

Perceptions of English Language Learners about E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic at Kohat University of Science and Technology

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 Pandemic has had an impact on almost every sector including education, the economy, lifestyle, and health. Several educational institutions all over the world have totally shifted to virtual education. The goal of this study is to examine how English language learners in Pakistan's ESL (English as a Second Language) setting perceive online learning during the Covid-19 outbreak at Kohat University of Science and Technology in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study was conducted at Kohat University of Science and Technology. Data for this study were gathered using an adapted questionnaire. 150 students from the BS English department were chosen using the convenience sampling method. A pilot study was conducted on 30 students of BS English last year students. The questionnaire's reliability and validity were tested using SPSS software version 22. It was found that English language learners have positive perceptions about e-learning and they further want improvement of e-learning not only in an emergency but also in a normal situation.*

Key Words: COVID-19, Perceptions, E-learning, English Language

Introduction

Language is the way to communicate our thought as define language is a system that allows people to communicate ideas that cannot be seen, heard, or touched using sounds, letters, manual signs, or tactile symbols (Delahunty and Garvey, 2010). In the context of SLA “seconding language learning” is used as an umbrella term for learning all non-native languages (Fasold and Linton, 2006). Gaining knowledge and skills through study, experience, or instruction is known as

learning (Radha et al., 2020). In Pakistan, the significance of English has not diminished (Ali, 2016). The primary factor underpinning this may be the evolving position and function of English in Pakistan has not diminished (Ali, 2016). In Pakistan, there are many institutions that used e-learning or technology in normal situations in a classroom setting but during the lockdown period of COVID-19, the whole process of teaching and learning shifted to the online system. The government of Pakistan also adopted a lockdown policy for controlling

the spread of the pandemic COVID-19. On March 13, 2020, Pakistani authorities shut down all educational institutions nationwide and implemented online education or e-learning system of learning by using the available resources of technology (Ali, 2020). E-learning is the process of using information and communication technology to access online learning and teaching resources (Arkorful and Ghana, 2015). The E-learning interactions do not merely support the development of student's English language skills, but also increase students' interest and inspiration in language learning generally (Mutambik, 2018). Additionally, they can acquire materials that may be enhanced or fitted with a variety of learning tools, such as multimedia, that can be supported by teachers (Suartama, 2014 as cited in Mulyani 2020). The difficulties and anxieties brought on by the sudden and abrupt change from the usual method of education during the Coronavirus period had a significant impact on students' perceptions of online learning (Dhawan, 2020). However, because the e-Learning system is a novel method of learning, so all students were not comfortable with it. The attitudes and viewpoints of the students will be different. Therefore, the aim of this study is to ascertain how students perceived online English language learning. The researcher is interested in studying how students perceive e-learning after using it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perception refers to the process of recalling information and forecasting messages that incorporate memory, hope, attention, and motivation (Rakhmat, 2011 as cited in Maharani et al., 2021). The teacher can better understand the students after knowing the students' perceptions. Therefore, the investigator conducted a study entitled "Perceptions of English language learners about e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic at Kohat University of Science and Technology". Several papers have been

published on various aspects of the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic (Woolliscroft, 2020; Spinelli and Pellino, 2020). Among the innovations discussed by Woolliscroft (2020) in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is virtual learning, improvements in diagnosis and treatment, virtual clinical learning, etc. All of these developments are made possible by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. For that reason, the researcher investigates English language learners' perception of e-learning at Kohat University of Science and technology. However, few studies investigate English learners' perceptions in different countries. The learner's perception of online English learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is studied by researchers like Rifiyanti (2020) at the Institut Bisnis & Informatika in Kosgoro, Indonesia. Another study by Rahim and Chandran (2021) looked into how Afghan university students responded to the usage of e-learning in an EFL setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study gives new data about the e-learning perception of English language learners with new locations which have not been studied in the previous study. Abbasi et al. (2020) examined the views of medical and dental students at the Liaquat College of Medicine and Dentistry in Karachi, Pakistan. According to the findings of this study, students did not favour online instruction over in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. More studies were needed to investigate English language learners' perception of e-learning in Pakistan. This study aims to better understand how English language learners at KUST in Pakistan's ESL context feel about e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A significant problem for global health, the economy, and education is the COVID-19 pandemic brought on by SARS-CoV-2 (Biswas and Debnath, 2020). Worldwide educational institutions have closed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Many nations have implemented strong social distancing measures and a

lockdown policy in response to the serious COVID-19 lockdown crisis (Mailizar et al., 2020). Schools, colleges, and universities have been closed while they look for alternative teaching and learning methods in order to save students' learning time. Information and communication technologies (ICT) were employed to deal with school, college, and university closures as well as to sustain the teaching and learning process. During this COVID-19 pandemic crisis, online learning, also known as electronic learning (e-learning), has been seen as the most efficient way to continue the teaching and learning process (Mailizar et al., 2020). The purpose of this study is to investigate how English language learners view e-learning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic at Kohat University of Science and Technology. The reason the researcher is interested in this case is that learning the English language requires numerous skills that need to be developed and refined by English language learners (Lismardayani and Oktavia, 2021). These skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The direct practice has a strong connection to speaking and listening abilities which may be difficult via online learning systems (Lismardayani and Oktavia, 2021). Basic listening skills include paying attention to the speaker to hear and understand what they are saying (Lismardayani and Oktavia, 2021). The researcher believes that learning English through e-learning has a significant impact on the acquisition and development of one's proficiency in the English language. Additionally, learning took place face-to-face before the COVID-19 pandemic rather than through an e-learning platform. As a result, the researcher is interested in learning more about how KUST's English department students perceived e-learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Question

- 1) What are the perceptions of the students of BS English about the usefulness of

e-learning in English during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Objective

- 1) To know the perceptions of BS English students about the usefulness of e-learning in English.

Significance of the Study

This research is important because of a sudden and massive shift to the use of e-learning that has never occurred before. Due to the pandemic, e-learning use has increased, replacing face-to-face connection between teachers and students, which was once the most crucial component of the teaching and learning process (Pustaka, 2020). Since students are the main target for e-learning systems, therefore this study focuses on their perceptions of e-learning. Student interest, satisfaction, acceptability, and stakeholder technical adoption are necessary for an e-learning system to be successful (Almaiah and Alismaiel, 2019; Shawai and Almaiah, 2018; Almaiah and Jalil, 2014). Findings from this study will provide us with students' views about e-learning, and its usefulness in the English language. The result of this study may also help university administrators and management in taking decisions in an emergency situation like COVID-19 in the future regarding e-learning implementation in universities for learning of English language. The research may help many Khyber Pakhtunkhwa educational 7 institutions adopt e-learning in the future. This study has shed insight into how learners perceive e-learning, and policymakers may utilize this information to help them formulate appropriate policies. Therefore, the policies take into account the demands and needs of technology for university students.

Limitations

The findings of this study are acknowledged

based on a small sample size examination of only one educational institution in KP, Pakistan. Thus, the findings might not apply to everyone. Additionally, the southern area of KPK is more developed than the northern area regarding technological development. This study only looked at students' perspectives, not teachers', parents', administrators', or policymakers' perspectives. They also concentrated on higher education institutions in Pakistan rather than public schools. Based on the findings of this study, it would be incorrect to assume that all English language learners in Pakistan have the same perceptions. The research was also limited to the academic years 2020 and 2021. It is important to remember that the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 25, so the results of this study must be regarded as applying to this age range. E-learning has many definitions, three different types (totally online, hybrid/blended/mixed, and web-assisted), and two different formats (synchronous and asynchronous). Therefore, it is crucial to understand that, unless otherwise mentioned, the word "e-learning" does not relate to any particular type or form in this study. The word "e-learning" refers to all of the types and forms of e-learning discussed in this study.

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach. Due to the strong theoretical foundation of this study of technology adoption, a quantitative approach with closed-ended questions was used (Khechine et al., 2014). The validity and reliability of quantitative study designs have been tested, and they may be clearly stated and acknowledged (Kumar, 2018). Practically any audience or stakeholder group has a generally positive perception of quantitative data (Dornyei, 2007). The data source is the topic from which the data is derived, and using inappropriate sources will lead to irrelevant data collection (Arikunto, 2013).

The information from questionnaires fulfilled by the BS students department English in KUST during the academic year 2020–2021 served as the study's primary source of data. The study's target population is KUST's undergraduate students from the department of English because they are learning English and studying special courses in English as compared to the students of other departments who only study functional English. The sample of the study is one hundred fifty (150) undergraduate students of the department of English, KUST. The researcher takes BS students of the department of English as a sample for this study because the survey investigates the perception of English language learners during COVID-19 toward e-learning, and they have experienced the e-learning system and were exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the e-learning system during the pandemic COVID-19. It includes the students of BS 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters because they have experienced the lockdown situation and the e-learning system during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are 42 participants in BS English 8th, 62 participants from BS English 8th semester and 46 participants were students of BS English 4th semester. Participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling techniques from non-random sampling types. Convenience sampling, also known as opportunity sampling, occurs when sample population components are chosen because they are easy to access (Kothari, 2004). Whoever is available at the time is included in convenience sampling, also known as haphazard sampling or accidental sampling (Gay et al., 2002). Individuals from the target population are chosen for the study if they meet certain practical conditions, such as proximity to the study site, availability at a given time, ease of accessibility, or a willingness to volunteer; the convenience of the researcher is a key element in sample selection (Dornyei, 2007).

This study used an adapted questionnaire as a data collection tool. A close-ended questionnaire along with an information sheet and concerning form was distributed among students of the BS English department. The researcher employed an adapted questionnaire (Das and Mishra, 2016) as a data collecting tool to gather information using a six-point Likert scale. This study used questionnaires to collect data because they are comparatively practical, affordable, and efficient in terms of time, human and financial resources; additionally, by distributing a questionnaire to a group of people, one can gather a significant amount of data in less than an hour (Dornyei, 2007). This tool offers more anonymity (Kumar, 2018). Those respondents who are difficult to contact can be easily reached. In order to provide a range of reactions to a sequence of statements, the researcher employed the Likert scale, which is valuable in social science and attitude research projects (Kothari, 2004). Respondents can react to each statement in the instrument using a Likert-type scale; it is thought to be more reliable and its construction takes substantially less effort, and students of opinion research usually utilize them (Kothari, 2004).

The study objectives were adjusted using the adapted questionnaire created by Das and Mishra (2016). The researcher adapted this instrument because it was greatly related to the purpose of this study and designed by (Das and Mishra, 2016) for assessing the Technology-Enabled Learning environment. This questionnaire was adapted because according to Das and Mishra (2016) the aim of this questionnaire was to assess the technology-enabled learning environment and during COVID-19 the whole process of teaching and learning shifted to an online system in Pakistan. The purpose of adaptation is to match the needs of a new population, area, language, or method and in the context of this study, consider and choose

those items which are connected to the objective of this study or any combination (Gamble, 2018). The questionnaire was based on a 6-points Likert scale: 1- strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3- slightly disagree, 4- slightly agree, 5- agree, 6- strongly agree. Six-point Likert scales were utilized in order to lower the percentage of neutral responses from participants. Even-numbered Likert scales force respondents to commit to a certain point even if they may not be certain of their opinions (Brown, 2000). The researcher selected four sections from the adapted questionnaire and changed the items in each of the four sections. All 23 items in the questionnaire were divided into four sections.

The questionnaire's Section A, which consists of three questions, was created to collect demographic data on the respondents, including their age, and the year of the study. Item No 2 of section A, selected only one option which is 21-25. (See table 3.1 and Das and Mishra (2016), Survey, appendix A). Table 3.1 A. Background Information I. No Questions: Your age group: 21-25 3 Year of study: Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4 Note: N.I=Item Number in the Questionnaire 3.5.2.2 Accessibility and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) Section B included questions to understand the accessibility and familiarity with using ICT tools. Five questions have been adapted from the second section of section B (Das and Mishra, 2016) questionnaire. All these five questions exclude all those options which look unfamiliar to students of BS English. This part was slightly modified by excluding and modifying some options of the questions (see the final questions 1-5 of section B in Table 3. 2, and (Das and Mishra, 2016), Survey, Appendix A).

Findings

This study explored the perceptions of BS English students about the usefulness of e-

learning in English. The study also examined the difference between the perceptions of male and female students about e-learning in the English language. The quantitative technique was used for data collection and analysis to answer the research question: What are the perceptions of the students of BS English about the usefulness of e-learning in learning English during the COVID-19 pandemic? To answer the question, I used a questionnaire with the BS students' Department of English at KUST. The questionnaire consisted of three parts the first part is about the demographic information of participants which shows that most of the students are from year 3, semester six (41%) and half of the participants are male and half are female participants. The second part is about access to the internet and the use of 75 devices for access to the internet. Most students have internet access in university while some have access to the internet both at home and in university. Secondly, participants mostly used mobile devices to access the internet and used smartphones for online learning of the English language. They have access to broadband internet connectivity and wi-fi access at the university. A high percentage of all these accesses showed that they have no problems accessing the internet. The research question was descriptive, and the response focused on the students' perceptions about the usefulness of e-learning in the English language; students' perceptions were limited to three options: agree, slightly agree, and strongly agree.

The first and second sections of the questionnaire gave demographic information about participants and information about access to the internet. Students' perceptions of e-learning were evaluated in the third section of the questionnaire. Overall, their perceptions are positive and their percentage of agreement is greater than their disagreement. The result of positive perceptions of students is the same as the

study of Roux (2021) who draw the conclusion that the majority of participants shared positive perceptions. Lismardayani and Oktavi (2021) also reported in their study that students' perceptions are mostly positive, however, some students expressed dissatisfaction with the usage of e-learning UNP and complained about some issues (UNP is e-learning system of Universitas Negeri Padang). According to a study by Layali and Al-Shlowiy (2020) based on a review of the literature, students' opinions of e-learning for ESL/EFL in Saudi universities were positive. They concluded that the researchers call for its adoption as the only practical form of education, with proven advantages and minor drawbacks that are preferred by students 76 during this time of the global pandemic. The result of ESL learners' positive perceptions was supported by the study which are conducted in the normal situation means conducted before COVID-19 (Al-Jarrah, 2017). According to research, positive perception can result in positive performance (Otter et al., 2013). The study also confirmed the UTAUT model, according to which students who have higher performance expectations, as measured by perceptions in this study, seem to be more willing to accept online learning than students with lower performance expectations (Al-Aish and Love, 2013; Khechine et al., 2014; Nikolopoulou et al., 2020). In this study overall, the participants' responses were positive and agreed with all the subscales of the questionnaire except the last scale of students' insecurity about technology. Most of the students agree, slightly agree and strongly agree with the negative meaning items of the subscale in the questionnaire "students' insecurity about technology" which indicates that they are uneasy using technology for learning. Their positive responses to the statements on this scale show that they are insecure about the use of technology. This result indicated that students studying English online during the

COVID-19 pandemic had mixed feelings; which means both positive and negative about the experience. This result is consistent with that of (Mulyani, 2020; Arigoh, 2021) who indicated that there are both positive and negative perceptions about e-learning. This result contradicted Rifiyanti (2020) which showed the learners' perception of the difficulty of language skills when learning English online. He discovered that the listening skill in online English learning is the skill that students believe to be the most challenging as compared to other English language skills. While in this study the first subscale of the questionnaire is about e-learning and the English language which has items about all four skills of the English language which shows that learners agreed that e-learning help in improving all the English language skills. The result also contradicted the study conducted by Khuankaew and Trail (2021) indicated that students' attitudes towards their online English language learning were not particularly positive.

We discovered that students' perceptions regarding e-learning are generally positive. The result also shows that they also used the e-learning system more frequently and with 77 rising enthusiasm for learning English. However, few of them do not agree with the usage of e-learning systems for learning English as a second language (ESL) and hold a negative opinion about it. Participants' perceptions of the usefulness of e-learning of English language learning were positive, according to both the closed-ended questions and the open-ended question findings. The open-ended question further supports the result in which some of the students mentioned the problems they face during the COVID-19 pandemic while learning English by using an e-learning system. These problems are the slow internet speed, and the non-availability of computer labs in short their responses showed that there is an intense need for improvement of e-learning. They also mentioned that the best

lecture and teachers should be provided for English learning and speaking this finding may also parallel with the finding of Ali (2016) which was conducted at the same university i.e. KUST who concluded that teachers need to make modifications to their techniques and practices when it comes to learning and teaching English because the existing conventional approaches, which are based on grammar and translation, cannot foster the learners' L2 motivation.

Conclusion

To prevent the spreading of coronavirus all the educational institutions were closed and switching from the traditional to the online education system become the first and primary way of instruction. To keep up with the curriculum, universities and other institutions are switching to online platforms. Although it may be too soon to predict how students and teachers will adapt to online learning as they identify the challenges and refocus their efforts to overcome them, researchers have made an effort to capture students' perceptions as an important factor. This quantitative study's goals were to look at ESL students' perceptions. The fundamental result of this study is that English language learners believed that e-learning is useful. It is concluded that English language learners have positive perceptions about e-learning and they further want improvement of e-learning not only in an emergency but also in a normal situation. The KUST administration and 79 faculty should take the required steps to improve the university's e-learning environment, which is currently the need of the day. This study showed that students were satisfied with e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and it did not affect their learning process. They want to improve and further develop of e-learning system for learning the English language.

This study helps university-level ESL students use technology in their learning process. Understanding student perceptions

and concerns help in addressing their individual needs and demands. Positive changes in student perceptions and motivation are necessary for successful technology integration and improvement of the teaching and learning process (Pepe [2016](#)). Most of the participants also feel insecure about technology therefore it is suggested to raise awareness among students about the risks of using technology and strategies to avoid and minimize those risks. The study suggests that English language learners' perceptions may be investigated in a future study. This study only focused on

English language learners (ESL) and used quantitative methods further study may study the perceptions of learners of others subjects as well. The sample of this study is very limited and used a convenient sampling technique. It is also suggested to investigate how English teachers perceive their experiences with e-teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers may also compare the perceptions of English language learning, and teaching in schools, colleges, universities and English language academies before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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