
MOTIVATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ONLINE ESL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Attitudes and motivation has a key role in learning a foreign language in a non-native context. The global pandemic introduced a new way of teaching and acquiring languages. As the education system transformed from traditional to digital learning and online communication. Pakistani education system and Higher Education Commission (HEC) faced issues of infrastructure, technology and resourceful teachers. Within these circumstances, the perceptions and attitudes of learners who are prompt at using technology required more attention and motivation to attend online classes. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effect of online education on the motivation of undergraduate students in an ESL classroom. A mixed-method study has been conducted using a questionnaire for descriptive analysis and semi-structured interviews for thematic analysis to know the attitudes and motivation of the participants. Data has been collected from 200 undergraduate students enrolled in a functional English course in a public sector university. The analysis of the data shows that motivation is a key factor in language learning. Similarly, face-to-face education offers more learning opportunities than online classes. The findings of the study are beneficial for the educational institutes in determining students' motivation, teaching pedagogy, methodology and learning opportunities for students in online

classes.

KEYWORDS

Attitudes, Online education, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has introduced a new pedagogy using digital technology in the educational sector. However, adopting such a change had many economic, social and technological issues. The first case of Covid-19 was reported in Wuhan, China (WHO, 2020). Similarly, the first case in Karachi, Pakistan was declared in February 2020. As per the public announcement of WHO (2020), strong initiatives have to be taken for public safety and precautionary measures to be followed in all spheres of life. As a result, worldwide lockdown was imposed by closing all the business centers, public offices and education centers. Pakistan also announced the lockdown to prevent the further spread of Covid-19 among its population. In this scenario, all the educational sectors were instructed to introduce online learning instead of face-to-face classes as per the instructions of HEC and ministers of education conference in Islamabad (Quraishi, Asif, Sheeraz and Amer, 2020). This initiative has been taken for the very first time. Previously, very few institutes have experienced online education. (Khan, 2020). Hence, higher education institutes were advised to develop a Learning Management System (LMS) to provide better learning opportunities for easy access to material and flexible video conference facility (Rehn, Maor, & McConney, 2016). Similarly, the LMS must be easy to approach and assessed through computer, laptop and android phones. (Han & Shin, 2016; Viberg & Grönlund, 2017). As most of the students reside in remote areas. This portal was to be monitored by HEC and university online education committees. As per the HEC (2020) guidelines, every institute selected its own teaching method and online portal using Microsoft Team, Google Classroom or Zoom. Some of the teachers pre-recorded their lectures using OBS recording software, while some of them used PowerPoint voice over slides. Yet most of the teachers and students were unfamiliar with technology and online instruction. Therefore, this shift in the education system was resisted. Hence, content, learning material (recorded lectures and slides) were reevaluated and institutes were asked to offer teacher trainings to successfully implement HEC's online education initiative (HEC COVID-19 Policy Guideline, 2020). In this situation, public sector universities and private institutes had to use the available infrastructure, resources and experienced teachers to develop material and teach online courses. The same mechanism was developed for English language teachers who had to develop interactive lessons. Hence, it was for the first time that the four skills of language were taught through the online medium. Consequently, the beliefs, experience and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of learners occupies an essential role in knowing the learning achievement of English language learners in an ESL setting within a public sector university.

Individual motivation of a learner plays a strong role in developing his learning habits. Therefore the learning style of a learner plays a potential role in digital learning (Firat, Kilinc, & Yuzer, 2017). As Lucey (2018) describes e-learning as a phenomenon of language acquisition which is attributed to a number of internal and external factors. Hence, while teaching any course, the teacher must focus on engaging and enhancing the motivation of a learner. Within the digital platform, the teacher must focus on different interactive activities. As online resources and activities enhances the students' interest and learning process. Overall, the student is successful in achieving the outcome of the course. Therefore, motivation plays an important role in language learning and in online classes it requires more attention and positive attitude. Consequently, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is required. Intrinsic motivation can be triggered by student's involvement in different activates that activates the schematic knowledge while the extrinsic motivation cab be activated with the teaching methodology, resources and the medium of instruction the teacher uses in online classes (Lucey, 2018). Extrinsic motivation plays a key role in rewarding and punishing the learner; as it has an impact on the image of learner at external level specifically the society. While in the case of intrinsic motivation learners personal desire, belief and individual desire is involved to do better from the others. In both of the motivations, learners are engaged in the learning process; however the outcomes are different. (Ajzan, 1988). Moreover, both of them are crucial in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, to address the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of learners, teachers need to relay on interactive lesson plan; so that the learners are engaged in a meaningful learning experience. The pre-Covid world introduced digital learning which part of the education system become at all level of education. As the role of technology became important in every area and discipline. Even though online education become an important part of the teaching-learning process, yet learners especially in Pakistani context preferred face-to-facing teaching. As previously, language learning was focused through the traditional mode of teaching but online language teaching revolutionized the teaching philosophy and exposed the learning system which faced many challenges. Especially developing motivation and having positive attitude for learning a language among learners became a challenging task which effected the attitudes of the learners towards online education.

Furthermore, Reis (2010) has stated that learners' attitudes and perceptions towards online teaching play an important role in education as it helps the teachers in using appropriate pedagogical methods with which the students can learn easily and according to the needs. Additionally, Farooq and Javid (2012) highlighted the importance of e-learning more than the traditional classroom which reflects the need to have blended learning for successful educational systems as online education is important in today's globalized world. In the same way Brohi and Munshi (2021) highlighted the importance of interactive methodology as essential while teaching.

Therefore, this study aims to determine and explore the effect of online education on the motivation and perceptions of undergraduate ESL learners in online classes. It also aims to explore the different strategies that have been used by teachers and the problems faced by learners during online English language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pandemic introduced new teaching pedagogies, methodology and language learning process which focuses on learner-centered classroom with communicative approach. (Abbasi & Aftab, 2020). Therefore, no major research has been done in the context of Pakistan with regard to motivation and perceptions of learners' towards online language learning. However, now active researchers during the first and second phase of online teaching are investigating the different challenges faced by teachers and learners during and after online education in different disciplines like medicine, nursing, engineering and humanities.

Although, motivation plays an important role in learning a language. It is one of the most important factors that speed up the learning process both in traditional and online learning. It is regarded as a highly essential component in order to have good academic performances of the students (Brown, 2000). As Brown (2000) defines motivation as the options that people have as to what experiences or goals they will use or avoid and the degree of efforts they exert in that respect. Moreover, Brown (2000) also states that it is justified to claim that a learner will be successful in language learning with proper motivation. Gardner (2006) also suggested that the students having a higher level of motivation will do much better than students having low level of motivation. Hence, the effect of online teaching and learning for motivation of the learners is reflected in their attitudes and perceptions towards online classes. Therefore, attitude and perceptions play an important role in learning a second language. Gardner (1985) suggests that attitude and perceptions are the essential components of motivation in language learning. He defines attitudes as the total of instincts and feelings of people, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any area. Similarly, Ajzen (1988, p.4) considers attitudes as "a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event". Baker (1992, p.10) defines attitudes as "a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior".

Delessio (2012) has identified that both academic skills and motivation are required in order to be successful in any learning environment. So, the knowledge related to any course would not be enough to have successful learning but motivation is also needed. Similarly, intrinsic motivation is also considered highly important when it comes to online education. Firat, Kilinc and Yuzer (2017) conducted a study in order to investigate the level of intrinsic motivation in online education. The data was collected

from 1639 students enrolled in 22 programs, and the results showed that the level of intrinsic motivation of the learners was high in online classes. As e-learning made them autonomous learners and they enjoyed the learning process. As a result, making student autonomous through online teaching enhanced their academic performances. Therefore, the same study can be conducted within Pakistan where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the learners can be investigated and explore whether students prefer teacher-instructed classes or they wish to be autonomous learners needs to be explored in detail. Chaudhary, Rasheed and Rasheed (2021) conducted a study using online survey to explore the motivation and perceptions of 16 social science and science teachers and 345 higher secondary and university students in Faisalabad. The analysis showed that teachers focused on asynchronous teaching and teachers and students faced lack of interaction in online classes. Beside teachers reported that student's lack of motivation for online classes was the vital factor and teachers also faced problems in their home. Along with low motivation, students reported lack of technological and electronic equipment as a major hurdle with no prior schematic knowledge of online applications.

Similarly, Ayub (2014) explored the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on academic performance of the learners, and the results showed both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are positively related in the academic performance of the learners. In the same manner Tao (2009) reported that there is a strong connection between online social presence and student motivation in online education. So, verbal immediacy should be focused in order to keep the learners motivated. Moreover, Lucey (2018) has carried a similar study to investigate the role of motivation in the persistence of adults in higher education. The findings have identified that motivation plays a crucial part in the persistence of online learners. Furthermore, Ahmad and Ghani (2020) have conducted a study on exploring the relation between English and online mode of education during Covid-19 and the results have shown that the students and teachers were not ready for this shift in the mode of teaching due to which they have faced many problems which can be resolved with a proper training of applications and software. In addition, Hernandez and Florez (2020) investigated how to keep students motivated in EFL classes. The data was collected from the teachers, and the findings indicated that synchronous modality should be used in order to maintain the motivation of the learners. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is highly required during online language learning. However, attitudes and perceptions of learners towards online learning are also equally important as well. Subsequently, Obaid Ullah, Khan and Khan (2017) investigated students' attitudes towards online learning at tertiary level. Hence, the views, beliefs and attitudes of the participants were explored towards using technology and experiencing online education. The analysis showed that if the students are not having proper understanding related to technology then negative attitudes are formed for online learning because their motivation is also effected due to lack of

knowledge. So, the management and government should organize different workshops, seminars, etc. in order to provide knowledge related to technology and its use in order to have effective results. Most of these researches have been conducted in the international context whereas the current study highlights the issue of online education and its impact on the motivation and perceptions of undergraduates ESL learners in Pakistani context.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the effect of online education on the motivation of undergraduate students in ESL classrooms.
2. To explore the perceptions of undergraduate students in the ESL classroom towards online classes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of online education on the motivation of undergraduate students in ESL classrooms?
2. What are the perceptions of undergraduate students in the ESL classroom towards online classes?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed method approach to know about the motivation and attitudes of undergraduate students enrolled in online semester. Data is first collected quantitatively using an online questionnaire through Google forms and then qualitatively using interviews. The mixed method approach is triangulated in order to analyze the data from the single study in two phases.

Population

The data for the present study has been collected from undergraduate students enrolled in a public sector university. The participants of the study includes both male and female students. This public sector university was selected as it includes a diverse and multicultural participants coming from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Data was collected from undergraduate students studying functional English course in different departments during the online semester as announced by the university. These students have been selected because English course is offered throughout the university during first semester across different disciplines to enhance the language skills of the learners during their early years.

Sampling Technique, Size, Instrument and Analysis

The sample consist of 2200 undergraduate students from 29 different departments. 220 undergraduates were taken as a representative sample for the present study which is 10% of the total target population. For selecting 220 undergraduates, systematic

sampling technique was used. However for the qualitative part, purposive sampling was used and semis-structured interviews were conducted from five participants. The quantity data was gathered using an online questionnaire as the physical one cannot be distributed due to COVID SOPs being implemented by the university. The questionnaire contains a 5-point Likert scale where a score of 1 counted as ‘Strongly disagreed’ and 5 as ‘Strongly Agreed’. The questionnaire adopted from Chakraborty, Mittal, Gupta, Yadav and Arora (2020) and some statements were changed to fit the context. Afterwards it was piloted on ten participants for face and content validity and the questionnaire was also sent to an international and local researcher for validation and reliability. After validation, the questionnaire was made on Google forms. Therefore, the link of the questionnaire was shared with the respondents through WhatsApp, email and classroom discussion during live sessions. Meanwhile, five participants were selected after formal consent for semi-structured interview. Five participants were enough as the researcher started receiving the same amount of data after the fifth participant.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Semi-structured interview data was transcribed and themes were generated using thematic analysis while questionnaire data was analysed for descriptive analysis focusing generating frequencies, as per objectives of the study which is to know about the motivation and perceptions of undergraduate ESL learners in online classes. The questionnaire was adopted from Abbasi & Aftab (2021) who used it for knowing ESL learners’ achievement in ESP course.

Listening skills in online classes

Figure 1

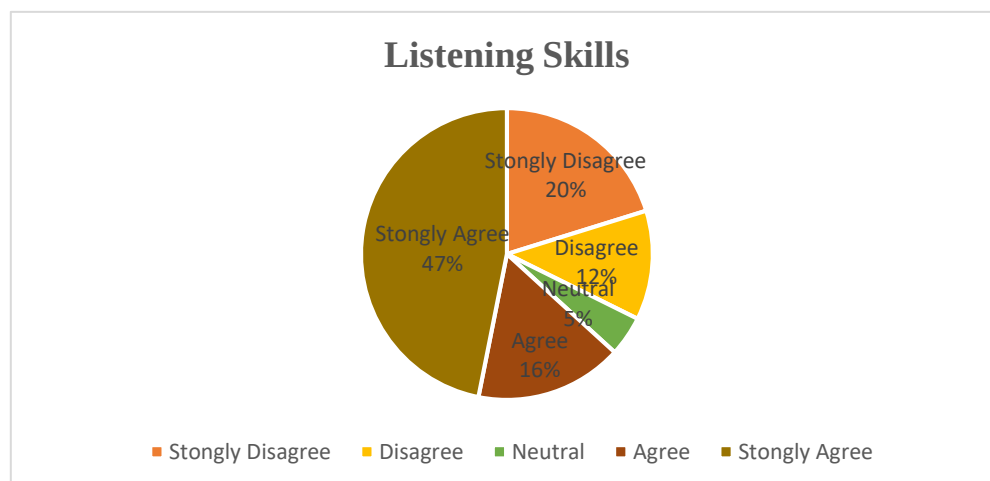


Figure 1 shows about the listening abilities that the students were able to learn during online classes. As 63% of the respondents agreed that they learnt about listening skills in online classes while 32% disagreed that their listening skills improved during online classes.

Reading skills in online classes

Figure 2



Figure 2 shows that 48% of the respondents agreed about learning reading skills in online classes. While 26% of the respondents were neutral and 26% of the respondents disagreed that their reading skills did not improved in online classes.

Writing skills in online classes

Figure 3

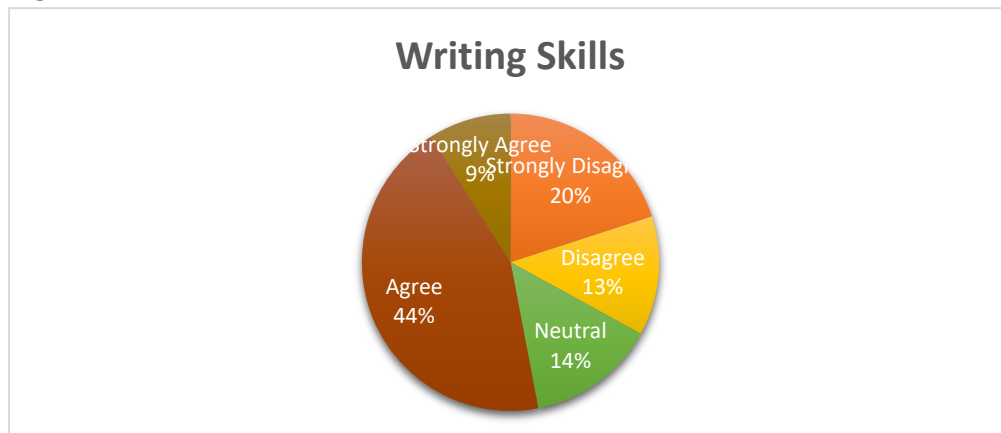


Figure 3 shows that 53% of the respondents agreed about learning speaking skills in online classes while 33% disagreed about learning writing skills. However 14% of the respondents remain neutral.

Speaking skills in online classes

Figure 4

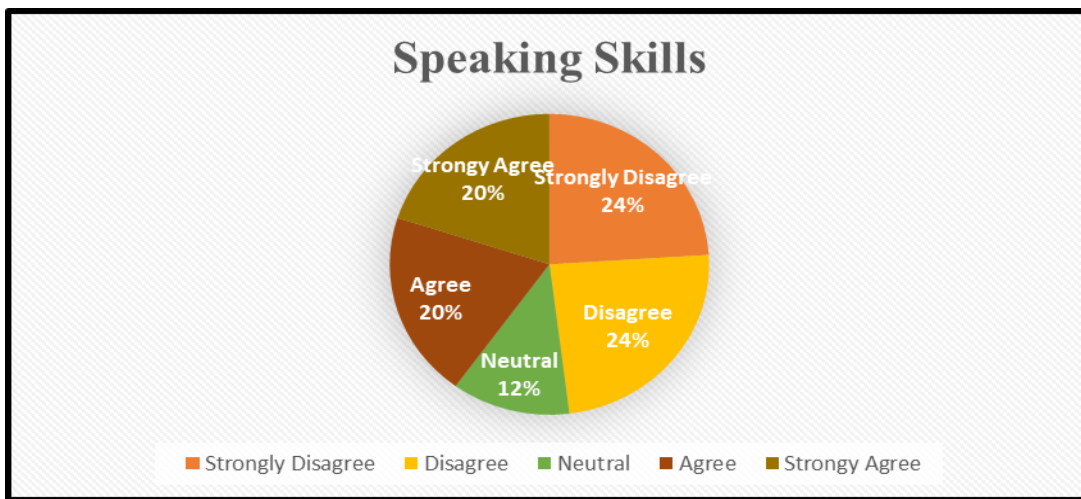


Figure 4 shows that 40% of the respondents agreed about learning speaking skills in online classes while 48% of the respondents disagreed about learning speaking skills in online classes.

Content Delivery, Feedback and Digital Technology

Table 01 below shows the descriptive frequency analysis of the motivation level of student's through different statements. The analysis reports about learner's behavior and response towards the content delivery by the English teacher; responses and feedback from the English teacher and a comparison between traditional classes and digital online classes.

The analysis of the statement about content delivery in English classes shows that 46.1% respondents disagreed that it was easy to understand the teaching; while 29.5% agreed that they were able to comprehend the content. In the same manner, 48.6% responded that they were unable to understand the activities and tasks given in the online classes for improving English language while 29.9% agreed that they were able to comprehend the different activities.

While reporting about the digital content 52% of the participants accepted that it was

quite easier for them to access the material while 20% reported that the online material was difficult to comprehend and download. Similarly, while reporting about instructions, 60% responded that physical instructions are more effective than online ones as almost 60% disagreed that online instructions are better. The respondents also believed that teacher must have easy access to technology and they must be prompt at using technology. Therefore, 23% responded that teacher's digital awareness is quite important while 56% disagreed with them. In language courses, feedback acquires an essential position therefore 61% respondents opted that it should be provided in online classes while 30% refrained from giving any response to this statement as they remain neutral to this response.

Table 1: *Questionnaire Analysis*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i. Easy to comprehend content in online classes	23.4%	22.7%	24.5%	22.3%	7.2%
ii. Easy to understand tasks/activities in online classes.	23.4%	25.2%	21.6%	22.7%	7.2%
iii. Feel comfortable in communicating in English in online classes	14.4%	10.1%	25.9%	38.1%	11.5%
iv. Convenient to get the teaching material in online classes	16.7%	13%	17.8%	36.2%	16.3%
v. Online mode of instruction is more interesting than traditional classrooms.	33.9%	27.1%	16.8%	13.6%	8.6%
vi. Teacher's digital literacy is important in online classes	31.3%	25.9%	19.8%	16.9%	6.1%
vii. Feedback is required in online classes	3.3%	5%	30%	45.1%	16.6%

viii. It is easy to learn a language in online classes	30%	30%	10%	4%	26%
ix. I become autonomous via the online instructional method.	5%	10%	5%	40%	40%
x. I face many problems in online classes.	10%	10%	20%	30%	30%
xi. I prefer online classes	37%	23%	10%	10%	20%
xii. I prefer physical classes	10%	10%	10%	40%	30%

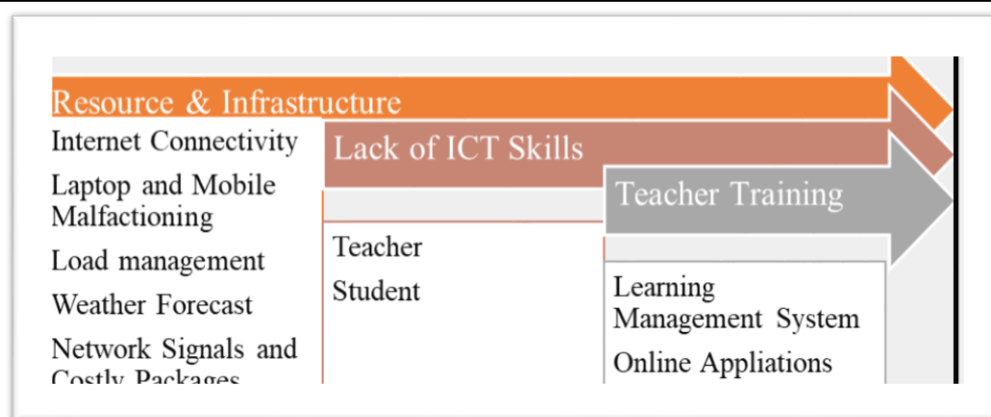
Learning a language in online classes is a difficult task. Especially, when the digital learning is practiced for the first time. Therefore almost 60% agreed with this idea that they were unable to learn a language. While 30% agreed that it is easy to learn a language in online classes. As online classes focused on learner-centered approach, almost 80% agreed that they become autonomous via online instructional method while almost 60% of the respondents narrated that they faced several problem in online classes.

Hence, 60% of the respondents reported that they do not prefer online classes and 30% agreed that they prefer online classes. While only 20% disagreed that they prefer physical classes and almost 70% agreed to prefer physical classes than online classes.

After the questionnaire analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted from the participants to validate the data gathered from the questionnaire analysis. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted after the formal consent of the participants.

Data was transcribed and audio recorded. The interview lasted for 30 to 40 minutes with each respondent. Data was then analyzed and coded for thematic analysis Figure 5 shows the major themes obtained after the analysis of the interview data.

Figure 5
Thematic Analysis



Resources and Infrastructure

The major obstacle in effecting the motivation and attitude of learners towards online classes was lack of resources and infrastructural problems. As in universities, most of these resources are readily available. But this online mode of education required every student to at least possess an android phone with the latest application and updates. However, in Pakistan, most of the students live in under-developed areas and belong to lower-middle class. Therefore, the resources was the main hurdle. As one of the respondent said “*hum interior Sindh mein rehte ha wahan cable internet nahe hota, 3G hota ha aur ospe bhe bare muskil se signals aate ha*”. Another participant said “*hamre pas toh android phone bhe nahe tha, humein purchase krna para*”.

Similarly, another participant remarked that “*lecturers mein audio ka itna issue tha, teachers ne shayad ache headphones use kiye honge, par hamare pas toh mobile wale headset he the, jismein awaz buhat kam aate the*”. Similarly, one other participant said that because of “*Har subject ke 3 hours k class k waja se hamare laptop kharab hoegye, kyun charging khatam hojate the*”. In the same way another participant said “*laptop kharab hogaya tha, per na toh asiignment krsakhte the na class leh sakhte the and laptop markets bhe band the*”

Another serious issue while taking the online classes was electricity failure. As one participant said “*we hardly had electricity for ten hours*” and another respondent said “*KE started load-management system where they used to shut down the electricity for seven to eight hours with a text message*”. In the same way another responded narrated that “*jab bijli nahe hoge to maobile charge nahe hoga aur jab miobile charge nahe hpqa toh class kaise leh sakhte ha*”

Similarly, unexpected weather forecast resulted in “*signal issues*”, *electricity failure*”

and *“rescheduling of online classes”*. This according to the respondents *“increased the learning load and affected our mental health and behavior with the family members”*. Online education not only affected the mental wellbeing of the learners but appeared costly as well with institutions saving on their economic budgets while the students facing economic problems. As one respondent said to attend the classes *“we had to purchase costly mobile packages and they weren’t worthwhile”* and *“packages buhat mehgi hote the aur oska ziada faida bhe nahe tha”*

Lack of ICT Skills

Another important issue that created a hindrance in the motivation and attitudes of respondent towards online classes was lack of ICT skills. Though it is the basic requirement of the HEC curriculum yet many students, especially the newly enrolled students faced ICT skills issues. Most of the students said that *“teachers ko training dah gaye lekin students ko nahe”*. Similarly, one respondent said, *“the university presume that students are already trained in this skills”* as reflected in the response of another respondent *“starting mein humein meeting join krna nahe aaraha tha, teachers se pochte toh who khud confuse hojaate”*.

Consequently, one participant said *“because of lack of training students’ performance got effected”*. *“Google doc per toh submit he nahe krna aaraha tha”* and *“teachers activities use krte the vo interesting the per humein apps use he nahe krna aate the”*, as narrated by one of the respondents.

Teacher Training

Another major theme was lack of teacher training who were required to teach courses in the online semester. As one responded said *“Teachers lack of essential lecture delivery affected our performance”*. In the same way another respondent said, *“30 minutes mein teacher 4 classes ka content parha dete the, jo ke comprehend krna muskil tha”*. Similarly another respondent said *“teacher followed a lecture based approach”* and *“teacher ko applications use krne he nahe aate the”*. Most of the respondents believed that as narrated by a respondent that *“teachers ko online activities dhondhne chehye the”* and *“teacher was unable to use technology to effectively teach us English online using the four skills”*

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that most of the respondent favored physical classes as almost 70% preferred to learn a language in face-to-face classes and only 30% preferred online classes. However, when inquired about the specific skills, the respondents reported that they were able to better learn each skill in online classes. As almost 62.6% (listening skills), 48% (reading skills), 50% (writing skills) and 40% (speaking skills) respondents reported that they were able to learn each skill more proficiently.

However, in terms of preference most of the respondents 50% disagreed and almost 29% agreed that online education is a better option during crisis time.

Similarly, the analysis of the interviews, shows that students faced many difficulties in learning through online mode of instruction due to the lack of resources and technological skills. Moreover, insufficient training of the teachers has also effected the teaching-learning process due to which the students are not motivated and have negative perceptions for online education. But if the higher authorities and government focus on these issues, and the teachers change their methodology and teaching practices as well then online education would become effective, and it can have a positive effect on the motivation and attitudes of the learners.

DISCUSSION

Quraishi, Asif, Sheeraz and Amer (2020) discussed in their study that universities faced many administrative and academic issues. The academic issues' ranges from redeveloping learning content, providing quality instruction, assessment and teacher training. This study however, focused on motivation of learners in online classes which is effective for online classes. Beside this technology, infrastructure and teacher training are some issues as highlighted by the learners. Similarly, Firat, Kilinc and Yuzer (2017) study concluded that student autonomy is highly essential in online classes. While focusing on the teacher training, most of the participants in this study conveyed that if the teacher is proficient in using the application for language learning, the students would be automatically motivated to use those applications independently. In the same manner Lucey (2018) study reported that motivation plays a key role in learning. This study reemphasis this that in order to effectively learn four skills, motivation and positive attitude is essential. Chaudhary, Rasheed and Rasheed (2021) identified a similar analysis and put forwards that not only English language teachers but social science and science teachers face the same technological and training issues in online teaching as reported in this study.

Hence, the results are effective for higher education institutes during the online semester in determining the level of motivation and attitudes students have. The result can be utilized to put in efforts to change the teaching methodology, incorporate interactive activity based classroom and focus more on discussion based approach than merely delivering the lecture. Also, the institutes can take steps to draft a new curriculum for online classes and try to utilize the available software's and application for language comprehension. Also, teacher training and ICT skills workshops must be conducted by institutes for faculty and students to fit in the needs of modern technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the motivation and perceptions of a single public sector university. Researchers may conduct a cross-sectional or longitudinal study using an experimental design. Also, teachers and students must be provided adequate training before conducting online classes and afterwards their perceptions and recommendations may be studied in details.

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