

## **Online learning in the Pandemic: The perspective of EFL teachers in Bihar**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The pandemic changed the course of teaching and learning from contact to virtual learning. This paper looks at EFL teachers' perspective towards online education in the management universities of Bihar. Data was collected randomly from 25 university teacher through interview and questionnaire via online mode. Teachers reported the benefits and also the issues of online classes. Teachers called for more interactive, interesting, and engaging courses to make learning effective.

**Keywords:** *Pandemic, Teaching, Learning, EFL, Coronavirus*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Universities and schools were closed in many countries as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). A sudden shift to online learning took place to continue education (Hassan, Mirza & Hussain, 2020). Online education became a reality in many nations thanks to COVID-19 and its newer variations. It was important to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of the whole shift into online learning in a Bihar University during COVID-19. Moreover, this shift lasted for a long period and was the only accessible option to teach especially after the presence of the new variants (Li and Zhang 2022). In online teaching, teachers are responsible to ensure that the content offered to students is engaging and not very difficult because students get bored and frustrated easily. Therefore, teachers attempt to make lessons more interesting and easier (Alolaywi, Y. 2021).

This paper determines how Bihar university EFL professors saw the advantages and cons of online learning in light of the imminent shift to online education as the only teaching choice. When novel Coronavirus variations were discovered, this study was conducted to examine instructors' perspectives of the benefits and downsides of online learning in English instruction. In addition, the study aimed to examine teachers' experiences and suggestions for improving the benefits and minimising the negatives of online learning.

### **METHODOLOGY**

EFL teachers were selected randomly from management universities in Bihar a included interview and questionnaire of a total of 25 teachers via online method. The majority of these are in Patna, although several are also in districts such as Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, and Madhubani.

## DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

The study covers four important districts in Bihar: Patna, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, and Madhubani, based on the highest number of management institutes and the feasibility of data gathering in these regions. English Language teachers in these four districts were invited through their management to participate in this study. 25 teachers agreed to participate in an online questionnaire and interview. Their ages ranged from 30 to 50 with the mean age as 40. Out of these 25 teachers, 16 teachers belonged to Bihar and the remaining 9 came to Bihar from other states. They all had earned Bachelor's Degree in Education (B.Ed) at least and some of them also possessed Masters Degree in English.

This study follows the qualitative nature to access the inner world of perception and make meaning by understanding, describing, and explaining the social process from the participants' perspectives and experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

*Questionnaire.* The researchers employed a fifteen-item online questionnaire that they created themselves. a) Digital devices, Internet, and platform availability b) Online learning benefits c) Online learning drawbacks and d) An open-ended question were all included of the report. Applied Linguistics professors reviewed the questionnaire and provided helpful suggestions before it was finalised. It was sent via Google Forms to the twenty-five teachers to complete it and return it anonymously.

*Interviews.* The interviews were conducted individually via Zoom with the twenty-five teachers who completed the questionnaire to obtain in-depth answers and meaningful information about their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions. The interviews included five questions corresponding to the questionnaire to ensure teachers' consistency of answers. The items included: (a) Benefits of online learning, (b) Suggestions for enhancing the benefits, (c) Drawbacks of online learning, (d) Suggestions for minimizing the drawbacks, and (e) Future use of online learning after Coronavirus ends. Conducting interviews helped the researchers to employ some prompts that built comprehensive details about teachers' answers.

The researchers started analyzing the data when they collected them. Data analysis occurred across the entire study. It was intertwined with data collection. Therefore, they followed the means of the Constant Comparative Method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) to explain the study problem based on participants' words and experiences. To begin with, the data analysis was flexible in developing initial themes and categories and then altering them as more verbal data was analysed and examined. Consequently, the data could be divided into two primary categories: (a) advantages of online learning and (b) disadvantages of it.

## FINDINGS

The 25 EFL teachers who participated in this study had laptops and/or mobile phones with Internet connection at their homes. Their university had an online learning platform called Blackboard. Five teachers used Blackboard to teach as an additional resource before Coronavirus started. Seven teachers used Social Media, websites, and/or mobile applications to

teach along with Blackboard including WhatsApp, Quizlet, Kahoot, Examenglish.com, and Test-english.com.

All 25 EFL teachers explained that online learning was a good and useful option to teach during Coronavirus time. Teacher#1 explained in the questionnaire that it was a good choice for teaching because it kept education going while taking safety measures such as physical distancing between individuals. The same also stated in the interview that online learning was suitable for teachers and learners as it allowed for more educational and communication opportunities.

Another participant, teacher#5, reported in the questionnaire that he kept good interaction with his students and managed to motivate them but still he preferred face-to-face classes for issues of interaction and motivation. He further stated in the interview that his students spoke more and participated in an online class as they were less afraid to interact as in traditional classes.

Furthermore, in the questionnaire, 16 teachers expressed their perceptions of the benefits of online learning which included motivation for teachers, ease of access, and use for EFL teaching, interactions between teachers and students and among students, and creating less teacher-centered classes. They also expressed their satisfaction with online learning and Blackboard as good means of education and communication during Coronavirus. However, EFL teachers did not like the disruption sometimes caused by slow Internet or the cheating of students in online assessments.

Teacher#21 reported in the questionnaire that the unreliable Internet connection caused delays in classes or submitting grades to students. He explained that the same Internet problem happened to his students as well and that it was unavoidable. He further explained in the interview that some learners had limited Internet quota or could not access the internet in certain areas.

Teacher#18 stated in the questionnaire that despite many measures taken to prevent cheating, learners found ways to cheat online which showed in high marks for low-achievers. He further explained in the interview that cheating was very difficult to control in online assessments than in traditional assessments on campus

## **DISCUSSION**

This study explores teachers' perceptions on the shift to online learning during COVID-19. It examines the benefits and drawbacks of using online learning to as the only teaching way to deliver English lessons in the pandemic time. Online platforms and websites are part of Web 0.2 technology, which is marked by an interactive interface that enable the communication between teachers and students and among students (Hartshorne & Ajjan, 2009). Students can communicate with each other in real time via video conferencing or via real-time chat on Blackboard, as well as via email or threaded discussion boards.

EFL teachers in this study found online learning, especially Blackboard, a useful teaching choice during Coronavirus. They further stated it was easy to access and use for EFL teaching. EFL teachers perceived online learning to be an easy to use and valuable teaching option during Coronavirus, this affected their attitude towards online learning and Blackboard which in turn affected their behavioral intention to use them and eventually resulted in using online learning and Blackboard to teach EFL. In addition, the use of Blackboard and online learning has resulted in increased contact between teachers and students as well as between students. Threaded and real-time chat options in Blackboard were important in making this happen. Students' learning of English as a Second Language (EFL) was facilitated by Vygotsky's (1978) Socio-cultural Theory of learning, which emphasises the importance of interaction between teacher and student and between students.

Although the twenty five EFL teachers expressed perceptions of the benefits of online learning, they all stated two drawbacks of it. The first one is the teachers suffering from the disruption that is caused by poor Internet connections and technical issues. Many teaching classes were disrupted by slow Internet or some technical glitches of Blackboard. Most teachers spent their time fixing these issues and training themselves to cope with them.

This also affected negatively the reporting of students' grades or giving them feedback on assignments. In addition, one teacher felt isolated by the lack of physical interaction with students and other teachers in online learning classes. Another teacher stated it was time-consuming to adapt teaching materials for online use and yet another reported it was sometimes more difficult to give his students clarifications and feedback in online learning than in face-to-face classes. The second drawback is students cheating in online assessments. All teachers disapproved of the fact that some students cheated in online assessments. Students were unrestricted to copy their colleagues' answers or use different resources without stating the reference. Despite taking measures to prevent cheating, it persisted and showed high marks for low-achieving students.

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