez [10] find the enjoyment dimension is the only dimension of satisfaction which directly impacts on learning, and that a lack of personal interaction affects perceived enjoyment. Holmberg [11] argues that motivation and learning is enhanced through personal relationships and this is the key area to explore; he suggests that factors which advance the learning process are short turnaround times for assignments and constant availability of tutors, plus a feeling of belonging by the use of conversational comments. This paper explores the degree to which these factors impact on the learning experience of adult learners, their online relationship with their tutor, and overall satisfaction with their course.

Recent research finds that classroom environments are also valued for face-to-face interactions and learning with and from the peer group, with peer discussions regarded as most beneficial [12]. This links with other studies which suggest that online learners also benefit most from peer interactions [13,14]. One way of enhancing peer interactions is through social media [15] and Ryman et al [16] also suggest that there needs to be a social network online, although they still affirm that effective leadership is essential for building relationships. The online tutor is more of a facilitator and the responsibility for learning is therefore placed on the learner [12], but Maor [2] finds that it is the tutor who provides the framework for learner reflection and interaction and then guides the learner through the online experience. However, the online attribute most valued and seen as critical to the learning experience is responsiveness [12].

Although online courses offer more flexibility, Jackson [17] finds they are more dependent on learners being self-motivated. This suggests that they may be more suited to a particular kind of learner, which can have an impact on the relationship with the tutor. Studies indicate that intrinsic motivation is a common characteristic of successful online learners [18,19]. However, Hartnett, St. George and Dron [20] find that motivation is more complex and can also be influenced by situational factors but frequent, on-going communication with a teacher helps in keeping learners motivated.

Past studies have found that online courses are flexible and convenient and create more learning opportunities [21, 22, 23], but these do not necessarily correlate with academic achievement. Malcom [24] cites Carnevale [25] as stressing that online tutors need to get to know their learners and have a better understanding of their needs. This was also recommended as one of the pathways to improved productivity online: Bakia, Shear, Toyama and Lasseter [26] suggest that individualised and personalised learning can increase motivation and lead to better learning outcomes.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

For this study it was essential to locate respondents with experience of either teaching or learning online. Social media sites were used as well as contacts known to have participated in online courses. Potential participants were contacted by email and asked if they would be prepared to answer some questions and those who responded positively were then sent a questionnaire. There were two questionnaires; one for teachers and one for learners. Almost three hundred people were contacted originally and eighty agreed to participate. In total forty four surveys were completed, thirty being from learners and fourteen from teachers. These were all collected in November 2012. Carrying out such a survey to collect quantitative data ensured that the study would produce consistent and stable results and provide validity [27] in measuring four defined items: online learning; motivation; interaction; and feedback. All participants gave their informed consent and confidentiality of data was ensured by giving anonymity to the returned questionnaires through the use of random numbering.

The sample used respondents coming from Europe, the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. They ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s and nine of the participants had English as their second language. Twenty eight of the forty four respondents were female. All had experience of teaching and/or learning online, using a variety of different platforms, with universities or private providers. Although it may be suggested that such a diverse sample shows an unconnected approach, it can be argued that the strength of this approach shows consistency across a wide range of learning contexts.

An initial content analysis using codes was carried out on the returned questionnaires and specific areas were identified as requiring more in-depth information. The questionnaires used a 5-point

Likert scale and the Strongly Agrees were amalgamated with the Agrees for the purpose of analysis; the same was done with the Disagrees and Strongly Disagrees. The data were further refined by refocusing through reflexivity: this process of reflecting on the interaction between the data and the research question helps in identifying any gaps in what is still required [28]. It was important that as much data as possible could be collected on the specific areas which would contribute to the issues raised in this paper; these were mainly learner perspectives on online courses and the relationship with their tutor, whereas the teacher perspectives were on their interaction with learners and their attitude towards online learning. These were areas which had raised some questions in the content analysis as the results were not fully in line with anticipated responses.

Qualitative data were then collected by using structured yet open questions. Respondents were identified from those who had agreed on the initial questionnaires to be interviewed if required. For this purpose they had provided an email address and from these a random selection was made to ensure that these represented both teacher and learner perspectives. Nine learner interviews and six teacher interviews were then carried out in January 2013. The learners commented on online teaching, advantages of classroom and online learning, the tutor as a motivator, face to face interaction and online learner support. Teachers were asked to comment on engagement and motivation of learners, improving interaction, availability, promptness of feedback and dislikes about online teaching. They were also given the opportunity of introducing any further points of discussion related to teaching online courses.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Online Learning and Teaching

The first measurement from the survey concerned online learning. This was divided into three areas: their enjoyment of online learning; preference for classroom based learning; and accessibility.

Attitudes towards online learning can have an impact on motivation and consequently participation and interaction. Figure 1 shows the attitude teachers and learners have towards online learning. The learners indicated more enjoyment of online learning than the teachers with 80% learners in favour against 64% of teachers. Teachers tended to prefer classroom based learning rather than learners where under half were in agreement that they preferred being in a classroom. Both teachers and learners liked the accessibility of online learning with 96% of learners showing approval against 85% of teachers. All teachers and learners had had experience of both classroom and online learning.

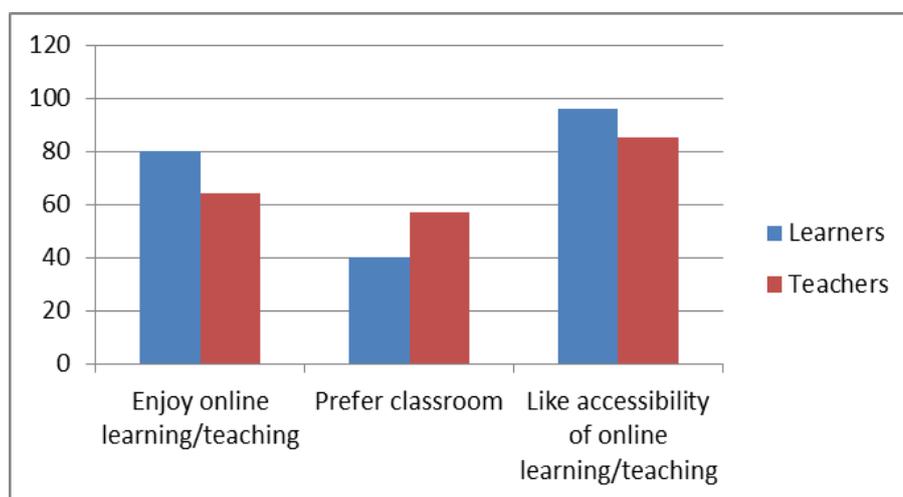


Figure 1. Online Learning & Teaching

### 4.2. Motivation

In the second measurement of motivation, learners and teachers were asked if they regarded themselves as self-motivated. Learners were then asked if they needed a teacher to motivate them and whether they felt they were better motivated in a classroom. Finally they were asked whether their online teacher motivated them. Teachers were asked if they were happy working on their own and then asked if they felt they encouraged and motivated their online learners.

Self-motivation was a strong indicator in both teachers and learners, and Figure 2 shows 100% of teachers saying they were self-motivated and 86% of learners agreeing. Only 23% of learners felt they needed a teacher to motivate them and just 36% believed that a classroom situation kept them motivated. Teachers were happy working on their own online with 92% in agreement. When asked whether they felt their online teacher motivated them, 66% of learners responded positively. The teachers were asked if they believed they encouraged and motivated their online learners and 71% felt they did so.

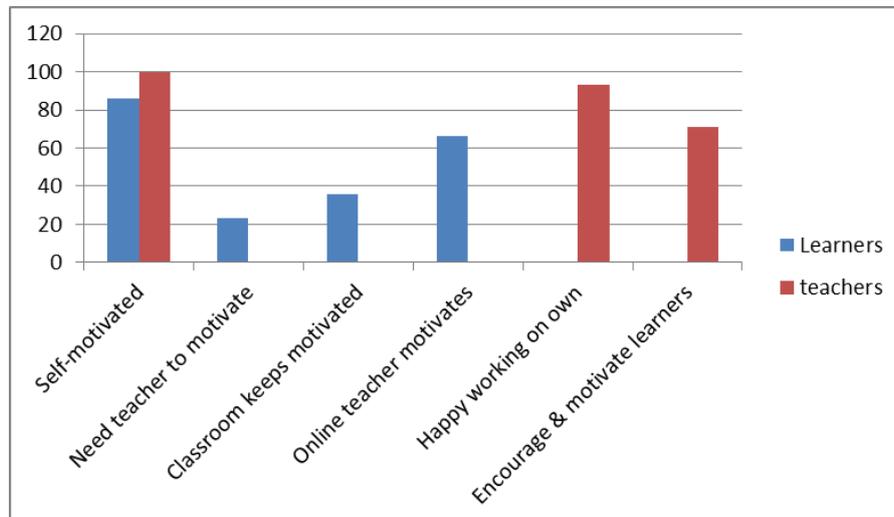


Figure 2. Motivation

### 4.3. Interaction

The third measurement was of interaction between teacher and learner. Interaction plays an important role in how learners perceive the quality and the success of a course, and is fundamental to satisfaction with online learning. As Figure 3 shows, 85% of teachers feel they interact well with their learners, but only 56% of learners felt they interacted well with their tutor. About the same numbers agreed that it was easier to interact face to face with 43% of learners and 42% of teachers agreeing. The percentage believing they had a good online relationship with their tutor or learner was also very similar, with 70% of learners and 71% of teachers in agreement, and this was replicated in whether they believed they had a learning partnership, with 66% of learners and 64% of teachers feeling that they did.

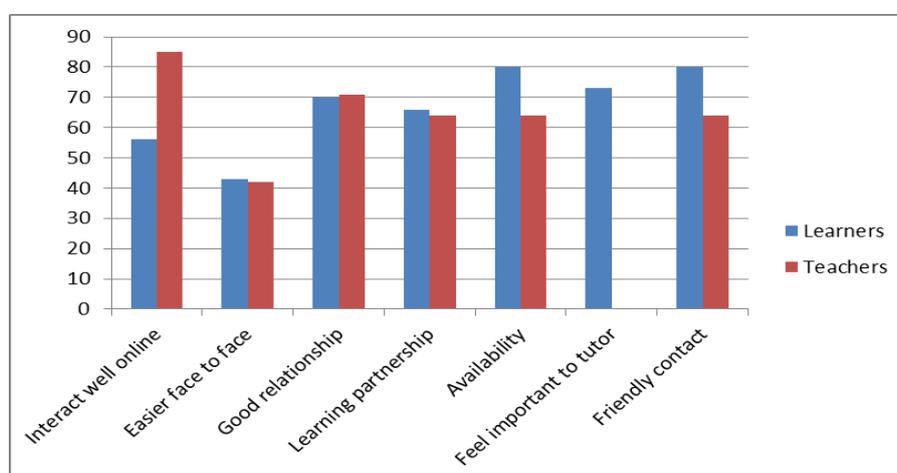


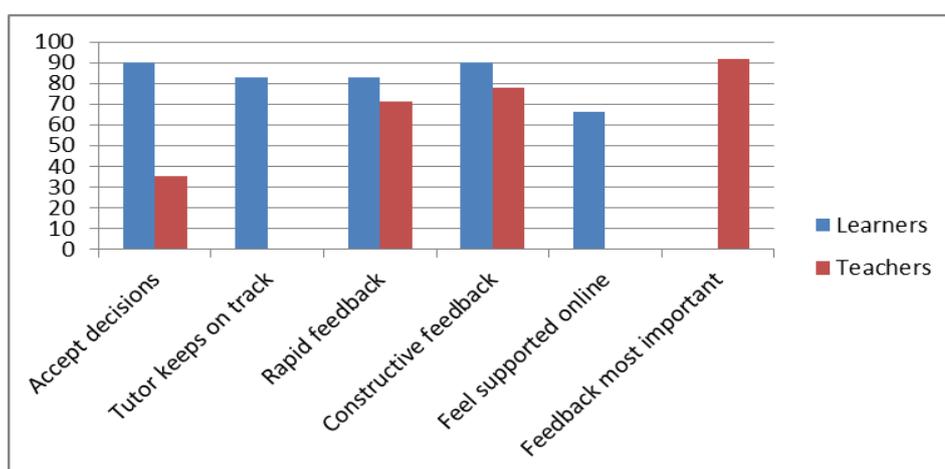
Figure 3. Interaction

When asked whether they were always available when their online learners needed guidance, 64% of teachers said that they were. Learners asked if their online tutor was always available when they needed guidance responded more positively with 80% feeling their tutor was there when needed. The learners were asked if they felt they were important to their tutor and 73% responded positively. 80%

of learners also believed that they received friendly, conversational comments from their online tutor, while 64% of teachers agreed that they kept in regular, friendly contact with their learners.

**4.4. Feedback**

The fourth and final measurement was feedback. Constructive and timely feedback is seen as one of the most valued attributes of an online programme. Teachers were asked if learners accepted their guidance and if they gave constructive feedback within 48 hours. They were also asked how they felt about the statement “Feedback is the most important factor in developing an online relationship with learners”. Learners were asked if they were confident with decisions made by their online tutor and if they felt their tutor kept them on track. They were also asked if the tutor gave rapid, constructive feedback and if they felt supported online. As shown in Figure 4, learners were confident with the decisions their tutor made with 90% showing satisfaction, whereas only 35% of the teachers felt that their learners accepted these decisions. 83% of the learners were confident that their tutor kept them on track. The learners were happy with the speed of feedback with 83% of them agreeing it was rapid whilst 71% of the teachers agreed that they gave feedback within 48 hours. 90% of the learners and 78% of the teachers felt this feedback was constructive. When asked if they felt supported online, 66% of the learners agreed. 92% of the teachers believed that feedback was the most important factor in developing an online relationship.



**Figure 4.** *Feedback*

**4.5. Learner Attitude**

The interview questions for the learners looked more deeply at specific areas identified in the surveys as requiring more information. Attitude towards online learning is a key factor in satisfaction and enjoyment of a course directly impacts learning. It is important that learners enjoy their online experience as they will then be more motivated to learn. Learners were asked what they enjoyed or did not enjoy about online learning and the results are shown in Figure 5. Interaction was shown as a positive attribute of online learning, yet at the same time the lack of interaction was highlighted. The accessibility and flexibility of online courses was favoured, and enjoyment comes from discussions and researching. Online learning is still seen as a lonely and impersonal environment requiring learners to be self-motivated. Despite the dislike of not being connected with other learners, there was a resistance to being asked to do group or pair tasks as part of the course.

**Table 1.** *Enjoyment of online learning*

Likes	Dislikes
Flexibility	Distractions
Work at own pace and in own time	Lonely
Accessibility	Computer systems
Discussions	Pair or group tasks
Research	Lack of interaction
Interaction	No connection with other learners
No stress	Need to be self-motivated
Comfortable environment	Impersonal

#### 4.6. Advantages of Online and Classroom Learning

It is recognised that there are differences between learning in a classroom and online, and it is important that these differences are recognised. Many of the advantages of classroom learning can be replicated online but may require a different approach. Learners were asked what they felt were the advantages of classroom based learning as opposed to online learning and Figure 6 shows their responses. The advantages of learning online were that learners could work at their own pace and receive immediate responses from their tutors. They also liked the interaction with other learners and the motivation they gained from others. Classrooms were favoured for the personal environment where learners felt they were closer to their teacher and other learners, and that they could bounce off ideas from each other. Group dynamics were an advantage of classroom-based learning.

**Table 2..** *Advantages of online/classroom*

<b>Advantages of Online Learning</b>	<b>Advantages of Classroom-based Learning</b>
Immediate responses	Personal and emotional involvement
Interaction with other learners	Group dynamics
Motivation from other learners	Personality of teacher
Stricter timetable	More structured
Not held up by slower classmates	Ideas bounced off each other
Quick progression	Peer assessment
	More bonding

#### 4.7. Teacher as Motivator

Although a significant characteristic of online learners is their self-motivation, the role of the teacher as a motivating force should not be underestimated. The learners were asked how they felt the teacher could motivate them as online learners. Rapid and constructive feedback, as well as regular contact, was favoured. One respondent wanted to know more about her teacher’s background before embarking on a course, as this gave her more confidence in the teacher as a person. Comments from the interviews included the following points.

*“I feel a teacher can motivate me via online learning by prompt and well-structured feedback.”*  
**Male, 26**

*“By giving quick positive feedback on submitted assignments.”* **Female, 37**

*I find the quick turnaround of marking and constructive feedback to be a big motivational force.”*  
**Female, 43**

*“I think as an online learner, it is important that the teacher maintains contact, even if an assignment has not been completed. I would not expect a daily e-mail, but perhaps once a week, a brief e-mail checking how I was finding the work. I would also appreciate discussing targets.”*  
**Female, 20’s**

*“Occasional telephone calls or e-mails to check the student’s progress, to ask if they need any additional help or help with something that isn’t clear to them. Some students may find it hard to ask for help.”* **Female, 52**

*“The online teacher has to try and build a personal relationship with the student and thus tie the student to the classroom. The learner’s output must be personally appreciated by the teacher on an individual basis. This will boost the learner’s motivation.”* **Female, 50’s**

*“As well as e-mail feedback, which can at times come across abrupt, one on one telephone conversations and webcam discussions.”* **Male, 48**

*“At this stage of my learning I have motivation but truthful encouragement and support is appreciated.”* **Female, 40’s**

*“Feedback in two days was very helpful in keeping me going rather than waiting for feedback for a previous assignment to move onto the next. Also, knowing a bit about your tutor makes the experience more interesting and makes you more motivated. I personally search my tutors’ names on the internet and I felt very positive when I learnt more about them and that made me more motivated.”* **Female, 24**

*“As an adult learner, I’m not looking for motivation from my tutor, I am hungry to learn, I’ve made a serious financial commitment, I’m immersing myself in the subject. Any and all feedback I receive from my tutor I perceive as highly constructive.” Female, 46*

**4.8. Classroom Interaction**

The interaction between teacher and learner helps in developing a relationship, whether online or in the classroom. There is a perception that interaction is easier when face to face. Interaction was explored by asking learners why it might be easier for a teacher to interact face to face and Figure 7 shows the responses. Body language and eye contact make it more personal face to face, and any issues arising can be resolved quickly. Teachers can choose the most appropriate learning style for individuals and it is interesting to note that one respondent remarked on the teacher being able to see the effort a learner was making.

**Table 3.** *Classroom interaction*

<b>Face to face interaction</b>
More personal
Minimises misunderstandings
No delay in responding
Teacher can see the effort the learner is making
Can choose the most effective style of teaching
Learners have to prepare for lessons
Issues can be resolved straight away
Teacher can send messages through body language
Teacher can address preferred learning styles
Eye contact
Can be more direct
Can give instructions orally

**4.9. Support**

When learners feel they are adequately supported in a learning environment, they will gain confidence and feel more motivated. Learners were asked what they thought could be done to support them more as online learners and their responses are shown in Figure 8. There was approval for regular progress reports from the teacher and more contact with both teacher and other learners through telephone conferencing, chat rooms, webinars, videos and Skype. It was suggested that the learning platform itself was made easy to navigate.

**Table 4.** *Learner online support*

<b>Online Support</b>
Personal Skype sessions and group webinars
Easy to navigate site
Clear steps for learner to monitor progress
Contact showing teacher is keeping track
Chat room or message board for students to contact each other
Regular updates on progress
Peer feedback
Different learning channels e.g. video, audio
Telephone conferencing

**4.10. Engaging and Motivating Learners**

It is essential that teachers can engage and therefore motivate their learners, but there is a perception that this is not always possible in an impersonal online learning environment. Teachers were asked what difference they felt when being able to engage and motivate learners teaching online as opposed to classroom teaching. Figure 9 compares and contrasts the factors the teachers identified. It was felt that communication between teacher and learner was more limited online and that personalities did

not come across. While teachers agreed that learners should be more self-motivated, they recognised that there were more distractions for them when learning online. They did feel they could build a rapport with their learners more quickly and that the learners did not suffer from peer pressure in an online learning environment. In the classroom the teachers felt that personal contact enabled them to respond more quickly to learners and that they could be more inclusive.

**Table 4.** *Engaging and motivating learners*

Online motivation	Classroom motivation
Communication inhibited	Can judge engagement one-to-one
Words without emotion	Learners not isolated
Learner must be self-motivated	Face to face interaction
Easy for learners to get distracted	Questions answered immediately
Can build quicker rapport with learners	Feedback in person
No peer pressure	Regular contact

#### 4.11. Improving Interaction

Interaction is regarded as the key to developing a teacher/learner relationship and the teachers were asked if there was any way they felt online interaction could be improved. It is perceived as being more difficult to interact with learners online. The responses from the teachers are shown in Figure 10. There was strong support for making more use of available technology to improve communication. Teachers also felt they should communicate promptly with their learners.

**Table 5.** *Online interaction*

Improving Interaction
Give feedback and communicate promptly
Use social media
Two way audio-visual
Use emerging technology
Make more use of Skype and telephone
Conference calls
Video tutorial

#### 4.12. Online Availability

Asynchronous learning is common in online courses and it can mean that communication and interaction between teacher and learner is limited, and that they may not be online at the same time. Availability of teachers was therefore an area to explore and teachers were asked what kind of availability they felt they should give to online learners. Their responses are in Figure 11. The range was interesting as it covered a very structured availability timeslot where specified hours were to be advised in advance, to others who felt they should be available at all times.

**Table 6.** *Online availability*

Online availability
Make specified hours very clear in advance
As much as possible, mark and give feedback quickly
12 – 24 hour response rate
Let students know when going to be away
Chat when online or arrange Skype sessions
24/7
Any time

#### 4.13. Timescale of Feedback

Promptness of feedback has been shown to be a primary factor in developing and maintaining online relationships between teachers and learners. The teachers were asked within which timescale they should give feedback to online learners and their responses are shown in Figure 12. The majority felt that between 24 hours and 48 hours was appropriate. One believed that a much quicker response rate

was required, giving 5 to 6 hours, while another felt that two weeks was the right amount of time for giving feedback on essays.

**Table 7.** *Feedback*

<b>Timescale for feedback</b>
48 hours
2 weeks for essays
24 – 48 hours
As soon as read, 5 – 6 hours
24 – 48 hours
24 – 36 hours

**4.14. Dislikes**

The final question teachers were asked was if there was anything they did not like about online teaching. Most of the teachers did not find there was anything else they wished to comment on, with some giving very positive comments about online teaching in general. Figure 13 gives the responses to this question, but these comments were in the minority. Misinterpretation of what the learner meant, the amount of time spent in setting up an online course and the question of plagiarism were mentioned.

**Table 8.** *Dislikes*

<b>Dislikes about online teaching</b>
Interpreting what the student means
Amount of time to set up
Plagiarism

**4.15. Other Comments from Teachers**

The teachers were asked if they had any further comments. These mainly highlighted the benefits of online courses such as being more accessible for rural and overseas learners, for those with time constraints, and for those who liked independent learning. The proviso was that not all courses are suited to an online platform. One teacher felt that peer interaction could be restrictive.

*“Some subjects are more suited to online learning.”*

*“Online course suffer badly from lack of online collaboration between the students who seem to be reluctant to commit their thoughts to record for all to see but resort to email collaboration between closed/selected/favoured groups.”*

*“It really helps people who are working or prefer to work as individuals without the stress and pressure of classrooms and exams.”*

*“I believe online learning will be the way forward for schools in the future.”*

*“It opens up new possibilities for learners, especially those in rural areas, studying minority subjects or overseas.”*

**5. DISCUSSION**

The interaction between teacher and learner is fundamental to the success of any online learning programme [2,3,4,5,6,7] and enjoyment of the course is enhanced by this personal interaction [11]. Although 80% of the learners agreed that they enjoyed online learning, only 64% of the teachers said that they enjoyed teaching online. The factors impacting this enjoyment tend to be rapid feedback times, constant availability of the teachers and regular, friendly contact. It would seem that adult learners on the whole feel that they do get feedback quickly and that their online tutor is available for them. They appear satisfied with the level of interactivity they are receiving from their tutors, suggesting that interaction is one of the benefits of their online experience. This may be that the adult learners are more self-motivated as some of their enjoyment comes from researching, working at their own pace, and in their own time.

However, the teachers are not quite as positive and there may indeed be some reluctance on their part to offer the online availability expected of them. Although they are aware of the need to be available for their online learners, and most agree that this should be as much as possible, one experienced online tutor suggested that tutor availability should be specified very clearly in advance. This is an area which could benefit from further research, as it is possible that the level of online availability expected of tutors may be making too many demands on their time, and ultimately be detrimental to their own well-being. In turn this could impact on their relationship with their learners, as they may even begin to resent the intrusion from learners on what they perceive as their personal time.

Peer interaction, normally through discussions, is also regarded as highly beneficial [12,13,14] and this could be a way of supplementing the interaction between online tutor and learner. Additionally, it could take some of the burden of being constantly available away from the tutor. The adult learners suggested that they would welcome more contact with their peers in discussions and through interacting with other learners as they were motivated by this. They also felt that more could be done using digital technology to connect them with other learners. The teachers agreed that interaction could be improved through use of emerging technology, but they did not consider peer interaction. There was, in fact, an implication of teachers working in isolation with learners and safeguarding them from any peer pressure which they may experience in the classroom. This may link to the learner who was very much against any pair or group tasks, and the teacher who commented on learners selecting favoured groups online. The online tutor provides the framework for interaction [29] and this could be controlled, but it would need more skills and training. Nevertheless, the online tutor is regarded as a facilitator [12] and this still requires effective leadership [16], whether online or in the classroom. In harnessing the benefits of peer interaction, the online tutor could enhance the level of their own contribution at the same time as building learning relationships. The learners suggest that they would feel more supported online if they had both tutor and peer feedback.

Although the level of interaction between tutor and learner was agreed as being satisfactory, the quality of that interaction was not so well regarded by the learners. Teachers believe they interact well with their online learners, with 85% of them in agreement. However, only 56% of the learners felt their tutor interacted well with them. This may be because learners do not feel their efforts are adequately valued. When asked about the advantages of face to face interaction, one learner commented that the teacher can see the effort the learner is making. It may also be that learners do not feel the same emotional and personal involvement with an online tutor, that they are more detached. One comment made was that the personality of the teacher was evident in the classroom. Simple gestures such as sending a quick friendly email to learners on a regular basis could enhance the quality of interaction and show more of the teacher's personality by giving a perception of care. There is also the option now of embedding an interactive tool such as Skype into the online learning programme, and this could be utilised for maintaining contact.

Feedback plays a large part in both interactive activity and relationship building between tutor and learner. It is both motivating and encouraging to learners and they appreciate a rapid response, but it is equally important that the feedback is constructive. Learners were satisfied with the speed of the feedback they received, which is significant as responsiveness is seen as critical to the learning experience [12]. The learners and teachers both felt that the feedback given and received was constructive, and 90% of learners were satisfied with the guidance they were given. Whilst 92% of the teachers believed that feedback was the most important factor in developing an online relationship, only 35% of them felt that their feedback decisions were accepted by learners. This suggests either a lack of confidence on the part of the teacher, or it reveals a wider issue whereby there is suspicion on the part of the teacher that they are not meeting the needs of the learner. It is in contrast with the learners themselves, where 90% said they were confident with the decisions their tutors made. However, comments from the teachers that they sometimes had problems interpreting what learners meant, and that online communication was inhibited, implies that there is a mismatch between teachers' expectations and the learner's contribution. This may suggest that instructions are not clear, as learners commented that face to face interaction meant the teacher could be more direct and give instructions orally. Further research could explore whether having short online videos where the teacher gives instructions to learners would improve communication and interpretation.

Intrinsic motivation is significant in both online learners and teachers, which is in line with previous research [18,19], and only 23% of learners felt they needed a teacher to motivate them. Despite this,

learners recognised that the teacher was a motivating force, and they agreed that this was by communicating with them, either in giving feedback, through telephone contact, or just by occasional emails. This is supported by Hartnett et al's study [20]. Whether or not they are self-motivated, it is a human characteristic that on-going communication makes learners feel their tutor is showing an interest in them and their learning journey. Deci and Ryan's [30] self-determination theory suggests that intrinsic motivation occurs when the activity is interesting or enjoyable, whilst extrinsic motivation occurs when there is a separable outcome, such as a reward or approval. The adult learners, whilst being intrinsically motivated by their enjoyment of their online course, are also extrinsically motivated by frequent communications from their tutor. These two motivational forces combine to make the learning outcomes more successful.

### 6. CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence that the interaction between online tutor and learner allows for a strong interpersonal relationship, which in turn leads to successful learning outcomes. An online relationship differs from a face to face relationship in that the personal and emotional involvement is not so evident. Therefore, the online tutor must work in a different way to communicate this interest in the learners. This can be through maintaining a friendly interaction such as a brief email of encouragement, or an occasional Skype session. In this way the teacher would become more of a personality with whom learners could connect. Many of the learners would prefer more peer interaction, which they feel is lacking in the online environment, as they are satisfied with the level of interaction with the tutor. However, there are questions about the quality of that interaction, and this lends itself to further investigation. Using some of the available interactive tools may improve quality and enhance the learning experience.

The online learners are mainly self-motivated but rapid, constructive feedback and regular communication from the tutor will increase the level of motivation and enhance the learning experience, leading to more successful outcomes. Feedback is a key factor in building a successful relationship between tutor and learner and the expectation is that this will be within a short period of time. The requirement for tutors to respond quickly and be constantly available may be placing too much pressure on them and could impact on the learning relationship. It is another area which would benefit from more research.

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