

**STUDENTS PERCEPTION REGARDING ONLINE AND
ON-CAMPUS CLASSES DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK:
A THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

The current research work intended to discover college and university pupils' perception regarding online and on-campus classes in Pakistan during Covid-19 outbreak. Qualitative research approach was employed which encompassed virtual online interviews and group debates with the assistance of an interview guide comprising of fifteen open-ended questions. Overall, 100 students were engaged in ten focus group discussion using a maximum variation sampling method. The thematic content analysis using Braun and Clark's (2006) framework was conducted. The analysis generated six fundamental themes related to online and on-campus classes: (1) quality learning (2) time saving, (3) self-assessment and self-regulation, (4) sense of inaccessibility, (5) other complications faced, and (6) ideal system. In conclusion, on-campus classes were well-appreciated and considered as ideal education system by students. This signifies substantial and talented potential for the forthcoming of education system. Furthermore, in future studies the values of the on-campus learning method and consequences should be thoroughly and frequently appraised to display its usefulness.

Keywords: COVID-19, Thematic Analysis, Online Classes, On-Campus

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INTRODUCTION

The novel corona virus disease-2019 (COVID-19) was firstly appeared and detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and then within a few months it spread all over the world and on 11th March 2020 the World Health Organization declared it a pandemic. Pakistan is not exceptional to this viral disease. On 26 February 2020, Pakistan's first patient of Covid-19 detected and within few days the condition became worse (Riaz et al., 2021). This pandemic had affected all areas of human life, including educational activities. As the COVID-19 situation worsened, the worldwide lockdown turned into a lockdown of all educational institutions such as school, colleges and universities. The closing of these institutions become a very stressful incident for educational administration having very limited resources. The Pakistan Ministry of Education declared suspension of all educational activities on 14 March 2020 and later online education started in all universities, colleges and in few schools to carry on the learning activities in a secure and safe manner.

Online education is basically a virtual learning system which incorporates internet connectivity with learning and teaching procedures (Bentley, et al., 2012). The learning and teaching process can be continued from the distance through internet connection and online mediums (Eldeeb, 2014). It was an unplanned shift from classroom-based learning to completely online educational activities and most of the institutions were not prepared for that transition so that they initially lacked in strategies and infrastructure (Zhang, et al., 2020). Through this evolution in learning modalities, a model of "flipped classroom" has been adopted for learning and teaching all over the world (Williams, 2016; Schwartzstein & Roberts, 2017). It becomes a silver lining on a dark cloud allowing for the slothful swiftness of reforms in educational institutions, which has been working with old lecture-based learning and teaching approaches, embedded with institutional prejudice and outdated classrooms. Nevertheless, this pandemic has become a trigger for global educational institutions to follow innovative approaches for learning in a comparatively short notice. Throughout this time period, most of the educational institutions have transferred to online mode of learning using Microsoft Teams, Blackboard, Zoom, or some other online platforms (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

Factually, online learning approach is not a new trend; a lot of researches suggested the usefulness of this learning system. Learning outcomes for different online learners through various online learning methods were as good as or even better than traditional learning methodology and the students were highly satisfied

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by online teaching and learning (Navarro & Shoemaker, 2000). Furthermore, another study indicated that hybrid format learners generally acquired about one-quarter less time period to attain fundamentally the same learning results as traditional-format learners (Bowen et al. 2014). Moreover, different studies have been carried out across the world to identify perception of student regarding online learning. For instance, a study conducted in Indonesia among students of medicine explored some supportive aspects along with few inhibitory factors related to distance or online learning. The most approved supportive feature was flexibility of location (87.9%) whereas the most frequent inhibitory aspect was signal dependency (80.2%) (Daroedono et al., 2020). Similarly, a study was conducted among Pakistani university students where targeted sample did not prefer online teaching practice over face-to-face learning method during the COVID-19 lock down condition. Overall, 77% students identified with negative perceptions about online learning (Abbasi et al., 2020).

Several educational institutions around the globe are promoting online learning as an effective teaching approach during pandemic and it is being broadly appreciated and accepted by the learners (Govindasamy, 2001; Blas & Fernandez, 2008). There are various grounds for its general acceptability such as ease of use, modernity, flexibility and good control over the environmental conditions. However, along with its manifold advantages over traditional teaching approach there are a few limitations or disadvantages of e-learning such as lack of student teacher interaction, lack of peer support, social isolation, and connectivity issues etc. (Maheshwari et al., 2015; Kwary & Fauzie, 2018). In spite of its wide spread adoption of online learning across the world, it was never used as a feature of normal education system in Pakistan until the recent spread of Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the sudden lockdown of all educational institutions however, now a number of schools, colleges and universities across the country are rapidly moving towards online-learning approach so that continuous education can be delivered during this quarantine period.

Therefore, study to explore the perception of students regarding the appropriateness of online learning practice then become significant as this initiative is very new and sudden in Pakistan and both teachers and students are trying to get familiar with this new methodology. It would be helpful and interesting to explore whether the students are adjusted to this new learning approach, would prefer some relevant modifications or rather would like to work in conventional learning in general (McCann, et al., 2010). Further, slight information exists about the perception and experiences of students relating to online learning in Pakistan.

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Consequently, the objective of this research was to assess the opinion and perception of Pakistani students regarding online learning methodology implemented in educational institutions during COVID-19 pandemic lock down. This information is very essential to explore student's prerequisites during online learning practice to make this newly adopted learning system useful for the students or learners.

METHOD

Participants

In current study purposeful sampling technique was used. To indorse adequate variety of opinion among participants one student from each semester of each department from university of Gujrat and its four city campus colleges were recruited using a supreme variation sampling method and attendance list of students were used as a sampling frame to select the participants of study. Total 100 (50 male & 50 female) students contributed in ten focus group deliberations, and each group had 10 participants. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Study Design

The present study is based on qualitative research approach in which online focus group qualitative design was used to measure perception of students regarding online and on-campus classes. For the reason that this design empowers a collaborative and in-depth investigation of respondents' experiences. Furthermore, the group procedure can aid individuals to explain opinions that might not appear from an interview and efficiently address the purposes of this study (Gedeon & Khalil, 2020). So that, focus group deliberations were the utmost appropriate choice. Because of COVID-19 pandemic the debates were directed online. This discussion also confirmed a comprehensive exploration of the perceptions, expectations, complications and was scheduled so as to produce recommendations for enhancements of forthcoming study.

Procedure

To collect data related to current study researchers develop a discussion guide that was reviewed by the experts. According to the recommendations of experts the guide was revised and approved by experts, and a pilot study was

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carried out with 10 university and college students. It comprised of eight open-ended questions, letting applicants to deliberate each possible elements regarding to online and on-campus classes. Afterward, ten electronic focus group discussions were conducted to collect data related to the perception of students regarding to online and on-campus classes. These focus group discussions were accompanied during March and June 2020. The average time of focus group discussion was approximately 45 minutes. Trust and rapport was established at the start of the focus group discussion in order to make them more comfortable and open in their responses throughout the discussion. Filling out the demographic and informed consent forms first also helped to relieve any possible hesitation. Specific questions were asked in an open-ended manner that promoted detailed description and did not limit participants' descriptions of their experiences. Following the outlined questions, and throughout the discussion, follow-up questions were asked to illuminate thoughts or ideas more clearly. Discussion was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. This helped to prevent inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data and supported the validity of the research.

Participants of study were approached via email. A virtual informed consent was taken from participants. Consent form included the information regarding the objectives of the study and the name of researcher. It was constructed to obtain the willingness of the participants about their participation in current research. Furthermore, to generate healthy discussion an email entailing necessary information related to focus group discussion was sent to all the participants and they participated in focus group discussion by Microsoft account whose id number was provided to participants. The privacy and confidentiality of data in the final report was guaranteed.

Data Analysis

In the present research data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis was carried out using six phases framework given by Braun & Clarke (2006).

The first step of analysis was reading and rereading the discussion transcripts to become familiar with the data. It was the first time the researcher got familiarity with data and develops interest in it. Audio recorded data was then transcribes which increased familiarity. Transcribing process was too much time consuming and lengthy. At this phase while reading and rereading researcher

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continuously mark and underline the ideas and patterns that were used in subsequent phases. After that, researcher was ready to start formal coding process.

When researcher has familiarized with the data and has identified initial coding patterns by underlining the original transcript second phase started. At this stage data being read and reread, initial codes were identified. It involved arranging the data into meaningful codes.

Third stage began when researcher has identified a long list of initial codes across the data set. At this stage themes were identified from initial codes. It was done by collecting all relevant initial codes under a theme. Particularly, researcher analyzed the codes and find out how different initial codes can be combined to form a theme. Provisional ideas relating to themes, categories, patterns, and relationships were identified at the third phase of the analysis.

At the fourth stage tentative themes were reviewed with reference to the research question and then these themes were rearranged into categories that could be compared. Refinement of identified themes was carried out at this stage. Reviewing and refining of themes occur at two levels. Level one related to check coded extracts of each theme to make it clear that it forms a coherent pattern. At level two, complete data set was reviewed to confirm that tentative themes accurately reflect the meaning of original data.

At this stage, researcher defined and refined the themes that were used in final analysis. Basically, this phase contain sort out the data into specific themes and issues. This phase involved establishing relationship between codes sub themes and main themes. Table 2 summarizes the main themes and sub-themes that were identified.

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RESULTS

Table 1
Demographic Characteristic of the Participant

Characteristics	F	%
Gender		
Male	50	50
Female	50	50
Age in Years		
19-25	46	46
25-31	54	54
Education		
BS	45	45
Masters	30	30
M.Phil.	25	25
Residence		
Rural	63	63
Urban	37	37

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Table 2
Main Themes and Sub Themes

No.	Main Theme	Sub-Theme
1.	Quality Learning	Easy to understand Involvement of multiple intervention
2.	Economical	Quick learning No need to visit institute Lecture recording
3.	Self-Assessment or Self-Regulation	Self enhancement Expression of opinion Influences of other
4.	Sense of Inaccessibility	Environmental control Daily tasks
5.	Multiple Complication	Technical error Expensive Poor class room assessment
6.	Ideal System	Class management Appropriate check and balance Quick response
7.	Role Related Stress	Inter-role Conflict Role Overload

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DISCUSSION

This study examined student's perception regarding online and on-campus classes. Concept of virtual classes in a unique study system in Gujrat so before COVID-19 students were not familiar from online study system. That's why no such study was previously conducted in Gujrat, Pakistan. In current study six core themes were identified using thematic analysis.

First theme was "quality learning" which stated that virtual classes during COVID-19 was a good step but it did not provide in-depth understanding of contents and concepts, furthermore it was difficult to get benefit from different inventions. On the other hand, on-campus classes provided in-depth understanding of difficult concepts by using different teaching methodologies. A study identified that institutional learning permits constructive learning when compared to online learning (Greenhalgh, 2001).

Next main theme of this study was "Economical" which was in the favor of online classes. This theme described that virtual classes system provided inexpensive education as the students can study while sitting at home. However, institutional learning provided expensive education. These findings are in line of previous study explored that online learning is an affordable and effective learning method (Williams, 2016).

Furthermore, another main theme derived by this study was 'Self-Assessment or Self-Regulation'. Respondents of this study indicated that evaluation of learning is difficult during online classes. More specifically student during the online classes it was difficult to express the opinion related to particular course and learning assessment was blurred. These outcomes are similar with a study concluded that in virtual classes classroom and self-assessment of students is clear as in on-campus classes (Williams, 2016).

Fourth major theme of this study was "Sense of Inaccessibility" which elaborated that low environmental control with a sense of isolation was persisted during online classes. Whereas, on campus or institutional classes enrich environment control with a sense of availability. A recent study depicted that physical and emotional intimacy which a learner can feel with their mentor is largely grounded upon the teacher's nonverbal indications. Nonverbal message, such as motions, deportment and eye contact encompass a key role in all

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communications which is difficult to deliver during online classes (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

Subsequently “Multiple Complication” showed that students had been faced different problems during online classes which complicated overall learning process such as electricity problems, inaccessibility of laptop or mobile, lack of knowledge about online classes. These problems collectively made learning unclear and unfavorable. Outcomes of a qualitative study focused on technical errors and untrained staff adversely effected the appropriateness of virtual (Bentley et al., 2012).

Six and last main theme of this study was “Ideal System” which concluded all the ten discussions of respondents. According to this theme on campus education system is an ideal system as compared to online education system. Furthermore, online education needs more planning and improvements for insuring quality learning. These findings are consistent with a study which stated that institutional learning provided enhanced the learning abilities of students while virtual learning system needs systematic improvement to make it an ideal system of education (Kwary & Fauzie, 2018).

Current study accomplished that online classes system was a good strategy due to COVID-19 pandemic but due to some inadequacies not an appropriate alternative of on-campus classes which provided in-depth understanding and self enhancement opportunities. The study’s limitation must be taken into consideration while interpreting the obtained results. This study has mainly utilized the qualitative approach which may be prone to personal interpretations by the researcher. Future studies must explore the phenomenon using quantitative approach. The sample is recruited from Gujrat city hence the findings have limited generalizability. Future studies may employ a sample from other universities as well.

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