Article

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Teachers' and Parents' Views on the Excessive Use of Technology During COVID by Primary Level Students

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Abstract

The widespread COVID 19 pandemic has affected learning and development of students at all ages and the sudden closure of schools has led to the new experience of online learning during this period. The study aimed to explore the perceptions and challenges faced by the teachers and parents of primary students regarding excessive use of technology during online learning. A qualitative approach using an exploratory method was applied to collect the data by deploying self-developed semi-structured interview protocols to collect the data. Three major themes emerged after the data analysis: (a) the debate on online classes versus physical classes; (b) the negative impact of technology on the development of children; and (c) appropriateness of online learning for young learners. The data illustrated that teachers and parents of primary students are not satisfied during online learning because of the adverse effect of technology on the learning and development of young learners. Hence, it is recommended that alternatives should be suggested by the school authorities and government, so that their learning and development are not hampered by the use of technology.

Keywords: COVID 19, effects of technology, home learning, online learning

INTRODUCTION

The widespread COVID19 pandemic has led to the closure of educational organizations across the world, altering all aspects of life including education (Mukhtar, et al., 2020). The authors further add that due to the transformation of traditional classes into online education system, a huge difference has been seen regarding students' interests and attitudes towards learning. Similarly, problems have been faced both by the teachers and parents as well. For positive participation in online classes, students should be well organized, they should be self-learners, and possess a high degree of attention level; therefore, this learning system is not appropriate for primary students. As young children are dependent learners, they need individual and focussed guidance and attention, which is difficult during online classes. Hence, the attention level of young children is unstable and the teachers feel helpless to understand whether every student has understood the concept or not. Therefore, teachers need more time to prepare lectures including different activities, so that the young learners stay connected to the screen and learn positively by their active participation. Another challenging aspect is the poor internet connectivity due to which children are distracted from other activities like playing games.

Furthermore, the pandemic has also given a tough routine to the parents, who have taken the responsibility that their children`s learning process continues smoothly during the times of COVID19 (Bhamani, et al., 2020). They have been continuously supervising their young children by sacrificing their commitments. Similarly, parents are also concerned about their children`s physical health due to the excessive increase of screen time. Hence, extended online classes for young children should be avoided to overcome these challenges.

Rationale

The purpose behind conducting this study was to identify the perceptions of teachers and parents of primary students towards online classes. This study gave the researchers an idea about the present scenario of primary students concerning their excessive usage of technology during online classes. In addition, the researchers were able to identify the problems faced by the teachers and parents of young learners during their online classes.

Research Questions

The research questions that emerged were:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of primary students towards online classes?

2. What are the challenges faced by the teachers and parents of primary students during online classes?

3. What is the impact of excessive use of technology during online classes on students` overall development?

4. To what extent are online classes inappropriate for primary-level students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Education in Pakistan

Online learning is used as an alternative form for face-to-face education. Face-to-face education is thought as a traditional method of learning where students and teachers interact in person; whereas, online or virtual learning is different from traditional education as it has a distance between the learner and the teacher (Salamat, et al., 2018). Like many other issues affecting us during the pandemic era, we have to approach online education with an open mind despite not being alert to technology especially in Pakistan. Nevertheless, with all the benefits, there are some problems faced within the E-learning system in Pakistan, which must be addressed (Kokoc & Altun, 2021). The numerous problems of online learning include the irregular supply of electricity in most of the areas, poor internet connection, dearth of gadgets, and scarcity of expert teachers who know to use technology and conduct online classes efficiently. Most importantly, the seriousness of the students who want to learn despite distractions and interferences has to be dealt with professionally (Shahid & Mughal, 2020).

Problems Encountered by Teachers During Online Classes

The shifting to online education was a rather problematic task, which failed to allow suitable training for teachers or students to grasp the complications of this new way of education (Raja, et al., 2021). According to him, this quick shift to the new model of education has highlighted the inadequate Approaches Towards Learning (ATL) skills of teachers, because of which students are unable to deal with it. Many teachers do not have enough knowledge to spot the tricks played by the students during online learning, neither do they have enough training to permit their classes to manoeuvre smoothly if there are any internet issues. Online education has brought forward the problem of cheating during assessments and teachers have had a tough time handling (Raja, et al., 2021). Teachers hardly have the opportunity to assess with surety whether the homework given to the students is completed by them or support is given at the rear by friends, parents, internet, and other such sources. Hence, giving separate homework to every student is simply a burden and difficult during this hard time (Sachdeva, 2021).

The challenges that most of the teachers face within the present situation are that they need to create interesting and innovative lectures using up-to-date methodologies, so that the learners are fully engaged, attentive, and show immense interest during online classes. Teachers need to think of ways to control the classes effectively without any distraction and misbehaviour from the side of the students. They must be prepared to own the determined output from the students by preparing assessments that mainly focus on the thinking and analysing

the abilities of the learners (Shahid & Mughal, 2020). Earlier, technology was not as important as teaching, but with the new shift to online system, it has become utmost important. Some teachers who are aware of the technology are doing an excellent job, while some having little knowledge are able to put pieces tighter. Then, there are those who do not own a gadget and are lost when it comes to teaching online. Hence, it is disappointing for educators, who try to be creative and productive for the betterment of the students, but fail to pay enough attention to it (Sharma, et al., 2020).

It is evident that not only do the students find this new scenario of teaching and learning unfamiliar, but also the frustrated teachers give up the idea of online classes. Unfortunately, the teachers are not given any option to enter into one-to-one talk with the students due to the limited time they have, resulting in frustration and disappointment by both parties. Researches have proved that students learn more when they are emotionally attached and interactive with their teachers and are more expressive when they feel their environment is comfortable for them (Sharma, et al., 2020).

Transformation from Face-To-Face to Online Teaching

For ages our education system has been supported by traditional patterns of teaching and the recent unplanned changes have shown how unequipped our educational system is. This eventually implies that our children's learning has been compromised and their parents are duly concerned about it (Bhamani, et al., 2020). It is especially difficult for parents of primary level students to spend most of their time helping their children, working with them on homework, and explaining the content. Those children whose parents are working, try to find more time to concentrate and focus to support their children to learn in this difficult time. Those parents who do not have IT skills, face greater and complex problems and search help from relatives, friends, colleagues, and other sources. Parents and students from weak communities also face difficulties, as many lack the resources to provide their children a computer or smartphone to attend online classes (Sachdeva, 2021).

Negative Impact of Technology During COVID 19

It is evident from the data available during COVID-19 and worldwide lockdown scenarios, that 1.5 billion children by April 2020 were stuck at home (Goldschmidt, 2020). Children have spent pointless time in front of the screens; from TVs to smartphones to tablets. Most parents are worried that the social development of their children has been affected during the lockdown. Especially in the case of primary level children, minimal interaction with their classmates has had an impact on the development of their social and emotional skills. Research has proved that learning from home can be very isolating and lonely for a child (Bhamani, et al., 2020). They miss their classmates and take classes in isolation, where they miscue the support of their teachers as well. Parents believe that through schools, a formally structural routine is followed during the week and this helps children to understand the importance of organization of time and doing assignments in a given period (Bhamani, et al., 2020). According to them, another main problem that is evident is the unavailability of computers and internet facilities when required. Any technical matter associated with the necessities of online learning could result in their lacking behind. Hence, many children are not able to continue their education during the pandemic, as they do not have access to online facilities (Bhamani, et al., 2020).

Technology Affecting Physical and Mental Health

Along with technical difficulties and lack of communication during online classes, technology has also affected student's mental and physical health. Research has shown that children who spend two or more hours every week playing sports or engaging in other varieties of physical activities are also less likely to experience

psychological issues (Bhamani, et al. 2020; Sarwar & Bhamani, 2018). Children often eat less healthy food when they spend long time in front of the screen. Hence, screen time has also been associated with addiction. A variety of technologies, like smartphones and social media are related with addiction as evident by research (Regis-Hernández, et al., 2020).

The interactive nature of multiple digital contents is especially appealing and interesting to young children. Apps and video games also often reward children with points or virtual stickers, which act like a drug that can trigger the discharge of dopamine within the brain (Gros, et al., 2020). Therefore, screens are a simple means of distraction, allowing children to ignore boring or complex tasks for them like schoolwork and may eventually cause attention problem. One of the research studies shows that children spending two hours or more looking continuously at a screen are more likely to fulfil the standard for a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) than children spending half an hour or less on a screen (Regis-Hernández, et al., 2020). Moreover, children`s screen time has increased by 80% than normal, which puts plenty of tension and pressure not only on the eyes, but also affects cognitive abilities and causes attention deficit among youngsters.

Studies suggest that actinic radiation plays a crucial role in healthy eye development and increased screen time can result in near-sightedness. Such cases have increased in the past few months. As children often use their gadgets in the evening, their sleeping hours are reduced, which affects their overall health (Regis-Hernández, et al., 2020). Hence, exposure to screens for young children affects their overall development. Schools are responsible for creating such lessons, whereby screen viewing time is minimal although excessive use of online tools has become a necessity during this time. Parents should set a schedule for screen time and keep monitoring their children to prevent excessive usage of technology.

Technology: A Blessing During COVID 19

Pakistan has been continuously battling with various problems within the education area and the recent pandemic has added salt to the wound. Earlier, it had been a struggle between Urdu and English-medium, but now online schooling and learning have added a brand new unexpected twist to that (Regis-Hernández, et al., 2020). Despite all the challenges and problems, the best and most convenient alternative available to hold on to the method of education will be none other than online learning during this time. Where COVID 19 has closed umpteen options, it has unlocked some new ones at the same time. It may be new and different for students, but it also allows them to learn in a helpful and safe environment during this particularly difficult period. Now the majority of parents and teachers have developed an understanding of the dynamics of online learning and with time, the situation will improve as the gaps will be plugged in by developing smart policies and rules (Shahid & Mughal, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was selected for this study, as it talks about 'how' and 'why' and allows a deeper understanding of experiences, processes, and situations. A qualitative method using exploratory approach allowed the researcher to understand whether online classes were appropriate for young learners at primary level or not because of psychological and physical impact of excessive usage of technology.

Research Participants

As this study was conducted during the time of COVID 19, participants were selected purposively based on their willingness to share their views. Three schools were identified and two teachers from each school teaching

at the primary level were acknowledged for the study to get an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by them. Six parents of primary grade students from the same schools were identified to get their perceptions pertaining to the appropriateness of online classes for young children.

Data Collection

The data were collected to reconnoitre the perceptions of teachers and parents of primary level students through semi-structured interviews via zoom during the COVID break. Dejonckheere and Vaughn (2018) recommend collecting the data by using interview protocols. Thus, two semi-structured interview tools were developed to collect open-ended data to discover the participant's thoughts, feelings, and views about the topic and to investigate deeply into personal and delicate topics. Six individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the teachers. The semi-structured interviews were based on seven open-ended questions to explore the challenges and perceptions of primary teachers regarding the impact of excessive use of technology during online classes. Interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the teachers. Similarly, individual interviews were conducted with six parents via zoom. The semi-structured interviews were based on eight open-ended questions to explore the experiences of parents of primary level children regarding what their views were related to the use of technology. It also explored whether online education was effective for young learners or not. The interviews were recorded with the prior consent of the participants.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Manual thematic analysis of the data was done by the researchers. Open coding from the attained data was done at the primary stage and themes and sub-themes were developed. Three major themes appeared from the analysis of the present data set: debate on online classes versus physical classes, negative impact of technology on the development of children, and effectiveness of online learning for young learners.

Debate on Online Classes Versus Physical Classes

Teachers and Parents Experiences

The data revealed that teachers had different perceptions in terms of their experiences during online classes. Some said that online is more convenient because they do not have to face traveling issues. As one of the teachers commented:

> *"It is convenient to teach from home. We don't have to face traffic issues and bother about how we are dressed, so it is better teaching from home."*

Few teachers also said that physical classes were better because young students get one-to-one attention from teachers and they were more attentive and interactive in the presence of other kids. Teachers were also unsure if the students had understood their instructions during online classes. One of the teachers commented:

> *"Teaching at school is best for young children because they can get maximum attention from teachers and students. You are not aware of what your students are doing during online classes."*

One of the parents added:

> *"In school, they are in front of their teachers and classmates and learn better and are more attentive."*

New Approach During COVID

It is evident from the data, that technology is the most significant aspect of online classes. Technology has become a necessity during COVID, where parents and teachers face uncountable problems because of poor internet connectivity and lack of technology resources. Few of the teachers revealed that their classes were disturbed most of the time due to technical issues like audio and camera that eventually resulted in disconnections during online classes. While few parents lamented that as electricity disruptions were very common in the country, it was difficult for the children to take their classes smoothly, which also affected their studies. As one of the teachers commented:

> *"Yes, technology issues are impacting online classes and concentration level is taking a dip."*

Some parents also faced issues buying and arranging gadgets for their children as the parents were already facing financial glitches due to lockdown. In addition, they also faced problems of understanding the technology. In this regard, few teachers said that initially they had to understand the technology and also had to facilitate parents as everyone was new to the emerging system.

One of the parents opined:

> *"I have two children so we had to arrange one more smartphone so that both could continue their online classes. Then it was difficult for me to understand how to operate online classes initially."*

One of the teachers said in this regard:

> *"Initially, it was not a good experience because it was new for all of us. It took time to educate the kids as well as the parents. I faced issues from parents to make them understand about how to upload assignments and other such issues."*

Distractions from Children During Online Classes

It is evident from the data that teachers had to give more time to their lesson planning as physical classes were transferred into online classes, which itself was a humongous change. To grab the attention of young learners, it is necessary to create lessons which are student centred rather than teacher centred. One of the teachers commented:

> *"Students enjoy when I give them online games or when they have to do some activity, but they get bored when I am just explaining the content. Hence, I need to spend much time to prepare my lessons so that it includes different activities. Considering that the use of technology is new for all of us, it takes a lot of time to manage it."*

Another teacher exclaimed:

> *"We need to change our strategy of teaching during online classes because young students need practical experience more than adults. Hence, we need time to prepare our lessons so that young children are fully engaged without being distracted."*

Few parents also revealed that most young children were unable to concentrate for a long time during online classes due to the disturbance going around them.

As one of the parents reacted:

> *"My child is distracted and not willing to concentrate as we live in a joint family system where we don't have extra room for online classes. The disturbance is also created by his younger siblings who are unable to understand this situation."*

Negative Impact of Technology on Children Development

Addiction of Technology

The data revealed that the transformation from physical classes to online classes had given significant importance to technology, which resulted in addiction for children due to the excessive use of screen time. Earlier, children were busy with the normal routine work, but now due to the lockdown, children have no other option or alternative, but to stay glued to the screen to keep themselves engaged. A teacher stated:

> *"Now kids have become more aware of technology as they are using it continuously. They can use it better as compared to their parents and teachers so they know how to manipulate us."*

The parents also revealed that children had become screen addicted, but it also depended on how parents were supervising and restricting their kids. Parents should set a time limit so that the children are aware of the fact that their parents are monitoring them. A parent reiterated:

> *"Yes, they are addicted to technology, but this entirely depends on the parents. I always clock the time and involve them in different activities like drawing, painting or helping me in cooking as young children need something to do all the time."*

Loss of Interaction with Friends

The data exposed that due to lockdown, children were confined at home; therefore, social interaction with their friends and other people was compromised. Due to this, the confidence level of children was affected largely.

As one of the parents said:

> *"Yes, their interaction is being compromised as my child is shy by nature, and was improving when going to school by making new friends, but now she has again become shy and feels lonely and avoids talking to the people."*

Moreover, few teachers revealed that extra-curricular activities like assemblies, games etc, are completely excluded from their routine, as a result of which they have become lazy and inactive.

Negative Effect On Children`s Health

It was evident that most of the time children were involved in using the technology, which had impacted their physical health causing weak eyesight, weight gain and their attention level had also been affected. It was also

apparent from the data, that parents and teachers both agreed that where online teaching was a necessity, it also had impacted children`s health in a very adverse manner. A teacher said:

> *"It affects their physical health as they become lazy by sitting in front of the screen and as a result of that, eyesight has been affected of both the students as well as the teachers."*

Is Online Learning Appropriate for Young Learners?

Understanding the Level of Young Children

The data also revealed that it was extremely cumbersome for the children to comprehend as children needed physical activities as well. As every child is different, some could cope with online classes and remained engaged with their teachers, while some found it difficult even to understand the instructions of the teachers. Few teachers shared that it was difficult to make sure every child had understood as compared to physical classes, where they could keep an eye on every child individually. Two teachers commented:

> *"Children are not able to understand the concepts clearly as young children need their teachers physically with them for paying more attention. They are lacking in understanding the basic concepts as hands-on experience is missing from their lives".*

> *"They don't learn much as compared to physical classes. In online classes, teachers also can't make out if the student is concentrating or not."*

Evaluation of Young Children

It was evident from the data that the students were unable to understand the concepts in the way they would do in face-to-face class and therefore; it was easy for them to find ways to manipulate the teachers while taking help from parents or elder siblings. They also knew that in online classes, they could get help easily by opening books or by asking parents, so they were not willing to study as compared to when they studied during their physical assessment. Children and parents both were not serious during the assessment time. One of the teachers shared:

> *"We cannot identify whether the students are getting support and help from their parents and siblings. So, it is difficult to evaluate whether it is done by themselves or not. They are also not willing to participate during class time, so it is difficult to judge whether they are taking notes during the lesson or not."*

Supervision of Young Children

The data revealed that during online classes, children needed the attention of their parents more than usual as operating technology was new for. Most of the parents identified that they had to face issues managing their other responsibilities when their children were taking their online classes. As two parents said:

> *"We as parents are bound with our children that disturbs other household work due to gas supply timings and other issues. We cook in the morning, supervise our children with their online classes and it has been tough for me to manage both. First supervising during their classes, then assisting them in doing homework and uploading the material."*

"They need our supervision due to sound-related issues because the teacher speaks softly, so I have to tell the teacher to explain again. Hence, they need more attention from us."

One of the teachers also commented in this regard:

"We have to wait for all to do their work. Sometimes they get distracted and don't follow the teachers' instructions or are busy doing something else. In physical classes, it is easy to keep an eye on them, but in online classes we cannot."

Discussion

In this study, in-depth zoom interviews were utilized to find the perceptions and challenges faced by the teachers and parents of primary students during online classes. The research questions developed were: "What is the impact of excessive use of technology during online classes on students` development?" "Do online classes are inappropriate for young learners like primary students?" From the findings it is evident that both questions have been answered explicitly.

In this time of pandemic, most of the teachers have faced issues regarding conducting online classes. Initially, training was required to adapt to the new way of teaching and they needed time and experience to make their lectures interesting and captivating so that the young learners remained engaged throughout the session (Aliyyah, et al., 2020). However, most of the teachers agreed that physical classes were much better than online classes for both the students as well as the teachers. Literature also coincides with this perception. According to Shahid and Mughal, (2020), teachers have to make lectures interesting and innovative so that the learners are fully engaged, attentive, and show immense interest during online classes. Another important issue which most of the teachers mentioned in the findings was that they were unable to evaluate students learning and understanding during online classes as they sought help from their parents and elder siblings during the assessment period. Raja, et al., (2021) add that online education has brought forward the issues of cheating during assessments, which becomes uncontrollable at times.

Parents have also faced similar issues regarding online learning of young children. As most of the parents were concerned about technology issues that hampered children's learning, they also identified that young children had become addicted to technology as they did not have any other alternative in the pandemic time. This resulted in excessive use of screen time, which adversely affected their health and development. Children`s screen time has increased by 80% than normal, which puts pressure on eyes and cognitive abilities and causes attention-deficit among youngsters. Few parents also identified that due to technology, they have become more bound towards their children. The children need complete supervision while taking online classes and sometimes assisting them in completing their assignments. Hence, parents have to manage their time according to their children`s new routine.

From the above discussion, it is obvious that the teachers as well as parents both agree that online learning is not suitable for young learners due to the problems discussed in this study. They find this new way of learning unusual as they need learning in the physical environment, where they can interact with peers and teachers. It emerges that young children`s learning and physical health has been significantly affected during online classes due to the excessive use of technology and young children have suffered throughout this period of pandemic.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aimed to explore the perceptions and challenges faced by the teachers and parents of primary students during online classes. The study also analysed the excessive use of technology that affects young learners during COVID 19. In conclusion, it can be stated that this study has helped the researcher to explore teachers' and parents' perceptions and challenges faced during online classes using a descriptive qualitative approach. Through this study, it shows that teachers and parents are not satisfied regarding young children`s learning during online classes. However, they feel that the use of excessive technology in this pandemic period has affected children`s learning and their overall development. Moreover, they realize that online learning is not suitable for young learners at the primary level as they need maximum attention and supervision from teachers as well as their parents. They need a school environment to learn and groom practically, so that they can express and explore themselves more, which is not possible in the present situation.

Based on the findings of the research, few recommendations are being laid out:

- Research should be conducted with public school teachers and parents.

- Changes should be made within the national curriculum to extend flexibility and improve technology issues.

- Joint efforts by the government, teachers, parents, and schools should be made to extend the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods that have been unfavourably affected.

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