



© Song_about_summer/stock.adobe.com

A new report states that theory lessons held online have major disadvantages compared with in-person lessons held on location

Risks in a digital world

The debate about whether, and if so, under which conditions, theory lessons should be held online is causing quite a stir. A new report is now warning against the risks of holding theory lessons exclusively online.

TEXT: SASKIA DOLL/MOVING INTERNATIONAL ROAD SAFETY ASSOCIATION

You could barely find a more hotly debated topic amongst driving instructors than the one that is currently raging, concerning the pros and cons of holding lessons remotely online as an alternative to in-person classes held on location. Many industry experts believe that holding theory lessons exclusively online threatens to endanger the quality of driver training. It was adopted as a necessary re-

sponse to the coronavirus pandemic, but its potential as a long-term model is being called into question. These concerns are now also backed up by a new scientific report published by Prof. Manfred Spitzer, Medical Director of the Psychiatric University Hospital at the University of Ulm.

Commissioned by road safety association Moving, the report entitled “Theorieunterricht in Fahrschulen: Digital oder

Präsenz?” [Theory Lessons in Driving Schools: Online or On Site?] confirms that holding theory lessons exclusively online would significantly reduce learners’ ability to retain the knowledge imparted for the long term, and would negatively affect the teaching of social skills. “In the medium term, this would endanger safety on the road, for example, and severely impact socially and economically disadvantaged students in par-

SURVEY**Online or on site?**

Based on its latest surveys “Moving Fahrschulmarkt 2022” [Moving Driving School Market 2022] and “Moving Trendstudie 2022” [Moving Trend Study 2022], road safety association Moving has summarised the main findings from its research:

1. Learner drivers state that it takes them an average of 14 minutes to travel from their home to their driving school.
2. 75 percent of learner drivers surveyed would like a consultation before starting their training.
3. In the post-pandemic world, 95 percent of driving schools surveyed would like to hold theory lessons in the form of in-person, on-site classes.
4. Only five percent of driving schools surveyed are maintaining an online-only remote learning set-up.
5. 78 percent of driving school owners confirm that the knowledge imparted in in-person lessons held on site is retained for longer than in online classes. Even 59 percent of “online driving schools” have found that the knowledge imparted in in-person lessons held on site is retained for longer.
6. According to the driving schools surveyed, online lessons mean that learner drivers have to expect more practical driving lessons and higher overall costs.
7. 47 percent of driving schools state that considerably more practical driving lessons could be required as a result of online lessons.
8. In the post-pandemic world, 87 percent of learner drivers surveyed would like to take their theory lessons in the form of in-person lessons held on site (either exclusively, or as part of a blended format).
9. Only 11 percent of learner drivers surveyed prefer online-only lessons.
10. In all respects, learner drivers rate in-person lessons held on site as more suitable than online lessons.

ticular”, states a press release from Moving. In his report, neuroscientist Spitzer points to various international studies that demonstrate that the use of digital information technology negatively impacts the learning experience of socially or economically disadvantaged students in particular.

SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES EXACERBATED

According to the report, if lessons were held only online, socially and economically disadvantaged learner drivers would have less chance of obtaining their driver’s licence. “The social aspect of learning that would normally be effectively conveyed with lasting effect by on-site theory lessons, would

need to form part of their practical driving lessons out on the road. As a result, they would require more practical driving lessons and would thus incur additional costs, which would again hit socially disadvantaged people particularly hard”, commented Moving. As such, Prof. Spitzer believes the most severe negative consequence of online lessons can be seen in how this affects the participation of socio-economically disadvantaged people in social interactions.

“According to our survey of driving schools, almost half of respondents assume that online theory lessons could mean a sharp increase in the number of practical driving lessons”, confirms Jörg-Michael Satz, President of Moving.

INTERACTION AND DIALOGUE ARE CALLED FOR

“As the report clearly shows, eliminating in-person lessons held on site would significantly impair the quality of driver train-

// THE REPORT STATES THAT DIRECT DISCUSSIONS ARE LESS EFFECTIVE IN ONLINE LESSONS //

ing and increase the risk of accidents for novice drivers, which would not contribute to achieving the declared goal of Vision Zero. We are therefore clear in our demands: Online theory lessons can only ever supplement in-person lessons held on site – they should never replace them entirely”, underlines Gerhard von Bressendorf, President of the German Driver Instructor’s Academy (Deutsche Fahrlehrer Akademie).

According to Prof. Spitzer, only in-person, on-site lessons can facilitate direct discussions between participants, tap into their emotions to the necessary extent, and focus the attention as a shared experience with others during interactive learning. He also notes that digital media have the demonstrable potential to disrupt learning and distract learners if it is used to impart knowledge in lessons.

CONCLUSION: THERE ARE MAJOR SIDE EFFECTS AND RISKS

In summary, the report concludes that if lessons were held only online and remotely, this would negatively affect the social interactions of socially disadvantaged people and lead to higher costs to obtain a driver’s licence. Over the long term, there would also be a greater risk of hazards in road traffic.

“No positive effects are expected. By contrast, the known side effects of online remote learning and the risks to be expected for individual learner drivers and road users in general are considerable”, sums up Prof. Spitzer.

Against this background, Jürgen Kopp, Chair of the German Federal Union of Driving Instructor Groups (Bundesvereinigung der Fahrlehrerverbände), also highlighted: “That is why we are urgently warning against introducing new legislation that would enable online theory lessons without some time spent on site in person.” //

// ONLINE-ONLY LESSONS COULD LEAD TO HIGHER COSTS FOR LEARNER DRIVERS //