

Perceptions of University Students about Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sindh Province Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sindh Province, Pakistan, the study looked at university students' perceptions of online teaching and learning in higher education. In order to do so, we looked at students' attitudes about online learning, their ability to absorb information, and their use of E-learning platforms. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to conduct an online survey. Data was obtained from 762 students from two universities in Sindh province. Expert opinions were used to appropriately validate the question. The findings of the study revealed that higher education institutions in Sindh Province were not ready to offer solely online courses. The most prominent concerns are technological issues, followed by teachers' lack of technical skills and badly suited instructional styles to the online setting. Students, on the other hand, attributed the last place to a lack of connection with professors or poor communication with them. The research implications for universities and researchers are examined in light of these findings.

Keywords: *Online Teaching, Covid-19, Pandemic, Higher Education. Perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic has altered the interaction between teachers and students in universities and colleges, causing alterations in the teaching-learning process. Universities were forced to carry out their activities with students purely online as a function of the pandemic (Yusuf & Al-Banawi, 2013). Many governments made steps to prevent the disease from spreading and to maintain the academic process's sustainability, and colleges everywhere around the world implemented web - based learning (Ali, 2020). Whereas internet-based learning is generally thought of as an alternative for conventional learning, this became a vital component of maintaining schools and colleges open during the Coronavirus outbreak. This shift in thinking may cause learners' perceptions of this mode of instruction to change, because their opinions may differ from those obtained in research before to the epidemic. As a result, we attempted to record the existence of such modifications in our paper. Previous research has shown that E-learning has numerous positive effects on students since it emphasises academic, is now more adaptable, and can promote student engagement by utilising asynchronous online

resources such as e-mail, forums, chat rooms, and videoconferences (Popovici, 2015). Furthermore, mobile applications expedite the simultaneous dissemination of subject matter to a huge number of participants; E-learning platforms provide these benefits to learners, including control over the content, control over the spending time learning, and the ability to adapt the procedure to the learner's interests and abilities objectives. This may affect the communication with students, and despite some inherent obstacles brought on by the current crisis, E-learning could help students understand the material.

Nevertheless, there are also some elements that may be considered obstacles in students' learning processes when using E-learning platforms, such as emotional exhaustion, delayed feedback or help because teachers may not always be readily accessible when students need help while learning, or feelings of isolation owing to the unavailability of powerful proximity of classmates. Fortunately, these problems can be addressed with the assistance of teachers who should tailor their educational tactics to the diversity of learners. In order to do so, experience and knowledge about teaching in the online environment are necessary. Thus, we believe that these challenges and disadvantages could be more prominent while the educational process takes place exclusively online. This might happen due to the lack of teachers' experience in using E-learning and due to the short time in which they had to adapt their teaching style to the new conditions. Relevant in this way are the results of a study conducted by School Education Gateway at the beginning of the pandemic which showed that 66.9% of respondents argued that they used online platforms for teaching for the first time (Horton, 2005). Thus, it can be inferred that students and teachers were not ready for an entirely online experience.

As a result, both university staff and students faced numerous obstacles. Most of the other difficulties universities face, according with Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, include sustaining a balance between distance learning, which might also endanger students' health by requiring them to spend long periods of time in front of a screen, and non-digital activities, analysing and focusing on students' emotional patients and providing people with support all throughout learning process, and take into consideration the fact that not all students have access to the internet. Additionally, colleges face challenges in maintaining uniform and relevant open courseware, interacting clearly with the scholarly institution, and gaining and enrolling pupils. Pupils, from the other side, experienced difficulties, with one study focusing on students' perspectives on E-learning identifying access and availability, internet access, a lack of adequate devices, and social issues represented by a lack of interaction and communication with instructors and classmates as being one of the main problem that students faced (Oye, 2011).

Considering the aforementioned factors, they believe whether shifting to exclusively E-learning can dramatically increase the education system and students' perceptions of the usage of the digital environment in the teaching and learning activities, and these concepts form the foundation of our research. We thought it was significant, relevant, and required to investigate regardless of whether students have transitioned to E-learning and are delighted, rather than disappointed, with this unique online experience. The purpose of this research is to determine the pupil's perspectives on the E-learning experience during the Coronavirus pandemic because then the E-learning infrastructure can be developed and maintained. In other words, this research looks into how the academic performance was chosen during the same moment of crisis, as well as the students' perspectives on the use of E-learning platforms and how these technologies effected their comprehension and integration of knowledge. We were also interested in defining the important challenges that students faced when learning online, as well as the context in which they would like these platforms which can be used by university in the future. As a result, our research can help to promote the E-learning process and providing relevant data on the effectiveness of specific methods for education background, the time has

been spent on assignments and duties, the course content, as well as student grievances, suggestions, and priorities for teaching techniques.

Universities must keep up with students' wants, interests, and expectations in today's higher education system, which is always changing. As a result, information technology and E-learning systems are viewed as critical components in institutions' operations, with these institutions increasingly expanding with online systems and gadgets. However, in this technological age, amongst the most significant issues that face universities is the integration of cutting-edge E-learning tools to enhance and support both teaching and learning (Gallie, 2004). Multiple definitions for the idea of E-learning have been presented given the complexity. E-learning, to put it simply, is the use of information technology and information systems and equipment to create and develop educational experiences. E-learning, according to Elmarie Engel Brecht, is a paradigm that employs electronic media such as the internet, CDs, cellular telephones, and even televisions to provide distance learning and teaching. In a nutshell, E-learning is the process of transmitting knowledge and education through the use of technological devices, and the notion is properly understood when something is presented within a context in which technology is used to meet people's need to learn and progress (Zare, 2016).

Educational technology dates back to 1840, when Isaac Pitman utilised mail and a shorthand technique to educate and collaborate with students, and the word E-learning was shown to have first originated in the educational profession in the early 1990s. Considering the aforementioned factors, this sort of web - based learning can be seen as a natural progression of the principle of remote learning. E-learning, according to a particularly comprehensive and encompassing definition, is a type of teaching and learning that combines electronic resources and mediums with the goal of fostering development and improving education and training quality (Venkatesh, 2003).

E-learning can also refer to a system for secondary qualifications or a network in which information is communicated to a large audience using electronic resources. Social media and the internet are the two important characteristics that keep such systems running. E-learning includes essential characteristics that facilitate and nourish the learning-teaching process by providing a wide range of possibilities for information sharing and downloading documents in various formats. Because it is a web-based system, no additional equipment is required, and when the content is posted, users are able to access it at any time (Vitoria, 2018). In this sense, the wide range of technological capabilities associated with the web has enabled the development and enhancement of E-learning programmes. Individual courses, which people take without having classmates, virtual classes, which are structured equally to a traditional, face-to-face course, required to learn games, where it process of comprehension and implementing this change is done through computer simulation operations, online and blended, that either manages to combine traditional and online classes, mobile learning, or knowledge management, which reorganises knowledge. As a result, E-learning is a multidimensional approach that integrates components include technology tools and design, e-learning networks, knowledge, and customers.

According to Oye et al., e-learning differs from a traditional or other ways of teaching and learning since it concentrates not just on the education but also in the personalised learning. To put that another way, while traditional education is more teacher-centered, the advent of E-learning has brought about a change toward a student-centered schooling. Likewise, Sun et al. reported that learners believe teachers need to know how to make adjustments their lectures to the online environment, rather than purely transferring data that was previously taught in some kind of a traditional way, and that they would rather give an appropriate number of projects and assignments in their study of students' personal experience during distance learning. (2018, Lochner). Furthermore, Huang et al. identified seven key factors that form the foundation of

online education and play a critical role in enhancing learning in abnormal circumstances such as the Coronavirus pandemic. Such components include: maintaining and working to develop digital infrastructure to avoid interruptions, especially during youtube clip; using friendly tools to help students fully integrate and understand the information; provides necessary, engaging, and diverse electronic information resources; using social networking sites to build social networks for understudies to reduce feelings of loneliness; as well as optimizing business processes efficient methods such as debates or learning based on discovery (2018, Ninoriya).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of students regarding the way universities managed to provide knowledge in the context of exclusively online learning. The ability to learn and assimilate information in the context of exclusively online learning and the use of E-learning platform in the process of exclusively online learning.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

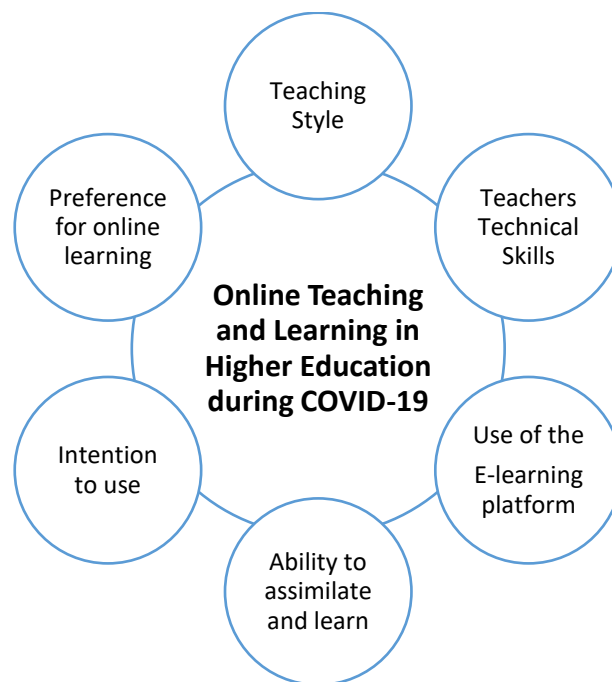


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to conduct an online survey. Data was obtained from 762 students from various universities in Sindh province. Professional opinions were used to appropriately validate the question. The results of the study revealed that institutions of higher learning in Sindh Province were just not interested in offering solely online courses. The most prominent concerns are technological issues, accompanied by teachers' lack of technical skills and badly adapted instructional styles to the online environment. Learners, on the other hand, attributed the very last place to a lack of engagement with educators or poor communication with them. The research implications for universities as well as scientists are explored in light of these results.

RESULTS

What Is the Perception of Students about the Way Universities Managed to Provide Knowledge in the Context of Exclusively Online Learning?

Universities, professors, and students were unprepared for the abrupt move to entirely online learning and teaching, but they sought to adapt and meet the new challenges by devising new ways. Institutions lacked the knowledge and technology to provide optimal conditions for online learning, with 69.4 percent of those polled experiencing regular or very frequent technical issues with the platforms provided by universities (connecting to the platform, signal loss, delayed viewing of messages, the sound was not clear). As a result, some lecturers have discovered alternative approaches by using other platforms, although this has caused concern amongst certain students because to a lack of transparency on when and where the program will be conducted on other systems. Access to those platforms was frequently constrained, and although there were connectivity issues, particularly when the number of pupils engaged was high. Furthermore, 14.8 percent of the respondents mentioned that understudies' absence of adequate technology for engagement in various learning has overlapped with any of these issues (poor internet connection, lack of laptops/computers, mobile relationship that temporarily provides access to services provided by the lecturer and systems).

What Is the Perception of Students about the Ability to Learn and Assimilate Information in the Context of Exclusively Online Learning?

Despite the fact that the majority of students (66.1%) had utilised the E-learning platform before with the epidemic, their views on using the online environment for learning are divided. Some of them think it's a good learning atmosphere (37.4%), while others think it's not so good (32%), and a third is undecided (30.6 percent). When it relates to their degree of satisfaction with their programme of study, the same thing happens: 39.1 percent are extremely satisfied or satisfied, 31.9 percent are unsure, and 29 percent are dissatisfied. Students believe that absorbing information is more difficult in the E-learning system (60.5%), and even that presenting seminars work on the internet is more challenging in the online environment (one third) (32.9 percent). The degree of knowledge and processing of information would've been increased if somehow the classes were held via a videoconferencing technology (73 percent). In this regard, it's worth noting that perhaps the vast majority of kids prefer to connect with professors in writing, on private messaging (52.4 percent), and with the microphone less during classes/seminars.

Students' Perception of the Use of E-Learning Platform

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the perceived ease of use of the system's instruments, as well as the perceived usefulness of such instruments, impact real network utilisation. In this regard, it's worth noting that neither student remarked that the platform was difficult to use in response to an open question concerning challenges encountered when using it. As a result, 66.1 percent of students had been using the website before and had no trouble utilising or controlling the equipment it offers. Teachers were required to use the very university's E-learning platform in the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak. Substitute platform were only allowed to be used to resolve complex technical issues that developed as a result of something like the servers hosting the E-learning platform. The majority of teachers used a significant amount of E-learning tools (above 7) on a regular schedule (86.4 percent of students mentioned this aspect). Unfortunately, only a small number of students think that at least seven of something like the eleven equipment were useful (68.9 percent). Despite the fact that the E-learning platform passes basic criteria for students to choose it (ease of use, utility), students still prefer alternative platforms given the small number of technical difficulties they observed while using those. Unfortunately, students equated technical concerns with the system's capacity, misunderstanding the distinction between both the platform's use/utility and thus the capacity of the servers supporting it at the present.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study's findings and findings result in two types of ramifications: practical and theoretical implications. On a more political level, a set of useful advice for professors can be presented in order for them to be successful in improving the quality of the educational process in the online environment. The study will provide an insight on how the teaching method unfolded at a context of dramatic and multiple changes in Pakistani higher education system. Thus, it is possible that the quality of the educational process will improve after an extended timeframe of adaptation and familiarisation of students and teachers with the online environment, and that students' perceptions of distance courses will be more positive, in line with other studies mentioned earlier in this paper.

However, in order for Romania's school curriculum to correctly and successfully convert to teaching and learning, a number of steps must be performed to promote and assist this new type of teaching. Throughout this context, universities could design teacher practice sessions or programmes whose purpose is to improve instructors' effectiveness and, implicitly, the educational system' quality. Attributed to the ability of the servers held by universities, technical issues have always been the most difficult to resolve. Universities have undoubtedly made attempts that address these issues and improve the functionality of E-learning tools. Poor internet connectivity, signal loss, and a lack of sufficient digital equipment continue to be issues for pupils, especially for those living in rural parts of the country or tend to have low households. Universities might develop programmes to fulfil such requirements, making the learning process easier for individuals who feel themselves in any of these circumstances.

The key obstacles that Pakistani higher education system faces today, in our opinion, are teachers' resilience to change and changing students' perception of online learning. Instructors' training programmes must be developed to assist someone to adapt to the new, to help them understand that the future of education in higher education systems is in the online environment, that perhaps the system is willing to recover to its from before the state, and that teaching method is an innovative mode of interaction with students. Teachers that are expansive, flexible, and eager to learn becoming identity and attempted to improve their communication skills. Unfortunately, some teachers are still resistant to learning how to utilise new technologies, and they just use the crucial functionalities of the E-learning platform throughout their classes. It's also worth noting that in university education, it is much more important for teachers to admit because you don't understand how to utilise specific platform capabilities, that's why they don't ask for help. Unfortunately, technical abilities alone are adequate; schools must therefore adapt their instructional strategies to the online world.

In terms of the information computation while distance courses, the findings show that it would be necessary to be using the video - conferencing function during classes, to balance the number of theory and practical tasks, and to ascribe students a sufficient wide range of practical tasks in order for them to stop spending too many times in front of the computer for better assimilation of information. To make up for the lack of communication in the digital environment, it is essential that the duties entail coordination. As a result, this necessitates not only creativity in conceptualising and designing projects that promote student engagement, but also technical knowledge in order to set up as well as deploy systems that boost interaction among students. Furthermore, teachers must quickly provide students with feedback' completed tasks, provide public backing, internationalise the tasks assigned to them, use a variety of instructional tools, provide information in multiple formats (sound, multimedia, words), and devise strategies to pique participants' desire to participate and allow them to focus during classes.

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