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ONLINE EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC;
STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This particular research study aims to scrutinize the outlooks and approaches of the Pakistani University Students headed for enforced online classes and distance learning developments in the pandemic of Coronavirus (COVID-19). A total of 200 students from the institution of higher education (Specifically enrolled in Masters and bachelors program) have been targeted and plotted to find their perceptions for the online education progress in the Universities of Pakistan. This study intended to fetch the inside of the participated students and explored that the students' responses towards online classes are uncomfortable and not satisfactory. The study concluded that online education's current development is not yielding desirable goals in developing countries like Pakistan, where the country's infrastructure is not stable. The students face ambiguity as most of the students have not stable access to an online education plan's mandatory technical requirements, i.e. stable and cheap internet connection, laptops or Android cellphones, electricity, etc. The study has also discussed the numbers of factors like the course instructor's physical interaction, an uncertain taken response time of the written communication, mobility, classroom discussions and socialization, practical implementation, etc. The university students have high lighted those factors which are causing hurdles in understanding online education.

1. Introduction

The Director-General of WHO Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on 30th January 2020, showed extreme concern and declared the COVID-19 as a global emergency for public health; which was later announced as pandemic on

11th March 2020 as around 120,000 more cases testified from 114 countries other than China (Cucinotta&Vanelli, 2020). The Federal Health Ministry of Pakistan confirmed the first two cases from Karachi and the Capital on 26th January 2020 (Ali, 2020). As per the statistics until 19th June 2020, a total of 165,062 of COVID-19 cases were reported. With 3229 casualties caused by Covid-19 (Covid-19 Stats, 2020). Due to the safety concerns aroused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government of Pakistan announced countrywide closure of all educational institutes on 13th March 2020 (Saqlain, Munir, Ahmed, Tahir, & Kamran, 2020). The Higher Education Commission (HEC) as per the directives issued from the Federal Government instructed all the higher education institutes and universities to adopt the distance learning (DL) approach. The institutes further asked to reschedule the continuing or upcoming exams and assist their students online in continuing their studies regularly until the COVID19 pandemic is over (Ali, 2020).

Though CoVID-19 has severely affected almost everyone it has left severe impacts on the education sector around the globe; that it will take a year or two to fill the loss caused by it to the students (Mailizar, Almanthari, Maulina, & Bruce, 2020). To follow social distancing, the schools, colleges, and universities globally faced the temporary shutdown (Toquero, 2020). The overnight transformation from conventional education to distance learning was not easy, leading to various problems. Many challenges were faced by the students, teachers, and the institutes itself in this regard (Crawford, Butler-Henderson, Rudolph, & Glowatz, 2020). However, there was no other choice to continue education except to halt the educational process; the educational institutions worldwide decided to continue the process with the limited resources available (Kaur, 2020).

2. Literature Review

Unfortunately, that was not the first time the educational activities were interrupted; earlier in 2009, the H1N1 Flu outbreak severely impacted educational activities worldwide, which was the time (SARS-CoV) (Cauchemez et al., 2014). The social distancing urged educational experts and academic institutions to adopt new learning behaviors using advanced technologies instead of relying on the traditional way of Education (Kaur, 2020). Realizing the need for time, many institutions started to offer online courses. There are two main problems almost everywhere; one very little efficacy is found in online learning (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Moreover, the second is delivering lectures through digital platforms is not that successful compared to the conventional teaching methods when it is about achieving learning goals and focusing on educational priorities (Liguori & Winkler, 2020).

The objectives of effective distance learning can only be achieved in countries where digitally progressive (Wains & Mahmood, 2008). That is why, in Pakistan, the objectives of distance learning are not achieved successfully. The main reason is the typical manual handling of all the administrative tasks of learning, teaching, evaluation, and examining (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). The unavailability of laptops, personal computers, and consistent internet connectivity obstructs and delays online learning progression mainly for less privileged, and inhabitants of rural areas or belong to relegated communities of Pakistan (Salam, Jianqiu, Pathan, & Lei, 2017). Even the students who can take online classes through their smartphones do not get to access a substantial amount of content as needed in distance learning.

The sudden change from conventional educational practices to remote learning strategies has become quite challenging for the educational institutions, yet a measure of organizational agility (Wu, 2020). Unfortunately, the academic

institutes' primary focus is to deliver the content through the digital medium, preferably on online teaching and delivery methods. This negligence is the inadequate resources in academic institutions and insufficient capacity of students for the latest technology that is affecting the responsiveness at both ends (Zhong, 2020). Initially, students were excited about it, but later they lost interest in the virtual classes due to interaction, participation, and conventional classroom. The real-time communication and sharing of thoughts, material, information, and information are compromised in the digital learning process (Britt, 2006).

The current digital learning process is not expected but is instead considered a crisis learning strategy (Pace, Pettit, & Barker, 2020). This whole situation has highlighted the flaws of traditional academic practices and urged the need to make significant curriculum amendments (Toquero, 2020). The importance of educational institutions as a resource for social activities and interactions cannot be denied. The continuous suspension of educational activities may cause a barrier in the necessary growth and learning-dependent on social interaction and activities. This issue needs to be sorted urgently, especially for the unfortunate children and young adults deprived of the essential technological resources and severely impacted by school suspension. However, the practice of closing academic institutions in response to health emergencies is not recent. However, unfortunately, the educational institutions worldwide are not yet prepared or capable to manage the prerequisites of present-day educational needs. Even in some rare cases if the proper delivery of online learning is made possible, it may still build up emotional and psychological pressure and give rise to misery at various levels (McCarthy, 2020).

Due to the limited budget, Introduction to Computer Technology adoption is inevitable in higher studies in Pakistan (Ali, 2020). There are no distinctive resources assigned in the education sector for the latest technologies and Introduction to Computer Technology initiatives (Kayani, 2005). Moreover, just after the announcement of closing the regular conventional classes, all the Government approved higher education institutions across the country were asked to practice e-learning and online management systems to administer the online educational sessions (Abbas, Ahmed, Khalid, & Yasmeen, 2017). Many educational institutions are even compelled to temporarily append their online classes due to formal learning and management systems' inaccessibility. The internationally recognized and high-rated universities of the country were capable of starting and continuing their online classes efficiently on an immediate basis.

Majority of the research work conducted in Pakistan on the challenges and opportunities of e-learning was conducted considering everyday scenarios (e.g., Ali & Ahmad, 2011; Bukhsh, 2007); where e-learning was not suggested as the compulsory option to continue the educational activities. Although few academic studies in the past made some brilliant discoveries in online education (Mailizar et al., 2020), analyzed that the typical traditional way of learning, distance education offers adequate interaction among instructors and learners needed to have effective learning outcomes. Well trained instructors are showing full commitment towards efficient delivery of lectures utilizing well-designed and up-to-date content. On the other hand, the current scenario portrays an entirely different view from the ideal online education programs. All the higher academic institutions countrywide are enforced to carry out online classes regardless of the limited resources and funds.

Few research studies recently concluded the SWOT analysis associated with remote learning during COVID-19 endemic (Ali and Ahmad, 2011). The researches were conducted to discover the benefits and issues of distance education from the perception of every individual or personnel related to it. The study directed by Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) recommended that the students' perspectives are significant in this regard. Consequently, upcoming case studies should consider and highlight students' differencing opinions regarding the challenges confronted by them. More study work is required to learn about implementing e-learning classes, which work as a barrier to attaining the learning objectives. Mailizar et al., (2020) also proposed that remote education excellence should not be compromised and reasons that serve as barriers should be probed in upcoming research work.

2.1 Objective of the Study

The leading purpose to conduct this study was targeted to conclude the following two objectives:

- To explore the perspective of university enrolled students regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of distance or online learning program conducted in Pakistan
- To discover the threats and opportunities of the online distance learning program from the university students perception in Pakistan

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

This study aims to explore, unwrap, and discover the students' perception and perspective in Pakistani higher education institutions. It focuses on identifying their attitude towards the Higher Education Commission (HEC) decision towards the adaptability of the online and distance education program and to identify the impact of implemented compulsory agenda of the online classes concerning the course work they covered during the pandemic break of COVID-19.

3.2. Survey

The study is conducted within an online survey technique to collect the data from 200 universities enrolled students and decode their perception for online classes. An online Google form questionnaire of 38 items is adopted and adapted from the study of Bernard, Brauer, Abrami, and Surkes (2004), has been distributed in the students of higher education students with the help of social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram) after conducting administering a pilot test in a small group of 20 universities enrolled students. Some suggested revisions and modification have been made to the questionnaire as per the pilot study participants' ideas and feedback.

The base paper study of Bernard, Brauer, Abrami, and Surkes was conducted in 2004 to identify online education culture's effectiveness and efficiency. This research is led to a sample size of 200 universities enrolled students (Bachelor's and Master's program) representing Pakistan's private and public, academic institutions. One hundred sixty females and 40 male students participated in this study.

3.3. Data Analysis

The statistics are composed and concluded based on an online survey and has been scrutinized based on frequency and percentage as per the responses of the university enrolled students. The demographic information has been recorded

with the help of LIKERT scale and analyzed as descriptive analysis with frequency and percentages as per the participated students' responses.

4. Results

Table 1					
Participants of the University Enrolled Students					
Participant Gender		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Female	161	80.5	80.5	80.5
	Male	39	19.5	19.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table No. 1 represents the participation of 200 universities enrolled students in well-reputed private and public higher education institutions of Pakistan. It reflects that 161 (80.5%) female students, while 39 (19.5%) male students participated in this study and became part of this online survey.

Table 2					
Descriptive Statistics for Student's University Enrolled Programs					
Qualification		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	BSPA	15	7.5	7.5	7.5
	B.A	2	1	1	8.5
	M.A	1	0.5	0.5	9
	M.Com	34	17	17	26
	B-Pharmacy	9	4.5	4.5	30.5
	MBA	40	20	20	50.5
	MPA	59	29.5	29.5	80
	BSC	1	0.5	0.5	80.5
	MSC	15	7.5	7.5	88
	MSC	5	2.5	2.5	90.5
	BBA	19	9.5	9.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table No. 2 represents the data of the university student's enrolled program. These participated students have attended the instruction based online distance learning program sessions during the pandemic of COVID-19.

MPA programs reflect the maximum participation of 29.5% whereas MA and BSC program students' participation is low, which is 0.5% each respectively.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Participant's University					
Participant University		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Private	72	36	36	36
	Public	128	64	64	100
	Total	200	100	100	

The above Table No. 3 is reflecting the participating students representing universities. The respondents from public universities are 128 (64%), and private universities are 72 (36%).

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics for Participant's Age					
Participant Age		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	16 – 20	64	32	33	33
	22 – 25	98	49	49	82
	26 – 30	38	19	19	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table 4 is representing the demographic element of participant age. It is reflecting that 98 (49%) of the participants belong between the 22-25 age bracket, 64(32%) belong from the 19-20 age bracket, and 38(19%) from the 26-30 age bracket.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for Student's Response Towards Proper Access to the Internet					
Internet Access Availability		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Proper Access	146	73	73	73
	No Access	19	9.5	9.5	82.5
	Limited Access	35	17.5	17.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table 5 represents descriptive statistics for student's perspectives for accessibility and availability of the internet. The data reflects that out of 200 participants, 146 (73%) students reported proper access to the internet while 19(9.5%) reported for no access to the internet and 35 (17.5%) for limited access to the internet.

Table 6					
Descriptive Statistics for Students Perspective for Online Learning Program					
Students Perspective		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Limited Internet Access	22	11	11	11
	Expensive	28	14	14	25
	Week Signals	102	51	51	76
	Unfamiliar with the use	4	2	2	78
	Other	44	22	22	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table 6 is representing the data of the participant's perception of online learning programs. Majority of the students that is 102 (51%) are reporting for the week signals of the internet, whereas minimal students (4 students, i.e. 2%) expressed their unfamiliarity with the use

Table 7					
Descriptive Statistics for Student's Competency for Internet Gadget Responsiveness					
Students Competency to Use Internet Gadget (computer/laptop)		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Agree	145	72.5	72.5	72.5
	Neutral	52	26	26	98.5
	Disagree	3	1.5	1.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table no. 7 represents the statistic data of 200 students for their perception of their competency for the usage of internet gadgets, especially computers and laptops. 145(72.5%) students reported that they are competent enough to use computers and laptops for online learning, whereas 3(1.5%) expressed that they are not competent enough to use laptops or computers. 53(26%) students have a neutral response to the query that means they are somehow satisfied with their competency.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics for Student's Readiness for Electronic Communication					
Student's Readiness for Electronic Communication		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Agree	123	61.5	61.5	61.5
	Neutral	55	27.5	27.5	89
	Disagree	22	11	11	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table no 8 reflects the data of 200 for student's readiness and comfortableness towards electronic communication with the instructor and the fellows. 123(61.5%) students express their readiness for electronic communication whereas 22(11%) students reported that they are not comfortable with electronic communication and 55(27.5%) gave neutral responses to digital communication.

Table 9 Descriptive Statistics for Student's Perception of Online and Classroom Learning					
There is no difference in the classroom and online learning strategy		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Agree	27	13.5	13.5	13.5
	Neutral	38	19	19	32.5
	Disagree	135	67.5	67.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table 9 represents the data collected from participated students for their perception to compare the online learning and classroom or conventional learning strategy. 135 (67.5%) participants expressed a massive difference between the both, 38(19%) expressed that there is little difference in both. They are somehow satisfied in comparing both, whereas most 135(67.5%) participants reported against the notion and selected a negative option in the Likert scale for online learning strategy.

Table 10 Descriptive Statistics for Student's perception for Online Course Completion					
Student's Perception of Online Classes and all Courses Effective Completion		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Agree	37	18.5	18.5	18.5
	Neutral	62	31	31	49.5
	Disagree	101	50.5	50.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table 10 reflects the participant's data expressing their perception for the online classes and entire courses effective online completion by distance learning online technique, majority of the participant that is 101(50.5%) reported it is challenging for them to understand the entire semester course plan remotely. 62 (31%) expressed a neutral response to it through the internet, while 37(18.5%) expressed a positive response.

Table 11 Descriptive Statistics for Student's Perception Towards Online Group Assignments					
Student's Perception of Online Group Assignments		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Agree	69	34.5	34.5	34.5
	Neutral	46	23	23	57.5
	Disagree	85	42.5	42.5	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table 11 is representing the student's data for their perception towards online group assignment. 85(42.5%) expressed that they feel difficulties and hurdles in completing their group tasks as a part of the online learning program, 46(23%) expressed a neutral response. In comparison, 69(34.5%) feel comfortable in completing their group assignments online.

Table 12 Descriptive Statistics for Student's Perspective for Need Face to Face Interface with Instructor					
Student's Perspective for the Need of Face to Face Interface with Instructor for Learning		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Agree	157	78.5	78.5	78.5
	Neutral	27	13.5	13.5	92
	Disagree	16	8	8	100
	Total	200	100	100	

Table No. 12 reflects the descriptive statistics analysis of student's perspectives for the need for face-to-face instructor interaction during the learning time. 157(78.5%) students reported the importance and effectiveness of face-to-face interaction whereas 27(13.5%) expressed neutral response to it whereas 16(8%) expressed that fact to face contact with a teacher in distant learning is not required.

5. Discussion

The majority of the students have shared their reservations about the remote learning strategies being adopted and online courses' delivery. Lack of reliable internet provisioning, futile technology, and the absence of productive interaction was unfortunately amid the main drawbacks encountered by higher studies in Pakistan. The same appeared to be the reasoning for students who do not find it convincing. The sudden change from conventional classroom education to remote learning has provided an entirely disparate understanding for students. Most less privileged students living in underdeveloped or rural areas do not have access to the internet and the necessary technology required for continuing their Education (Ahmad, 2020).

Several institutions could not offer a practical remote learning experience to their students due to the limited resources. The research also highlighted the students' issues like the absence of on-campus productive interactivity, practical or group assignments. The conventional classroom learning was comparatively more effective than remote education as per the feedback gathered during the survey. As per the survey, we can conclude that remote learning compared to traditional learning cannot be more effective in impoverished nations like Pakistan. The majority of students lack access to essential internet and technical facilities.

One of the essential issues that should be discussed yet neglected is the need for remote or distance learning motivation. The core advantage of traditional classes is that they actively participate and anticipate the learning activities with their teachers and fellow students. 67.5% of students feel more motivated towards learning in the conventional classroom than remote learning sessions. Simultaneously, the remaining students prefer online classes over the traditional one; as they get more time to study and complete their assignments conveniently.

The success of online learning sessions lies in students' ability and how they efficiently survive with the fast-paced remote sessions. However, they do need

to have comprehensive technology and reliable internet connectivity. 42.5% of students who are facilitated with both can able to manage study time efficiently suitably, but when it comes to submitting group assignments and projects where group contribution is mandatory they do find difficulty

6. Conclusion

The emergence of COVID-19 has impacted the conventional educational practices worldwide. Though the educational institutes opted for distance/remote learning as an alternative option for resuming education; without risking its students and faculty members' health, it doesn't seem as useful as the regular traditional educational practices.

Especially in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, where the online/remote learning cannot produce desired outcomes; most students do not have access to a reliable internet connection and proper technical requirements. This study's persistence is to address the efficacy of online versus the productivity of conventional educational practices, especially for students of higher education. According to the research conducted, 73% of students had access to an internet facility, and 72.5% of students could attend classes over computer/laptop. In comparison, 67.5% of students felt that regular classes were more productive and helpful than online or remote education. Other than the technical and monetary issues; lack of interaction, delayed response, and absence of socialization were also reported by the students. According to 42.5% of students, they found difficulty in performing group projects due to social distancing. This study further elaborates that educational organizations need to make some significant changes in their curriculum and design content to be effectively delivered online.

Due to the mentioned complications, 67.5% of students supported conventional learning in comparison to online learning. 78.5% of students urged the need for face-to-face interaction with their instructors for effective and efficient learning, which is compromised in distance learning.

As advised by the World Health Organization, people have to adjust their daily activities, which means designing an appropriate curriculum and useful content to deliver is much needed by the educational institutions. Digital literacy training should also be provided to the faculty members for retrieving better learning outcomes.

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