

## 'The Netflixization of academia': is this the end for university lectures?

Level 3 • Advanced

### 1 Warmer

Complete the table. Add two more items of your own.

	Which things can you find in your classroom?	Which things might you find in a university lecture theatre?	Which things are the most useful for learning a language?
teacher (or lecturer)			
data projector			
TV			
microphone			
video recording equipment			
loudspeakers			
flip chart			
whiteboard			
textbook			

### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

wary                      pervaded                      compelled                      gloomier                      reservations                      infiltration  
 spontaneous                      lectern                      sage                      approaches                      shift                      ubiquitous

- when something becomes a feature of something gradually, without anyone noticing \_\_\_\_\_
- someone who is wise and shows good judgement \_\_\_\_\_
- spread through the whole of something and became a very obvious feature of it \_\_\_\_\_
- more negative and with less hope \_\_\_\_\_
- made to do something \_\_\_\_\_
- particular ways of thinking about or dealing with something \_\_\_\_\_
- a tall piece of furniture with a sloping surface where you put an open book or document when you are giving a speech \_\_\_\_\_
- happening in a natural way without being planned or thought about \_\_\_\_\_
- careful or nervous about doing something because you think it might cause a problem \_\_\_\_\_
- feelings of doubt about whether something is good or right \_\_\_\_\_
- a change in something \_\_\_\_\_
- present everywhere \_\_\_\_\_

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*Universities are increasingly recording lectures, but academics are wary of being spied on or made obsolete*

Chris Stokel-Walker

4 December, 2019

- 1 It's a time of change for universities, but their policies are struggling to keep up with rising student numbers and the growing infiltration of technology in lecture theatres. At many institutions, teaching is recorded through a system called Panopto (or ReCap) and uploaded to digital learning environments like Blackboard so it's accessible in students' own time. According to Panopto's own figures, more than 1,000 institutions worldwide use it to record more than 100 hours of video every month. The old idea of "the sage on the stage" that has pervaded higher education for thousands of years is disappearing. And some people are worried.
- 2 Academics fear that on-demand recordings, which some have called the "Netflixization of academia", will affect attendance. They also worry about less obvious consequences: it could be used to bust strikes, it could be a watching eye monitoring their performance, and eventually it could replace them. But do they have genuine reason to be concerned?
- 3 "I wouldn't say the data proves them wrong," says Emily Nordmann, a University of Glasgow academic who has studied lecture recording technology. But she disagrees with the gloomier predictions: "It's a tool in the same way a textbook is for a student."
- 4 A survey by Newcastle University's students' union found that around three-quarters of students say they very rarely use recordings as a reason not to attend lectures – apart from disabled students or those living far away who struggle to afford the daily commute. "Lecture recording is very beneficial for vulnerable groups of students," explains Pablo Charro de la Fuente, education officer at Newcastle University. And when one in five students are from outside the UK, recordings can also be a good way to revisit material they didn't fully understand.
- 5 There's also a longstanding worry that reruns could become the norm. "I've heard individual staff members express concern they'll be replaced by a videotape. When the ReCap policy is updated, we've always relayed that that's not the purpose of it," says Joe Barton, representation and research coordinator at Newcastle University's students' union.
- 6 Since the intellectual property for the content of lecture recordings generally belongs to the performer, it's unlikely that recordings will replace lecturers. This hasn't quelled any anxieties among staff: Jisc, an organization which provides tech support and advice to universities, has been compelled to produce guidance for fearful lecturers.
- 7 The problem is that each university has different policies when it comes to lecture recording. A survey of 35 UK institutions by Nordmann and colleagues found that 11 had staff opt in to recording, 19 required staff to opt out and four had different approaches depending on individual schools.
- 8 But the evidence is that students don't want a teacherless classroom. "I don't think that interaction with the lecturer can be replaced," says de la Fuente. "It wouldn't be welcomed by the student body."
- 9 "The community side of lecture attendance is the most important thing," adds Nordmann. "Students can probably learn the same amount from the video, but it's actually being there in the room with the person that makes the difference."
- 10 There are also concerns that the creeping advent of the red light and camera or microphone near the lectern is a way to spy on staff members and monitor how they teach. In reality, almost every university policy Nordmann has read explicitly states that recordings can't be used for the purposes of performance management.
- 11 Nevertheless, some academics think that recording lectures has changed the way they teach – whether it makes them less spontaneous and more likely to stick to the script or wary of cracking jokes in case it comes out wrong and is captured on camera.
- 12 As the demographics of those teaching change, concerns around recording will likely disappear. "I see a difference between people who have been lecturing for 20 or 30 years and people who are newer to it or who are perhaps more used

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to having every moment of their lives filmed and recorded," says Nordmann. "Because I've always been recorded, I don't think about it."

- 13 Additionally, most universities allow lecturers to opt out of recording some lectures or to pause recordings at sensitive moments – though often they don't know they can. "Students understand," says Nordmann. "If you treat them like adults and explain why some lectures are recorded and some aren't, they generally are fine with it."
- 14 Regardless of some lecturers' reservations, the tide is turning. Between 70 and 80% of British universities now have lecture recording

technology in their lecture rooms. "As video has become commonplace in education, academics are using it like any other technology: they experiment with it, learn what it does well and find their own applications for it in the classroom," says Peter Ingle, general manager for Panopto in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

- 15 Nordmann describes the shift as similar to how PowerPoint transformed presentations. "It's now become ubiquitous," she says. "That's the comparison we're looking at."

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### 3 Finding information

- a. Complete the table using information from the article. Add any further ideas of your own.

The video recording of lectures	
Positive effects for students	Negative effects for students
Positive effects for lecturers	Negative effects for lecturers

- b. Explain what you understand by the term *Netflixization* and why the author used it.

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#### 4 Word pairs

a. Join the words to make word pairs from the article.

- |                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. express      | a. in         |
| 2. intellectual | b. body       |
| 3. opt          | c. property   |
| 4. opt          | d. management |
| 5. student      | e. concern    |
| 6. performance  | f. out        |

b. Find the word pairs in the article to check your answers and read them in context.

c. Explain what they mean. Look up any you do not know.

d. Use each word pair in a new sentence of your own.

#### 5 Multi-word expressions

Find the following multi-word expressions in the article.

1. a five-word expressions that describes a method of teaching in which a lecturer stands at the front of the room and holds a talk
2. a four-word idiom meaning that a situation is changing

#### 6 Discussion

Make notes of your own answers to these questions, then discuss the questions with other students.

- In your opinion, what are the advantages of learning in a physical classroom with other students and with a teacher or lecturer?
- Under what circumstances might video recordings of lectures and lessons be useful for you personally and help facilitate your learning?

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#### KEY

#### 2 Key words

1. infiltration
2. sage
3. pervaded
4. gloomier
5. compelled
6. approaches
7. lectern
8. spontaneous
9. wary
10. reservations
11. shift
12. ubiquitous

#### 3 Finding information

The video recording of lectures	
<p><b>Positive effects for students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recordings that have been uploaded to digital learning environments are then available whenever students want to access them.</li> <li>• The recordings can be accessed by students who were unable to attend lectures due to disability, illness or the cost involved in getting to university.</li> <li>• The recordings could be shown when lecturers are on strike.</li> <li>• Students (especially those from abroad) can rewatch the lectures and revisit material they didn't understand.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Negative effects for students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many students don't want a teacherless classroom.</li> <li>• Interaction with the lecturer would be lost, which is something students do not want to happen.</li> <li>• Students will lose the feeling of community, of being part of a group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Positive effects for lecturers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The content of recorded lectures remains the property of the lecturer.</li> <li>• Guidance has been provided for them by some tech support companies.</li> <li>• They can opt out of having their lectures recorded.</li> <li>• Most lecturers have the possibility to pause the recording at sensitive moments.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Negative effects for lecturers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They worry that on-demand video recordings may eventually replace lecturers.</li> <li>• The recordings could be used during times of strikes, therefore undermining the strike.</li> <li>• Students may not bother to attend lectures if they know they can watch recordings of them.</li> <li>• Lecturers are worried that recordings might be used to spy on them and monitor how they teach.</li> <li>• Lecturers will be more careful about what they say – especially when it comes to anything spontaneous such as making jokes. They will be worried that any slip they make will be recorded and could be used against them.</li> </ul>

#### 4 Word pairs

1. e – say publicly that you are worried about something or not convinced that it has benefits
2. c – something that someone has created or invented and that no one else is legally allowed to make, copy or sell
- 3/4. a – decide that you want to do something or be involved in something
- 3/4. f – decide not to take part in something or to stop taking part in it
5. b – all the students that belong to a university
6. d – checking that someone is doing what they should be doing in their job and that they are doing it well

#### 5 Multi-word expressions

1. the sage on the stage
2. the tide is turning