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“Investigating The Undergraduate Students’ Readiness to Participate in Online Classes Amid Covid-19 Outbreak: A Survey of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sindh, Pakistan”

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KEY WORDS

Readiness; online classes; undergraduate students; COVID-19 outbreak

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate undergraduate students’ readiness to participate in online classes amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The study was quantitative by method and descriptive by purpose. Convenience sampling was used. Data was analyzed through pie charts and the percentage was calculated. The survey was conducted online through multiple WhatsApp groups of the undergraduate students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad. A self-developed questionnaire containing 10 items, with a 5-Point rating scale was sent online to 245 participants, amongst 156 (63.6%) participants responded. 74 (47.8%) of the participants were not prepared and rejected the online classes. 82 (52.3%) participants had not gone through online training sessions, just 54 (34.8%) participants were trained. 72 (45.8%) did not want to move towards online education, they prefer face-to-face classes. The institution had even not proposed any online tool to drag students online. 108 (69.6%) participants had limited internet connectivity. 97 (62.5%) participants had not laptops/desktops but they had smartphones available. Most 129 (82.6%) of the participants had not substitute power source available as they faced power outage. 82 (52.2%) participants couldn’t utilize possible alternative resources to participate in online classes. 7 (4.2%) respondents had even not either laptops or smartphones available. Findings show that the students rejected online classes due to facilities unavailable. It is recommended that the university must include online classes in its policy and arrange pieces of trainings, and propose online learning platforms before any disruption of on-campus classes.

Introduction

The WHO representative, on December 31' 2019, received a notification about an unknown case of pneumonia in Wuhan, China. Due to this unexplained etiology, 44 cases of patients were reported by Chinese WHO authorities from December 31, 2019, to January 3, 2020. No pathogens were found during this period. later on, the national authorities of China identified a new type of coronavirus on January 7, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic has dragged the people to their homes around the world. The pandemic stopped almost all activities in the world. It is May 10' 2020; more than 210 countries have been affected by the disease. More than 279,310 people have died and more than 4024,730 have been affected all over the world. Along with other activities, the educational system of the world was severely affected (Worldometer, 2020).

Several regions in the world were affected, and there was a fear of losing the entire semester or even the upcoming semester. As per the researchers, it was uncertain to get back again to normal teaching soon. Many institutions that were previously unwilling to change traditional teaching methods have no choice but to switch entirely to online teaching and learning (Dhawan, 2020). The education system of Pakistan is also badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic (Khan et al., 2020).. All academic institutions of Sindh, Pakistan locked down since February 27' 2020 due to 1st case of coronavirus that appeared on February 26, 2020. The epidemic reached its peak in Pakistan and may it be continued a couple of months more (Nafees, M., & Khan, F., 2020). Higher Education Commission issued a notification to move all national institutions towards online education but at the same time, students lack the facilities to participate in online classes, instead, in May 2020, universities started online classes to

continue the interrupted educational process. In this paper, the survey is conducted from undergraduate students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad to investigate their readiness to re-continue online classes during the COVID-19 outbreak. It is also investigated to describe their perceptions about readiness to participate in online classes, facilities available to resume interrupted classes over the internet, trainings, any proposed online platform to drag students back into the educational process (Kuhn, 2019). The undergraduate students who either live in rural (disadvantaged areas) or urban (towns and cities), face internet access issues to participate in online classes and follow institutional instructions (Oyedemi, 2018).

Objectives

- To investigate students' readiness to participate in online classes amid COVID-19.
- To uncover the facts of students' readiness to participate in online classes.
- To what extent institution has prepared their students to participate in online classes amid COVID-19.

Problem Statement

The undergraduate students face problems in the universities of Sindh, Pakistan to continue their disrupted education due to the COVID-19 epidemic. Most of the students who either live in towns or in rural (Disadvantaged areas) Sindh, face lots of issues to be connected online to follow institutional instructions. They face readiness-related problems to participate in an online education. The issues, they face remotely to participate in online classes are; either they have no internet or limited internet connectivity, lack of proposed online platform, preplanning, and lack of training. The universities must facilitate and provide possible resources to students and teaching

faculties to run online classes. The survey is conducted from the undergraduate students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University to describe perceptions about their readiness to participate in online classes.

Literature Review

(McCay, 2020) says the running time during the covid-19 is the most difficult time for the university. Florida Tech's president says the university has been struggling with the realities of the covid-19, the pandemic has produced uncertainty and disrupted global life. Florida Tech has planned to preserve the situation. Around 6300 students are enrolled in the university and are expected to recall the staff and students either on-campus or online.

(World Bank's EdTech Team, 2020) reports about the resources provided and platforms in order to identify and facilitate the rapid technological solutions that can help students and support online learning. Furthermore, the open-source platforms that are freely available and have a variety of educational sources in multi-languages are prioritized to adopt and implement to continue students' remote learning. The environments should be provided like online libraries, lesson plans, and reading materials either online or offline as they can easily be downloaded at low internet connectivity and watched through analog TV or radio sources. Synchronous and asynchronous are the best solutions for students' remote learning in a pandemic situation. The listed different pedagogical opportunities will help and support educational crises in COVID-19.

Chairman; HEC (Banuri, 2020) headed a meeting while addressing the vice-chancellors of universities that the closure of the universities may be extended to July 15' 2020 due to the current wake of the coronavirus epidemic. The meeting was about to take the necessary actions and making decisions to announce fair policies about online teaching,

admissions, and conduction of examinations after the end of the disrupted period of the semester. Furthermore, the Higher Education Commission decided to address the complaints and the problems faced by the undergraduate students. The chairman directed to set up an appellate system to resolve students' complaints on disrupted periods. The vice-chancellors of the universities presented their views and expressed appreciation for the positive attitude of the HEC towards the academic difficulties. They agreed to suggest an exam policy that adapts to the feasibility plan and student needs depending on the nature of the examination.

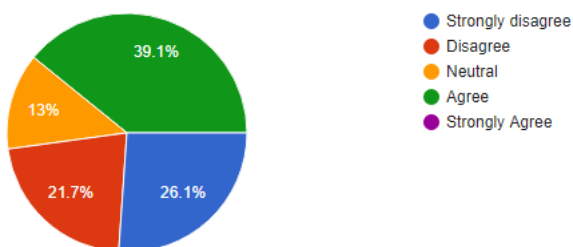
(Alphonse et al., 2019) describe that remote learning is an integral part of educational activities in the academic institutions that are widely implemented in education to facilitate students through e-learning. Many institutions started emergency online classes to save students time in an epidemic-like situation. Students, living in towns and cities, have internet access to participate in online classes whereas the students who live in rural (disadvantaged) areas are always found unprepared to participate in online classes due to limited or no internet connectivity. Online education is a challenge for them to resume interrupted classes in emergency lockdown.

The writer (Crawford, J., 2020) discusses the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) presented the global university community with significant challenges. By reviewing the literature, using universities' and government resources where possible, we provided timely maps of COVID-19 responses to higher education in 20 countries/regions. We have found that the answers from university providers vary, ranging from unresponsive strategies for social isolation on campus to redesigning quick courses and products that are entirely online. During the discussion, we presented the types of countermeasures and assessed the mobility of higher education to prepare teachers and the

students for the epidemic. However, it is also proved that disadvantaged learners are impacted by poorly resourced facilities and restricted access to technology. Internet can affect the organization's response or students' ability to participate in the online environment. The objective is to support the exchange of knowledge and compensatory activities in the university. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the institution should realize to reunite the disrupted academic system and provide a virtual environment to students without compromising on the quality of education.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate undergraduate students' readiness to participate in online classes amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Shaheed Benazirabad. This study was quantitative by method and descriptive by purpose. Convenience sampling was used. A 5-Point rating scale was used to collect data. The target population of the study comprises 2700 undergraduate students. An online questionnaire was sent through the WhatsApp application to the participants. The questionnaire contained ten items about students' readiness for online classes. The online questionnaire was sent to 245 participants through WhatsApp groups,



amongst them, 156 participants from 7 departments responded. The data was analyzed through pie charts and the percentage was calculated.

Results And Discussion

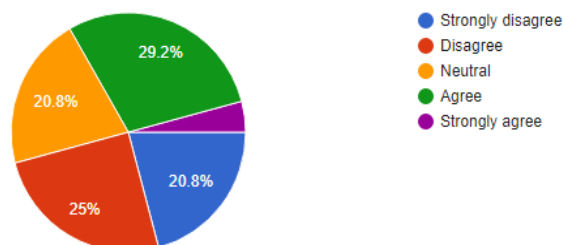
The data analysis shows the statistical responses to ten items used in online questionnaire.

1. I am ready to participate in online classes amid COVID-19 outbreak

Graph 1. Collected responses to Students' Readiness to Participate in Online classes

Graph 1 shows the statistical data for students' readiness to participate in online classes amid the COVID-19 pandemic. 74 (47.8%) participants were either strongly disagreed or disagreed with their readiness to participate in online classes whereas, 61 (39.1%) agreed. And 21 (13%) participants responded as neutral.

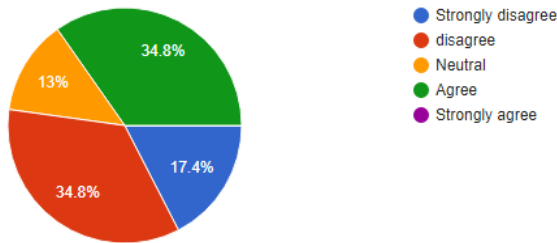
2. I want to move towards online education amid COVID-19.



Graph 2. Collected responses for Students' Movement towards online education amid COVID-19

Graph 2 shows data analysis from the collected responses. 72 (45.8%) participants responded as disagree with moving to online education, whereas, 52 (33.4%) agreed and 32 (20.8%) responded as neutral.

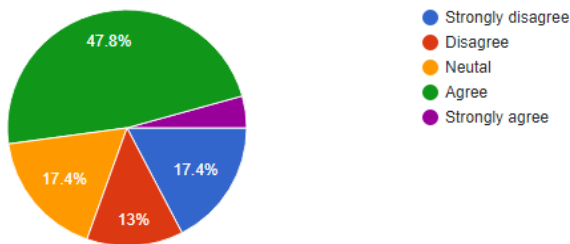
3. Institution has trained me to use proposed online tool.



Graph 3. Collected responses to Institution has trained students to use Proposed Online Tool

The statistical responses in Graph 3 shows overall 82 (52.2%) respondents disagreed with to statement “Institution has trained me to use the proposed online tool”, whereas, 54 (34.8%) participants agreed and 20 (13%) responded as neutral.

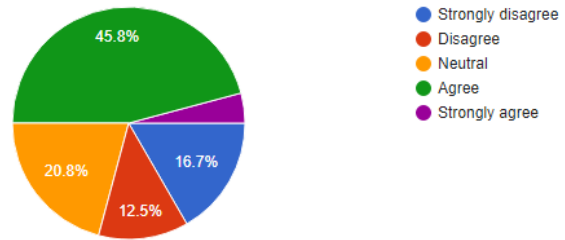
4. I have attended online training sessions.



Graph 4. Collected responses for Attended Online Training sessions

Graph 4 shows overall 82 (52.3%) participants were either strongly agreed or agreed with attended online training sessions whereas, 47 (30.4%) respondents opposed and 27 (17.4%) responded as neutral.

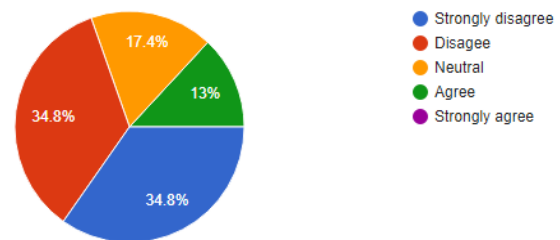
5. Institute has started Online Classes Amid COVID-19 epidemic



Graph 5. Collected responses to Institute has Started Online Classes during COVID-19

In Graph 5, statistical data shows, overall 78 (50%) respondents agreed with started online classes during COVID-19 whereas, 46 (29.2%) opposed and 32 (20.8%) participants responded as neutral and were uncertain regarding online classes started.

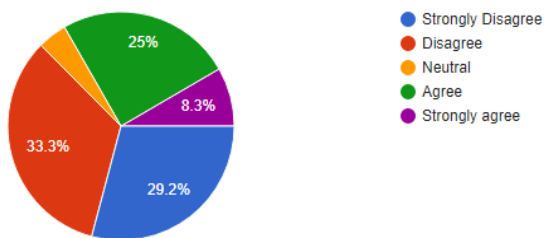
6. I have strong internet connectivity to resume online classes.



Graph 6. Collected responses for Availability of Strong Internet Connection

In Graph 6, the data shows 108 (69.6%) respondents didn't have strong internet connectivity to participate in online classes, whereas, just 21 (13%) respondents had strong internet connection, and 27 (17.4%) responded as neutral.

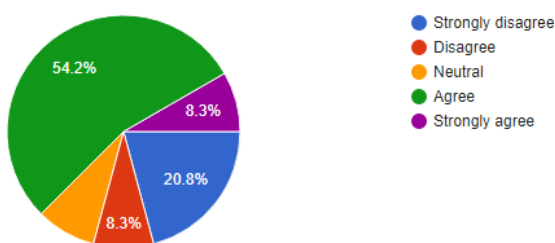
7. I have a laptop/desktop available to participate in online classes.



Graph 7. Collected' responses for Availability of Laptop/Desktop to participate in Online classes

Graph 7 shows the statistical data in the responses to “I have a laptop/desktop available to participate in online classes”. The pie chart shows, majority of 97 (62.5%) respondents overall disagreed with the availability of laptops or desktops to participate in online classes remotely. 52 (33.3%) respondents had laptops/ desktops available and 7 (4.2%) responded as neutral.

8. I have a smartphone available to participate in online classes.

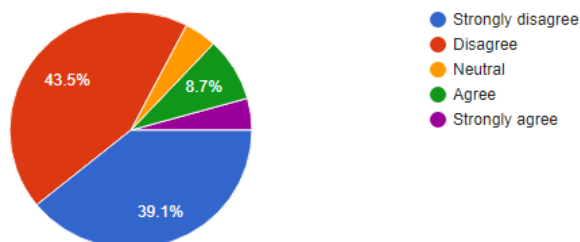


Graph 8. Collected Responses for Availability of Smartphone to participate in Online classes

Graph 8 shows the statistical data for the availability of smartphones to participate in online classes. The majority 97 (62.5%) respondents overall agreed with the

availability of smartphones and 46 (29.1%) disagreed. Just 13 (8.4%) responded as neutral.

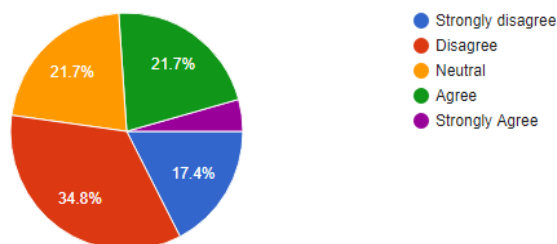
9. I have a substitute power source available instead of WAPDA to avoid any interruption.



Graph 9. Collected Responses for Availability of Substitute Power instead of WAPDA

Graph 9 represents, the majority of 129 (82.6%) participants disagreed with the availability of substitute power and face substitute power issues during outages. Just 21 (13.4%) participants had substitute power available and 6 (3.84%) participants responded as neutral.

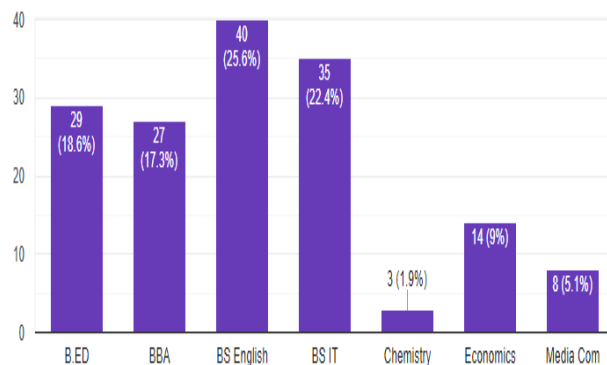
10. I can utilize possible resources to attend online classes



Graph 10. Collected Responses for Availing and utilizing possible ltentive resources to attend online classes

Graph 10 shows the statistical responses to utilize possible sources to attend online classes remotely amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Overall 82 (52.2%) participants responded as disagree, whereas, 41 (25.9%) participants agreed to utilize possible alternative resources to attend online classes at their home. 33 (21.7%) participants responded as neutral.

6.1 Departments participated in the survey



Graph 11. Number and percentage of participants from departments

Graph 11 shows the statistical data for the respondents who participated in the survey from seven departments. Total 156 students participated in the survey, 29 were from Bachelor of Education of 2017 to 2020 batches; 27 from Bachelor of Business and Administration; 40 from Bachelor of English, 35 from BS IT, 3 from Chemistry, 14 participants from Economics, and 8 from Media Communication participated in an online survey amongst 10 departments; Statistics, Molecular Biology and Genetics, and Sindhi could not participate in the survey.

Findings Of The Study

Findings of the study show 74 (47.8%) participants disagreed with their readiness to participate in online classes. 72 (45.8%) participants opposed to move towards online education, they prefer face-to-face classes. The majority 82 (52.2%) participants disagreed that the institution had trained them to use proposed online tools. 82 (52.3%) respondents favored that they had undergone online trainings sessions to face any disruption of regular classes. It is the 2nd week of May 2020, overall 78 (50%) participants agreed in responses to online classes have been started whereas, the remaining 46 (29.2%) respondents even were not known about the

start of online classes amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Only 21 (13%) participants had strong internet connectivity whereas, the majority 108 (69.6%) participants had not even a strong internet connection to participate in online classes. Most 97 (62.5%) participants had not a laptop or desktop but they had smartphones available and 7 (4.2%) respondents had not either laptops or smartphones available to participate in online classes. The majority of 129 (82.6%) respondents even had not substitute power to avoid any interruption of online classes instead of WAPDA available. 82 (52.2%) of the respondents could not utilize possible alternative resources to attend online classes because of a power outage. Findings show that most of the students were not ready to participate in online classes due to facilities unavailable.

Conclusion

It is concluded that most undergraduate students lack basic facilities and were unprepared to participate in online classes amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to the facilities unavailable. The institution had not facilitated them for online classes. Although heavy fees were charged from the students at the time of admission but the university might not have included online classes in their policy. Online platform for online education was not proposed before any disruption of face-to-face classes. It is concluded that students have rejected online classes.

Recommendations

- ✓ University must include online education in its policy to avoid any disruption of on-campus classes.
- ✓ University must provide students the laptops with internet data packages at cheaper rates in the installments with respect to internet service available in the area to participate in online classes.

Waheed, Abdul et al; (2021): Investigating The Undergraduate Students' Readiness to Participate in Online Classes Amid Covid-19 Outbreak: A Survey of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sindh, Pakistan

- ✓ Students must be trained with LMS tools to resume their classes online

safely from their homes in an epidemic situation.

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