



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Students' Readiness in context of Transformation from Traditional to Online Teaching Practices at Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

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This study analyzed students' perceived readiness at Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan. A quantitative approach was used to collect data through survey method from 368 students (151 males and 217 females) from five public sector Higher education institutions of South Punjab, Pakistan. The scale adopted in this study Online Learning Readiness (OLRS) was designed by Hung et al. (2010). The gathered data was analyzed by using SPSS. The collected data revealed that students were highly prepared for online learning and were successful and confident in their online educational endeavors. However, a significant difference was observed in opinion of male and female respondents on five dimensions of scale. In present study, male students exhibited more readiness than female students. These findings will help institutions and teachers with providing further training to improve students' digital skills, ensuring the improvement of learning practices in new online environments, and implementing guidelines and policies.

Introduction

Higher education underwent a transformation to online mode of learning as a choice in spite of the conventional face to face mode of learning. Higher education institutions continues to experience this fundamental shift from many years and it is quite evident by changing practices from conventional to online teaching and learning experiences in higher education institutions (Herman, 2013). Further, Aldhafeeri and Khan (2016) described that in this era of digital technology, online education is becoming more popular in educational institutions all over the world, resulting in a shift away from traditional brick and mortar classrooms toward virtual learning opportunities.

Similarly, Tereseviciene (2020) illustrated that technological advancement necessitates everyone be tech-savvy as the ability to think critically and adapt to new challenges enables learning activities to develop. Moreover, learning activities must

be capable of producing digitally equipped students who can adapt to any change (Indraswati et al., 2020). First, Warner et al. (1998) came up with the idea that students should be ready for online learning. Recent researches also focused on readiness as a critical factor for online learning environment. In this context, Liu (2019) explained that preparedness refers to students' readiness to engage in learning activities in an online setting.

In addition, Warden et al. (2022) stated that in technology-mediated education, students must feel competent and confident in their abilities. Moreover, Latheef (2021) identified readiness as a critical factor for determining the success of students in online classrooms. Following this, described readiness for new technologies is critical for a higher education institution to achieve the intended results and benefits (Machado, 2007).

Further, Stone (2019) stated that Higher education institutions are increasingly delivering courses online, sometimes with little understanding of their students' readiness for online teaching. This is a significant issue, as the number of online students is growing faster than the number of students enrolled in traditional modes of instruction. Additionally, COVID-19 has accelerated the transformation of institutions into virtual environment. The COVID-19 outbreak has completely changed the learning model. Online learning has replaced face-to-face learning (Yudiawan et al., 2021).

Similarly, Olayemi et al. (2021) cited like many developed countries in the world, many low-income developing countries are also making significant attempts to adopt the same online model of learning. Yet, this has become challenging due to poor infrastructure and inadequate preparation by institutions and students. Moreover, in Pakistan, conventional learning approaches were used in educational institutions, and this method was successful. As a result of the pandemic COVID19, online education is evolving at a rapid rate in higher education institutions. This transformation from traditional to online teaching requires the need to investigate and to gauge teachers as well as student's readiness for online learning. (Toquero, 2020).

However, this new online learning environment requires some technical training for users. A certain amount of readiness is required to get the most out of this new learning environment. This transformation from traditional to online environment has highlighted the problem related to student's readiness at HEIs in South Punjab, Pakistan. This study was conducted to measure students' perceived readiness for new learning mode. Many research studies to assess students' online learning readiness have been undertaken. Those few research studies were only available on international level. Similarly in the context of Pakistan, Rafique et al. (2021) conducted the study to measure the readiness of students.

Several studies examined online learning and its challenges, but none of these studies explored online learning from the students' perspective, particularly in terms of their readiness. Examining students' readiness in educational institutions in the context of online education in Pakistan will assist stakeholders and decision-makers in evaluating and improving the quality of online learning in light of the new circumstances

Material and Methods

The study is based on quantitative research design .According to HEIs (Higher Education Institutions), there are a total of eight HEC recognized public sector universities in the South Punjab Province, but only five public universities from three districts offering programmes in social sciences were selected for the study purposes. Further, out of (03) districts (Multan, D.G Khan and Bahawalpur) (02) Public sector universities, (Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, The Woman University Multan) from Multan, and two (02) (The Islamic University of Bahawalpur and The Government Sadiq Women University) from Bahawalpur as well as (1) Ghazi University D.G Khan were selected for collection of quantitative data.

The population included all male and female students from six departments of faculty of social sciences at Higher education institutions. There were nine thousands one hundred and sixty three (9163) students enrolled on regular basis in BS programs in selected departments of Social Sciences. A sample of three hundred and sixty eight (368) including one hundred and fifty one (151) males and two hundred and two hundred and seventeen (217) females was drawn from the target population by using convenient sampling method.

In this regard, the main data collection instrument for survey was adopted with permission from the main author Hung et al. (2010). The instrument was designed on a five point Likert scale including Eighteen (18) items on five dimensions. In present study, to reliability of items was determined by Cronbach's Alpha. The value of alpha was found 0.895. The first part of this scale was designed to ask basic demographics. Data collection was initiated through the questionnaires, which were distributed to the BS students in selected departments of social sciences during the academic years 2021. To obtain maximum response rate, questionnaires for the survey were distributed through Google Form via an online link to the concerned heads of departments and through the personal contacts due to the worst COVID condition in Pakistan.

Results and Discussion

Students' Overall Readiness Score

Table 1
Perceived Online Learning Readiness (N = 368)

Sr. No	Statement	M	SD
<i>Computer/Internet Self-efficacy</i>			
CIS1	I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning	3.74	1.22
CIS2	I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint).	3.93	1.24
CIS3	I feel confident in using the Internet (Google, Yahoo) to find or gather information for online learning.	4.13	1.14
<i>Self-Directed learning</i>			
SDL1	I manage time well.	3.76	1.17
SDL2	I carry out my own study plan.	3.65	1.22
SDL3	I set up my learning goals	3.82	1.21

SDL4	I seek assistance when facing learning problems.	3.51	1.25
SDL5	I have higher expectations for my learning performance.	3.73	1.24
Learner Control		3.49	1.25
LC1	I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, Internet surfing).	3.30	1.36
LC2	I can direct my own learning progress	3.58	1.18
LC3	I repeated the online instructional materials on the basis of my needs.	3.61	1.20
Motivation for Learning		3.95	1.25
MFL1	I have motivation to learn.	3.81	1.27
MFL2	I am open to new ideas.	3.96	1.21
MFL3	I improve from my mistakes.	3.93	1.30
MFL4	I like to share my ideas with others.	4.10	1.24
Online communication Self-efficacy		3.87	1.17
OCS1	I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion board) to effectively communicate with others.	4.06	1.07
OCS2	I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text.	3.65	1.31
OCS3	I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions.	3.91	1.12

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics about the OLRS items. A series of items were given to measure respondent's online learning readiness. The participants' responses related to items are depicted in Table 1. The findings revealed students' motivation for learning was the most highly rated dimension of online learning readiness (OLR), with a mean score of 3.95 (SD = 1.25). Moreover, the finding revealed students had higher level of motivation for learning in online environment. The computer/internet self-efficacy was the second measure with highest mean score. Similarly, online communication Self-efficacy was also rated high (M = 3.87, SD = 1.17). Moreover, score of the respondents on self-directed learning dimension was (M = 3.69, SD = 1.22). Further, dimension lowest rated by respondents was learner control of online learning readiness, with an average of 3.49 (1.25). Majority of respondents according to results in the study believed that they had adequate computer and internet abilities.

Readiness Score on Basis of Gender

Table 2
Independent samples t-test of online learning readiness scores by gender

Dimensions	Category	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	Sig
Computer/Internet efficacy	Male	151	3.90	2.78	366	.74	.463**
	Female	217	3.98	2.98			
Self-Directed learning	Male	151	3.82	4.46	366	2.20	.028*
	Female	217	3.61	4.46			
Learner Control	Male	151	3.74	2.93	366	3.64	.000*
	Female	217	3.35	2.88			
Motivation for Learning	Male	151	4.03	3.87	366	1.36	.174**
	Female	217	3.89	3.96			
Online communication Self-efficacy	Male	151	3.02	2.44	366	2.64	.009*
	Female	217	2.83	2.85			

Online Learning Readiness score	Male	151	3.91	12.91	366	2.67	.008*
	Female	217	3.70	13.17			

*Significant ($P < .05$) **Not significant ($p > .05$)

An independent sample t-test was conducted to find out the differences based on gender on different dimensions of instrument. According to revealed findings, male and female significantly differ in score. Table 2 shows the statistical results. Males ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 12.91$) were significantly more prepared for online learning than females ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 13.17$), $t = 2.67$, $p = .008$. All measures revealed significant differences based on gender, with the exception of motivation for learning as well as on dimension of computer/internet self-efficacy which revealed no differences among students on the basis of their gender. Similarly, as indicated by the results, no statistical differences was found on dimension related to computer/internet self-efficacy between male students ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 2.78$) female students ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 2.98$), $t = .74$, $p = .463$. Males ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 3.87$) and females ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 3.96$), $t = 1.36$, $p = .174$, showed no significant difference in motivation for learning.

Discussion

The findings in the current study revealed students HEIs were ready for online educational setting. According to findings of the study; the highest ranked dimension was motivation for learning. The finding is similar to those reported by Rafique et al. (2021) who found students highly motivated. The above mentioned findings agree with the study of Hung et al. (2010) and it was found in study motivation is a critical factor for learning. Furthermore, students demonstrated a high degree of confidence related to computer/internet self-efficacy and showed proficiency into operate functions of computer and internet successfully.

All of these findings are comparable to those of research conducted Rafique et al. (2021) in which the students demonstrated a relatively high degree of self-efficacy when executing fundamental computer operations such as controlling and utilizing various types of software required for online learning. The findings are compatible with the statistical results of Yasin and Ong (2020) who described student could improve their readiness in online environment with a high level of self-efficacy. Additionally, the results suggested that students perceived themselves to have relatively low control in managing time.

The abovementioned statistics are consistent with those of Hung et al. (2010) in which the same dimension was rated low by the respondents in the study. According to the findings of study, there was difference among male and female students. Difference was observed among students on dimension of computer/internet self-efficacy as well as online communication self-efficacy. The male respondents showed a higher perception as compared to female. In a study Rafique et al. (2021) reported same difference on these two measures. In current study, all measures revealed significant differences based on gender, with the exception of two measures, no significant difference on basis of gender was found on dimension of computer/internet self-efficacy and motivation for learning.

The results showed there was significant difference between male and female students in computer/internet self-efficacy in motivation for learning. However, the results are different from other studies by Hung et al. (2010) in which no significant

difference was reported on the basis of gender. Similarly, results are not in accordance with study of Chung et al. (2020) who observed no significant difference among respondents gender regarding attitude and behavior.

Conclusions

The objective of study was to analyze student's perceived readiness for online environment at Higher education institutions. The first research question was related to students' perceived readiness. It was found that the respondents have the highest level of readiness and they were prepared for online learning and that they were motivated to study in this online setting. Furthermore, in this study, BS students showed higher greater readiness for computer/internet use as well as self-efficacy in online communication. The second research question addressed in this study was to predict readiness of students on the basis of their gender. According to findings, student's gender seemed to be a powerful predictor of OLR dimensions, as demonstrated by the data in the present study. In developing countries such as Pakistan, this study provides a powerful impetus for the digital transformation of education at all levels, as well as the opportunity for concerned education stakeholders to pave the way to adopt technological platform effectively in new normal.

Recommendations

Following recommendations were drawn on the basis of findings and conclusions:

1. Training as well as workshops should be promoted for capacity-building of students and to explore learning possibilities in online academic environment at institution of higher Education.
2. Higher Education Institutions should establish a sophisticated plan to meet students' expectations and to promote educational opportunities in the digital age.

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