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**BUSINESS STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING DURING
COVID 19 IN PAKISTAN**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of business students about online learning in the first wave of COVID-19. Qualitative research approach was used in this study and data was collected from business students of five business schools of Lahore, Pakistan. Ten students who have taken full length semester during COVID- 19 were conveniently selected for an in-depth interview. The duration of the interview was thirty minutes. The responses from the sample were taken by using a semi structured self-developed interview guide. Thematic analysis was done after the collection of responses through interviews. Major themes were identified and future implications were suggested to improve online education in Pakistan. Results: Five major themes were emerged on the basis of students' experiences. These themes are impact on content understanding, experience with technology, online assessment, impact on career and opportunities for improvement. Study concluded that students have mixed experience about online learning during COVID- 19. Students who are residing in rural areas are facing technical problems more than students in urban areas during online classes.

Key Words: Online Learning; Business Schools: Students Experiences

Introduction

COVID 19, a global pandemic declared by World Health Organization, has shook the entire world. It has affected all most all the sectors such as business, industry and education is no exception. In short it has changed the entire landscape of education sector. Due to the need of social distancing, schools colleges and universities has shut down their doors for students. The situation has resulted in a paradigm shift and most of the institutions are forced to move from campus based learning to online mode of teaching overnight. In this crisis most of the academic leaders are considering online education as the panacea to solve problems (UNESCO, 2020). Many institutions are using blended learning model to cope with the present situation. The top ranked universities like Harvard, MIT, Stanford and Cambridge among others are moving their programs online rather on campus

delivery mode (Demuyakor, 2020; Bao, 2020; Picciano, 2017). The move to online orientation carries many benefits such as cheap cost, flexibility, pacing option and preferred learning environment. But universities round the globe are also facing number of challenges like infrastructure, curriculum, online pedagogical issues, and the most important provision of adequate resource to ensure effective and efficient delivery of knowledge.

Just like other countries Pakistani institutions are also adopting online and blended mode of education to minimize the loss of students' time in this pandemic situation. But being a developing country problems outweigh the benefits at both ends i.e. institutions and students. The successful move towards online education needs careful and deep understanding of problems from both the perspective of administration and students. This study explored the experiences of business students to understand their problems during online interface so that effective strategies could be designed to improve online education system.

Online Education: Problems & Opportunities

Internet is not only reshaping our societies but also education system round the globe. Universities are capitalizing this technological advancement and are moving towards online delivery method. Online delivery mode can be categorized as synchronous and asynchronous. There is live interaction between teacher and the student in synchronous mode such as videoconferencing, audio conferencing and web chat while in asynchronous mode students can access digital curriculum material through prerecorded lectures and students can respond via discussion boards, email and social networking at any time (Littlefield, 2018). There are several studies which reported the benefits of online mode of delivery such as cost effectiveness, ease of use, control over environment and flexibility. However, a number of challenges are also associated with this mode of delivery.

There are many strengths of online education if it is carefully planned and implemented. First, it has time and location flexibility. Second, it's cost effective as compared to traditional learning methods. Third, students can have access to variety of courses around the globe. Fourth, quick feedback of students learning is possible through reliable and robust evaluation system. Lastly, it can cater the need of mass audience without heavy investment for establishing large on ground campuses. As it has many plus points but there are structural and behavioral problems for adopting this form of learning. Developing countries like Pakistan have no strong infrastructure to cater the need of urban and rural populations. Moreover, the attitude of stakeholders (administration, students, teachers, parents) to this mode of learning is not much positive. Lack of specific learning space in houses, financial constraints, lack of personal and professional time management skills, students non serious attitudes, less interaction between student and teachers and distractions during online classes are some of the problems which needs attention to make online experienced effective.

Despite of all the problems of online learning in Pakistan and around the globe, COVID -19 has opened doors of opportunities for institutions. Many of the institutions have moved to online learning to cope with the pandemic crisis. Now this is an ideal time for institutional management to grab this opportunity and design strategies to capitalize these opportunities. Institutions should develop strong infrastructure, innovate their program offerings, design interactive curriculum content, train the faculty and students to impart technical and behavioral skills, and develop secure and reliable assessment systems both for teachers and students. Moreover, EdTech Startups can provide solutions to

academia such as e-content and e-assessments for bringing positive results in this pandemic situation.

Research Objectives

Keeping in view the current scenario of online education during Covid-19 this study was designed to:

- Explore business students' experiences about online learning in Pakistani business schools.
- Identify opportunities to improve online education in the light of explored experiences of students.

Research Design

This study is qualitative in nature and employed in-depth online interviews to generate responses from participants in the month of August 2020. This design is suitable for the study because it involves an interactive and in-depth exploration of respondents' experiences. It can also reveal extensive opinions that an individual holds about an issue. Therefore, in-depth probing is most suitable to achieve the stated objectives. Data was collected from business students of five business schools of Lahore, Pakistan. Ten students were conveniently selected for an in-depth interview that has experienced a full length semester through online mode of teaching. The responses were collected by using a semi structured interview guide through online interviews. The duration of the interview was thirty minutes and it was ensured that students would be probed down extensively to explore their experiences to generate recommendation to improve online mode of education.

Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis technique was used to come up with major findings of study. Thematic analysis is good when researcher is trying to find out respondents' opinion, perceptions and experiences from a set of qualitative data such as interview transcripts. This study employed an inductive approach to determine themes of the study from explicit responses of the participants.

The collected data through online interviews was transcribed and codes were generated after careful understanding of the data. Codes were combined to come up with major themes. After careful and intensive reviewing of data, themes were selected to draw findings of study.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were well informed about the study. A prior consent was taken before conducting the interview. The anonymity of the respondents was ensured. Only the researcher had access to the data.

Results

This study was conducted to explore students' experiences about online classes in Pakistani business schools. Data was collected from eight students who have taken full semester through online mode during COVID 19 pandemic. The data was analyzed and different subthemes were identified. These sub themes were classified into five major themes i.e. educational impact, challenges faced during online classes, online assessment, career impact and suggestions for improvement in online education.

Impact on Content understanding: Theme 1

The participants discussed this theme with respect to their understanding about the content and problems in understanding different subjects during online classes in COVID-19. Students provide mixed responses about content understanding and availability of course materials. Most of the students experienced that teachers there is less understanding of contents in online mode of delivery and teachers

cover more material in online classes as compared to on campus classes. As one of the participants identified that:

- “Students don’t get better understanding like they get to learn in traditional classes, there is no quick understanding in online classes as you quickly learn in traditional Classes”.

Participants commented:

- “Teachers cover more content in online classes due to less discussion and in campus class teachers discuss all the content related aspects and in online class’s teacher cover 12 chapters of each subject”.
- “Teachers cover content in all courses but problem is that how much you understood. Teachers cover their contents but the problem arises in understanding. It was the main problem of online classes that you can’t understand all the material delivered by teacher.”

Most of the students shared their experiences that online method is not appropriate for practical subjects as compared to theoretical subjects. It can be elaborated from following statements:

- “Course content was completely well but some subjects are quiet technical so we have to focus a lot on them like numerical type and derivations. We have faced difficulty in this type of subjects but we have sorted it out by recordings we are provided”.
- “In traditional classes teachers complete the course content in very effective way because we have learnt both theory & numerical subjects and we cannot understand the numerical subject properly in online classes. In traditional classes teacher can solve the numerical on white board and we can easily understand the question. But in online classes it is very difficult to understand the numerical subjects as compared to theory subjects.”

Students shared their experiences about availability of course material. Three forth of the participants shared that teachers provide them relevant course material such as online books, power point and lecture recordings etc. Students take material from Google class rooms, LMS and CMS. One of the students complained that the recommended material is available on paid websites and students could not buy it due to limited resources.

- “Only slides are available and some extra material is available and yes if we demand any material from teacher that we want slides and some extra material then we will have it otherwise no”.
- “No, there is no access because all the books are from international office and all are paid and in university library we have access to these books and now we are in home and we don’t have access here and university online library the access are in the Premises of the university to connect with the university WIFI so it will be accessible from the website but can’t access it from home and all the international authored books are paid so I don’t have access”.
- “Our teachers send us material in Google classroom and it is easily available to us.
- “We have online LMS system and teachers upload all the lectures and all the other related material of the course. We use those lectures and other book reference for projects and assignment”.
- “In CMS we have driven links and other discussion boards and we can see anytime recorded lectures and mostly in exams we get help from those recordings”.
- “Course material is not available as such because all the books are by international authors and paid. Teacher provide the content like slides, I study from it”.

Experience with Technology: Theme 2

This theme is discussed with reference to two sub themes i.e. type of technology used in online classes and problems encountered in using the technology. Synchronous and asynchronous both modes are being used by teachers in business schools. Students described that they use zoom, and Google meet application for online classes

- “I am taking online classes on Zoom Application and yes! Most of the times I can understand lectures but if sometimes do not get it first time then I listen to the recording again to make the concept clear”.
- I'm using zoom through university email address we used to log in from that account.
- We are using Goggle class room and Google meet, mostly interaction are on Google meet.

Some of the participants were satisfied with the technology usage and others reported that they encountered problems such as connectivity, voice distortion, login problems and load shedding during online classes. Their opinions are:

- “My experience is not good because when we discussed in session we faced difficulties of connectivity network error because some of students live in village and there are internet issues.
- “It’s not good for 3 hours constant to see the laptop screen and also it is annoying to use hand free and some people belong from rural area like me. I belong from Gujranwala village here the WIFI connection is not good so there are many problems I have to face and also middle class families or low middle class family are living in the space of one room or two rooms and specifying a room for studies and ask family not to come in and no voice there, this is a problem”.
- “Experience is average because I talk with teacher and there will be load shedding so I lost my connection and due to weak internet connection there was distortion in the voice. Student is speaking rightly from their end but next person is not understanding what I am saying in the online classes so many students ask in the class please repeat that what you are saying if I repeat and if the internet connection is week than again voice is not clear so due to this I have average experience”.
- From my point of view online classes should be stopped because of problems faced by students especially from out of city they have no facilities so that’s why they are not able to attend the classes and teachers did not showed cooperation they said what can we do? And they also did not send us recorded lectures. Hostels students went home without their books because of sudden covid-19. In this situation online classes should not be started.
- Overall experience is average because the facilities in the Pakistan in the rural areas are not good like internet facility or mobile data. First there is need to improve the facility of mobile data and internet facilities than have to bring students to online classes like this many students have facing difficulties that belonged to rural areas.
- I use Wi-Fi but during light issue I used mobile data for connectivity. WIFI is good but in case of light issue I use mobile data. It’s expensive because of online classes but mobile data is best because there is no connectivity issue. And university did not provide us any type of facility.
- I use Wi-Fi connectivity for taking online classes. It is convenient because our Wi-Fi is connected with UPS (power storage devise) so I doesn’t face problem even in case of load shedding.

In addition to technical issue there are some behavioral issues both at the end of students and teachers. It can be illustrated by the following statements:

- “In traditional class more questioning happened because teachers are in front of us and they get our point easily and teachers keep an eye on all students. But during online class’s students knows that teachers cannot see us and when numbers of mikes are on there is a noise distortion and I did not get teachers point of view due to lack of understanding and lack of discipline”.
- “I think it is up to student. Those students who take them serious and attend regularly then this system is good for them. On the other hand those students who are not serious with it, this system will affect their future very badly”.
- “Some time students interrupt so teacher does not covers the course it also depends because there is no activity there is no specific question answer session so it’s boring some students sleep and teacher don’t know that students are sleeping what they are doing mikes are off and also there is no video call so teacher don’t know who is listening and who is not”.
- “In traditional classes we have to follow rules and time table and have to concentrate in lecture and also learn from environment but in online class students are not bound to listen lecture with concentration and there is no environmental learning”.
- “In online classes we feel relax some time we think we will take class after 15 minutes or meanwhile in online class we play any game or if any friends message come we start chit chat with him there will be disturbance so we lose our concentration”.
- “It is difficult for me because there is no timing teacher just message us for class that you have class on this time than I have to be available and mange my internet connection and arrange all the things.
- “To be honest the experience is not good at all. I have to be self-disciplined which is very difficult as an individual. To be honest, I get to sleep during the early morning classes. I feel a bit of lonely as I don’t get to meet my friends. I feel pain in my eyes and not active at all.

Online Assessment: Theme: 3

This theme emerged from the experiences of participants about online assessment. Students reported that the modes of assessment were online quizzes, assignments, projects, and online exams. Participants’ experiences are elaborated from these statements:

- “Bundles of assignments & projects given by teachers & also they give quizzes and mostly assignments and projects are analytical because teachers give the assignments & projects out of book or out of syllabus”.
- “Very bad experience because there were unseen papers and were irrelevant to subject. My subject is international business & finance and question in the paper is that write the summary of movie”.
- “In assignments we get help from recorded lectures and not facing difficulty but in projects we have to work in groups. In group mental level and knowledge of all group members is different so we have faced difficulty in group work i.e. discussion. So I think individual work is good in online assessment”.
- “It was good experience. Some MCQs were technical and difficult to solve in one minute but long questions were attempted easily. But if someone whose typing speed is slow, can’t attempt long question in time”.

- We get to receive online questions to solve and then send it after scanning the answer sheet. Experience was tough because we didn't give online exams before and secondly everyone thought that it would be very easy but papers were difficult and no cheating chance was available.
- We have been given only two exams and in all other subjects we were given only assignments and projects. All of them are good and easy as well as in physical examination environment is very strict but online assignments and projects and exams was good and learn very well and now we have received our result and you know that they are very good
- "I personally face many problems. My home is away from the city and there is no internet availability. I don't have laptop and I use mobile for online classes and some people don't have laptop and some people have so I faces many problems in making assignments".

Impact on career: Theme 4

This theme is discussed in two sub themes i.e. degree completion and conceptual understanding.

- "I think online classes impact our future. If we attend classes regularly, do assignments are project then it will definitely positively impact on our future but if didn't take lecture and didn't do assignment projects properly then it will impact negatively".
- "Online classes have more impact on career because the final year students who have the last semester they have to do projects like final projects in which they have to meet with the field related people for example I am from HR and my final project is on HR and I have to go and meet there with HR people and in online classes this facility is not available because I am in home and assignments task is given to me I downloaded material from Google and submit.
- "I feel that there is bad impact on our future like we attend classes but our concepts are not clear as compared to regular classes and many thing are not clear in online classes. We have assignment or project I can't do it properly. If there is a project and I want to meet industry people, due to COVID 19 cannot meet or cannot go anywhere. I face many issues regarding this so we collect data from Google and use it".
- There is bad impact, traditionally, we go university and do project physically we make attendance and also do a project on big company or NGO or collect data. But in online classes we collect data online due to COVID-19 because no one allow to meet, no one ready for it so we are not groomed for career".
- "It will because we haven't taken classes regularly and not learn more from them but for me I took all classes and it will effect on my future because I have learn many things from it
- Yes, I think it's a great impact on our future because not only in business field but in every field of life technology play very important role just like today online business are started like shopping and so on, so it is very helpful how to maintain our business and software etc.
- Career will be affected for those students whose CGPA has decreased or will reduce as everyone knows it's difficult to maintain it in online classes".

Opportunities for improvement: Theme 4

Fourth theme was emerged form students suggestions for improving online modality in Pakistan. These suggestions included blended format, provision of devices and facilities, simple and relevant material, teachers training, students'

training and student centered classrooms. Their suggestions were reflected in following statements:

- “First of all provide the android mobile phone, laptops & mobile data facility, because every student do not belong to the rich back ground some students can easily afford these types of thing or some students are not. And if the institution cannot provide these facilities. It would be better not to start online classes but to freeze the semester”.
- “The only need is to make lectures more attractive and interesting so that student will be motivated to attend by their own will. There is also need for improving online teaching method.
- “No, Suggestions for betterment I just pray that this pandemic ends soon so we get to have our regular classes in our institutions, one thing I suggest that network issues should be resolved and internet problems in backward areas. Universities should also introduce policies regarding this problem”.
- “Teachers should ask students to open their cameras after every 15 minutes and ask questions during class to make them attentive towards lecture”.
- “There is need to train the teachers, students training is also important we have to improve so many things like net issue and WIFI. Pakistan is a developing country and we are not well facilitated so for online classes we have to improve things.”
- Blended model is a good choice. If I have 10 classes in a week so there will be 5 online classes and 5 traditional classes. It will be good choice and students’ learning will be improved and teacher will feel more adjusted.
- I suggest that teacher’s should reduce the number of students in a class because to many voices disturb the study environment during Class.
- My suggestion is that government should take initiative and develop infrastructure and provide facilities like internet and devices to those students who cannot afford these facilities.

Discussion

This study was conducted to explore business students’ experiences about online classes during COVID in universities of Pakistan. Five themes emerged from business students experiences about online classes i.e. impact on content understanding, experiences with technology usage, online assessment, career impact and opportunities for improvement in online mode of education. Business students shared mixed responses about online learning. They think that decision of online classes was good initiative by the government for in time degree completion during COVID crisis but there are some other factors for which students have raised their concerns. Multiple challenges are identified from students’ experiences such as content issues, technical, behavioral and assessment issues. It is a challenge for governments and institutions to provide facilities to students for their engagement in online learning. It is challenge for teachers to devise student centered methodologies for online teaching and assessment. It is a challenge for institutions to design digital content for better understanding of students. As the world have to suddenly shift towards online mode of teaching and learning there is lack of quality control standards for online system of education. Therefore, strategies must be devised to lessen these challenges so everyone can get equal benefits from this opportunity.

According to this study students perceived that online mode of delivery is appropriate for theory based subjects as compared to practical subjects. Students were of the opinion that they did not understand courses such as accounting and corporate finance through online mode as they require proper demonstration of

problem solution on white boards. According to literature, this problem arises as students and teachers have to accidentally shift towards this mode of teaching and they are not technically and mentally ready for it (Abbasi, et.al. 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Song et. al., 2004; & Parkes, et.al. 2014).

Pakistan is a developing country and infrastructure for adoption of online learning is not up to the required standards. The availability of devices such as laptops, computers and mobiles is also not even in all strata of society. IT infrastructure is prerequisite for shifting to online education systems and it should be strong enough to satisfy the needs of its stakeholders i.e. institutions, students and faculty. This study explored that those students who do not have access to technical resources such as devices and internet faced more problems than those who have easy access to these resources. Therefore, to realize fullest benefits of online education, institutions and government should ensure the provision of affordable technical resources to users. Otherwise those students will be ignored who do not have access to these resources. The finding of this research is in line with other researches (Mumtaz, et.al. 2021; Dhawan, 2020; Khalil, et.al. 2020; Maqsood et.a., 2020; Rehman, 2020; Ramanai, 2015) .

Another problem which the students experienced in online mode of delivery was assessment. Different universities adopted different assessment techniques for students' evaluation in Pakistan. These techniques are online quizzes, assignments, online exams, projects, and case studies. Some of the students were satisfied but others complained that due to unavailability of resources and prior experience of online assessment they get lower grades as compared to traditional assessment. This finding is in line with previous researches which reported that online assessment has benefits but errors and ethical issues should be taken into considerations to make it fruitful. (Mumtaz, 2021; Maqsood et.a., 2020; & Dhawan, 2020). Alruwais (2108) reported that in developing countries students faces assessment problems due to poor infrastructure, unfamiliarity of students as well as teachers with hardware and software and incompetency in evaluation of group projects. It results in scoring error.

Students also reported that they have limited social interactions during practical projects and they got data for these projects via phone calls and software applications. They discussed that social interaction with industry is very important for their personal grooming and growth which is hindered due to social distancing practices during COVID 19.

Students identified the behavioral issues which results in poor online classes. They shared that some of the students have non serious attitude towards online classes. They play games, some students sleep during classes, some starts chatting with friends as students cameras are off during online classes. According to literature and students' findings this problem may be solved by designing interactive and attractive digital materials by the faculty. This situation become worsens when there are attitude problems on teachers' side. In this study students mentioned that teachers take unplanned classes. Teachers gave them sudden calls and they have to be present in that class. Moreover, there is problem of long duration of classes. These problems may be solved by training teachers for online classes and institutions may control the implementation of timetable in synchronous systems. One explicit solution to behavioral problems is training of students and teachers through workshops.

This study also explored the students' suggestions for improving online education system in Pakistan. Majority of students suggested that Government and

institutions should facilitate students by providing necessary technological gadgets for effective online learning. Another suggestion is use of blended learning models to overcome the problems related to practical understanding and interaction. Students also recommended that teachers should design the learning material in a way to make online classes more interactive and attractive (Nwanko, 2015). For students' non serious attitudes they suggested the camera of students should be turned on. They also said students and teachers should be trained for online mode of learning (Mumtaz, 2021). Many of these suggestions are in line with the findings reported in many studies.

Conclusion

Three things are important in developing an online education system i.e. infrastructure, students and teachers. Study explored that students faced infrastructure related problems such as electricity problems, internet issues, login problems and unavailability of modern devices. As online education has multiple benefits for students, therefore, students think that technical issues must be resolved before embarking on this mode of learning. Faculty should explore innovative methodologies and design interactive digital materials to make online classes more interesting and attractive for students. Institutions must devise secure and reliable soft wares for e-assessment and robust feedback to students. Moreover, faculty and students should be trained to capitalize this opportunity and reap its fullest benefits.

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