

Technological Acceptance Among Pakistani Public-Sector University Teachers: Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching Literature Online

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Abstract

In the context of the pandemic, teaching and learning in higher education shifted greatly towards the online mode of learning. Having moved on from the scenario, we have looked at the perceptions of teachers regarding challenges and opportunities provided by online teaching and learning of literature. Five teachers from two public-sector institutions were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis showed that teachers faced a number of challenges such as lack of connectivity, lack of competence and training. They also believed that students tended to become rather passive in online classes. However, they not only pointed out the challenges but also focussed on how literature teaching had become more fun due to the use of online learning platforms. We recommend that online teaching of literature should be continued to some extent post- Covid 19 as well.

Keywords: *Online teaching, English literature, Pakistan, challenges, opportunities.*

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, following the unexpected emergence of the coronavirus in China in December 2019 (Cucinotta and Vanelli, 2020). The National Security Committee (NSC) resolved to close educational institutions, including universities, starting on March 16, 2020, in reaction to this epidemic in Pakistan (Higher Education Commission, 2020). The transition from in-person learning to online education, known as "emergency e-learning," was made possible by the closing of educational institutions (Murphy, 2020). As in online teaching, electronic

devices were the only medium of instruction and only source through which interaction between teacher and student took place (Dobre,2007). This new teaching pedagogy (online learning) was not very common in Pakistan before Covid-19. However, the Universities in Pakistan shifted their learning process to Learning Management System (LMS) which is a web-based application used to deliver learning content, monitor students' involvement and performance. Different softwares like Zoom, Teams, Google classroom etc. were used to carry out online classes and meetings. In Pakistan where online teaching introduced teachers and students to new technology but due to lack of experience and dearth of technical infrastructure, poor internet connections affected the quality education. However, being teachers of English literature in Pakistan, we faced a number of issues related to teaching in general and teaching literature specifically. The context we taught in was that of public-sector universities in Pakistan. Therefore, the current study intends to interview other teachers to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching and learning literature online. The research question that guided this study was, "What are the challenges faced by teachers of literature while teaching online?"

We believe that insights from during the pandemic are highly relevant in today's educational scenario as teaching and learning online has become a possibility, a norm and an increasingly more encouraged mode of teaching and learning in Pakistan after the pandemic. We present our recommendations for teachers of literature in the conclusion that connect the study with the needs of the teachers today.

2. Literature Review

As a preventative step, all educational sectors, including universities and schools, were unexpectedly decided to close in the aftermath of the COVID-19 epidemic. The teaching pedagogy changed as a result, moving from face-to-face(F2F) to online instruction (Burgess & Sievertsen,2020). The quick change in teaching methods presented several challenges for universities trying to use the new online teaching platform. The most frequent obstacles included problems with a lack of institutional mentorship and support, poor and insufficient infrastructure (Judd et al. 2020), and problems with instructors' lack of ICT proficiency in the use of digital media (Huber and Helm 2020). Other recent issues with online teaching, such as the lack of technology, problems with internet connectivity, a lack of time management skills, and problems with online student evaluation are also highlighted (Mendes, Bastos, Amante, Aires, and Cardoso,2019; Blau, Shamir, and Avdiel,2020).

Similar disparities in learning outcomes can be seen in rural regions due to challenges with dependable power supplies and Internet access during this time of the "new normal" (Uwezo, 2020). Furthermore, according to Mondol & Mohiuddin (2020), "the teaching learning process gets hampered resulting in the motivation swing and less participation" of students (p. 242), which is a form of internal element generating difficulty in online teaching at the individual level.

Pakistan, like all other nations, made the decision to close all educational institutions nationwide on March 13, 2020 (Ali, 2020). Technology-based education interventions have been identified by Pakistan's Ministry of Education and Federal Training (2020) as a way to support learners through online teaching tools like Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams that can be accessed through internet-connected computers and smartphone mobile technology. Additionally, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) took swift action in response to the quick switch from face-to-face to online instruction by developing the Online Readiness Policy Guidance Note and Policy Guidelines for universities on COVID19. Despite these prompt steps by HEC, there are still a number of restrictions and difficulties that universities must overcome in order to satisfy the expectations of both students and teachers for online instruction. The difficulties experienced by instructors and students on various levels are highlighted by one of the research projects done by Adnan and Anwar (2020). For example, problems with internet access, monetary difficulties, and an unfavourable learning atmosphere at home.

The focus on teaching practices on subject-specific disciplines from faculty of Arts and Humanities, more specifically, the field of teaching English Literature online from teachers' perspectives, has not yet been explored. This is in addition to the physical obstacles (connectivity barrier, infrastructural issues, etc.) in the online classroom generally. It is simpler to create online language learning exercises than it is to teach undergraduate students' literature. The literary text is crucial for students in literature classes because it "represents authentic feelings of their authors and this produces a strong motivation in the learners," according to Babae & Yahya (2014, p. 82). Teaching different genres of literature (Drama, novel poetry etc.) in an online class can be a hard task for teachers as some literature genres need different approaches from teachers and require active involvement from the students in lessons.

Reading (1989, p.35) asserts that engaging in classroom discussions with the students is essential while teaching literature because "this is a subject whose disciplinary landscape and characteristic forms of inquiry have been formed in the classroom and in dialogue with students." According to Reading (1989, p. 35), learning occurs when "students actually are in terms of knowledge, skills, and motivation...and must seek genuine response and engagement from other students, leading to new knowledge and understanding." Literature syllabuses typically cover a wide range of topics.

The spontaneous interchange of ideas between the teacher and the students does not typically occur in real time in online classrooms, which is why students frequently perceive them as passive (Shenoy et al., 2020). Since contact between students and teachers is essential for teaching literature, a "lack of human interaction" in an online classroom may result in subpar performance and attitude (Bertea, 2009). Recently, Hussain and Ali (2022) carried out a quantitative study to investigate the difficulties encountered by literature students in an online environment. Based on 151 replies from students at 16 public institutions, it was discovered that students' lack of digital literacy made it difficult for them to comprehend literature in online classes. Students requested more interaction and debate in their online English literature lectures. The outcomes also showed that pupils favoured interactive education. Additionally, they did not think that using digital tools to teach theatre and poetry was particularly helpful. For teaching short tales and novels, however, the online format was chosen.

The challenges and achievements of online teaching at the collegiate level at Pakistan's rural public sector institutions were covered in different research by Khan et al. (2022). According to research, poor internet access, a lack of university support, instructors' inadequate online teaching abilities, students' and teachers' preparation, and a lack of student equipment are the primary problems with online education. The research provided many recommendations, including that IT be made a permanent part of university teaching and learning, that the university support instructors by providing them with appropriate net/tools and teacher training, and that students be given orientation on online learning.

Teachers in English literature must determine the most effective techniques to carry out the teaching-learning process in an online classroom. In addition, it's crucial to consider instructors' attitudes and preferences while creating a successful online learning environment for English Literature lessons. The current study will concentrate on the views

and perspectives of the professors on the customary methods for teaching literature online at certain Pakistani universities. Other significant considerations, such as outside influences on teaching practises for online classrooms (e.g., internet connection, instructors' ICT proficiency, etc.), are also taken into account. The main tenets of this study are to explore teachers' perspectives on online literature courses in COVID-19, the difficulties they encountered during the process, the tools and platforms they felt most at ease using, and to take into account their recommendations for improving the practises of teaching literature.

3. Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative research approach. Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method in this study because they allow for follow-up questions (Bryman, 2010) and help gather in-depth information (Cohen et al., 2007). This study sought to understand how teachers perceived the difficulties and opportunities of teaching literature online. Before being applied to the primary data collection, the interview schedule underwent testing. The pilot interview was also used into the main research because the interview schedule didn't require any significant alterations following the pilot.

The interview schedule included questions regarding participants' background such as qualification, teaching experience etc. and then we talked about the respondents' ICT competence, followed by teaching strategies, classroom management and relationship with students in online classes.

Five teachers from the two selected public-sector universities of Pakistan were selected as the participants in the main study. We wanted to keep some consistency in the experience levels of the participants and therefore the participants having a teaching experience ranging from 4 to 10 years were included in the study. The data was collected over Zoom, and the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The data was analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2006) model of thematic analysis. We familiarized ourselves with the data, coded it, revised the codes and developed themes out of these. The themes were then reviewed, named, and are presented in the following section.

4. Findings

4.1 Challenges in teaching literature online

Coping with the pandemic COVID-19 resulted in the shift to e-learning where a number of challenges impeded the intended learning outcomes. In response to the question of challenges of teaching literature online, participants identified both external barriers (connectivity issues, time management, challenges in using ICT gadgets, Lack of professional training) and internal barriers (less participation from students, communication barriers). Majority of the participants talked about lack of professional training for the readiness towards online teaching. All the participants seem to be in agreement that there was no formal training or workshop organized to make them aware of the tools and resources for online classes. Participants pointed out that organisations have not placed a lot of emphasis on offering technology training to faculty to support the success of their online courses. There is a shortage of pedagogical and instructional assistance for many online teachers. They also expressed the belief that professional development strategies that cater to the demands of teachers who teach online have a direct impact on the caliber of online courses. These strategies are essential for assisting educators in implementing online pedagogical practices. Participants expressed worry about the time and effort required for online instruction as well as the institutions' lack of support and incentives. One of the participants suggested that university administrators should think about giving instructors who teach online greater pedagogical training and opportunities for theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of e-teaching. A different participant made the observation that faculty require ongoing assistance when selecting the technology platforms to use, structuring the course in an online environment, ensuring technologies function, troubleshooting when issues arise, assisting students with their technological needs, and setting up the technological infrastructure. In order to construct their online teacher persona using online pedagogies and to foster favourable attitudes towards online teaching by embracing collaborative work, it is crucial to adequately educate and support instructors for online teaching.

A majority of the participants talked about the challenge of connectivity issues and digital divide. Seven of the participants highlighted that sometimes, because of slow internet or technical glitches, students and teachers, both get disconnected from the meeting. Eight out of ten participants highlighted lack of resources on the students' part. Since the participants

were from public sector institutes, the majority of the students come from rural settings and marginalized communities where access to technology and reliable internet connections are limited. Because of this digital divide, not all learners can successfully participate in online courses. One participant commented:

I think in online courses, there are so many discrepancies. Students who are living in cities learn a lot because they have access, things are quite easier for them, everything is available online, and they can talk to us and take advice. They also get feedback and they have access to everything like Facebook and because of such availability they are competent too in the IT field. On the other hand, there are some students who are living in villages where they don't have access to reliable internet, so they have to go out (GS).

Four of the participants also reflected that since they use the basic version of Zoom, they face the challenge of 40 minutes meeting time where after 40 minutes they have to restart and students rejoin the meeting. This disturbs the flow of the class. Two of the participants also shared that the basic Zoom app does not allow above 100 participants. Hence, in case of a large class, teachers are unable to allow remaining students. When teaching online courses, the participants also expressed a high level of depersonalization and a lack of success. Eight of the participants indicated that professors make an effort to build relationships with students since there is a perception that connections with students are being lost in online classrooms. One of the participants commented that in physical classes, teachers know their students and build a trustworthy relation with students. Another participant commented:

My communication with the first batch was more effective because they used to come to the office for their queries or we used to see them physically. On the other hand, students in online classes do not open their videos, so we don't know them properly. I used to give them group work in physical classes, as they had to discuss with me and I looked over to them, I used to round over them, I used to get in contact with them. Though we tried our best to do the same thing in online classes through breakout rooms, this wasn't done appropriately because some students have turned off their

videos while others have turned off their audios, so communication wasn't that much effective.

4.2 Students' engagement and learning in online classes

Hence, participants viewed that students can be better motivated when teachers stand in front of them. It is one of the benefits of traditional classes that the focus of students can be maintained better. Learners' participation and engagement in online settings is another major issue discussed by participants. The participants saw the lack of interactive dialogic sessions where all students may express their literary views as a barrier to developing online literature courses. Online classrooms, where most students are passive and mute, hence have low levels of student motivation. It might be difficult to motivate students and get them involved in productive interactions with one other and the course material. One of the participants observed that when there is online conversation, some students choose not to participate. There have been issues in online discussions where only 2 to 3 students participate. Participants reported the challenge of involving students in online discussion as the way students used to discuss novels in the physical class, like teachers used to make literature circles, assign roles to students for discussion, this cannot be managed in online classes. The essence of novel with expression and extract is missing in online settings whereas in physical classes, teachers go to individual students and ask them what they are feeling about the particular theme or event. Another participant further elaborated the challenge as:

Some students were such that even if you were calling their roll number those students would not respond and you were not even able to do anything regarding it. CR or GR or the bright students were the only ones who were taking the class seriously otherwise you cannot force the students to speak up in online class. This case is different in face-to-face classes because on campus if you are maintaining eye contact with a student and addressing them then they would definitely respond even if they are beating around the bush or not answering substantially but they would at least respond. So, in an online setting, you don't get a response from all of the students (GS).

Participants also noted a number of significant distinctions between their communication styles while teaching in person and online. One of the participants expressed her opinion

that in face-to-face classes, teachers receive cues from the vocal and nonverbal replies of the pupils. However, because teachers cannot see students' faces in an online situation, it can be challenging to read these indications. Online settings frequently lack nonverbal communication indicators including tone of voice, eye contact, gestures, and emotions. Participants also mentioned that they need to pay close attention to how they communicate and the phrases they use when taking classes online. Among the participants, one said:

Online, we are more reserved in terms of the kind of references we give. I think it is less reliable as compared to face to face. It's being recorded; students can also record from their device as well. Teachers cannot take the risk of saying something extra. I do not talk about sensitive issues like religion, we teach works which talk about atheism, existentialism etc so I have this fear as well that I shouldn't say any such thing (SK).

Participants also talked about challenges in using ICT gadgets. Instructors' comfort level with technology also plays an important role in online teaching. Three of the participants reflected their uncertainty, uneasiness and unpreparedness for the challenges of teaching online. As one participant commented:

We did not know what zoom was, how the class would be conducted, there were a lot of challenges. When it started, I felt a lot of anxiety. I felt depressed about what was going on. Students were misbehaving so we witnessed all that (SH).

4.3 Strategies and Solutions used

While discussing the difficulties of teaching literature online, participants also acknowledged the advantages and ideas for overcoming these difficulties. Participants discussed the utilization of various cutting-edge teaching techniques and online resources in answer to the subject of how to make online literature programs more entertaining and engaging. They claimed to have used a wide range of technical resources to impart course material and support student learning. Participants reflected that when they prepare lectures for online classes, they can cover different things especially with reference to technology; they get a lot of access to different resources from which they can learn and can deliver it. Two of the participants mentioned using Padlet wall (a collaborative discussion e-board) and Flipgrid (short video capturing app) to make their literature classes more engaging. One of the participants mentioned:

I gave tasks to students on Flipgrid from Prose and Novel that they should make a video on the work. I made it compulsory for them to comment on any three colleagues' videos critically. I told them not to just write awesome, great etc, but to critically comment and the presenter had to reply to them. First comment was always mine. I told them to take it as a standard that what kind of comments should be made. We worked like that on Padlet as well. I gave them a short note to write, and other students commented on it. Everyone had to comment on any two. When I gave them this task, they did a very good debate on this afterwards as well in class. They tried to apply theories as well. Some of them went to an advance level like deconstructionism, third world feminism and new historicism were discussed.

Three of the participants also talked about quizzes, mentioning Kahoot! (a game-based learning platform) and polls that encourage students to be receptive in online classes through active learning and assessment. As one participant commented, *"I use poles or quizzes in zoom, through voting their interaction becomes more effective, you can set 10 questions with yes or no, or with 2 or 3 options, so students give answers and become excited"*.

Participants further elaborated that active learning is encouraged in online classes through other innovative tools like using breakout rooms, structured exercises, screen sharing, YouTube videos, presentations and showing images related to their discussion theme. One of the participants shared her experience of teaching a 'Research Methodology' course online. She reflected that in research methods class, she used to show students Google scholar and taught them how to download, or how to site. So, if the screen is in front of students, they can easily understand. Another participant also shared his experience of teaching 'Fiction' and 'Drama' online. He elaborated that while preparing the content, he used images relevant to the novel, *Lord of the Flies*. He showed the characters' images. While teaching the play, *Oedipus Rex*, he displayed the images related to Greek culture and history. One other participant commented, *"When I teach novels and drama, I show students movies or animated videos on YouTube"*.

Adding more to the advantages of online classes, eight out of ten participants reflected that online classes have reduced participation anxiety for shy or introverted students. Introverts feel comfortable replying in the chat box. One participant added that females do not talk

much as they feel hesitant but in online classes, they reply. Their videos are turned off, they are not visible physically, and therefore, they are comfortable in participating. Another participant commented:

This surprises me; a couple of girls who stay quiet in physical classes participate in the discussion. In physical classes, I would have to keep asking again and again but they do not talk. They ask questions online, they write long comments in the chat as well, and they talk by unmuting themselves. So, I have noticed this change especially in female students.

Six of the participants offered a solution for dealing with the difficulty of students' motivation and lack of involvement in online classes: randomly asking questions after obtaining the students' names. One of the participants shared that to increase the interaction, the strategy she employed was to call out the student by his or her roll number and ask questions. This way, students try to be a bit attentive and focused. Another participant shared:

I kept their chat box open so they could comment or ask anything. During lectures I used to read their comments or messages along with their names, and reply to them, in return they ask more questions or queries, so communication gets strong and effective. Or I give them tasks through breakout rooms as they can speak in groups easily and through groups' maximum number participate in the class (GS).

5. Discussion

The teachers faced a lot of difficulties in teaching literature online as these teachers belonged to an underdeveloped, poorly resources public-sector context and were not used to using technology in their teaching. The problems Pakistani teachers faced were very similar to those faced by teachers elsewhere (e.g., Judd et al., 2020; Huber and Helm, 2020). As the change from physical to online classes was abrupt and institutions had not been ready for it, teachers in various contexts felt uncomfortable with and unprepared for the virtual classroom. However, for the Pakistani teachers the challenges were manifold as resources were an issue, internet connectivity, access to internet in remote areas were still a matter of concern (see also, Adnan and Anwar, 2020).

Maintaining students' engagement, motivation and learning in online classes was quite difficult according to the participants. It was easy for the students to become passive in an online class as pointed out by Shenoy et al. (2020). As the participants mentioned, it is easier for teachers to connect with students in a physical class as they can see their expression and move closer to them to ensure their attention, however, not having those options was a readjustment. As Berteau (2009) points out that online classes have a disadvantage due to the lack of human interaction.

The teachers specifically felt the need for engagement as they were teaching literature and as Reading (1989) emphasizes literature classroom feeds on discussion. Due to cultural reasons and institutional policy, the students' cameras were turned off in these virtual classrooms. Teachers found it especially hard to engage them in a discussion on a literary text when they couldn't even see them. Hussain and Ali (2022) found in their study that students also felt same as the teachers as they found it hard to learn literature online.

Unlike most studies focusing on challenges related to online teaching (Hussain and Ali, 2022; Khan et al., 2020; Shenoy et al., 2020), our participants also talked about strategies, so though teachers faced a number of challenges in teaching literature online, they learnt to navigate and used a number of strategies to teach literature online. Taking students' names, using humor, calling them by their roll numbers as displayed on the screen, marking attendance in the middle of the session all helped teachers gain more attention from the students. Teachers also talked about a number of advantages of teaching literature online. Using the apps such as Zoom, Teams or Google Meet, they were able to share their computer screens with students. In an atmosphere of low resources, this opened up huge resource options for the classroom. The participants were able to use different mediums such as Paddlit, Youtube, Kahoot! Etc, open multiple tabs, help students visit different websites for different activities such as showing how to get direct citations from Google Scholar. These are useful, interactive perspectives into online teaching that can be used post-Covid 19.

6. Conclusion

The current study looked at teachers' perceptions of possibilities and problems related to online learning during the COVID-19 epidemic. Our findings imply that instructors have conflicting attitudes about the online teaching experience, which is consistent with research conducted in Jordan (Almahasees et al., 2021) and Karnataka, a state in southwest India.

The reason of having negative opinion is because teachers are confronted with number of challenges for instance lack of infrastructure, ICT training and support from institutions, performance evaluation of students, less student's participation in discussion, internet connectivity were the major problems highlighted by teachers. Contrary to the negative opinions, there is a large number of optimistic and positive feedback received. Teachers reported that the online teaching system made everyone familiar with the technology. It removed the anxiety issues and shyness of students in class participation. It allowed a variety of technological tools to be used in teaching practice which enhanced teachers' teaching skills to deliver course material as per the teaching standards used at the international level.

We advise teachers to continue using online learning environments to hold certain classes with their students in light of the findings of the current study. This will not only help them stay up-to-date with technological tools but would also enhance the quality of teaching and learning literature. Students will also stay active through the use of multiple media sources. Covid-19 has left us all improved in our ICT competence, literature teachers should keep promoting online teaching in order to keep literature teaching current and in line with the modern pedagogies.

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