ONLINE LEARNING CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS DURING PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a detrimental impact on practically every industry throughout the world's economy. The education sector is one of the relatively few that has benefited from broad digitalization and internet accessibility around the world. When it comes to one's ability to continue their education throughout the outbreak, taking classes online at a higher education institution proved to be the most effective method. This research intends to examine the challenges that English language learners (EFL) at Science and Arts College, Maharshi Dayanand University, India would have as they adjusted to online education during the spring semester of 2020. This evaluation is being done in light of the anticipated COVID-19 outbreak. This study's objectives are to (1) evaluate the efficacy of various approaches to online instruction and (2) investigate the novel experiences that students have had while participating in online education. In order to accomplish this, we studied the survey-style questionnaire that was filled out by 184 different pupils. In order to determine whether or not the study was reliable, a descriptive statistical method was utilized. During the COVID-19 conference, it became abundantly evident that problems with technology, coursework, and communication were the most detrimental to the process of studying English as a foreign language (EFL) online. The findings of the study indicate that the majority of individuals who are enrolled in English as a foreign language classes that are offered online are dissatisfied with their progress since they are not meeting the standards for the desired level of advancement in language learning.

Keywords: Teachers and Students, Online Learning Challenges

INTRODUCTION

As a direct result of the rapid expansion of technological capabilities, there was an urgent requirement for comprehensive educational reform to be implemented immediately. It was

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essential for people to increase their levels of knowledge whenever and wherever they could. It makes no difference where you are. During the last twenty years, numerous educational institutions located all over the world have begun providing students with the opportunity to take classes online. However, only a small percentage of educational institutions really implement this strategy, and an even smaller percentage of those institutions have faculty members who are knowledgeable with the components of e-learning. The Massive Open Online Open Course (MOOC) movement, according to Lynch (2004), has enhanced faculty members' exposure to and comprehension of online learning. According to Hartnett and Louwrens (2015), one of the most important things teachers can do to keep students engaged and motivated in digital classrooms is to provide them with guidance. It is necessary to have a pragmatic point of view while involving the intellect, the heart, and the behaviors. Students need specialized social care throughout the process of transitioning to a new educational setting so that they can increase their ability to concentrate and their level of desire for online learning during this critical period.

The closing of schools across the globe was a prudent action that was done to keep people separated from one another and to halt the progression of the sickness. Because they already possessed the necessary technological infrastructure, certain nations were able to make a quick transition to online education. Students at every Indian university were given the opportunity to complete both obligatory and elective coursework online through the use of the Blackboard platform.

This study investigated the challenges that international students have when attempting to learn English as a foreign language (EFL) in the context of the ongoing pandemic of influenza around the world, as well as the potential future resources that could assist these students in overcoming these challenges. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it investigates how the COVID-19 epidemic has impacted English as a foreign language instruction and the learning of English by those who are not native speakers. The potentially negative effects of the change brought on by Covid-19 will be felt throughout all of society's institutions, but especially in the field of education. Because of these advancements, intelligent leaders are required to set new standards in order to have an impact on the future of all industries and sectors. Higher education will play a crucial part in the transition, not just in the field of education but also in the fields of healthcare, the economy, sports, and even further afield. If you don't have a specific objective in mind, whatever strategy you make is condemned to uncertainty and likely to fail. Throughout the entirety of the crisis that was caused by the novel corona virus, the academic and medical communities in a number of different countries have demonstrated outstanding responses and efforts. India is a good

example of one of these nations. Because of the gravity of the issue, which was brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, there was no other choice but to switch to a learning environment that was conducted online. The lockdown has been implemented by most countries in order to safeguard their populations from the recent epidemic of the Corona virus. The very first day that Maharshi Dayanand University made its courses available online was March 2, 2020. As a result of the institution's prior experience with blended learning, the transition to e-learning during the COVID-19 outbreak was quite smooth and did not cause any discomfort to the students. Even before the first case of the Corona virus was reported, all of the academic departments at the institution had already implemented blended learning, with some required and elective classes utilizing the Blackboard platform. Because of this, a few of the lecturers were able to obtain valuable experience utilizing Blackboard, which is a platform utilized for online education. Through the workshops that were conducted by these professors, it was envisioned that the faculty at these universities would acquire the knowledge necessary to use Blackboard for online instruction. All of the university's faculty members, spanning all of the university's colleges and departments, participated in the online training sessions that were enthusiastically organized by the training and development section of the university.

One of the advantages of receiving an education on the internet is that it is accessible from any location in the world, regardless of factors such as cost or time zone. However, this approach to education does come with a few drawbacks that should not be overlooked. Students commonly put in a request with their teachers to record their classes so that they may go back and look over the material whenever they have the time. It is undeniable that the thorough pre-recording reviews and preparations that teachers are currently engaging in are contributing to improved pedagogical practices in the classroom. The students gain benefits from being able to view the lectures whenever it is most convenient for them. Reading, writing, and giving speeches in front of an audience were just a few of the many challenging tasks that students had to complete in English language classes and other subjects taught in English. Face-to-face training of phonemes, allophones, morphemes, and other linguistics topics is necessary for students enrolled in classes on phonetics and phonology, for example. To our great regret, not all lecture halls are equipped with permanent internet connections. Some of the students struggled as a result of issues with connectivity and a deficiency of sufficient learning tools.

The chances for students and teachers to investigate and experiment with various types of educational technology, such as mobile-based learning, computer-based learning, and web-based learning, have shown to be extremely beneficial to all parties involved in the

educational process. This indicates that in recent years, access to online education has become more straightforward to acquire. According to Prensky (2001), contemporary students are distinct from those of previous generations in that they have always been fluent in and comprehended the language of technology. They interact with digital and virtual surroundings for a significantly increased amount of time. Students in today's world are able to become active participants in e-learning thanks to their engagement with a wide variety of technological incarnations and applications.

Information technology (IT) and the COVID-19 pandemic are held up as a potential cure-all for the activation of e-learning entrepreneurialism in the here and now as well as in the future.

Theoretical framework

On page 4, Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, and Leu (2008) state that both technological literacy and digital literacy have been established and increased. This is supported by their use of the phrase "both." In order for educators to successfully incorporate new technologies into their students' educational experiences, the instructional strategies and ideas they use in the classroom need to change alongside those technologies as they discover new uses for them. Teachers draw from a wide variety of educational philosophies to guide their day-to-day practice and decision making. Despite this, they continue to employ more conventional methods of instruction. According to Mwanza and Engestrom (2005), the theoretical approach that activity theory takes was critical in the process of supporting the development of creative instructional approaches. Researching the ways in which humans and robots communicate with one another is the primary theoretical emphasis of this work. Through the utilization of various third parties, it was a substantial contributor to the acceleration of the distribution of information. According to this idea, educational outcomes may potentially improve if traditional activity-based teaching and learning was modernized, re-contextualized, and reworked through the utilization of cutting-edge technological resources (Engestrom, 1987). Vygotsky (1978) conducted research on how learning develops over time and how it is influenced by social interaction (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). Attwell (2010, a) investigated how Vygotsky's concepts on context-based learning and technology-enhanced instruction relate to one another and found that there is a connection between the two. According to Coffield (2008), there is not enough "convincing evidence" to split students into four groups based on their preferred modes of learning, which are visual, aural, kinaesthetic, and tactile. He says that this is because people learn in a variety of ways. According to a quote that can be found on page 32, he said, "this movement allows its

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disciples the pretense of student-centered teaching, and it neatly transfers responsibility for students' failure to learn to tutors, e.g. 'You didn't match your teaching style to their learning styles.'"

As a direct response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the whole educational system has transitioned to an online delivery method. The majority of educational institutions in every region of the world have shifted their ELE (English Language Education) programs to be delivered online. In our school, students who are studying English as a second language are experimenting with taking classes online for the very first time. As a result, the focus of this research is on the difficulties and roadblocks that were experienced online during the pandemic, as well as the potential solutions that may be implemented to assist in avoiding these sorts of issues in the future. Research and projects of a similar nature have been conducted in order to study and address further concerns regarding the integration of technology into more conventional modes of teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine the challenges that students at Maharshi Dayanand University in India faced during the transition to online learning in the second semester of the academic year 2020, and to make suggestions for the improvement of future virtual education in light of the widespread COVID-19 epidemic. The research will be conducted in India.

PARTICIPANTS

As part of their education at Maharshi Dayanand University in India, undergraduate students from Madinah's Faculty of Science and Arts participated in the study. The research was carried out as part of the university's English language program. It took place in the spring of 2020, immediately after the completion of all of the online classes and just before the last exams. In total, there were 184 students included in the sample, including 85 male and 99 female participants. At the undergraduate level, all of them had English as their area of concentration. The number of students enrolled in the English department at the university far exceeds that of any other department at the institution. The vast majority of the students had never before participated in an educational opportunity that took place entirely online. Prior to the current scenario, the main school offered one or two online beginning Arabic classes on a voluntary basis. These classes were taken at the main campus. Students had the choice to enroll in online classes; nevertheless, they were expected to physically present themselves for all of

their examinations. The participation rate is presented as a percentage of the total population in the chart that can be found below.
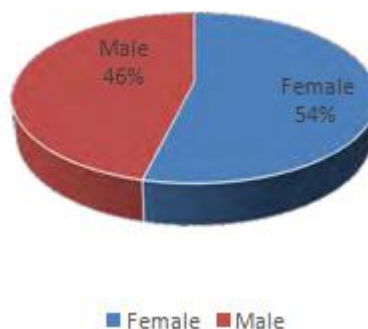

Figure1. Sample structure dispersion

Research Instrument

A questionnaire in the form of an online survey was produced in order to enquire about and collect data on the problems of learning English as a foreign language online during the extraordinary health and economic crises. The goal of this endeavor was to inquire about and gather statistics on these challenges. The questionnaire for the survey has a total of 23 questions, some of which are open-ended and others of which are multiple-choice or yes/no questions. The questions ask about several aspects of the study's objectives. It was prepared using Google Forms, and students in late 2020 received it through various WhatsApp groups as the second semester was drawing to a close. In the first section of the survey, students are asked for basic demographic information. In the second section, students are questioned regarding their use of and satisfaction with various online learning platforms (such as Blackboard) and the resources that are made available to them. In the third section, students are questioned regarding the challenges they encountered while participating in online learning. Finally, students are questioned regarding their overall satisfaction with the experience. In order to ensure that the results of the questionnaire are accurate, its validity and reliability were evaluated.

RESULTS

The conclusions of the study, which focused on the following four factors after conducting an analysis of the obtained data using descriptive research methodologies, are as follows:

- Participating in the offered activities and making advantage of the features provided by the Blackboard application.

- The supplementary tools, in addition to Blackboard, that are utilized during online instruction.

- The difficulties and setbacks that can be experienced while taking English education online.

- The level of contentment felt by EFL students participating in face-to-face virtual learning at COVID-19.

The first research question concerned the capacity of the students to make full use of all the resources provided by Blackboard to participate in online learning activities. According to the findings, 69.80% of the students were able to utilize all of the features that Blackboard offers for online learning. They were able to sign up for the online classes, participate actively, submit their assignments, and take the exams. 10.50% of students were only able to attend classes, 7.80% were able to attend and participate during the lectures, but they were unable to submit their assignment and were unable to complete the examinations online. 4.50% of students were able to attend, participate, and submit the projects, but 7.20% of students were unable to complete the aforementioned activities using the Blackboard platform. The percentage of the Blackboard tool's capabilities that were utilized for online English instruction at the COVID-19 conference is displayed in figure two below.
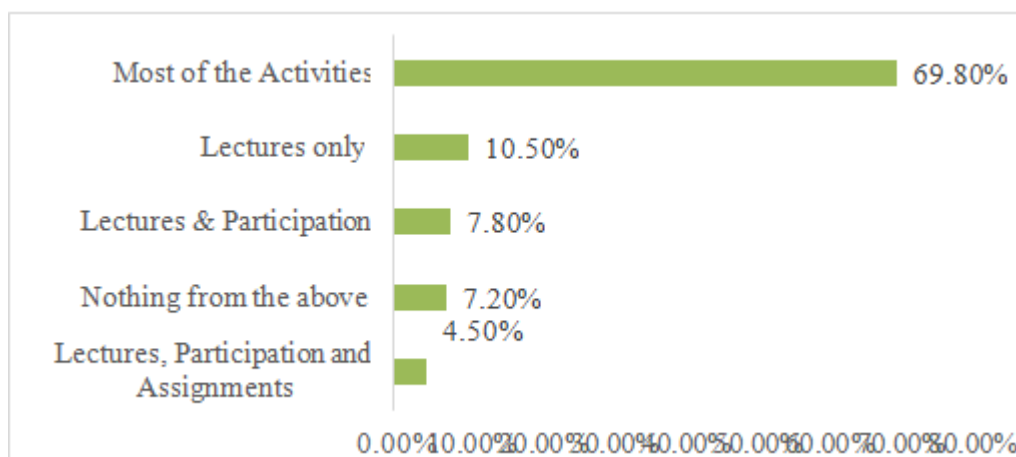

Figure 2 Blackboard Platform-based activities that have been carried out

The second research question focuses on the various applications other than Blackboard that were utilized by some EFL students when they were unable to access Blackboard. In order to share and collect various assignments and responsibilities, we used WhatsApp. Many educators have found success in using WhatsApp as a tool for managing their classrooms. Emails came in at a close second with a ratio of 53.60 percent, while the app had the highest percentage of users at 72 percent. Zoom came in third place, with 33.50 percent of the total users signing up for the service. Twenty-four percent of those who responded to the survey used an option other than Google Classroom or Microsoft Team, which are now the two most popular choices. Figure 3 illustrates the proportion of students who utilized online learning platforms and technologies other than Blackboard during the COVID-19 epidemic.
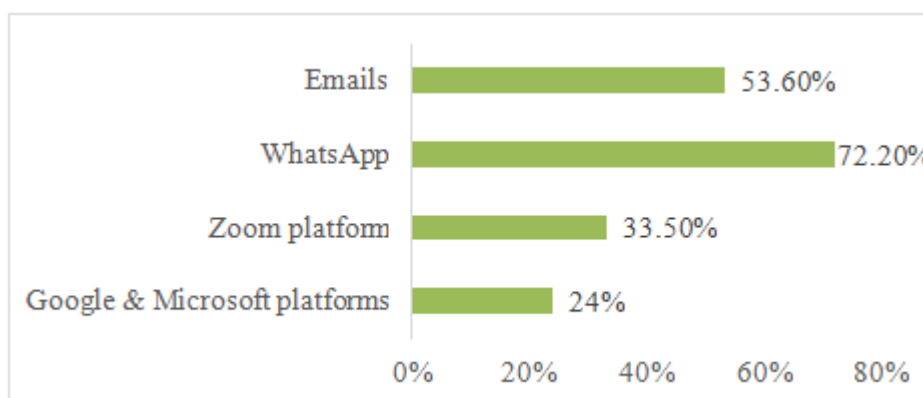

Figure 3 several distinct online classrooms and learning environments

In response to the third study question, we investigated the issues that were reported; the majority of students (48%) listed sluggish internet speed as their most significant challenge. Students reported having no problems with their online classes, on average, less than one-third of the time. A total of 14 points were allotted for the capability of connecting to the internet and obtaining data. Due to technical problems, approximately one fifth of the student body had difficulty taking the tests that were administered online. If a student does not participate in a lab session, they will receive an 8% grade. For further information on the use of distance learning in educational institutions, kindly refer to the following graph, which can be seen in Figure 4:
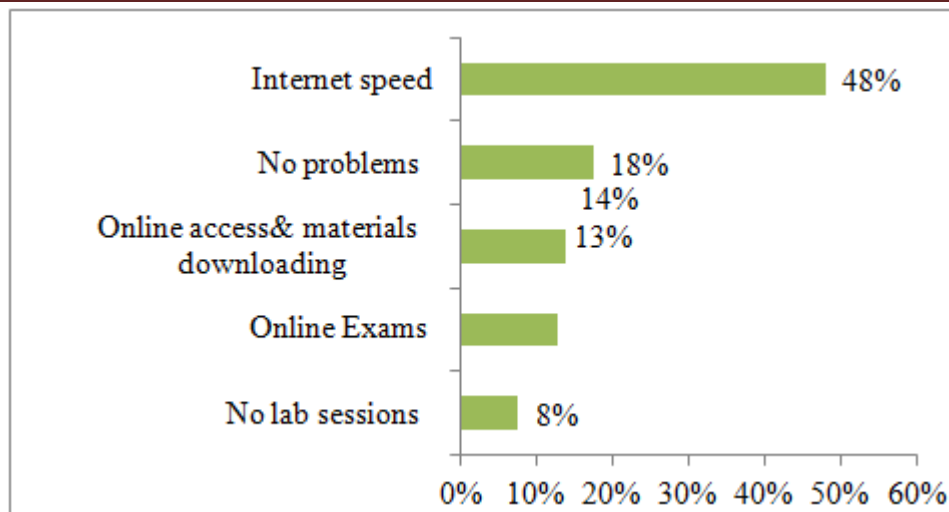
Figure 4 the Obstacles Faced by Online Education

The third and last research question focuses on the extent to which students were satisfied with the online courses they were taking throughout the pandemic. Students have claimed that they are satisfied with their online education in some capacity or another. The percentage of students who are entirely satisfied ranges from 43.20 percent to 42.90 percent. Only 13.8% of students felt that the benefits they gained from their online courses outweighed the negatives.

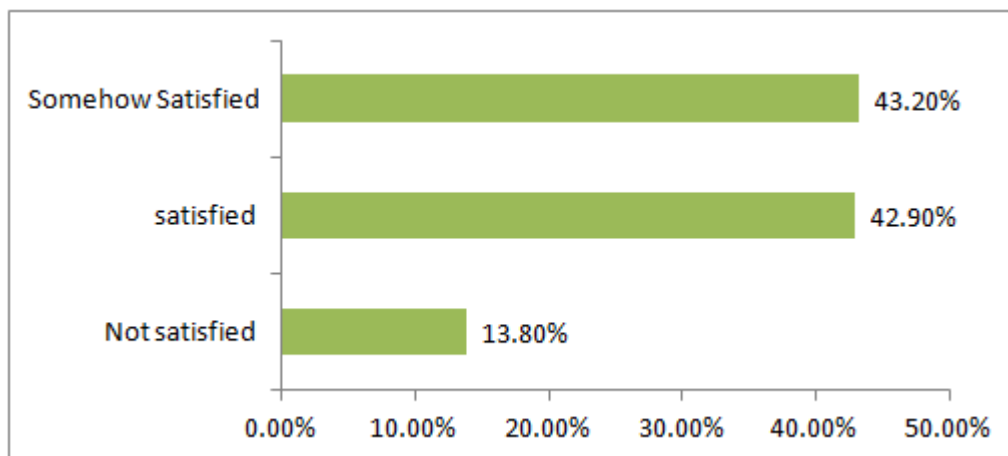Determine the students' thoughts and feelings regarding their time spent learning online.

Figure 5 A Favorable Attitudes towards Education Obtained Via the Internet

The following table, Table 1, presents some descriptive statistics gleaned from the investigation. The mean, standard deviation, sample variance, kurtosis, skewness, and confidence level (95%) scores are the highest of all statistical metrics when it comes to obstacles and related online concerns in online English language learning during the pandemic. This is because of how widespread the epidemic was. Studying the English language online comes with its own set of complications and difficulties. Every one of the other variables, with the only exception of "difficulty," has a mean value that is less than 1. The overall average student satisfaction rating for online learning environments is 0.333, with Blackboard receiving the lowest ratings (0.219) and other platforms receiving the highest ratings (0.458), respectively. It appears from this that studying English as a foreign language online was made more difficult by the challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 An examination of the variables via the lens of descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Variance	Kurtosis	Skewness	Confidence Level (95.0%)
Blackboard Facilities	0.1996	0.279429	0.07808	4.884151	2.203594	0.346956
Alternative Used Platforms	0.45825	0.214812	0.046144	-1.95412	0.440486	0.341814
Challenges	3.6514	7.520839	56.56302	4.984711	2.231877	9.338355
Satisfaction	0.333	0.168882	0.028521	--	-1.73144	0.419525

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to investigate the challenges and problems that EFL students have encountered while participating in online education during the COVID-19 cycle that is

currently underway. Education delivered in real time via the internet was the only thing that could have prevented the outbreak as it occurred. On the other hand, this had the impact of dampening the pupils' productivity as well as their ability to retain information. The findings of the study indicated that there were issues with student access to the Blackboard platform. Thirty percent of students who began their education on Blackboard but then migrated to another learning management system did not successfully complete their programs. According to the findings of the research, the most significant barrier that students of English as a foreign language face when attempting to receive their education online is technical issues. There were technical difficulties that prevented students from connecting to the internet, attending classes, and downloading necessary materials for classes. The online test was inaccessible for the students' mobile devices, which were not supported. The fact that students were unable to establish connections with their English language instructors while participating in online classes made it clear that they had issues communicating in English, as was evident in their answers to free-form questions. Less than half of EFL students say that they are content with the online instruction, while 14% say that they are not satisfied and 43% say that they do not fully support the expansion of online education in the absence of an emergency. During the pandemic, it is recommended that additional research be carried out in order to determine how instructors felt about utilizing technology in the classroom in order to teach English to their pupils.

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