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# *Online Education Blessing or Burden in Pakistan: Challenges and Perception of English Language Students*

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## **Abstract**

It is globally observed during pandemic 19, that online learning system adoption and usage was a major challenge for academia. But after getting awareness of crucial factors in implementing and major challenges in the usage of online education systems create convenience for universities to manage these issues. Although there is no clear worldwide consensus on critical factors and challenges in the adoption and usage of online platforms during the pandemic 19, hence the scarcity of knowledge in the area motivates researchers all over the world to explore the reasons behind the gap area. Literature reported that these influential online education-related factors and challenges can be global and context-specific. To cover this grey area, the present study aims to identify those global and culturally impacting factors in the adoption and challenges in the usage of online learning platforms in universities. In the present study



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interpretivism, a qualitative approach was adopted to explore and interpret reality with deep and thick descriptions. Data were collected from 10 students of English language classes from two universities through semi-structured interviews. For qualitative inquiry and data interpretation, thematic analysis was employed. Based on the findings of the research, it was suggested that universities should provide online learning resources such as proper learning management systems, resolve their technical issues, and arrange training sessions for their faculty and students to use e-learning systems properly. Moreover, universities should spread awareness about online learning among students and the community through seminars and workshops and also promote blended learning and innovative software such as Chat GPT in their classrooms.

**Keywords:** online learning, blended learning, interpretivism, thematic analysis

## **1. Introduction**

### **Online Education in Pakistan**

Covid-19 has forced an abrupt change in the direction of education. In Pakistan, after the immediate lockdown on the 24th of March, all educational services were forced to go online to financially survive. This brought many problems that are still not completely addressed. As we noticed that Corona has destructed every field of life, especially academia, and noticeably affected the instruction framework in numerous nations considering the fact of digital education. As coronavirus control estimates spread all through South Asia, schools, colleges, and universities for example, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan wind up inadequately ready for remote learning in light of the fact that their institutions are closed and their students went back to homes, many remote areas are without internet facilities or with poor internet connections to proceed with the classes systems.

Worldwide organizations have turned to telecommuting mode to react to the difficulties posed by the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus. Lockdown of cities and shutdown of enterprises are additionally joined by the closure of schools making a phenomenal stop in the conventional face-to-face instructional learning process (Rasheed 2020).

To repay the ensuing loss of youngster instruction, many educational systems in the private sector in Pakistan have adopted remote instruction. Notwithstanding, this new method of instructing isn't as simple as it is anticipated to be. In underdeveloped nations like Pakistan, not all educators and students have an approach to the necessary facilities for example network access, PCs, and mobiles to lead and get benefit from online instruction. Likewise, in many public and private schools, colleges and

universities teachers are lacking in required computerized learning skills and attitude which will take time to redress.

Only elite schools with students from the privileged group of society can afford digital education and can fulfill the necessities of students through online guidance. In comparison, schools comprised of middle and lower class don't appear to go online doesn't make a difference in what endeavors they make. Correspondingly, students from public schools, who include over 80% of the total school student body in the nation, are not able to get online guidance due to poor ICT facilities, untrained teachers, the unacceptance of digital education, and low access to online education.

There are numerous territories in Pakistan like Tribal regions, Baluchistan, AJK, and Gilgit-Baltistan where fast and quality internet access is not possible. Private cellular and other telecommunication agencies are not permitted to provide their networks in these regions. In Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK, Special Communication Organization (SCO) has imposed its own business model in these areas, and it doesn't let some other organizations come there. Thus, students in these regions are generally at high risk as a result of the pitiful web access of SCO and its all-out nonappearance in numerous parts. This is a direct result of this pathetic network service that numerous private schools in Gilgit-Baltistan have begun Tele-classes through nearby TV links.

The schools, with access to quality networks, are finding a way to involve students and their parents in this procedure of online instruction. In such a manner, internet preparation is being directed for educators to outfit them with abilities concerning the utilization of different learning management systems and conference platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet.

### **Challenges**

Digital instruction is certainly not a sweet dish. Educators whine about expanded workload as they are occupied with adapting to the difficulties and changing with this new method of learning nonstop. On the off chance that you are one of the educators occupied with distant instruction, you would notice your mobile or any other gadget is signaling messages on WhatsApp from students and management nonstop keeping you mentally engrossed.

A few times, you would feel as though you have been attached to a seat with a solid rope before your table to chip away at your PC. You would likewise be accepting messages like ' Sir we have no light at home. My youngster will miss the booked meeting today or s/he would not have the option to endeavor the paper on Google Classroom. Similarly, another parent would ask, 'Sir I informed you the previous

evening however you didn't react, would you please react to our inquiry? Several messages on various issues alongside missed calls would invite you promptly toward the beginning of the day when you check your mobile after you wake up (Malik 2020).

In the case of teaching several courses, each course with at least 40 students, your problem will increase when Out of these 40 students just 15-16 students would turn out in an online test or a meeting for different reasons. You are generally expected to keep a record of all tests and student participation. Besides, as part of your professional responsibility as a teacher, you must call the parents to persuade them to urge their children to go to online meetings, tests, and so on as a feature of your professional tasks.

At the point when you contact parents, you will hear a heap of veritable reasons for the incomplete academic tasks of their children. Some would state they had a load-shedding issue, and others would profess to have overlooked their password and email ID yet when you check you will find that they had signed in 30 minutes prior. They would be courteously mentioning you to again give them a new ID and password. A few students would not have computers or smartphones as they may be utilizing web information on their parents' mobiles which would end subsequent to going to at least two meetings.

It is a fact both difficulties and opportunities go side by side. As an instructor, I trust that with the passage of time, in persistent adherence to remote learning, institutions, educators, students, and parents will learn to adjust to this new method of distance learning as we do not have any other option in the current coronavirus outbreak.

For this reason, HEC has given guidelines about five significant areas, for example, institutional readiness, course readiness, teacher readiness, student readiness, library, and assessment readiness. Through online training, HEC is trying to educate college and university teachers about remote instruction. The colleges are additionally making efforts to make their Learning Management Systems operational. Only those institutions situated in developed areas can adopt LMS otherwise institutions those are in far-flung areas of Pakistan are still struggling with internet connectivity issues. In short to the degree of strategy-making and sharpening colleges, HEC has provided detailed guidelines. From study hall to online classes, the excursion isn't so easy; especially here in Pakistan, it is critical regarding its challenges. (Bellaaj ,Zekri, & Albugami 2015).

Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) requested that colleges and universities connect with faculty and rapidly create online courses and communicate those to the students considering the pandemic flare-up in the nation. The coronavirus

pandemic has imperiled all of us and online training is the solution for the survival of the teachers and students. In any case, there are a few issues with respect to the online framework in Pakistan, most of the students don't have advanced cells and internet facilities which prompts disappointment. Before COVID-19 the instruction system was not good, after this pandemic period it gravely impacted the students and their future. Numerous students come back from abroad because of this pandemic period, after the flight's suspension most of the students are stuck in their country of origin confronting issues, for example, study, money related, and time research.

It implies availability issue needs premier consideration of the Govt. In such a manner, cellular companies ought to undoubtedly broaden their ability and transfer speed. These issues can likewise be tended to if the Govt. of Pakistan guides the cell organizations to give 4G facilities in all the under-developing zones of Pakistan, including AJK and GB. Without considering their region we can't complete the objectives of online classes. In certain regions, unscheduled breakdown of power is likewise a major issue (Saavedra 2020).

This may cause a genuine block in accessing distance learning. Other than this, a few students inferable from their budgetary position don't have appropriate devices like PC and Android telephones, which are pre-imperatives of online classes. The Govt. what's more, Philanthropists should likewise approach to distinguish those students who can't buy PC and android telephones. It is likewise fitting that HEC should come up with the expectation of a complimentary arrangement of instructive assets, such as a digital library and Microsoft Teams to the enlisted students (any place they are) with no web charges. This would be an incredible help towards the advancement of value online instruction and transforming this testing time into a chance. Furthermore, the exploration and lab-based exercises are additionally required to be planned on the most current logical lines. We ought to be perceptive of the way that our instructors are not well equipped for Internet teaching. So also, the students and staff ought to be facilitated with a user's manual for the online framework. In the wake of picking up force and accomplishment at a more significant level, the equivalent online framework can be presented at universities and school levels. This requires a firm purpose from all the partners, through which we can together battle all the difficulties of COVID-19 (Tamanna 2020).

Boarding students have left for their homes found generally in backward regions, and international students from various provinces move to their own countries Another student Muhammad Abbas from Pakistan who is Studying Ph.D. in Zhengzhou China returned to his city Lahore, close to Shezan his Ph.D. scholarship when the conclusion of his thesis was reported. He stated he is on a Chinese Government Scholarship around 4500 yuan for each month. After the pandemic outbreak, china has quit

subsidizing all grant students except for a couple of colleges from March onwards until 1 September 2020. It is a chaotic circumstance for all PhD researchers to face financial burden and closure of the study.

Maybe this lockdown has given us a thought of how we can improve our instructional models to guarantee that students get the greatest potential advantages. We can utilize this as a chance to overhaul learning spaces/networks, in a joint effort with parents, to additionally encourage student learning. More than anything, this sudden reminder should incite all stakeholders to think about the genuine motivation behind schools and the eventual fate of learning in this nation. (Saavedra 2020)

The arrangement of quality education is the sole duty of the state and educational institutions. HEC has directed institutions to ensure the quality of remote learning without compromising set standards. This disastrous circumstance requires a keen commitment from all concerned. Propelled nations and the Prime Minister of Pakistan himself encourage individuals to figure out how to live with the coronavirus for a specific period until such time as no enduring treatment is designed to battle the infection. Given this overarching situation, the administration, HEC, and higher education institutions are required to take a futuristic edge, reachable and positive way to save the whole education system and the future of many students across the country (Al-Khasawneh, and Obeidallah, 2019).

## **2. Method**

### **Research questions**

1. What are the influential factors in the adoption of online education among English language students in the higher education sector?
2. What are the crucial issues faced by English language university students in using the online system?

### **Approach**

For the research interpretivism approach was used to gather and analyze the data. The meaning-making process from qualitative data was completed in three phases. In phase 1, the relevant literature review was collected to bring light on previously identified e-Learning challenges, and in the 2nd phase, thematic analyses (Braun & Laura, 2006) were employed for familiarization of data, development of initial codes, identifying the main themes and categorize main factors and barriers impacting E-Learning in English

classrooms. Moreover, in the third stage, the final categories with the coding of factors and challenges to E-Learning were developed.

### **Data Collection**

In the present study, a qualitative data collection and analysis approach was adopted. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were employed with English language university students to get deep and natural data from the participants. Creswell (2014) states that the interview method can deeply explore the feelings, emotions, and opinions of the participants and gives them more chances to share their inner truthful thoughts openly and freely. Furthermore, the findings of the study will help teachers, communities, and policymakers to identify the obstacles and a way forward in implementing e-learning in educational institutions. It is important to share that the researcher did not follow any structured pattern of questions but rather follow an interview guide to proceed with questioning regarding the topic. This discourse between the researcher and the interviewee enables the sample to share deep information in a natural way. By following the main objectives of the study, questions were asked about the online education challenges they faced during the pandemic 19 and to identify the main factors in using online systems in their studies.

### **Participants**

For the study, a total of 10 under-graduation students from English language classes at one public and one private university were chosen for the interviews without a technical background. Participants voluntarily participated in the study and Informed consent was dually signed by them prior to data gathering with assured confidentiality of the data. For the qualitative inquiry, to meet the rich description of the data nature a sample of 4-50 is sufficient (Quick and Hall (2015). They further argue that the sample should be selected on the appropriateness and adequacy grounds of the research.

### **3. Data Analysis**

In the first step, the recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed by following the four-stage analysis process. In the thematic analysis, the researcher conducted analysis in three stages, i) descriptive coding, 2) selective coding, and the final report. In descriptive coding, after the familiarization of data, words, phrases, and sentences from the transcript were assigned codes related to factors and challenges influencing E-Learning implementation. These codes further were divided into categories, themes, and sub-themes related to the transcription. Jackson and Bazeley (Almaiah 2018).

In selective coding, the researcher followed the main themes such as factors affecting e-learning systems and challenges in the usage of e-learning among university students. In the process of data analysis, further sub-themes emerged from the main themes to clarify the research topic in detail.

The data is analyzed and reported into two segments.

- 1) Factors affecting e-learning system implementation during Pandemic 19
- 2) Challenges faced by students in the usage of e-learning during COVID 19

First of all thematic analysis of factors is presented here. After transcription of the data coding and themes along sub-themes are emerged and reported here.

- 1) Mindset

Participants reported that the mindset of teachers, parents, and students was the main hurdle in the acceptance of the e-learning system. They said “We were uncertain about the E system efficiency and reliability while taking lectures, sending assignments, and other classroom tasks. Three of them said “We showed little seriousness in taking online classes as we think traditional teaching is more authentic and reliable”. We procrastinate our online work and waited for the traditional classroom to start”.

- 2) E-learning infrastructure or technical issues (power supply issues, internet connectivity, gadget shortage, adoption of LMS)

Students reported that while taking online classes electricity shortfall, internet system availability, and shortage of e-learning gadgets such as mobiles, laptops, and computers were major obstacles to e-learning efficiency. They said, “It was hard to attend individual online classes as we don’t have e-learning resources and we have to take classes collectively by gathering at one spot”. We faced serious issues in presenting our work online as there was no authentic learning software adopted, and we usually send our work through What Sapp or Google Meet or Zoom”. Literature reported that teacher’s and management e-learning knowledge facilitates students and teachers and increases classroom engagement (Alhabeeb and Rowley 2017)

- 3) Financial burden: interviewees reported that “we faced financial burden in supporting our e-learning classes as we had insufficient money to get internet packages and always were in stress to meet assignment deadlines”. Moreover, they expressed their views about university financial support for students, “university management



had no sufficient budget to develop new internet connections and to make e-learning infrastructure available for their teachers and students”.

4) E-system efficiency

Students showed dissatisfaction towards online system efficiency as the majority said “We were scared in sharing our academic work online due to insecurity and hacking system. “ We were doubtful about the privacy of information and system reliability and feared about fake information”.

5) Contextual factors (usage of e-learning, lack of awareness, focus on traditional learning, language problem, education hurdle, gender discrimination, e-learning perception )

Participants also shared their opinion about cultural and contextual factors. “They said that we are not familiar with e-learning and trust the physical presence of teachers in regular classes. Female students shared that “our parents don’t allow us to keep mobiles or remain sitting in front of laptops or computers for hours as they think e-learning is only a wastage of time and may disrupt our girls” “We also faced language problems as all e-learning was in a second language and we were not expert in foreign language communication”

6) Personal factors (self-efficacy, confidence, seriousness, procrastination, less expertise, plagiarism)

Students also expressed their personality issues in obtaining e-learning. They argued that “we always face low confidence and low self-esteem in presenting our e-work to our teachers as we were not expert in typing, surfing internet sources and formatting the material” and “ we usually linger on our assignments due to inefficiency of e-learning and practice plagiarism to present our assignments on time”. We were happy to easily cut and paste others’ work and present it to our teachers as there was no plagiarism policy was adopted by our university.

7) Teacher’s E-learning skills

Students reported another important challenge in the implementation of e-learning the teacher’s online learning skills. They expressed that” our teachers preferred sending the whole course book through Whatsapp or e-mail without explaining the material which causes disinterest and disengagement among students. “Our teachers were inefficient in using e-learning platforms and even though they don’t know how to engage their students in online classes that’s why poor attendance was another

challenge for teachers. It was also reported by the participants that students pasted their pictures in online classes and their friends or siblings attended their classes due to the teacher's poor control and short e-learning abilities.

8) Fear of E-learning

Data represented that students and teachers both did not interact frequently through online platforms due to fear of wrong use of the internet. "We were scared of using online channels for being exposed of our little knowledge of e-learning and feared making mistakes and in return getting penalties from teachers and management".

9) E-learning is a fun

Teachers and students did not take e-learning as seriously as traditional teaching. "We enjoyed e-learning as fun and exchanged our IDs with our friends and paste only our photos on Ids and disappeared from online classes". "We were not serious in e-learning and always create noise and funny voices during lectures and presentations as we think the teacher is not physically present".

10) Security risks

Students shared that e-learning created many security risks in data storage, sharing, and usage during examinations. "We did not feel secure in online examinations due to a risk of data privacy and completed our exams with confusion and stress". Female students shared their experiences as "we faced family restrictions in appearing for video conferences of our class, we were not allowed to keep mobiles or other e-learning devices to manage our classes". Boys also bullied female students and female teachers by using abusive language, sexual cartoons, figures, and vulgar messages". Due to bullying many female teachers refused to teach online.

11) The growing trend of cheating

More plagiarism and cheating in academics were observed as negative factors. "We submitted our assignments and examinations by sitting together with our friends and cheated the whole examinations because of poor online assessment systems". Our teachers did not check our assignments and presentation's plagiarism, so we presented mostly copy-pasted material to our teachers".

12) Policy changes

Students' responses suggested that for the success of ICT adoption and usage government and universities should revamp their educational policies and goals and

adopt blended learning with updated teaching methodologies and new LMS systems to combat technological challenges.

### **Practical implications of findings of the study**

The findings of the study would be a valuable addition to understanding the challenging factors in the implementation and usage of E-learning in academia. The present study will be helpful for teachers, students, and policymakers to develop new e-learning policies by considering these factors and challenges. As results showed that not only infrastructure and technical issues as mentioned in the previous studies (Almaiah and Almulhem 2018; Almaiah and Alyoussef 2019; Eltahir 2019; Chen and Tseng 2012) are obstacles to implementation and usage of e-learning but contextual, social, and personal factors of teachers and students are also vulnerable. There are some suggestions that can be made based on the findings of the study. Firstly, universities need to adopt better internet infrastructure to provide proper facilitation to students and teachers to use online resources. As it is a misunderstanding to think that now the pandemic is over so we should shift our focus from online learning to traditional teaching. In fact, the Pandemic brought a technical revolution a blessing in disguise, we need to promote online learning as it is the need of the time. Secondly, to make teachers and students adept in e-learning the universities should arrange e-learning training and workshops to introduce new pedagogies and assessment approaches in the classrooms. Thirdly, universities should hire online learning experts to provide user-friendly, easy, and simple systems to students and teachers then they would take more interest in the adoption of e-learning. The universities should bring change in their educational policies to promote e-learning and introduce credited online courses and assignments to their students. The universities should demand the government for more computers and software and hardware to improve their e-learning infrastructure. Lastly, universities should adopt new e-learning platforms such as Chat gpt and arrange proper training for their teachers and students to implement in their classrooms in teaching and assessments.

### **4. Conclusion**

The present study makes a valuable contribution to identifying the potential factors in establishing and delimiting the e-learning implementation and usage in academia. For achieving the objectives of the study and getting a thick and rich description of the variables of the study interpretivism a qualitative approach was used. For the data collection purpose through purposive sampling students of two universities were contacted. For data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data generation was done through thematic analysis. Through thematic analysis themes and codes emerged. These themes highlighted different contextual, personal, technical, and

social factors in the adoption and using e-learning systems in universities. It is suggested that if we adopt better infrastructure in e-learning by adopting proper learning management systems, availability of internet resources, and introducing friendly user internet systems that will boost the self-esteem and confidence of teachers and students in using e-learning platforms.

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