

Attitude Of Undergraduate Students Towards Online Classes During Covid-19 Lockdown

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Abstract

Online learning has already increased in the last decade tremendously but the COVID-19 outbreak has made the countries to adapt themselves to the new situation even in the education sector. The pandemic has made the learning institutions to adopt online learning. Like other countries, the government of Pakistan has decided to adjust the education from face-to-face mode to online mode. The present research aimed to determine the attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes in a Public sector university (University of Malakand) in KP. The study objectives were to measure the attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes and to find whether the attitude of the students towards online classes varies according to gender or not. Survey type and comparative research designs were used. The instrument used to gather the data was a questionnaire regarding the topic. The Questionnaire was pilot tested before implementation. The Cronbach's Alpha was calculated 0.83. The sample size was 680 students selected from eight different departments through two-stage random sampling technique. Statistical tools employed were descriptive statistics. It was found that, there is a positive attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes. It was mentioned by the participants, that in spite of certain hurdles, the execution of online classes was a best option for utilization of time during COVID-19. It was recommended that appropriate policies should be prepared by policy makers to cope with the challenges in a calamity particularly in providing education to students. Funds should be provided by the government for the implementation of online learning system across the country. It was suggested that future research should be conducted on teachers, teaching and learning strategies and the impact of online classes in several other universities.

Keywords: Online learning, COVID-19, students' attitude, pandemic, lockdown,

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a global health issue of international interest on 30th of January 2020. The wide spread of COVID-19 forced the WHO to declare it as 'pandemic' on 11th March 2020. Federal Health Ministry has declared that Pakistan is a part of the pandemic by confirming two cases of COVID-19 on 26 February 2020 in Islamabad and Karachi (Tanveer, Bhaumik, Hassan & Haq, 2020). Most of the countries across the world have started to plan a strategy to control the spread of the disease by imposing lockdown, social distancing as well as avoiding face to face interaction in teaching and

learning process (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). The pandemic compelled the schools, colleges and even universities' administration to close down their campuses so that the social interaction should be avoided and the social distancing measures should be observed (Tekulapally 2021). The government of Pakistan also took the decision to close the entire educational institutions across the country to hold the spread of COVID-19 on 13th March, 2020. The available technical resources would be utilized by the Educational Institutions with the purpose to facilitate students of all academic fields. The FG of Pakistan directed, the HEC to issue an official order to all the educational institutions under the umbrella of

Higher Education Commission to get ready for distance learning (DL) modes or online learning, so that a proper assistance should be provided to the students online in different academic fields regularly (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020).

Online learning is a learning process which takes place by using multiple devices such as laptop and mobile phones with internet access synchronously or asynchronously. Most of the administrative activities and teaching learning process of different institutions were manually controlled in the country before the pandemic. But due to pandemic a lot of institutions at graduate and undergraduate levels in the country moved towards online learning. Despite the fact that online learning was adopted over the world, but never used as a part of formal education by most of the educational institutions until the recent pandemic of COVID-19 in Pakistan (Ahmed & Osman, 2020). The contemporary research studies have found the merits, demerits and opportunities of online teaching- learning in the light of different perspectives of various stakeholders, but more research works are needed to explore this virtual approach. In Pakistan, this is a recent advent in teaching methodologies both the teachers and learners are trying to get acquainted with the new system of online classes. They wanted to know students' stances towards this virtual approach, which is the need of the time. For the students enrolled in university online classes are new experience, for the successful completion of their studies. To curb the spread of COVID-19, strict social distancing and lockdown policies have been adopted (Akimanimpaye & Fakude, 2015). All the educational institutions were directed to teach by adopting the online teaching learning platform. Being a novel and emerging field, it is crucial to research every side of online learning. Mostly the research works in the past have identified barriers, and the factors regarding online classes, which have a great impact on students. However, some of the research projects have explored students' attitude towards online classes at different levels.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, strict social distancing and lockdown policy had been adopted. All the educational institutions were directed to teach by adopting the online teaching learning platform (Allo, 2020). Online learning is a new form of learning which helped in strengthening the teaching- learning

process in the pandemic. Being a novel and emerging field, it is crucial to carry out studies, which has to cover every aspect of online learning (Ali, Jamil, Sethi & Ali, 2016). Several research works had investigated the various dimensions of online learning, i.e., learners' academic achievements during online teaching /learning, the barriers encountered by students in online phase of education, but minimum research was conducted on the students' attitude towards online learning. It is necessary to search out students' attitude related to the virtual mode of teaching and learning in pandemic (Cantoni, Cellario & Porta, 2004). Learners are adjusted to the new approach or they would like any change or modification, or rather they would wish to revert completely to the traditional methods of learning, these are the engrossing points to be explored. COVID-19 was identified as a dangerous, threatening, and sixth public health of emergency services (SPHEC) and as a universal crisis on January 30, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). An international public health emergency was declared on 31st January, 2020 (WHO, 2020), and on 11th February, 2020 the Pneumonia was named as Corona virus disease-19 (COVID-19). It was a highly contagious disease, which spread within no time globally. It was proclaimed as a global pandemic by WHO on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Corona virus-19 (COVID19) is a communicable disease and can be easily transmittable from person to person. Fever, coughing, cold and a runny nose are some of the initial symptoms of the virus. The novel virus can be transferred within minutes through aerosols or touching the surfaces of metals or other materials by the person having problems in respiratory system (Toquero, 2020; Ali, 2020).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported, almost 196 countries, such as the "United States, Canada, Washington, Australia, Germany, India, China, Japan" and many more in April 2020. In these countries the educational institution were closed in response to the advice given by the health authorities, and physical classes were suspended in more than 134 countries, reported by UNICEF. Class activities and degree completion were negatively affected (Cacheiro-Gonzalez, Medina-Rivilla, Dominguez-Garrido & Medina- Dominguez, 2019). The nationwide closure affected approximately 1,726 billion learners in the

world. There were 1.6 billion learners affected until April 2020, reported by UNESCO. The major needs of societies are education and learning, but a tough situation was provided to both teachers and learners to continue their courses in pandemic issue. The governments of the nations were searching for treatment options but were helpless (Alnabelsi, Al-Hussaini & Owens, 2015). Due to the pandemic, 90 percent of the students' population was affected; 800 million were girls among them, as UNESCO mentioned. The government and tertiary institutions across the world launched various policy initiatives against the situation generated by COVID-19 outbreak and to continue teaching activities. However, obscurity and dispute were found about "what to teach" and "how to teach" the environment for teaching and the duties and responsibility of both teachers and students, and the implications for equitable access to education (Viner, Russell, Croker, Packer, Ward, Stansfield, & Booy, 2020). The closing of educational institutions provided highly limited option to educational administration. At this point of time opening the educational institutes was a risky affair (Alsaaty, Carter, Abrahams & Alshameri, 2016; Xue, Li & Xu, 2022). Therefore, managing and executing changes in the education system required analysis and planning for future actions, especially when the cases exceeded. The closure of academic activities made the students worried about their studies. To ensure the continuity of classes, alternative methods were thought by the teaching professionals (Bojović, Bojović, Vujošević & Šuh, 2020). The immense attack of pandemic on education made us realize that no matter what type of mode it could be, education must be continued. To cope with the alarming situation Educational Technology has been considered important to reduce the influence by providing distance education globally. Different strategies were adopted worldwide Amir, Tanti, Maharani, Wimardhani, Julia, Sulijaya & Puspitawati, 2020).

Online learning

The current scenario has forced the acquisition of education and knowledge outside the educational frontiers (Tanhan, 2020). Everybody has to accept that it is the era of online classes and should have to go online. By the end of the decade, a rapid tendency was

seen towards online learning and teaching at all levels (Coman, Țiru, Meseșan-Schmitz, Stanciu & Bularca, 2020). In the recent years developments in computer technology and the rapid growth in the technological applications have paved the way for online education worldwide (Anaraki, 2004). Online learning is the most diversified form of learning. It is the most facilitated form of learning. It is an effective and an adequate way to upgrade academia (Zhu, Yu & Riezebos 2016). Online learning is the combination of several types of technologies for the sole purpose of promoting education. Learning to use computer technology is called online learning (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). Online learning is the acquisition and use of knowledge distributed and facilitated primarily by electronic means". Furthermore, many names and terms are attributed to online learning/online education such as learning through "web, distance learning, open learning, web-based learning, flexible learning, computer-assisted learning, mixed education, blended learning, m-learning, internet-based online courses" organized courses and programs (Syauqi, Munadi & Triyono, 2020; Cooper, Schindler & Sun, 2006). They share the common ability of using computer linked to a network. The possibility of learning from "anywhere", "anytime" and any medium becomes evident. Online learning is the use of e-learning accessed through internet and electronic gadgets (Costa, Alvelos & Teixeira, 2012).

Online learning is the learning experience that takes place while using gadgets "mobile phones and laptops" etc with an internet connection in synchronous or asynchronous environment. In a Synchronous environment "live broadcasting" occurs with the help of technology which allows a "live interaction" between the teachers and students. Web chats, audio conferencing, videoconferencing are some of the examples of synchronous learning. A real time communication and interaction take place between faculty and students (Astuti & Febrian, 2019; Sood, 2020). A lot of opportunities could be provided by Synchronous learning for social contacts. The synchronization of OL gives the deeper sense of connectivity to students with their fellows and tutors. Students would have full command and liberty to accomplish their study tasks with the help of internet at any time and site (Shetty, Shilpa, Dey & Kavya, 2020). The other basic mode of online learning is

asynchronous learning which involves a substantial delay in time between instruction and its reception. Examples of asynchronous learning are emails, video recorded earlier, discussion forums (Aswasulasikin, Pujiani & Hadi, 2020). Asynchronous' also called 'recorded' in which the contents prepared by the faculty in a recorded form and share with the students to watch them through online mode. In asynchronous learning students use certain media tools like discussion boards and e-mails for learning but they decide their own time for participation (Basilaia, Dgebuadze, Kantaria & Chokhanelidze, 2020; Singh & Thurman, 2019)). Students are independent to log in and participate in different activities with their own time and pace, which is in contrast to synchronous learning where live video or audio conferencing are used for learning activities with an instant feedback. To join live lectures in a real time interaction between the faculty and students and to get immediate feedback are some of the factors on which the synchronous learning environment has been structured, whereas, in asynchronous learning, the content is not accessible in live form. It could be accessed at different forums (Blizak, Blizak, Bouchenak, & Yahiaoui, 2020). Students could independently made interactions with fellows and teachers, in such type of environments. In educational institution the supply of education through online classes have a significant influence and developed rapidly. An educational method that helps the learning process by using the ICT application is termed as e-learning. It is helpful for learners to access all the required education programs. No doubt, that learning based on web has gained the attention of the globe (Boca, 2021).

Statement of Problem

In Pakistan, like other countries, all the educational institutions were shutdown on 13th March 2020, extended to 31st May 2020, to avoid the quick spread of coronavirus in the country. At first, this step of government was criticized because there was no alternative such as “online classes, quiz program, reading materials, assignment etc” to save students’ time. Subsequently, the spread of the infectious disease within no time justified the closure even in Pakistan (Saqlain, Munir, Ahmed, Tahir & Kamran, 2020). It was considered a good decision. There were hurdles in the delivery of substitute modes of

education. The education sector in Pakistan has seen a staggering impact during the pandemic (Ali, 2020). The Ministry of Education, with the help of MoIB declared that “tele-schooling” should be started for K-12. Limited infrastructures, deficient knowledge in digital pedagogy were the main concerning issues primarily related to connectivity (Haider & Al-Salman, 2020). The Ministry of Federal Education and the provincial government are responsible for the national education system in Pakistan. Technology – based learning was identified by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (Pakistan). The learners were supported by making the intervention of technology such as “radio, television’ and the online applications “Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft”. Online learning is a wide terminology, providing a complete portrait of several types of online learning using the modern ICT. To provide the teaching content, instruction and information with the help of modern technology and using internet is termed as online learning or e-learning (Horton, 2006). Online learning is like a tool to make the T & L process more student-centered, and adding innovation and flexibility to it (Dahalan, Hassan & Atan, 2012). Moreover, some of the works were designed at Secondary and Inter levels, but not at Undergraduate level. As this is an important stage in academics, but no formal research was attempted at this level. The students are more enthusiastic and vibrant at this level. Therefore, it would be a matter of great importance to know their attitude regarding online learning. The present work is an attempt to investigate the attitude of the students getting education through online classes during COVID – 19 at university level in District Malakand.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes in University of Malakand
2. To search whether the attitude of undergraduate students toward online classes varies according to gender method.

Method and Procedures

A descriptive survey was conducted based on the mentioned literature to collect the required data from a large population. Therefore, a questionnaire was

developed on the attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes.

Population of the Study

The target population selected for the study, consisted of undergraduate students at University of Malakand. The total students' population in the institution was 6800. The participants were selected from eight departments "Department of Education, Department of Political Science, Department of Chemistry, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Pharmacy, Department of Islamic Studies, Department of Law and Management Studies". These departments were selected randomly.

Sample of the Study

Two-stage random sampling technique was adopted. In the first stage Eight departments "Department of Education, Department of Political Science, Department of Chemistry, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Pharmacy, Department of Islamic Studies, Department of Law and Management Studies", were selected randomly from the University of Malakand KP. In the second stage 680 individuals were selected randomly., which was 10% of the total population.

Research Instrument

The researcher developed a survey questionnaire to elicit undergraduate students' views on the online classes imposed by COVID-19 lockdown during the academic year 2020-2021. Questionnaire is a simple and easy method for collecting the huge quantity of data. In order to develop a questionnaire, the global and local literatures related to online learning, distance learning and virtual classes was reviewed by the researcher. The researcher developed the study instrument based on literature, which targeted students' attitude towards online learning. To achieve the objectives of the study the researcher edited the items of the questionnaire. The survey instrument was constructed in two sections: one is demographic information of students about age, gender, department and location rural/urban. The second section consisted of attitudes of students toward online classes. This part consisted of 51 statements that reflect the different factors which influence online classes. Student responses were quantified using 5

point Likert scale. Scale ranged from strongly agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree, with each weighing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, respectively. This part of the instrument consisted of open-ended questions to determine the feelings, suggestions and recommendations of students regarding the implementing of online classes in the future. So, a standardized attitude scale (SAOC) was developed to conduct the study.

Validity and Reliability

The scale was developed by submitting the questionnaire to five experts who reviewed the questionnaire. Upon the received comments and modifications suggested by the experts, the questionnaire was finalized. Since the respondents in the study were Pashto-speaking but they can also use Urdu which is the national language of the country, and easily understandable to the students in KP. The survey questionnaire was in English language, translated from English into Urdu by the language experts. To confirm the accuracy of the translation it is reviewed by the researcher. The languages suited the subject matter was ensured. The Cronbach's Alpha calculated was 0.83. Again the expert feedback was taken and the changes were incorporated into the questionnaire. The alpha coefficient value less than 0.70 is meant that the items on Likert scale would be unlike to measure the same construct, because it is considered a standard level. Therefore, it is obvious that the 51 items can measure the same construct because the Cronbach's Alpha was .832 for measuring the attitude of students towards online classes in present study. During the pilot testing two-open ended questions were answered by the respondents. Their responses helped the researcher design the survey questions. The instrument can be adopted to evaluate the statements of student's about online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Collection Procedure

After the tests of validity and reliability the instrument was considered to be administered. Two-stage random sampling technique was used. The participants of the study were selected randomly. The questionnaires were distributed among the students at higher education institution (University of Malakand). Under stern observation they were guided carefully and were

asked to respond to all questions.

Data Analysis

Coding and analysis were executed through the IBM SPSS Statistics (version 22). Different statistics such as descriptive statistics which include “mean, median, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentage”. These were employed to analyze the collected data and to gain an overall idea about the demographic data and to determine the attitude towards online classes. An independent-sample t-test was applied to a comparison

between female students’ attitudes and male students’ attitudes toward online classes. Answers to the open questions were analyzed qualitatively.

RESULTS

A cut point was required in order to label the students’ positive and negative attitude towards online classes. For this purpose, 138 was taken as a Median cut point. It was developed on the procedure as adopted by Ali (2012). The levels comprise of positive and negative.

Table 4. 1: Frequency of positive and negative attitude towards online classes.

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Positive attitude	581	85.4%
Negative attitude	93	13.6%
Moderate attitude	06	0.8%
Total	680	100%

Table 4.1 shows that Students who’s attitude was less than the median score 138 were 93 students whose percentage is 13.6%.

Whereas the students whose attitude were higher than 138 were 581 students whose percentage was 85.4 %.

Table 4. 2: Positive and Negative attitude of Male students

N=454

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Male Positive attitude	392	86.34 %
Male Negative attitude	62	13.65 %

Table 4.2 shows the male students’ positive attitude is more than their negative attitude.

Table 4. 3: Positive and Negative attitude of Female students

N=226

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Female Positive attitude	195	86.28 %
Female Negative attitude	31	13.72 %

Table 4.3 shows that female students positive attitude is more than their negative attitude, the result is the same as in male students attitude towards online

classes. The results show that there is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female students.

Table 4. 4: Gender-wise distribution of respondents:

	Frequency	Percentage
Male Students	454	66.76 %
Female Students	226	33.23 %
Male students Positive attitude	392	86.34%
Female students Positive attitude	195	86.28 %
Male students Negative attitude	62	13.65 %
Female students Negative attitude	31	13.72 %

Table 4.4 shows that 66.76% male students and 33.23% female students participated in the survey.

86.34% of male students and 86.28% of female students positive attitudes were found. .

Table 4. 5: Mean difference between the attitude of male and female students towards online classes.

There is no mean significant difference between the attitude of male and female students on the scale of attitude towards online classes (SAOC).

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig	(2 tailed)
Male	454	131.7665	22.21634				
Female	226	130.3142	21.05598	678	.817	.414	

$p > .01$

Table 4.5 shows that $p > .01$, therefore there is no significant mean difference between the attitude of male and female students towards Online Classes. Hence the null hypothesis was accepted.

majority of them did not responded to these questions.

Question One: How do you feel about online Classes during COVID-19 Lockdown?

Qualitative Results

The last part of the survey was open-ended questions. Students were asked to answer these questions. The

The question was answered by some of the students. Their responses showed different positive views and students mentioned several advantages in taking

online classes. Some of them mentioned the challenges they faced in online classes. The following are the responses of students to the question. Some of the advantages and challenges were mentioned in the survey of this study, but the researcher reported them to measure to what extent the students look at online classes.

Arguments in the favour of Online Classes

The participants expressed the following views about online classes.

“Online classes were Good initiative taken by government to save time and future of students”.

“Online classes were the best option, best alternative in COVID-19”.

“Everything has advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, online classes also have advantages and disadvantages. But due to COVID-19 we have no other alternative like physical classes so, online classes were best for continuing the process of education”

“Online classes were a good step taken during school, college, universities closure. It saved students from wasting time”. “It was very helpful because the students have to work more as compare to physical classes. In online classes we use internet and books more as compared to physical classes during physical classes the teacher can provide notes etc easily while online you have to do it on your own”. “The overall experience had been good with the online class during the lockdown. It provided me with the realization of the need to be more literate of methods and ways for the continuation of education in any circumstances”.

“I learned much in online classes during COVID-19 lockdown. It was practiced in foreign countries. It kept me away from the misuse of internet”.

“Online classes were pretty easily accessible and less tiresome. One could ask teacher about a particular issue or topic without any hesitation. In short, online classes were as useful as physical classes”.

“The online learning platforms LMS , Google Meet and Zoom have a better experience”. “I appreciated the online classes taken through Zoom”. “Online classes were not good as it was first time. The teachers did not prepare the lecture. First experience little bit difficult if taken properly then beneficial”

“It was a good experience because we did not take online classes before this pandemic. A new experience but sometime we faced difficulty also”.

“Online courses are convenient online courses offer flexibility bring education right to your home. I feel online courses require more time than on campus classes. online course connect you to the global village and teach you to be self disciplined”.

“I feel very comfortable by taking my classes through online system because it avoids personal meetings and handshake during pandemic. I have learnt a lot from online classes”.

“Online classes were good personally, I was much satisfied. I would like to take it in future as well. In a short time one can learn more. If there is any issue one can easily contact with their teachers through WhatsApp. The money which is used for fare can be used for internet data packs. Some of the participants came across to some technical challenges and certain barriers were identified in online classes. Very few of the respondents mentioned that online classes were difficult to understand, the quality of education was not good, just a fun, there was difficulty in understanding the lectures. It was not interesting neither useful. There was lack of motivation, communication, practical activity and lack of social interaction. In online classes there was no time management, boring, little informative. Fear and laziness were created. Online classes were as worst as COVID-19. The issues they faced are mentioned in the following statements:

“In online classes burden was more on students than teachers”.

“There should be no online class, because we do not gain anything. There is a lot of network problem during classes”.

“I had a bad experience. There was a lot of internet connection problem. There was a sound disruption

problem. I did not get the whole lecture because of the loss of internet.”

“Unawareness of students from electronic technology makes the online classes ineffective”. “When books and notes are in soft form it is not effective “

‘As compared to physical classes in online classes students face difficulties, they remain

“Physical classes are much better than online classes one cannot learn in online classes as in physical class due to the unavailability of internet mobile and other electronic devices. It was a bad experience”.

“Physical are better because online classes are just a source of fun”.

“Online classes are good but not like physical classes because there are internet issues”.

Question Two: What do you suggest and recommend about Online Classes in future?

Most of the students showed their preferences regarding online classes in future. They showed interest in the continuation of online classes and responded with valuable suggestions and recommendation. Some of them even disfavored online classes to be a part of the future.

Conditional Continuation of Online Classes

The statements in favor are the following:

“It will be continued in the future because we live in an advanced society, and it’s the need of everyone to know about the online learning system”.

“Taking online classes enhances students’ interest in technology which are useful for the coming times, online classes are better to take in such situations”.

“Online classes should be a part of the future”. “It is best for experience”.

“Online classes are better than physical because it gives more information”. “Defiantly I will take classes online if I have got another opportunity in the future”

“Online classes will be better in future it is a best way to reach knowledge to everyone”. “I recommend the

online classes in this digital age”.

“Online classes are better option in future because this is the age of internet and social

media”.

“Taking online classes enhances students’ interest in technology which is useful in the coming times. It is better to take online classes in such situations”.

“In my opinion online classes should be continued throughout the life not only in our country but across the world because it is very beneficial.”

“I prefer online classes in future. But the issues related to internet should be resolved by the government, it would be more beneficial”

“It must be ensured that teachers took classes with consistency”.

“If there is online classes in future, the government must provide free internet connection”.

“Students attendance should be mandatory. Classes should be taken through Zoom and Google classrooms rather than WhatsApp”.

“More literacy for the online mood of education both for students and teachers is required. The faculty to be trained enough, to make an association between the traditional and new methods of teaching”.

“I recommend one subject in a day. The time should be two hours and specified”.

Arguments against Online Classes

Some of the participants did not recommend online classes in future. The statements disfavor online classes included the following:

“I suggest that there should be no online classes in future because it does not provide concept clarity as compared to physical classes.

“I think the subjects which contain theory the online classes are best option. But for the students who have practical subjects online classes are not beneficial”.

“I will never recommend online classes. It causes a huge loss to the students’ studies”.

“I don’t suggest online classes in future. Because, it decreases creativity and confidence level of students”.

“It was something new for students; the teachers did not provide any guidance to them”. “Don’t even try for online class in the future”.

“I have no interest in online classes in future”.

“I suggest and recommend online classes is not good for student in future physical classes are good for learning and experience”.

Discussion

COVID-19 pandemic has imposed so many limitations on every walk of life worldwide including education. The global lockdown as the result of COVID-19 brought immense change in the traditional methods of learning in academic institutions across the globe (Rundle, Park, Herbstman, Kinsey & Wang, 2020). But due to the curiosity and creativity of the human nature it does not stop its journey but continue it. The pace, with which the education was moving, slowed down but different aspects of experimentation were being taught to the world (Dhull & Sakshi, 2017). It was decided by all the academic administration across the world to take online classes during the pandemic as an alternative to recommence education. FTF learning activities in the traditional classroom environment switched over to the online learning system. It was expected that both teachers and students carried out their duty and responsibilities from home (Dagger, O'Connor, Lawless, Walsh & Wade, 2007). According to UNESCO, education has been affected by COVID-19 in 188 countries worldwide. Almost 60.2 million teachers and lecturers of schools and universities are no more in the classroom. So online teaching and learning is started by the world of education. As online classes are proceeding, so the investigation of students’ attitude becomes necessary to identify students’ attitudes to divulge their perspectives on the current mode of learning (Dangi & George, 2020). The attitude towards online learning was assessed by the researchers within different educational background like MBBS, dentistry, academic undergraduates and under normal

circumstances, which provided mixed results. Some of them showed favorable and others showed unfavorable attitude propensity towards online learning. Online classes are the only alternative to conduct the process of e-learning (Sehran, 2020). The current study examined the attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes in times of pandemic after the transition of classes to the digital and online platform in public sector university of Pakistan. More than half of the participants in the study were male (57%), and female were (28.6%) similarly study conducted where majority of participants (63%) were male. Contrary to the studies carried out in Malaysia where mostly the participants (64.1%), (53.7%) and (86%) were female. The current study found the positive attitude of undergraduate students towards online classes, 85.4% of the population responded in the favor of online classes. Only 13.6% not favored online classes. In the present study no SD was found in the attitude of male and female students, which matches the finding where no significant difference was noted on gender based on the attitude towards e-learning (Rodriguez-Morales, Bonilla-Aldana, Tiwari, Rabaan & Dhama, 2020). The results of the current study not aligned with prior studies in which more satisfaction was observed among female students about online learning and more positive perception was seen of virtual class than male students. The results of the current study revealed that online classes are convenient, teachers are easily accessible, and time could be easily managed. Online classes are less expensive, can save time in terms of travelling, the recorded lectures can be heard again is in line with the results of the study on ESL learners (Dhawan, 2020). Due to the faster way of communication it benefits the students in saving money and time because travelling is not involved.

The findings of the present study coincided with other studies conducted across the world. For instance, the results of this research support the results of the study showed that 95% of students described e-learning more convenient (Doyumgaç, Tanhan & Kiyamaz, 2021). A study in China between rural and urban students is also supporting the positive attitude of rural students towards online learning with (102.7 ± 14.2) scores. The results of the current research supported the results in another study on undergraduate students where propitious attitude was seen towards online

learning. Similar, study conducted on the lectures delivered digitally confirms the acceptance of students towards digital learning. Similar to the current study, the perception of students was pointed out positive towards online learning, and thus, the novel system of learning is highly acceptable (Engelbrecht, 2005).

The findings of the current study was also in line with the studies (presented that students were more satisfied in online -learning rather than face to face learning. Generally, high satisfaction and positive attitude was noted towards online learning than traditional learning. The results of the current study coincides with the results were mostly “BNS, BSN, MBBS” students had a positive attitude towards it, and other western countries which have shown more positive attitude towards online learning. The result of the existing study is not supported by some of the previous studies where the attitude towards online classes was generally negative. However, the current study is in line with the findings of the medical students in “Kerman and Shahid Sadoughi Universities of Medical Sciences in Iran”, where positive attitudes were observed (Galy, Downey & Johnson, 2011).

The results of the present study mentioned that we learn much about the computer skills and technicalities, it increased our knowledge related to technology responded by some of the participants are aligned with a study where 92.6% agreed that online learning makes them more skillful (Gonzalez & Moore, 2020). The findings of the present study supported the view that online classes are fruitful in a pandemic. The study’s findings described that student think of getting chance to join in online classes are helpful, despite of some drawbacks, aligned with the present study that online classes are beneficial in increasing the spread of education. Online classes consume more time, however it is also time-saving and reduces the possibility of disease spreading is supported by the results of the current study that online class’s saves time and mitigate the risk of corona virus (Guillasper, Oducado & Soriano, 2021).

The results of the present study highlighted that students appreciated online classes as the proper utilization of pandemic time which is in accord with the results found in the previous study.. The present study mentioned that it was a good experience during

lockdown to make us literate of different methods (Omar, Hassan & Atan, 2012). Continuation of education in any circumstances supported by another result, that online class is the single way through education could be continued in the middle of this pandemic. Literature showed that generally positive attitude towards, online learning was reported by a huge number of students. Even though they sometimes encountered technical issues online classes are beneficial instead of some drawbacks as highlighted by the current study. In the present study despite of the highly positive attitude of students towards online classes some of the participants mentioned some of the challenges they met during online classes like face to face interaction, internet issues, technology related issues is similar to the findings of the study. In India, where also students favored online learning to assist them in improving their academics as well as in keeping them interested despite the pandemic. Yet, they accepted the challenges such as lack of FTF interactions, and technology-related issues (Okhovati, 2015).

The findings of the study corresponded to the current study where few of the participants highlighted technical challenges and lack of interaction, even though they have positive perception towards online classes. One of the respondents in the present study mentioned that online classes gave a good and bad experience, bad due to the electricity which is in line with the previous study (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020). Due to electricity they sometimes disconnected from online classes and faced the challenges of communication. The studies in Nepal also endorsed it. Access to online classes and problems of communication with teachers and peers were noted. Some of the respondents in the current study responded that online classes are good and one can gain more in online classes but internet and its costly data packages were problems which confirms the findings of the previous study conducted by where 70% of students mentioned that slow computers internet discouraged their participation in online classes and internet related issues such as its speed and connectivity were reported by Indian students during pandemic (Noor, Isa & Mazhar, 2020). The (84%) undergraduate students of Uganda mentioned the poor internet connectivity and 93% identified it costly which were the barriers in their participation in online

classes similar to the observation that low speed and costly internet packages lead to inconvenience in online learning. In the present survey some of the participants mentioned that the students residing in rural areas have the problem of internet which coincides with the study which found that students from rural areas had poor internet and deficient computer devices at their homes, leads to disfavoring online classes. The study matches with the study conducted that sometimes the students cannot take part in online classes. The reasons were financial problems to buy laptop and mobile phones and lack of rickety signals of the internet in rural regions. The views were supported by another study that students who belonged to remote areas have low access to internet might be a possible reason to have less positive perception of rural students than urban students.

Although, the results of the current investigation identified that in the area where internet is suitable the online classes are easy for the students and save more time is in line with the finding of the previous study that students with strong internet connections, appeared to have better attitude. The present study mentioned that the availability of laptop and android to every student was difficult which is in accordance with the studies where students faced difficulty due to the lack of gadgets, and suitable devices to access online classes (Mailizar, Abdulsalam & Suci, 2020). The present study also mentioned that online classes are better for those having laptop and Wi-Fi which is similar to the findings of the previous study presented that the use of broadband connections have to tend the students attitude positive towards online classes. The results of the present study also strengthen the views of the other study conducted which revealed several advantages of online learning such as better assimilation of information and eliminating the space and time barriers, things that bring motivation in students, so that they might be involved in conversation, and to exchange their opinions (Meng, Hua & Bian, 2020).

The current study also supported the views that regardless the hurdles faced by the students, especially undergraduate students, they had related these problems only to the pandemic situation and were satisfied with online learning. It was highlighted by the

studies that some teachers tried to learn, find remedies, extended their support for students and modified their methodologies to the current conditions, things that some students praised despite the prevailing technical complexity, as in the present study the participants highlighted the hard work of the teachers (Mirahmadizadeh, Ranjbar, Shahriarirad, Erfani, Ghaem, Jafari & Rahimi, 2020). Teaching faculty is doing their best to increase the competency of their students related to online learning. They tried to provide education to all students, even though the various hurdles they encountered. The present study identified that students considered platforms like LMS, Google Meet and Zoom etc, useful and was a better experience which is in harmony with the study generally students consider the platform as useful tool for online teaching because it could be a substitution of the physical interaction with their mentor and friends through video conference (Nassoura, 2020). In the present study some of the students even favored physical or traditional or conventional classes which support the claim of the studies, in which most students gave preferences to traditional classes within the walls of classroom instead of virtual classes (Mojtahedzadeh, Mohammadi, Emami & Rahmani, 2014). In a study students did not prefer online teaching over FTF teaching and suggested that for better learning necessary measures should be taken by the administration and faculty to bring advancement in the current online phase of education (Ho, Chee & Ho, 2020). Current study identified that online classes are convenient and offer flexibility, bring education right to home, flexible with respect to time and space, these results were supported by prior studies, where more than half of the respondents concurred on the flexibility of schedules ensured by online learning. The advantage of online learning in terms of flexibility in comparison to the traditional classroom learning, that online learning is not bound to the boundaries of time and space, and distance allowing greater flexibility among student (Khalil, Mansour, Fadda, Almisnid, Aldamegh, Al-Nafeesah & Al-Wutayd, 2020). The freedom to study at their own time encouraged students to continue online learning mode. Students felt more flexible in this mode of education. The present analysis claimed that online classes provide extra time for reading general books supported by the study that students feel comfort and flexibility in online learning and can save more time

for homework on the other side, learning with technology has made the atmosphere more enjoyable and comfortable for learning (Kim, 2020). Study identified that most students mentioned positive views about online classes due to its flexible nature (Khan, Nabi, Khojah & Tahir, 2020). The results of the current study highlighted that there is a strong need of proper training and guidance is required for both teachers and students to produce positive and fruitful results because the teachers lack the technical skills. The online classes would be remained good even in future then, the result is in line with the previous studies where difficulty was mentioned in understanding online classes which required appropriate guidance (Knowles & Kerkman, 2007). Similarly, higher education students from Romania, accepted, that the process of learning might be affected by the skills and style of the teacher in the online environment. Lack of technicalities on the part of teachers to teach online and cooperate with students learning was seen very important. For making online classes more fascinating institutions must focus to provide instructors with guidance and training to control the large groups and equipped with the technical knowledge and motivation among students (Maheshwari, Zheleva, Rajasekhar & Batra, 2015).

Conclusion

Higher education was affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic across the world. Educational institutions were closed due to lockdown. For the first time the online education was adopted around the world due to pandemic. The global pandemic opened new ways for upgrading the teaching learning system. On a positive note the emergence of technology provided opportunities and captured the attention of the world. In Pakistan the conventional system of education was followed in all educational institutions. The pandemic turned the focus of government to start online-based education. Therefore, the teachers and students are trying their best to get acquainted to this recently emerged practice. However, online classes were the only mean to carry on education in the mid of this pandemic, when the entire country was in lockdown. Through this study, the researcher attempted to know about the attitude of public university students towards online classes that took place due to the sudden changes occurred in the system of higher education in Pakistan.

In conclusion, the feedback from the students of University of Malakand has been presented during the transition to full online classes through surveys among 680 respondents. The study concluded that most of the respondents (85.4%) have a positive attitude towards online classes. Increase positivity among the students is shown by the result about online learning during the pandemic. The results revealed that online classes bring a positive change in students' attitudes in general. After facing the abrupt closure of the institutes and sudden break in studies, the continuation of studies through online classes seem the only way out of this trouble and students were motivated towards their studies more than earlier normal situation, and they welcomed online classes under the circumstances prevailed by COVID-19. Most of the students favored online studies. It was a happy incident and a best alternative in the pandemic time for them. They felt comfortable and satisfying while learning through online classes. They expressed that it was a good initiative taken by government to save our time and future. The classes were taken on time due to which courses were completed within the given time framework. Online classes were economical in terms of time and money. Students belong to remote areas and other places far from campus could save time by not covering the long distance and not paying travel fare. Moreover, it is convenient that they managed a specific time for consulting with their friends and teachers. It helps in creating a sense of responsibility among students. It provided us with the realization of the need to make ourselves more literate of the different methods which helps in the continuation of education in the time of crisis. It helped in introducing new websites and software and make us skillful in the use of technology. They were excited about learning through online platforms like LMS, Google Meet and Zoom Classroom.

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