Investigating The Problems Faced By The Esl Learners In E-Learning At Intermediate Level

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Abstract

The present study investigates the problems and difficulties faced by English language learners in E-learning through LMS (Learning Management System). It further explores the learners' technical, economic, geographical, and behavioural issues in the online teaching and learning system. This study was conducted with 25 students of Intermediate Part-II at Government Graduate College Bure Wala,Distt. Vehari (Pakistan). The data was collected through the quantitative method by employing the research tool of the questionnaire, which comprised ten close-ended questions for the learners with dichotomic options. The data were analysed by applying the statistical device of percentage. The findings of the study show that E-learning is a quite helpful system of teaching the English language. It has also been suggested that the teachers pay more attention to the content and teaching method to make it interesting and attractive for the learners and conduct proper testing in language skills.

Key Words: E-learning, Learning Management System (LMS), Learning Outcomes,Online Teaching, Teaching Objectives.

1. Introduction

For the last two decades or so, there has been rapid development in Information Technology. It has widened the range of the application and implementation of this technology to different minor or major walks of human life. This opportunity attracted people to utilise it in Business, Education and Commerce. With this, the concept of online education also developed. E-Learning and online teaching have given many advantages over face to face teaching in the present-day education system (Dolence & Norris, 1995;

Katz 1999; Appana, 2008; Shopova ,2014). That is why there is a significant shift from face to face teaching to E-learning and the teaching system. This change is observed in English language teaching and learning as well (Vovides, Sanchez-Alonso, Mitropoulou, & Nickmans, 2007).with the availability of online software and apps, the learners can engage themselves in health discussions and debates. It has wiped out the limitations of class size and the time bounds (Harasim, Calvert & Groeneboer, 1997).

 Along with the advantages of this E-Learning system, there is a possibility of some difficulties for the learners which are not observed in the traditional or face to face educational environment (Tsai, 2009); these difficulties encountered in the online learning system put a negative impact on the learning of the students(Davies &Graffs, 2005). There areCognition, anxiety, interest, economic standing, technical issues, preferences, geographical environment, content provided, teaching methodology, and learners' learning style. In this E-learning system, there are multi-dimensional activities and tasks and, in some cases, complicated content for the learners to cope with (Tyler-Smith, 2006).

In this E-learning programme, the learners have freedom of learning, and this requires a self-regulatory system. Change (2013) believes that the learners who follow this self-regulatory work perform better in their academics than the others. On the other hand, the apps and blogs involved in the online learning system are not simple for everyone. Instead, they require some technical know-how to run them. If the learners are not good at that, they face anxiety and pressure while having this E-learning. Asa result of this anxiety, they cannot perform well, and their learning is negatively affected (Aydın, F. & Ünaldı, Ü. E.,2010).

An E-learning system is run with the far-reaching effects of computers and internet databases. The utility of computers and the internet in English language learning cannot be denied. As it requires proper technique to use these aids and there is an access issue, it invites attention to look into the matter from the learners' perspective. It is significant to look into the matter and find whether it is helpful for every learner or some difficulties the learners face. They can work better if it is learners friendly.

2. Statement of the Problem
This new tendency to use ICT in the education system has invited the researchers to probe into this approach. Many studies have been conducted on E-learning regarding its working, usability and novelty. Most of these studies have been conducted to see how this E-learning system is different from face to face learning and teaching system and to find out the advantages and shortcomings of this new system. It is observed that little attention has been given to analysing the present E-learning system to suggest a better E-learning environment that can provide better and more effective opportunities for the learners. It is

also significant to find the views and share the learners' experiences educated through the E-learning system.

3.Research Objectives
This study is based on the following objectives:
  (i)   To investigate the technical, economic, behavioural and academic problems the learners face in the E-learning system.
  (ii)   To find out the general perception of the learners towards learning the English language through the E-learning system.
  (iii) To highlight the gaps between the learners and the learning system to be bridged by managing such educational systems.

4.Literature Review
E-learning has come to play a pivotal role in the education system with the development in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). However, Erben et al. (2009: 81) suggest that the IT experts in language learning and teaching be aware of the potential frustration and how these can be avoided. These frustrations work as problems and challenges for the learners in the process of E-learning. On the other hand, Kusumo, et al. (2012) claim that the students of the universities are more attracted towards E-learning as it enhances the effectiveness of their learning.

In this E-learning system, the Learning Management System (LMS) is popular software thatdifferent institutions use. This software can provide multipurpose aid to the ongoing E-learning system. This software possesses various teaching tools, testing, communication, and feedback and differentiates it from other data-based pieces of training (Klimova, 1995). He (1995) believes that due to the advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the educationists have to readjust and redefine the teaching and learning strategies and approaches.

Abed Al Atti& Abu Khotwah(2012) consider the advantages of E-learning and state that this system can:
  (i)   Assist the teachers in developing better teaching material and overcoming the efficiencies of their experience.
  (ii)   Fulfil any inadequate training and academic cadres.
  (iii) Provide such a package of electronic material for the teachers and the learners, keeping updated.
  (iv)   Update the examination and evaluation system of the institutions.
  (v)   Provide better awareness of IT among the community.
  (vi)   Run the admission system of the institutions.

(vii) Assist the teaching process like registration of the students, setting up the timetable etc.

Al Mousa and Al Mubarak (2005) claim that virtual or online classes are low cost, welcome a more considerable number of students at a time, are speedy in finding the response, have no time or space bounds, can relax the teacher from physical classroom management and save him from the hectic work of paper setting and marking. Al Qahtani (2010) conducted a study on virtual classes in an E-learning system and suggested that such an online teaching and learning system should be expanded to other universities and educational institutes. Basaqr (2009) also indicated that an E-learning system could provide better and faster solutions to many of the problems faced by the universities provided that this learning system is used appropriately.

Atuk and Ali (2008) also state different advantages of E-learning: it is a flexible system for a learner and provides better access to them. They (2008) claim that a student can feel convenient in such a learning system, and there is no bound of time, place, or speed for the learner. They also believe that the content used in such a learning system is quite inexpensive.

5.Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study is based on exploratory research design, and data has been collected by using the quantitative method. Davis (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has been applied here. Davis (1989) offers a model for accepting new technology in the language learning process and calls it Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). According to this model two basic factors influence the intention of the learner towards the use of technology: the perceived ease of use and the perceived usefulness. This model, in fact, gives the factors that influence the learning bent of mind of the adults.

6.Data Collection

The data has been collected by using the quantitative method. The undergraduates of Government Graduate College Bure Wala ,Distt. Vehari is the population of this study. The sample of this study is the 25 students of Intermediate Part-II who have been selected through random sampling. They are all male students whose average age falls between 17-19 years. A questionnaire has been developed carrying ten close-ended questions with Yes/No options.

7. Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

A questionnaire was developed to collect the data from the 25 participants of intermediate part-II class who were randomly selected. The participants were asked 10 questions to respond with Yes/No options. As these were close ended questions, they could not give

their ideas or share their experiences in their own words. The responses gathered from them were calculated by employing percentage (%) as statistical device.

Q1. Do you have android mobile or computer of your own for online classes?

In response to this question 18 students opted "Yes" whereas 7 students opted "No". It shows that 7 out of 25 students or 28% of the students did not own an android mobile or a computer of their own and they either miss their classes or they share the mobiles of their class mates to have access to these online classes. It also shows that 72% students have the facility of android mobiles to enjoy the online classes. Though majority of students have android mobiles and have an access to the online classes, a great minority of 28% remains without classes. In other words more than one fourth of the class is left out in the process of online teaching and learning.

Q2. Did you easily manage to buy android mobile or computer for your classes?

For this question only 13 students replied with "Yes". It shows that only 52% learners were economically in a position to buy or arrange an android mobile phone or a computer to attend these online classes or to learn through E- learning system of education. 5 Students out of 25 or the 20% of the participants could buy mobiles   by borrowing some money and it was a great burden on the family budget. So, 7 students out of 25 or 28% of the participants could not afford to have this facility so far. It shows that in the beginning it looks quite costly for 28% students and their families to buy mobile phones or computers. It shows that 48% students have financial issues to meet the requirements of the online classes. It is apparent that such system puts a lot of burden on the families of almost half of the students. Under such situation, they either resort to borrow money or remain without classes.

Q3. Is there any audio/ video problem in your classes?

For this question 14 students said "Yes" which means that 56% participants were not satisfied with the quality of the videos or the voice either due to the poor production or the recording or there were some internet connection issues for the students. It means that the majority of them were not satisfied with the working of that online system. Only 11 students out of 25 were satisfied with the availability of network and the quality of videos and the voice. The significant part of the students of the public sector colleges and universities often belong to remote areas in Pakistan. The people living in scattered and remote area cannot enjoy good quality of internet database. In such areas the signals are weak and they affect the quality of videos and voices badly. Sometimes their links are

disconnected completely and at some other moments they have poor quality of videos and sounds. The present study shows that most of the students cannot attend their classes completely and smoothly. Unfortunately, only a minority of the class can enjoy online classes without any distortion or hindrance. The outcome of the responses of the learners does not satisfy the factor of "Perceived Ease of Use" (PEOU) of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Q4. Do you enjoy your classes?
This question had a surprising response as only 8 students responded positively and they showed that they enjoyed their classes but 17 students showed that they did not enjoy their online classes. It shows that 68% of the participants are not interested or motivated by this E-learning system. It also shows that there is a significant gap between the educational motives of the college and planning of the teaching staff and the attitude of the learners. This gap needs to be filled otherwise the activity goes wasted. It requires the institution and teaching staff to work more for making their lectures attractive and to enhance the involvement of the learners. Such response diminishes the tendency towards accepting new technology by the learners.

Q5. Can you use all the apps well that are used for your online classes?
In response to this question 18 students said that that they are good at using these apps whereas the 7 students seems reluctant and showed less confidence in the use of android mobile and the relevant apps. It means that 72% of the participants are good at the use of the apps. It shows that the majority of the learners are good at using this new technology that is being employed in their online classes. It further invites the faculty to arrange some training sessions for the learners so that they can use their mobile phones or the computers in a better way.

Q6. Is there internet coverage problem in the area where you live?
For this question 20 out of 25 students responded negatively and admitted that they have the internet service in the locality where they are residing presently. Only 5 students or 20% of the subject of the study complained that they have to face internet access issues quite often which hinders in the way of their online connection. The response of the students towards this question shows that most of them face technical issues of internet coverage in their localities. There are a variety of internet data base services available in Pakistan. Owing to this people have different connections and purchase internet services from different companies. There are some areas where the customers face low signals and some interruptions in internet services. This study shows that online teaching and learning is based on the availability of internet services. So this mode of education can only be

successful if technology is working well and if there is fine internet coverage in that locality. Otherwise the learners would be facing problems and the learning system would be faulty.

Q7. Are you satisfied with the content material your teachers provide to you in online class?

This question was responded negatively by 11 students whereas 14 students were more or less satisfied with the quality and readability with the given material during online classes. It also raises a concern and invites the faculty to work more to satisfy 44% students as this is a significant portion of the learners. It also shows that the teachers should also work more on the content and add some interesting activities to make it learnable. In the online or virtual teaching and learning system, the teacher is away from the students. So the teacher has limited range of using body language and the physical exposure. The teacher has to focus more on the voice, images and videos as teaching aids. While developing such audio visual aids the teacher must take care of the quality and the usability of them. The present study shows that only 56% students are satisfied with the content that teachers provide to the students during on line classes. The rest of the students are not satisfied with the content of the virtual class. It invites the attention of the teachers to work more on the preparation of the teaching aids. The teaching resources should be attractive, appealing and informative for the learners. Well- defined, attractively displayed and interesting lectures can be more satisfying for the learners. It requires the teachers to work hard and plan the lessons according to the needs of the learners.

Q.8 Does your teacher ask you to give feedback about the class?

This question also had a surprising response from the learners. Out of the sample of 25 learners, 21 responded this question in negative and said that they were never asked to give feedback about their class whereas only four of the learners replied with "Yes". It shows that the teacher never bothered to ask about some feedback from 84% of the group of these randomly selected students. It shows that most of the teachers of the online classes focus on delivering their lectures to the given population and do not bother to have feedback from them. The present study shows that only 16 % students are attending classes where teachers ask for the feedback from the students. Such activity can provide information to the teacher regarding the degree of effectiveness of their lectures. Further the teacher can know of the responses of the learners including the difficulties and the hurdles they are facing in the online learning process. Even in the face to face classes, having feedback from the students can be useful for the teacher for future teaching. In the online teaching and learning system, feedback of the learners is more required. It is so, as in this mode of teaching, the learners are at a distance and they are linked with the teacher through technology.

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Q9. Do you prefer the online classes to the face to face classes?

For this question 14 students opted "Yes" whereas 11 students showed their interest in having face to face or physical classes for learning English language. It means that 44% learners are interested to have face to face classes and they are less interested in E-learning system. This study shows that most of the students are interested to have online classes. It shows that 56% students are satisfied with the online classes. They find this system of education easier and more satisfactory. On the other side 44% students find it difficult to go with online learning system and want to have physical classes. The response of the subject of study towards this question shows that there are strong views among the students for both modes of teaching. Online mode of teaching and learning has a marginal edge over the physical or face to face classes. It invites the policy makers and the heads of the educational institutes that they can carry on with both modes of teaching to satisfy the students.

Q10. Are you given some test in language skills like reading, writing, speaking or listening?

This question was also responded with "No" by 22 students which shows that at that stage of their learning, 88% students were never tested or evaluated by the teacher. It again shows that the teacher had ignored a very important aspect of teaching and learning process that guides him to readjust his method of teaching. In English language classes, the use of the language skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening is almost indispensible. In such online classes, it is even more required that the learners are engaged in speaking skill. It puts on the language teacher to involve and deploy the language skills in teaching as well as testing. The present study shows that only 8% of the students are tested in language skills but the majority of the students are not given such tests. It invites the language teachers to plan their lessons by deploying all language skills and they must give tests to the students in these skills.

8.Conclusion

This study reports upon the exploration of the E-learning system being used to teach English language at a public postgraduate college. By using quantitative method of data collection and applying percentage (%) as a statistical device it has been found through the responses of the learners that E-learning is quite useful way of teaching English language. At the same time it has also come out that at Public Institutes the teachers need to improve their content to make it interesting, attractive and learnable. This study also shows that in this system the teachers pay least attention to testing and evaluation and they do not let all the learners to put up questions or to give their feedback. So it blinds the teacher to meet the objectives and to know about the learning outcomes. This attitude of the teachers lets

them unaware of the problems and the difficulties of the learners who are taught through online classes. In this way they cannot remove their problems. It has also been found that android mobiles and the computers are quite costly teaching and learning aids and they are out of the reach of a good number of students registered with the Public Institutes. So some economical way should be adopted that can be within the reach of all the students.

This study shows that 56% students face technical issues in the online education system as they belong to remote areas and have internet access issues. Only 44% learners are having proper access to and availability of internet facility. Financial issue also runs counter to it. Only 52% students can easily manage to buy an android cell phone of their own. 28% students do not have any android cell phone whereas 20% students have to borrow money to buy to purchase a cell phone to attend online classes. It shows that 48% students have financial problems in their way to get connected with the online class. In the same way 44% students are not satisfied with the online classes from academic and behavioral point of view. It invites the attention of the management to tackle the technical, financial and academic issues of the learners of the online system of education to make it more useful.

This study also provides information regarding the general perception of the learners towards the online classes. In this regard 56% students are satisfied with this mode of learning whereas 44% of the learners have some concerns. They are of multiple types regarding financial burden, internet coverage, running the apps, attitude towards the quality of lectures, the content material and the less use of the language skills in the teaching and learning process. All of these issues invite some better approach of the language teacher who is conducting an online class.

The findings of the present study invite the attention of the management to be more vigilant and proactive in conducting online teaching system. The study points out that there is a need of better lesson plans and a continuous formative evaluation system so that the problems can be detected and hence removed as early as possible. The study also shows that although 56% students are in favour of online classes, still a big portion of the learners wants to have face to face classes. It means that where possible the authorities should try to run both modes of teaching to facilitate both kinds of learners. It can offer choices to them.

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