



RESEARCH PAPER

A Study on the Journey of Transformation from a Traditional Platform to Online Teaching Practices at Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The widespread usage of digital technology has placed pressure on academic institutions to rethink their approaches to learning and instruction in contemporary times. The fundamental objective of this investigation was to explore departmental heads' perspectives on online teaching practices at HEI (Higher Education Institutions). Secondly, to suggest some suitable initiatives for the best online teaching practices at HEI. This investigation was qualitative in nature. For this study, five (5) HEIs in South Punjab, Pakistan, were chosen. To obtain qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was arranged for a sample of eighteen (18) heads/chairpersons selected by convenient sampling. The data was analyzed using NVIVO 12 for a comprehensive thematic analysis. This qualitative research unearthed a number of issues associated with the transformation towards online learning practices. Furthermore, it revealed the initiatives presented by the departmental heads to address the issues and the requirement of providing further training for teachers to improve their potential.

Keywords: Transformation, Traditional Platform, Online Teaching, Practices, Higher Education

Introduction

In recent years, as a direct result of the proliferation of new technologies, modern developments have profoundly changed conventional learning frameworks as well as learning practices and posed new challenges to traditional educational models (Espiritu & Budhrani, 2019). In this context, Barrot et al. (2021) illustrated that the 1990s marked the beginning of widespread implementation of technology in educational settings. One such transformation is the widespread popularity and fast growing adoption of online learning in various learning contexts. Following this, Burns (2013) pointed that online learning has become a critical concern in higher education. Moreover, the (HEIs) are increasingly embracing online learning (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021).

Furthermore, Tondeur et al. (2017) described how technology has dramatically changed the landscape of higher education by eliminating traditional boundaries that exist between teachers and learners making it feasible for learning to take place in an environment that is more collaborative than ever before. In addition to this, Wong et al. (2019) cited many institutions of higher education, have gone through a significant transformation in the previous two decades as a result of new developments in sector of education. According to Jensen (2019), this transition started taking place in higher education institutions several years ago. However, a global epidemic has intensified this shift from a conventional learning environment to an online classroom.

In the present scenario, online teaching has become increasingly significant in academic institutions due to its ability to provide flexible learning opportunities and reach a wider audience. However, in Pakistan; (HEIs) are in the beginning phases of transformation as these institutions have started to ride this tide of change notably

aftermath of COVID-19. The main focus of the current study was to investigate heads' perspectives on the transformation towards online educational practices in higher-education institutions. Without a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the issues from the perspectives of the key stakeholders, this transformation cannot be realized.

The findings of this investigation have certain practical implications for HEI administrators in developing ongoing professional growth initiatives for those transitioning to an online learning context. Furthermore, the results of this research might provide educational institutions with direction in their efforts to successfully adapt traditional learning culture to an online environment.

Literature Review

In the past two decades, the boom in information and communication technology has transformed many aspects of academic organizations from traditional teaching platforms to online models of education (Pathak, 2016). However, the process of managing the transformation towards new technologies continues to provide challenges for teachers and administrators (Bennett et al., 2018). Several research investigations related to the transformation towards an online learning platform carried out on an international level provided insight into multiple facets of online learning from a variety of perspectives. In this context, Kebritch et al. (2017) also observed that since online education modifies almost all aspects, including changes in obligations and instructional approaches, this presents issues for the successful educational process at HEIs. So, according to the offered research's insights, it was recommended that these problems should be addressed in order to navigate the limitations posed by online education. Furthermore, Maggio et al. (2018), in an investigation, highlighted that the online academic environment offers a completely different context with new mechanisms and different requirements. This study also emphasized the need for future research to better understand the ever-changing dynamics of the transition to online teaching. Moreover, Stone (2019) studied how online learning has transformed higher education in Australia and recommended the need to develop mechanisms to progress beyond the traditional methods of education. In addition to this, Garca-Morales et al. (2021) carried out a study on transforming higher education institutions in America emphasizing the necessity of changing training procedures in order to promote technological skills for the successful completion of online learning process.

In addition to this, to the best of the researchers' information, many significant research investigations related to online teaching conducted in context of Pakistan have focused primarily on the experiences of learners and teachers particularly through the period known as Covid-19. In this regard, Mumtaz et al. (2021) carried out an investigation to explore the issues that are linked with transitioning from conventional to online academics in Pakistan. In addition, Nazir and Khan (2021) in another study which was conducted to determine the barriers in Pakistani institutions while striving to learn online through the experiences of those students. In a similar way, Shahid and Shahid (2022) investigated the level of satisfaction felt by university faculty and students in relation to their experiences with online learning.

Material and Methods

The current study employed a qualitative research approach. In this exploratory investigation, five universities primarily in the public sector in South Punjab participated including Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan (only the Multan Campus), and The Women University, Multan were among the chosen institutions from Multan city. Moreover, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur and The Government Sadiq College Women University Bahawalpur were selected from the Bahawalpur district. Furthermore, the campus of Ghazi University D.G. Khan was also chosen for the same purpose. The heads of the aforementioned institutions were chosen through convenient sampling, and they were

contacted via email with an invitation for their participation in this qualitative research investigation. Furthermore, in the present study, a total of eighteen 18 male and female department chairs were included, and at least three respondents from each institution were selected (Male 11, and Female7) who were easily accessible. For the present study, qualitative information was gathered from chairpersons of various departments of Social Sciences about their experiences in the transformation journey from traditional platforms to online teaching practices through an interview process that was semi-structured. This interview session was held with department chairpersons/heads to inquire about their viewpoints on online learning practices and questions revolving around 04 various aspects: challenges associated with the transformation from traditional to online teaching practices, training requirements, potential future prospects of online learning and suggestions for improving online practices. In accordance with the ethical standards, informed permission was sought from those whose interviews were recorded. The objectives of the present research served as the basis for the selection of the discussion themes that were included as part of the interview procedure. In-person interviews were arranged with each of the nominated department head/chairperson in a setting intended for the conversation in a relaxing and conducive environment.

Results and Discussion

The results of the qualitative analysis, which were figured out from the interviews with chairpersons, are presented. For the convenience of both the qualitative data analysis and data organization, a Microsoft Word document was created for each interviewee, and those documents were then imported into NViVO-12, the software widely regarded as the best primary tool for qualitative analysis. In the qualitative analysis, a variety of figures, including word clouds and tree maps, were utilized to demonstrate the findings of the research. Finally, a word cloud, and a tree map were created from the most frequently used words such as counting the frequency of phrases and terms to highlight the various themes in order to depict the participants' viewpoints on online learning practices. The results are organized and presented in accordance with the series of interview questions. The researcher thematically analyzed the key questions, which were related to the study's objectives. The section afterwards outlines both the findings and the specifics of the qualitative investigation, which can be found in the following section.

Word Cloud of Challenges and Issues related to Online Teaching

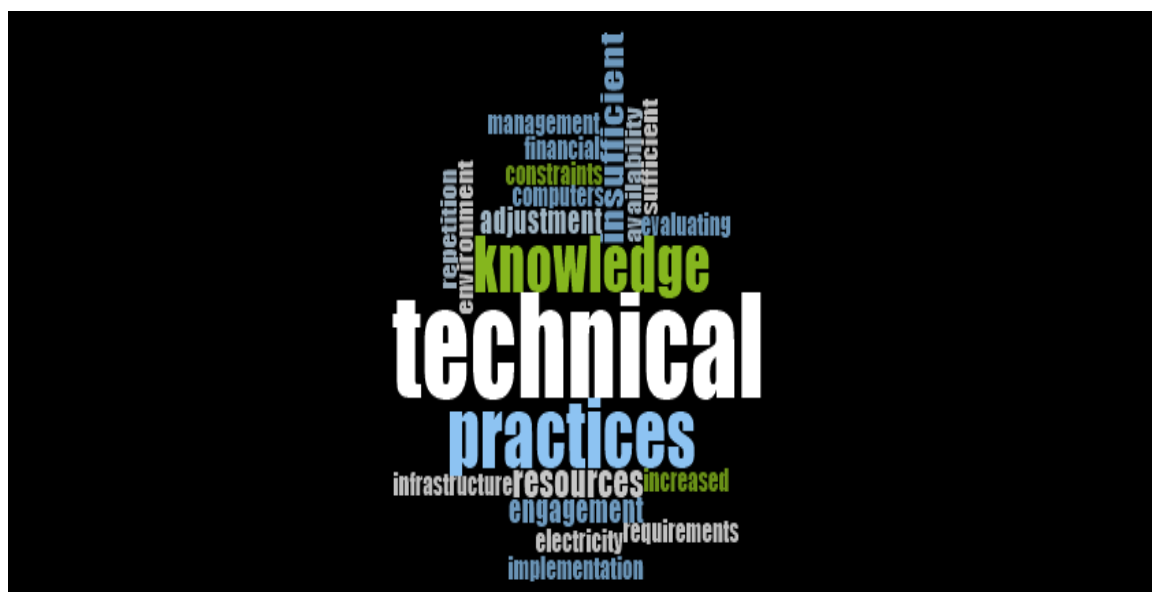


Figure 1 Challenges/Issues in Online Teaching

The following figure1 depicts the views of chairpersons on some of the obstacles in relation to some obstacles that are experienced during the process of instruction using an online method. The words that are used most frequently suggest that the key issues that are being brought up by the heads in this context indicate that the main issues are technical issues such as poor connectivity, power outages, difficulties in coping to and participating in the online environment, an inadequate level of technological competence, a lack of resources, and budgetary limits are all factors that might be cited as challenges.

Table 1
A summary about the Issues and Barriers in Online Teaching

Words	Word Frequency	Weighted (%)
Infrastructure	11	30.00
Financial	09	25.00
Competencies	07	15.00
Electricity	05	20.00
Broadband	03	10.00

The above table 1 summarizes several obstacles and issues identified in online learning environment. The following main words are commonly used: infrastructure, financial, competencies, electricity and broadband. Some of these remarks are shown below in the following comments; one of the participants highlighted the problem in these words. "I think, limited access to online platform and limited internet access due to inadequate network converge is a main issue." As a result, some of the challenges raised by participants during the discussion were budgetary constraints, outages of electricity, poor network connectivity, and a lack of the key competences and abilities for learning through online mode.

Word Cloud indicating Suggestions for Training



Figure 2 Suggestions for Training

The above given figure2 inquires about the responses of respondents in terms of a broad spectrum of key features for developing and enhancing capacity for online teaching. The terms that are used more frequently are in bold and make a cloud surrounding the

keyword “organized.” These terms include: education, surroundings, information, training, environment, performed technology, and more. These terms include: “stakeholders “professional”, “orientations” “knowledge”, and so on. The following cloud also displays the comments of different respondents as they were received. One of the participants stated, "In my opinion, workshops on changing professional identity and teaching approaches in digital environment should be organized at Institution”.

Word Tree Map about Suggestions for requirements of Training

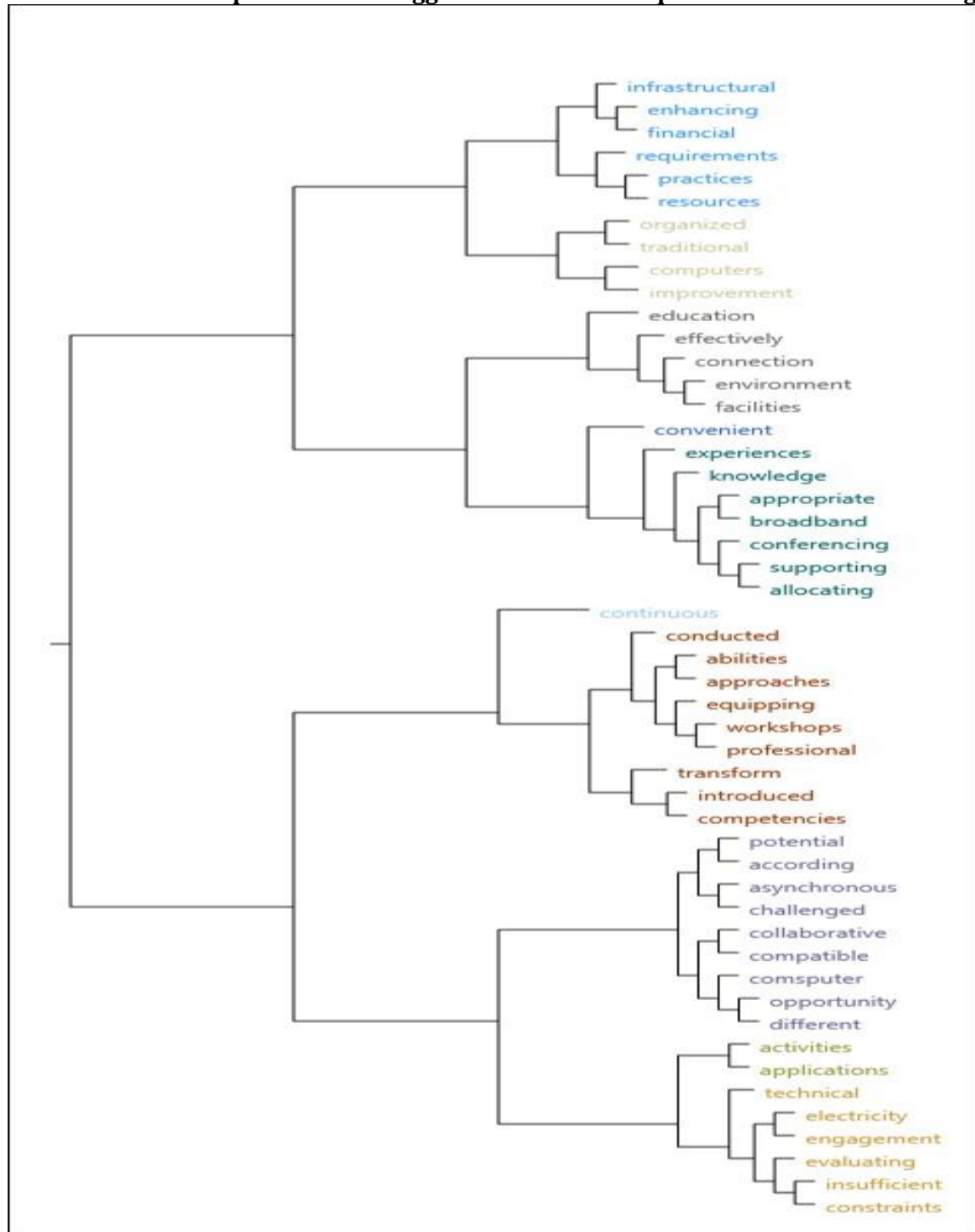


Figure3 Suggestions for requirements of Training

The above given figure 3 of the word tree map shows the most common words used by the participants to describe the kind of training that can enhance and improve the skills

for online teaching. The following key words, such as organized, technical, and professional, as well as transform, competences, and workshops, are particularly vital for the particular sort of training specified by the respective heads for strengthening skills for online learning. The major words introduced ideas that were centered on empowering teachers with the capacity to develop online learning materials and enhancing their level of technological expertise so that they could more effectively work towards the implementation of online learning environments.

Word Cloud related to Prospects for Online Learning in the Future



Figure 4 Prospects for Online Learning

This displayed figure 4 illustrates perspectives on the potential prospects of online learning in higher education institutions. The most frequently cited words appear highlighted in bold, forming a cloud surrounding the term “opportunity”. The most commonly effective, convenient and collaborative. The underlying notion that emerged from this word cloud suggests that respondents perceived the prospective positive features of online learning in the context of offering learners with academic possibilities that make it possible for users to easily access information from any location they desire.

Word Cloud of Different Suggestions and Measures to Improve Online Practices



Figure 5 Suggestions and Measures

The following figure 5 demonstrates the measures that should be taken and the recommendations that have been made by chairpersons for enhancing the online platform at HEIs. The terms that are used more frequently are highlighted in bold, forming a cloud around the word “practices”. These terms include things like “resources”, “technological”, “infrastructure”, and “management”, among others. The overarching idea that can be gleaned by this word cloud is the various recommendations for increasing the infrastructure for technology along with the resources that can be utilized. The preceding figure also demonstrates that institutions should prioritize infrastructure improvements for the effective implementation of online practices.

Discussion

The purpose of the qualitative investigation was to explore departmental heads' perspectives about online learning. In accordance with the study's results, one of most pressing problems having an effect on the process of learning online was a lack of adequate technical infrastructure and connectivity issues. The findings match with a study by Bdair (2021), in which the same concerns were brought to light, such as a lack of training and limited internet coverage, and were highlighted as the main issues. Moreover, in this investigation, the positive attitudes of the respondents were shown by the qualitative data, which shows that they are aware of the benefits of online education in terms of providing educational opportunities and being easy to use, flexible, and compatible. Furthermore, the results of the study correspond with the findings of the qualitative investigation that was carried out by Mukhtar et al. (2020), which highlighted the same benefits, including ease of access and comfort; on the other hand, it highlighted some of the suggestions presented by participants for providing teachers with training on how to make use of online modalities. The qualitative findings from the analysis of the suggestions of heads highlighted the need for affordable bandwidth packages, as well as a stronger network, more investment in information technology resources, and other facilities, in order to maximize the practical value of online educational experiences. Similarly, Mondol and Mohiuddin (2020) pointed out strong views on ensuring online learning resources such as economical data bundles and an improved networking in a qualitative study.

According to the results, the majority of heads were concerned with organizing seminars and training sessions for teachers transitioning from traditional teaching methods to online classroom culture. This result seems to be in line with what De Gagne and Walters (2009) found. It was reported in their qualitative study that instructors need professional training to do their jobs well in an online academic setting.

Conclusions

The results of this study and examined perspectives of heads indicate that for high-quality online learning experiences, it is necessary to comprehend and handle the issues and obstacles associated with this new method of learning in order to provide excellent online learning experiences. Moreover, to ensure a seamless and successful transition, higher education institutions (HEIs) need to be responsive to the challenges that they face, develop solutions that are appropriate for addressing those challenges, and mobilize resources to do so. In addition to this, to receive the maximum benefits of this new learning environment and to provide an excellent setting for online learning, basic requirements, including infrastructure and training for users, are vital. In Pakistan, there is a high potential for online platform as it, is cost-effective and smart for Pakistan's struggling education industry. It is evident that there is much space for development over time after considering the multiple benefits and challenges of using online learning in the higher education system.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need to make investments in the modernization of technological infrastructure to ensure accessibility and equity at HEIs.
2. Moreover, effective capacity building training and workshops should be organized for the end-users.
3. Further, institutions should modify their policies and make strategic choices as a consequence of transformation in order to meet performance standards and deliver improved educational services.

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