CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS IN ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING[1]

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Abstract: With the proliferation of online courses nowadays, it is necessary to ask what defines the success of teaching and learning in these new learning environments exactly. This paper identifies and critically discusses a number of factors for successful implementation of online delivery, particularly as far as online language learning is concerned. These include student and teacher characteristics, instructional design, provision of support to instructors and students, technology, and language skills characteristics. I argue that these factors need to be carefully considered when designing online language learning simply because they could potentially impinge on students' learning and learning experience in these new learning environments.

Key words: critical success factors, online language learning

The past decade has seen a proliferation of online course offerings (Rovai, Wighting, & Lucking, 2004), either as a primary mode of delivery or as a complement to conventional classroom instruction (Olson & Wisher, 2002). In the context of language teaching and learning, the new technology has also gained immense popularity. For example, the Internet has been used for teaching English for Specific Purposes (Nesi, 1998), Translation (Connel, 1999), Vocabulary (Fitze, 2006), and Writing (Mehlenbacher, Miller, Covington, & Larsen, 2000). Although use of this technology in language classrooms can be traced as far back as two decades ago, it has only been during

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the past ten years or so that online language learning programs have started to increase dramatically (Fukushima, 2006).

As the number of online course offerings continues to mount, so too do research studies examining their effectiveness. However, the results of these studies have not always been consistent, in that some studies have attested to the effectiveness of an online strategy, while others have reported quite the opposite (Jones & Chen, 2008). These conflicting findings have raised critical questions about what exactly dictates the success of an online mode of delivery. What are the critical success factors in online learning, then? The term "critical success factor" has been used to refer to issues or factors that must be addressed, considered, or taken into account to ensure successful implementation of online learning. One reason for identifying these factors is that, with the advent of sophisticated technology to deliver course materials, it is always tempting to attribute the success or failure of an online learning program to technology alone. In this respect, Fischer and Scharff (1998: 5) cogently argue that "one of the major misunderstandings in our current debate about enhancing learning with new media is the assumption that technological advances will, by virtue of their very existence, improve the quality of learning". Unfortunately, such a misconception is not uncommon among educators across the globe.

Selim (2007) noted that, while there is plethora of research articles comparing the effectiveness of online learning relative to conventional face-to-face classroom instruction, very few articles have addressed the critical factors that impinge upon the success of online learning. This is particularly true for online language learning, as relatively little research has been conducted in this particular context (Olson & Wisher, 2002). The CSFs proposed in this paper are concerned with online language learning, they may well be applicable to other fields. Identifying these critical success factors is crucial, since it has both theoretical and practical implications. At a theoretical level, identifying online learning's critical success factors may contribute to further development and refinement of current online learning theories. At a very practical level, it may serve as a practical guideline for online instructors seeking to integrate technology into the curriculum. Put simply, examining critical success factors in online learning is crucial if we are to make the most of online learning (Volery & Lord, 2000).

A small number of articles attempting to identify online learning's critical success factors have been published. For example, Volery and Lord (2000) identified three critical factors in e-learning: technology, instructor, and previous use of technology. Similarly, Dillon and Gunawardena (1995)

recognized three factors: technology, instructor characteristics, and student characteristics. However, a number of other critical factors such as instructional design (pedagogy), unit characteristics, and provision of support for both instructors and students have not been considered, despite the fact that these factors may actually play an equally, if not more important, role in the success of an online learning program. Therefore, I herewith propose six critical success factors impinging on the effectiveness of online learning in general, and online language learning in particular. These critical factors include: (a) student characteristics (b) instructional design (pedagogy) (c) provision of support for both instructors and students (d) teacher characteristics (e) technology and (f) language skills characteristics. Arguments presented in this paper are drawn from two sources: (1) a current literature review on online learning, and (2) empirical data from the author's own study[2] comparing the effectiveness of the three different modes of instruction: face-to-face, online, and hybrid instruction.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

A study conducted by the author suggests that some students perceive the teacher's physical absence in an online environment to be detrimental to their motivation to participate in online discussion and sharing of ideas with others. Others reported that they just could not put up with being exposed to a computer screen and would prefer to read course materials from course books accordingly. Interestingly, there are also students who testified that, although they did enjoy the dynamic interaction afforded by the Web, they still believe that they would learn more effectively in a conventional classroom. In other words, for all these students, technology cannot replace face-to-face communication with the teacher in a face-to-face classroom.

By contrast, some students reported that they not only enjoyed working with computers and interacted with one another using both synchronous and asynchronous communication, but also expressed their strong interest in future online learning programs. These students expressed their appreciation of the flexibility of online learning in terms of 'time' and 'space', which enabled them to learn at their own pace. Furthermore, they also reported that online learning is both interesting and convenient – they could find help from a diverse array of sources: the teacher, classmates, online communities, and search engines. Some students described how they en-

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joyed social interaction with English speaking people using synchronous communication made available by social network providers. Whilst social interaction with native speakers was at these students' own initiative and was not part of the learning activities, this experience proves to be a particularly interesting one.

Finally, the majority of students who reported that they enjoyed their online experience also testified that their self-confidence in using English to communicate with native speakers increased immensely as a result of their online experience over the course of the semester.

The above cases suggest that although identical learning environments are provided and the same teacher teaches the class, students may well react quite differently to such a delivery mode. I would argue, following previous authors, those differences in students' perceptions of online learning may partially be attributed to students' individual characteristics. In particular, students have different learning styles (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999) and learning preferences (Wallace, 1996). The former refers to how individuals process information in a certain learning environment, whereas the latter concerns primarily the learning methods that work best for each student. As far as online delivery mode is concerned, there is evidence that suggests that students' perception of its effectiveness is influenced by their learning styles (Sauers & Walker, 2004). Because students have different learning styles and learning preferences, online learning may suit certain learning styles better than others (Terrell, 2002). This difference in students' learning styles will, in turn, affect their perception of the merit of online delivery. In the context of language learning, it has been reported that students "whose major learning style preference was auditory considered Web-based learning more useful for learning vocabulary than did those with this style as a minor or negligible preference" (Felix, 2004: 245). Thus, examining the relationship between learning styles and students' perception of learning a language or a particular language skill online is crucial to ensure successful implementation of online language learning.

Additionally, such characteristics as attitude to, and belief in, technology may also impinge on students' perceptions of how technology-enhanced learning may actually help them learn (Keller & Gernerud, 2002). Needless to say, students have differing perceptions regarding the merit of technology in their learning; some are more positive than others. In this case, students who have positive attitudes to technology are more likely to succeed in these learning environments than those who do not have such attitudes, simply because they may be more interested and more motivated, thus more willing to work harder. By the same token, while some students

may have sound computer literacy, others may be struggling with moving the mouse. In the end, these differences can impinge on their attitudes to technology-enhanced learning (Holscherl & Strubel, 2000). Since students have different levels of computer literacy, technology-enhanced learning may not work for every student[3] (Rovai, 2004).

Finally, online delivery requires that students take more responsibility of their own learning more than that expected in a face-to-face classroom. The problem, however, is that while some students are less dependent, others rely heavily on their teacher for their learning. Students who are less dependent on their teacher normally set their own goals and develop strategies to achieve these goals without expecting their teacher to tell them what to do. These students are normally referred to as self-regulated learners. By contrast, students who are not self-regulated in their learning rely heavily on their teacher and the absence of the teacher can be detrimental to their learning and learning experience. Typically, these students would require ongoing guidance from the teacher. Because online delivery requires that students be independent and is more challenging than conventional classroom, it is naturally more appropriate for self-regulated learners. Indeed, previous studies suggest that only those who employ self-regulation in their learning would most benefit from the online delivery mode (O'Hanlon, 2001). Thus, students' self-regulation should be taken into account when introducing an online mode of delivery. Being able to identify which students may thrive in an online environment and which ones flourish in a conventional classroom is critical for the success of an online mode of instruction. Of course, there are still other individual characteristics that may also come into play, but providing an exhaustive list of these characteristics is beyond the scope of this current paper.

To sum up the discussion thus far, previous studies point to the fact that differences in individual characteristics play a critical role in shaping learners' perceptions of, and attitude to, online delivery, which may, in turn, impinge on successful implementation of online delivery. Therefore, the challenge for future research is to comprehensively scrutinise learners' characteristics and decide which particular characteristics are more likely to thrive in an online mode of delivery and which are more likely to flourish in a conventional face-to-face classroom. Only then can we take an utmost

[3] However, with the ubiquity of computers in our society nowadays, students' computer literacy will gradually get better and, therefore; this should not be of concern in the future. Moreover, training programs can always be organised for students who are computer illiterate to ensure that they have minimal skills to effectively function in an online environment.

benefit of the technology in enhancing learning and avoid unnecessary hassle from both the teacher and the students.

TECHNOLOGY

An interesting argument in the debate over the effectiveness of an online mode of instruction concerns the role of technology. Clark (1983: 445) contends that "media are mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition". Arguing in a similar vein, Blake, Wilson, Cetto, and Pardo-Ballester (2008: 124) write "the EFL teacher, not the medium, will ultimately determine whether or not any given instantiation of a DL [Distance Learning] language course makes a positive contribution to the L2 student's long march to advanced proficiency". In other words, these researchers suggest that technology only plays an insignificant role in students' learning and learning experience. I would, however, suggest, following some of the previous researchers, that successful implementation of online learning depends crucially on the technology factor and its role cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

To begin with, in the absence of face-to-face contact between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves, communication in an online environment relies heavily on technology. In this case, reliable technology plays a critical role. A study conducted by the author reveals that one of the frequently reported disadvantage of online delivery concerns technical problems faced by students while trying to access the Web. These problems include frequent disruption to the internet connection, slow loading, compatibility of hardware and software, just to name a few, all of which contribute to students' dissatisfaction. Indeed, plethora of research suggests that, as far as online delivery is concerned, technical problems are amongst the most frequently identified (Ku & Lohr, 2003). Therefore, reliable technology is a pre-requisite for successful implementation of online delivery.

In addition to issues related to technological reliability, interface designs also play an important role in engendering students' perceptions of technology-enhanced learning (Trevitt, 1995). In this case, such factors as ease of use, navigation, mapping, screen design, information presentation, aesthetics, and overall functionality are considered critical (Reeves & Harmon, 1993). Not only do user-friendly designs help learners with limited computer literacy cope with their computer anxiety, but they may also assist these learners in making effective use of online learning tools. By

contrast, unnecessarily intricate designs may be intimidating, even for those who have previous experience with computers. Additionally, when developing more than one online course, it is important to develop consistent designs to enable users to efficiently navigate across different courses, for inconsistent designs could be perplexing for some students when trying to access learning materials or using online communication tools. Thus, interface designs should also be taken into account when developing online courses.

Furthermore, online learning tools should be capable of providing students with a diverse array of communication channels. Put differently, they should enable the students to communicate both synchronously and asynchronously. This is particularly important since empirical evidence suggests that the provision of multi-communication channels in an online environment correlates positively with student satisfaction with online delivery (Williams, Nicholas, & Gunter, 2005). Obviously, just like face-to-face instruction, online tuition requires students to perform different learning tasks such as small group discussion, class discussion, presentation, brainstorming, working in pairs, and so forth. In this case, a certain communication channel may be more preferable than others to perform a given task. Media Richness theory postulates that the effectiveness of the media depends crucially on the appropriate match between characteristics of the tasks or information to be communicated and media richness (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). Therefore, both synchronous and asynchronous communication tools should be made available simply because each communication medium has its own strengths and weaknesses relative to task characteristics. Most importantly, these tools should be accessible all the time.

The provision of various communication channels is particularly important for language learning where social interaction is central to such endeavours. Synchronous and asynchronous communication enables language learners to interact and communicate with native speakers, the experience of which may not be available for in-class students in general. In a study by the author mentioned earlier, a number of students, at their own initiative, were involved in a chat line with English speaking people using synchronous communication, and these students considered this experience of interacting with native speakers to be one of their best experiences while taking the unit. These students also reported that their confidence in using English for communication increased immensely as a result of this experience. Thus, while providing various communication channels is important regardless of the unit, it is particularly important for language learning be-

cause these communication tools enable language learners to have access to native speakers.

Clearly then, while it is true that technology is not the only factor that may impinge on successful implementation of an online delivery, it is evident that its role cannot be underestimated. Regardless of instructional design, unit objectives may be difficult, if not impossible, to attain with unreliable technology or inappropriate choice of technology relative to learning tasks, made worse by non-user friendly interface designs. It is for this reason that, unlike some of the previous researchers who have underestimated the role of technology, I suggest that technology should be seriously taken into account when designing online delivery. The choice of which technology to opt for to support certain learning tasks is critical, for its effectiveness may vary, depending on the nature of the tasks at hand.

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

In conventional face-to-face classrooms, each teacher has different characteristics (some are more friendly, more humorous than others; some have better teaching styles and facilitating skills than others, etc.) and these differences in teacher characteristics may impact on students' perceptions about the class they attended. This is also true for teaching in an online environment. Webster and Hackley (1997) identified three characteristics of a teacher that may influence students' perception of the effectiveness of online learning. These include: (a) attitude towards technology (b) teaching style, and (c) control of the technology.

To begin with, different teachers may have different perceptions of the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning. Whilst some teachers may have positive attitudes, others may have strong reservations about such a delivery mode and, in some cases, are involved in online delivery only because such a program is part of the university's policy. In this case, it is just natural to expect that teachers who believe in the merit of new technology are more likely to have greater enthusiasm and motivation in their teaching than those who do not, and have greater capacity to endure the challenges of online learning. These attitudes may, in turn, be contagious to students. Thus, if we want our students to have positive perceptions of online delivery, then the teacher him/herself should have such attitudes in the first place. Unless the teacher shows enthusiasm and puts trust in this new technology, convincing students of the value of technology-enhanced learning would be a particularly difficult task.

Furthermore, a teacher's teaching styles also plays a crucial role in an online environment. In particular, teaching styles that promote social interaction among the students and between the students and the teacher are strongly recommended. Simply providing technology alone does not necessarily result in students' engagement. Social interaction is critical not only because it can reduce a sense of alienation and isolation due to the absence of face-to-face communication among the classroom community members, but also because, as far as modern learning theories are concerned, students would learn best if they interact with one another. A particularly important aspect in this regard is teachers' facilitating skills, as these have a significant impact on students' motivation, participation, and engagement in online activities. Needles to say, dynamic interactions among online students require good facilitating skills on the part of the teacher. In the absence of face-to-face contact with the teacher, students' attention can easily be distracted. Also, at times, students are reluctant to participate and, in this case, teachers' sound facilitating skills can make a real difference. Unfortunately, just like teachers in a conventional classroom, online teachers have different facilitating skills; some teachers are better facilitators than others.

Finally, teachers' survival IT knowledge is also important in engendering students' positive online experience. Very often, as mentioned previously, students are faced with technical problems when accessing the Web and these require immediate response from the teacher. In this case, a delayed response could be detrimental to their motivation. To be able to provide an immediate response, however, the teachers themselves need to have some basic survival IT knowledge, at least at a very practical level. Teachers should also be prepared to do some simple troubleshooting or make some modifications to course content or quizzes when necessary, and this requires a basic understanding of both hardware and software.

In short, the success of an online mode of delivery also depends crucially on the teacher characteristics. If the teacher him/herself does not have faith in the merit of online delivery, then it will be difficult, if not impossible, to expect success from such endeavours. Teacher characteristics, such as positive attitude to technology, teaching styles that promote interaction among students and between the students and the teacher, sound facilitating skills, and mastery of basic IT survival knowledge, are among the important characteristics of a teacher that are indispensable to the success of an online mode of instruction.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN (PEDAGOGY)

It is a fallacy to assume that, just because a course is run face-to-face it would automatically be a success. This is simply because a number of factors come into play and one of these is instructional design. In a face-to-face classroom, instructional design will help students learn if they attract students' attention, underscore the relevance of course materials to be learned, engender self-confidence in the learners, and result in learners' satisfaction with their performance in the course, as well as developing a positive learning experience (Keller, 1983). Thus, instructional design could impact on students' learning and the learning experience in a conventional classroom. This is also the case with online delivery. Roach and Lemasters (2006) reported that course structure and instructional design affects students' satisfaction levels with online learning.

However, while the role of instructional design in online learning has been identified in the literature, much of the discussion centres on the issue of whether it is technology or instructional design that matters most and, in most cases, is not framed within the context of the identification of critical success factors in online learning. For example, it has been suggested that pedagogy plays a more important role than technology (Clark, 1983). Ali and Elfessi (2004: 2) concur with this view and argue that "one common mistake made in the use of the Web is the focus on technology at the expense of pedagogy". In other words, these researchers all suggest that instructional design should be prioritised over technology. As I discussed previously, however, both should be taken into account, for each of them could impact on students' learning and the learning experience in this new learning environment.

Instructional design, which serves as the blueprint of learning activities in a classroom, is grounded on a particular learning theory. Due to its importance, Salaberry (1996: 7) suggests that "it is not the medium itself that determines the pedagogical outcome, but the specific focus of the theoretical approach on the language learning phenomena". Put differently, it is the theoretical underpinnings upon which the instructional design and the successive learning activities are based that dictate the outcomes of online delivery. Different theoretical approaches should, therefore, translate into different learning activities, thus potentially different learning outcomes.

However, in some cases, identical activities can derive from different theoretical grounds if the underpinnings of the theories are similar. For example, sociocultural constructivism postulates that social interaction is vital because learning is innately social and because it enables the learners to

work within their zone of proximal development. By comparison, although cognitive constructivism does not regard social interaction as compulsory, it posits that social interaction can potentially promote 'disequilibrium', thus forcing the learners to modify their current cognitive structures in light of new information encountered during social interaction with others. By the same token, second language acquisition theory considers social interaction crucial as it can promote 'negative evidence', 'comprehensible input', and 'comprehensible output'. In other words, learning activities that encourage social interaction and exchanges of ideas among the learners can be derived from sociocultural constructivism, cognitive constructivism, or second language acquisition theory.

One important consideration when designing learning activities is student characteristics. For example, while some students prefer to work on their own, others may prefer to work in group. Therefore, learning activities should involve both group work and individual learning activities. By designing activities that could benefit a diverse array of student characteristics, there is a real chance that online delivery will become a success. On the other hand, failing to take student characteristics into account may result in meagre learning or, even worse, the failure of such endeavours. The lack of success of online learning programs in the past may partially be attributed to the fact that they did not sufficiently address differences in student characteristics when designing online learning activities.

Another important consideration in relation to instructional design concerns technology. I would suggest that technology should always be taken into account simply because certain learning activities may be better supported by certain technology than by others (Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995). Technological consideration is critical because it affects the implementation of instructional design as a whole. For example, if the internet connection is slow, then there is no point designing activities that involve the downloading or uploading of large files, such as video or audio which works best with broadband internet connection. Of course, with the advancement in computer software and hardware, much improvement has been made and it is now possible to dramatically reduce file size in just a matter of a click. However, it is always wise to ask whether particular learning activities are well supported by the technology available. This is especially important since previous studies unanimously reported that technical problems are among the most frequently reported by students as the drawback of online learning delivery. In the end, it is how well technology supports the implementation of a particular instructional design that dictates the effectiveness of online delivery. Instructional design which applies cur-

rent learning theories, such as sociocultural constructivism, will be in vain if technology does not enable a dynamic interaction among the students, and between the students and the teacher. In this case, Leidner and Jarvenpaa (1995: 18) cogently argue that "the effectiveness of information technology in contributing to learning will be a function of how well the technology supports a particular model of learning and the appropriateness of the model to a particular learning situation".

In short, instructional design plays a major role in conventional face-to-face classroom environments; it is even more important in online learning environments where communication and interaction among members of the classroom community are mediated by technology. Good instructional design is informed by sound learning theories and translated into unambiguous and well-structured learning activities, and considers the different characteristics of the learners. Success of online delivery depends crucially on how well the learning activities are designed and also how well technology supports the implementation of such activities. Matching technology capabilities and sound instructional design is one of the keys to successful implementation of online learning.

PROVISION OF SUPPORT

In a conventional face-to-face classroom, provision of support to both students and the teacher has long been regarded as an important factor in the success of teaching and learning in this classroom. In an online environment, the need for this support may even be more imperative. In the absence of face-to-face contact between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves, communication relies heavily on technology. However, at times, technical problems do occur and, unless dealt with immediately, this could potentially lead to chaos. Whereas some of these problems may be resolved by the teacher, others may require special technical expertise. Thus, it is crucial that both the teacher and students be provided with continuing technical support (Owston, 1997).

Support for the teacher can be provided in the form of regular training programs on the platform or courseware delivery system. This may include, to name a few, training on how to create a class, how to post course content, how to use both synchronous and asynchronous communication, how to create and upload online interactive quizzes, and how to run basic troubleshooting. Training on online pedagogy including, but not limited to, how to design learning activities, how to facilitate online discussion using both synchronous and asynchronous communication, how to provide feedback,

and how to provide scaffolding online is also vital. These training programs are essential because they provide teachers with skills critical to effectively and efficiently teach online and, most importantly, because they have the capacity to increase teachers' self-confidence.

In addition to technical support, professional incentives and rewards should also be provided to teachers who have successfully taught online units. These incentives can be provided in the form of promotional activities or the like, which are outlined and defined clearly in the university's policy and should be well understood by staff. Rewarding online teachers who receive high ratings from the students is important as a way of showing appreciation of all the hard work they have done in the past and, at the same time, as an instrument to motivate them to continue to do so in the future. As for those teachers who receive lower ratings, it is necessary that the institution always ensures the availability of necessary training programs in areas in need of further improvement.

Apart from the teacher, online students also require ongoing technical support. In a study conducted by the author, as mentioned earlier, some students reported that they could not log on to the chat room due to software issues, and it took some time before this issue was resolved. While some students were willing to wait a bit longer until the problem was fixed, others were frustrated by this problem. Thus, providing prompt and reliable technical support constitutes one of the most important ingredients of successful online delivery. In fact, a previous study suggests that when technical support is provided, students tend to perceive the use of online tools to be relatively easy (Lee, 2006). Obviously, knowing that technical assistance is readily available anytime when needed can be reassuring. Perhaps the most distressing experience, as far as online students are concerned, is having a technical problem and not knowing whom to turn to for help, or knowing that the teacher himself cannot be of much help.

Additionally, it is also important that online students be provided with access to a diverse array of learning resources such as course materials and other relevant readings accessible through the courseware delivery system. In some good universities, online students even have full access to library catalogues, journal articles, conference proceedings and digitised text books. The idea is that learning resources that are available to face-to-face students should also be accessible by online students in such a way that all that distinguishes them is the mode of delivery. Of course, the provision of these resources requires a strong commitment and investment on the part of the institution. However, such investment is necessary once an institution has opted for online delivery.

All in all, providing various types of support to both online teachers and students is vital to the success of online delivery. It is very difficult to imagine how online delivery could ever be successful without the strong and continuing support and commitment from the institution. Providing technology alone is not sufficient; on the contrary, the introduction of new technology in the classroom may potentially result in chaos without the necessary support from the institution.

LANGUAGE SKILLS CHARACTERISTICS

Previous studies examining the effectiveness of online learning across different subjects and content areas have yielded conflicting findings. These inconsistent results may simply be attributed to the different characteristics of the subjects under investigation. In other words, while new technologies may be appropriate for teaching certain subjects, such as maths and statistics, they may not necessarily be suitable for teaching others (Banas & Emory, 1998).

In the context of language teaching and learning, a similar argument applies. For example, while online delivery may be appropriate for teaching Writing and Grammar as a unit, it may not be automatically suitable for teaching Speaking. The challenge for teachers and researchers in the field is, therefore, to comprehensively scrutinise which language skills are better taught face-to-face; which are appropriate for online; and which can be taught using a hybrid mode, that is, a mixture of face-to-face and online. Needless to say, this will require extensive research before a solid conclusion regarding this issue can be confidently made.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Online course offerings have continued to grow at an almost exponential rate worldwide since they were first introduced in tertiary education. Over the past decade or so, online delivery has also been used to teach language courses, most notably English as a Foreign or Second Language. Interestingly, or perhaps ironically, while there is a plethora of research comparing the effectiveness of online tuition relative to conventional face-to-face classroom instruction, relatively little research has endeavoured to answer the question of what exactly it is that dictates the success of online delivery. This paper has attempted to address this question based on the literature of online learning and the empirical evidence gathered during a

research study by the author, resulting in the identification of six critical success factors of online learning. Although not exhaustive, these factors include student characteristics, instructional design, provision of support to both instructors and students, teacher characteristics, technology, and language skills characteristics. Throughout this paper, I have argued that these factors should be seriously taken into account when considering opting for online delivery.

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