Problems, Challenges, and Opportunities of Online English Learning and Teaching During Covid-19 at University Level in Pakistan

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Abstract
This study aims to explore different issues, challenges and opportunities concerning online learning and teaching faced by multiple stakeholders. Particularly this study aims to investigate teaching of English in Pakistan amid Covid-19. It also aims to explore the problems of digital illiteracy which seems to be the cause of failure of online classes in Pakistan. The study will identify the benefits and opportunities in conducting online classes so that in Pakistan online classes can be in scope as the world is highly recommending and moving towards this mood of study. Data for this study is collected from multiple resources. Primary data is collected from students and faculty of different universities while secondary data is gathered from published sources. This study tells us that in such crucial time where the world is holding the bridle of online learning and teaching and shifting its trends towards e-learning, Pakistan can also step forward in conducting online classes. Minor issues can be solved by parents, teachers and students to make this mood of learning successful. It discusses drawbacks of e-learning in Pakistan. It discusses the digital illiteracy from parents’ side and from student’s side and also tells some suggestions to overcome these problems. In the end some suggestions are given which can be beneficial in conducting online classes in Pakistan.

Keywords:
Covid-19 pandemic situation, challenges, e-learning, solution

1. Introduction
Since 1900 technology has become the part and parcel of our education system. It is also included in English teaching-learning in various aspects. Its use in English classes has brought tremendous positive changes. Initially the technology was started with the use of audio cassettes, and television then it was replaced with modern audio-visual aids like projectors, laptops, smart boards and smart phones. With the end of 20th century usage of technology tools become an integral part of our education system especially English language teaching classes. A lot of refreshers courses and trainings have been conducted to make technology familiar and proficient in the use of technology. Even in the developing countries like Pakistan, it’s not unfamiliar to almost every English teacher. With the dawn of 2020, revolutionary changes have seen in teaching learning due to the spread of corona viruses in the form of covid-19 situation. Intentionally or unintentionally all the educators, teachers and schools were completed to adapt their students in a challenging situation. They have to shift towards e-learning or online classes. It wasn’t difficult for educational world in developed countries. They have every kind of facilities, high speed internet, gadgets and access to technology in every hand is available.

2. Research Method
This is a library research or literature study type research. Literature study research is defined as to bring out the necessary and essential data by reading and surfing the literature sources. The data used in this research is taken from e-books, textbooks, articles, publications as references and other relevant sources. This obtained data was being analyzed qualitatively. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), activities in qualitative data analysis were carried out interactively and continuously to completion which was described in four steps. The four steps are data collection, data reduction, data display, and verification or conclusion.

2.1. Education system During covid-19 in Developing and Developed Countries:
During covid-19 a lot of problems and challenges are faced by the teachers, students and parents as well. Some of the developing countries tried to provide some resources as radio, television and other devices which can make the online classes quite easy. Education community has to face a big challenge due to covid-19 situation. In (Crawford et al., 2020) authors evaluated and discussed the higher education response of almost 20 countries in the world. They suggested that by keeping social distancing strategies, education system needs a rapid and curriculum change and development to shift physical classes to online learning. A lot of governments in the world immediately shift the physical classes to online classes to keep the continuity of education.
UNESCO gives a report by containing the information that globally 195 countries almost closed their schools in which 1.5 billion students were affected from pre-primary to higher education. The ratio of the students who have no internet accessibility and internet access is 50% and 43% in the whole world. A report shows that 56 million students are unable to use Mobil phones because of the unavailability of mobile phones. Furthermore, in pandemic situation online classes need more ICT trained teachers. In our developing countries there is only 1 trained teacher for 56 students at primary level, and this 1 trained teacher has to deal about more than 60 students in a class. (UNESCO, 2020b), (O’Hagan, 2020). In such crisis situation, it’s not possible for the government to trained a majority of teachers in ICT so as a result pandemic will have a large impact of the health as well as education system. Specially in low income and developing countries it is having negative affects and they are less able to provide distant learning or training to teachers at once.(Winthrop, 2020).

2.2. Benefits And Opportunities By E-Learning:

The best and most important aspect of online classes during online is the self reliance habit of students. In online classes the teacher teaches and then the students have to take the responsibility of taking or understanding the lecture. If the teacher gives them project base learning in which the research is involved, they will learn independently. So those students who always rely on teachers will shift to rely on online resources and will try to enhance their knowledge and skills by themselves. Online learning not only promoted independent learning among students by taking certain checking certain measures of learning authority but it also develops study skills such as the habit of note taking which based on reading and listening. It also tells them time management skill, searching variety of similar related material and then test preparations and far above honesty and confidence. in addition, online learning develops a sense of conscientiousness among students that the try to maintain a sense of integrity which is necessary for their work and submission deadlines. It provides them the best platform where they can showcase the integrity by showing their work individually. When the students are asked to attempt quiz in given date and submission of assignment in particular time it tells them how to meet with deadlines and time management. Online learning also provides with a space and time to slow learners to help them furnish a different level of help by which they can cope with their weaknesses.

2.3. Covid-19 And Education Situation in Pakistan:

Covid-19 affected the whole world system in the world. Schools closure has raised a lot of difficulties for students, teachers and parents. In this crucial period, distant learning was the only solution to continue the education and continue the education process. Covid-19 is a pandemic that has same effects on education system in different countries. (Wajid et.al,2020) The United nation education, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) declared that pandemic outbreak has impacted the education system in all the countries whether developed or underdeveloped (UNESCO,2020h). History witnesses a lot of pandemics that not only affected the human life but also education system and economic development and conditions and left humanity in much trouble. Some countries suffered a lot and had effect on all fields of life (Editors, 2020) The world health organization (WHO)(2020) officially announced on march 11,2020 that corona virus is pandemic which has affected 114 courters and more than 2,00000 people in the world. First case of covid-19 was reported by municipal health commission in the province of China (Hubei) in December 31,2019,(WHO,2020) Education is the pillar of development for every country and those countries who have high percentage of literacy are more developed, so it’s linked with progress and growth of all countries. But the wide spread pandemic diseases are affecting the education system from changing curriculum to closing down the education system. These challenges are faced by our education system during this pandemic. (Owusu-Fordjour et.al.,2015)

In almost all the developing countries along with the economic shock, educational lose also occurred as soon after Covid-19 exposure, government made lock down to reduce this speed of infection. So, the developing countries along with Pakistan is facing the greatest economic decline and educational issues and problems as shortening the curriculum 1st and then promotion without exams in some cases. They are also suffering problems in transportation system due to this lockdown. (Haleem et.al.,2020)

2.4. Problems Of Teachers, Students and Parents In Pakistan:

The field of education is filled up with the development of communication and information technology. With the shift of physical classes to online classes student’s teachers and parents suffer a lot of issues and problems equally. There was different kind of problems that the parents and teachers were facing. For example, some were unaware about the use of technology like how to take online classes on Google meet, zoom or on other networks. Students were also unaware about the use of technological tools. The challenging situation for parents was that kids were relax and parents were taking pain in providing media, learning resources for their children and they have to upgrade themselves to understand the risk of technology and then notice what their kids are doing on internet. Parents were responsible during the online classes that their children would learn the distributed material through learning media.
Along with parents, students were also suffering different kinds of problems as lack of knowledge of technology, unavailability of internet and gadgets and the biggest thing is motivation. Because by staying home, youngsters get sluggish and they feel it hectic to take class online by just listening one person or two for about 2 to 3 hours. So, they try to avoid or they just login and then muted the audio to avoid any disturbances. There are many limitations which are faced during online classes, among them biggest is time constraints, because in online classes teacher can take only one or two hours, and even he or she doesn’t know whether the kids giving his concentration to him or not. There may be many unwanted things can happen like students while taking classes are out of the view of their parents so they can chat to someone they can play games, can open harmful sites and can go for some unwanted material.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Challenges And Drawbacks Of E-Learning In Pakistan:

As the lecture is recorded so it is good opportunity for slow learners to repeat the lecture and clarify the doubts to comprehend the lesson that they were feeling difficulty. In this situation online learning is a blessing for such students to get achievement as they have confidence issue and they feel shy in physical classes and feel reluctant to question. Online learning is also an opportunity for students whose parents sit with them and they constantly help them to understand and comprehend the concepts, they may also help them by telling them different sites to make concepts clear. The best positive aspect of online class is the time management where the student doesn’t have to take whole daily university or school, here they can manage their time and other possible chores they are planning to do. It helps them to manage their other tasks at the same time as they don’t have to travel anywhere from home.

Online learning is also beneficial for parents as it reduces cost burden as money that is spend on transportation, private or public or the rent of hostels if they are living in hostels. Some students like to show off by being dressed up luxuriously so it’s also a money saving benefit. They are free to take classes in their bedroom, lounge or living room so this facility also makes them comfortable and flexible. Along with benefits and opportunities e-learning has some drawbacks and challenges which are seen since many years and also an increase of dependency is seen in 2020 due to diverse situation faced by Covid-19. By seeing the emergency situation due to covid-19, e-learning became the essential entity of language teaching but it also exposed some of the problems and challenges that are faced by teachers. The most important factor is the way of instructional methods but here in virtual classes teachers faced issues in the adaptability to the computer-based instructions. It’s not easy task to move students from face-to-face instruction to online, here students are free and its totally up to them whether they listen the teacher or not so the biggest issue is adaptability which results in resistant to adapt this new kind of learning platform. However, as the world is shifting to online learning so it is imperative that teachers should create a positive and innovative impression about this virtual learning on students’ mind by telling them that the whole world is working virtually. It can be made beneficial to the students if they are given prior training about how to use these virtual platforms as most of the students have trouble in using the technological tools. So, such students can make comfortable by giving training and by giving them time to make discussions with their peer students so they can have classroom type environment and can approach virtual classes with proper affinity and can involve themselves with the open mind.

Another challenge that is seen in online learning is computer literacy especially the students who belong to small towns cities and rural areas they take this new concept as a nightmare. So, the possible solution is to teach such students by giving small trainings how to use technology. They can develop their basic computer skills like Microsoft word and where to take classes some platforms as Google meet, zoom and Microsoft teams. They can learn how to create assignments and upload presentations, how to access and upload files and documents. Another biggest challenge is the availability of internet that is major issue in Pakistan and especially in small cities and towns. In villages most of the student’s even don’t have Mobil signals so they travel to take classes far away. Most of the student’s face poor connection issues so they miss their classes as a result they become tense because they don’t have any solution to this problem. In order to overcome this issue students can use their Mobil phones by taking some low budget packages which is financially not viable at all. But here is again that problem which is availability of internet so what can be the solution is that they can go to those places where they can find good network and take their classes. One more issue that is found was the lack of motivation. Being at home students become sluggish and they are reacting as lazy ones. Lack of motivation is causing issues as students are reluctant to take this advanced technology and medium of instruction that is linked with online classes. They are lacking in positive attitude to get motivated in playing their active role in online classes. As a result, they remain behind and fail at the end. If the students are lacking in motivation, they will not bother to spend extra time in clearing the concepts which remain complex for them. They will try to seek ways of escape.
3.2. Suggestions To Overcome the Challenges for Effective Teaching-Learning:

1. Even though no one can deny the importance of e-learning in the 21st century where the whole world is going to shift their business, study everything with its plethora of benefits for everyone yet the language teachers and all other subject teachers need to find out viable solutions to the faced problems. Technological literacy for teachers and students and change of attitude is very necessary in order to implement e-learning and get benefited from it. By giving literacy we can encourage student to gain confidence so that they can accept this change of shift from traditional face to face classes to online classes.

2. Extra or initial introductory classes can be arranged for the students like orientation which will help them to remove their queries and doubts. These classes could be used as an open discussion which should not be treated as formal interaction. Before conducting the online classes, teachers can conduct in campus classes to teach students the use of different apps in which they will take classes and can also tell them how to keep update on the learning management system (LMS).

3. There can be some supplementary resources which are related to the coming classes, it will help students to understand the weekly classes. If the lectures would be in recorded form, then the students can access them and use them whenever they need it. There is much need that students should know how to collaborate with each other, for this purpose, teachers can assign them group or peer presentations like this they will develop a good connection and community.

4. It is also proved by research that peer learning is beneficial and this tutoring remedy can be used to enhance the learning ability of slow learners. Its beneficial in physical classes and it enhances the confidence if the students who do not speak in front of teacher, there they can discuss their issues with their peers and can remove their learning issues. Along with all these activities and supplements, the online classes should focus on new strategies which will develop language skills and improve technological literacy.

4. Conclusion

Though online learning has come into sharp focus due to COVID-19, yet it was in vogue as a supplementary part of traditional learning for years. With mask wearing and social distancing measures still in force in many countries, online learning or some form of blended learning offers the only viable answer. With a number of technological apps like, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Moodle, and so on, a new form of blended teaching-learning will evolve which will combine the features of online learning with face-to-face interaction. This type of teaching will offer numerous opportunities to the students to play a major part in the process of learning and also gives them ample time to reflect on the learning. Be it fully online leaning or a blended one, both the students and the teachers acquire greater importance and significance. They are the ones who start the process right from planning the curriculum, designing activities based on the curriculum and learning outcomes to the delivery of lesson. This is the theatrical stage for learners and teachers. They need to play their part to truest extent for the successful teaching learning to take place. A challenge always brings opportunities. This covid-19 has suffered the education system at one side but also showed the positive side of education system by exploring the online learning system where every individual has to plunge and learn whether he was afraid of technology or was a lover of technology. It has positive as well as negative effects. But the studies show that situation would come better in near future as the whole of world is shifting to digital world.

References


