A Study on Attitude and Motivation towards E- Learning among Pre-University Students at Westminster International University in Tashkent

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has made significant adjustments to the educational process in almost all countries of the world. The methods and approaches, techniques, and technologies that teachers used in offline learning turned out to be ineffective. The purpose of the study is to consider the prospects of online learning for English learners at the pre-university department at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT). The case study technique was used to gather the required data. The research materials were the results of a survey conducted among English learners of the 1st and 2nd levels of pre-university department. The attitude of Basics of English for Academic Purposes (BEAP) students to distance learning was revealed. The answers to each of these questions summarize the results of the study as follows: the majority of students would prefer face-to-face classes to online or hybrid ones. Further prospects include teaching English to BEAP students only in a blended learning format.

Keywords: information, WIUT, BigBlueButton (BBB), classroom, presentations, screen sharing files, exams, video/audio files.

Introduction

Modern society in 2020 was forced to almost completely switch to distance learning. This is what many educational institutions have done. Classes started to be conducted remotely in an online format. All this involved the use of new forms of information organization that could ensure its maximum perception.

The sudden shift to distance learning has brought many challenges, but also offers numerous opportunities. Once teachers have overcome the initial obstacles of setting up an online classroom for their students, they have a number of learning tools at their disposal that give them a more flexible approach to the learning experience. Currently, the virtual classroom is an online space that has some of the features of traditional classrooms, but is still different in other ways. Virtual classroom platforms with their efficient learning management systems enable the creation of presentations, screen sharing files, exams, video/audio files, etc. for teaching purposes.

A study was conducted to reveal BEAP students' attitudes towards distance learning. The survey involved 80 BEAP students of pre-university department at WIUT doing Basics of English for Academic Purposes. The study revealed that 12.5% of students found distant learning extremely effective, 31.3% -moderately effective and 22.5% -not effective.

The lessons took place in real time. Online classes were built in the format of a web conference. It used the open source Big Blue Button (BBB) software that supports multiple audio tracks and video sharing, the ability to show presentations, Microsoft Office and Open Office documents, images, PDF documents, advanced whiteboard features such as pointer, zoom and drawing, access to desktop. Public and private chats were used for feedback with web conference users. The user could also enter the conference as either a viewer or a moderator. As a viewer, s/he could join a voice conference, use a webcam, raise his/her hand (to ask for the floor) and communicate with

other people. A moderator could mute / unmute any viewer's microphone, remove any viewer from a web conference, and also transmit word to any viewer to perform (make any user the host). The presenter could upload presentations, documents, use the whiteboard.

Literature review

The term e-learning is often used interchangeably with terms such as online learning, technology-enhanced learning and distance learning. According to Kaya (2002), distance education is "the method of carrying out specially designed instructional activities through various mediums connecting teachers and students in cases where the implementation of physical classroom teaching is not possible due to the limitations of traditional learning-teaching methods". A.W. Bates (2005) emphasizes the distinction that e-learning can encompass any form of technology, while online learning refers specifically to the use of the internet and the web. It is seen that mostly new learning experiences have emerged which occur at internet-assisted digital environments (Crawford, 2009). Online course are courses "where most or all of the content is delivered online... (and students) typically have no face-to-face meetings" (Allen & Seaman, 2003). Rosenberg (2001) defines e-learning process as "the use of internet technologies in accessing information and creating it".

Online learning provides teachers with an efficient way to deliver lessons to students. Online learning has a range of tools such as videos, PDFs, podcasts, and teachers can use any of these tools as part of their lesson plans. By expanding the lesson plan beyond traditional textbooks and incorporating online resources, teachers can teach more efficiently.

Students studying online can attend classes from any location convenient for them. For this they need good internet connection, a computer, laptop or smartphone. There is no need to commute to brick and mortar schools. Now all they have to do is open their devices and log in at the scheduled time to take the class.

There are many students who are individual learners and are distracted by large groups in the classroom and find it hard concentrating on what the teacher taught in the class. However, this problem does not exist in online courses. Every single student has a direct interaction with the teacher and this promotes fast learning. A positive feature of e-learning is that it increases learner autonomy (Johnston et al., 2005). Students can actively participate in an e-learning environment where they can improve their thinking skills and learn independently (Dumford and Miller, 2018).

Method

The current study used a survey approach to determine attitude of 86 students towards online learning. It took place at the Pre-university department at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT). Course in Pre-Foundation Studies (CPFS) Levels 1 and 2 were designed as a study program to prepare students for entry into Level 3 at WIUT. The online questionnaire was distributed to the respondents through Google form platform. The questionnaire consists of 14 close ended questions.

Participants

The subjects of the study are 44 male and 42 female students learning Basics of English for Academic Purposes. The course is aimed at teaching English and preparing students for further undergraduate studies at WIUT. The study covers two levels of students learning English.

Data Collection

Two different tools were applied: questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire is used to find out the subjects' perceptions, attitudes and motivation towards online learning option. Subjects' preference for online learning was also assessed. The interviews were conducted with a few

randomly selected individuals. The main question that was asked is "Were you satisfied with online learning?" The purpose of using interviews is to confirm what has been obtained from the questionnaires.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to find out students' attitudes towards e-learning and to investigate how the e-learning affects the students' success in language learning at pre-university department at WIUT. With this aim in mind, the study tries to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards distance classes?

2. How effective is the online learning in terms of student success in English classes?

3. Are the students motivated to learn through E-learning?

Results

The first part of the questionnaire attempted to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents using three questions on gender, age and level of education. The level of education comprises two categories: BEAP1 and BEAP2 students. The age groups were set between 14-16 years, 17-19 years, and 20-22 years. A total of 86 respondents participated in this study. There were 51% of male respondents and 49% - female. The results are depicted in Figure 1.
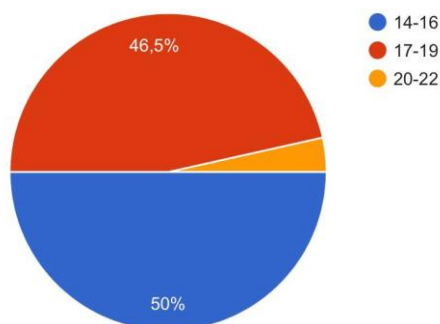

Figure 1. The students' age groups

For internet connection quality, 43% disclosed to have good internet connectivity speed while 12,8% claimed to have poor internet connection. Lastly, 2.3% stated to have no internet connection. The results are depicted in Figure 2.
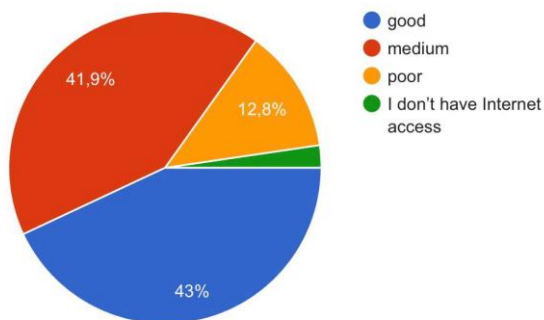

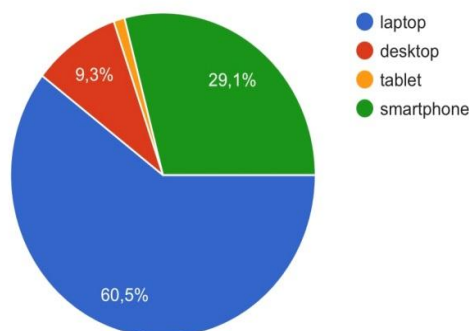*Figure 2. The quality of internet connection during the confinement period*
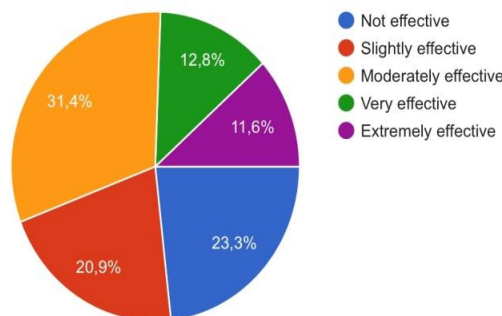
Figure 3.The device used for online learning

Figure 4.The effectiveness of online learning

Laptop, used by 60.5% of respondents, was the most popular device used for online learning (Figure 3) while around 30% of students used smartphone to access online lessons. Almost a third of students consider online learning moderately effective whereas almost a quarter think that it was not effective. There are other students who believe that online learning was very effective and extremely effective, accounting for almost 13% and 12% of total responses respectively.
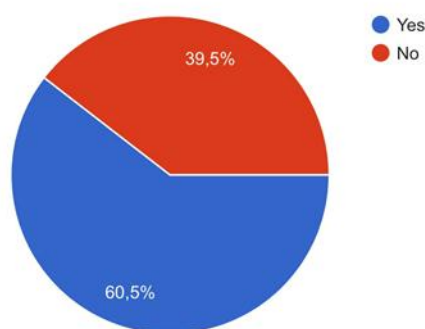

Figure 5.Students' motivation towards online learning

As seen from the chart (Figure 5), 60.5% of respondents claimed that they were motivated to learn English online and they saw improvements in English skills while taking part in online classes. The

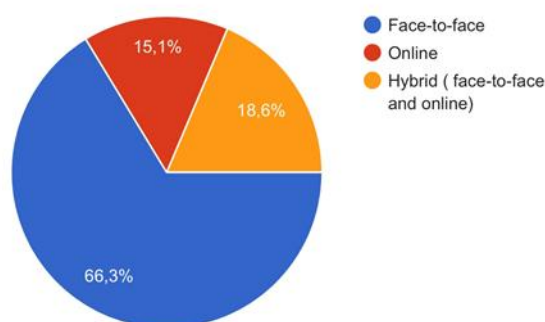results depicted in Figure 6 reveal that students prefer face-to-face classes to online and hybrid ones.

Figure 6.The students' preference for mode of BEAP classes

Discussion

The main aim of the study was to assess students' attitude and motivation to learn online. A questionnaire was developed to meet the requirements of the study. Selected students were asked to fill out this questionnaire. In response to the questionnaire on attitudes towards online teaching, the responses of students participating in the present study indicated that the majority of them agreed that online teaching improves students' learning skills and increases understanding of the subject matter. Similarly, a study conducted to assess students' attitudes towards online learning at tertiary level in Peshawar found that a majority of students agree that online learning can improve academic productivity and strengthen educational concepts will (Ullah et al., 2017).

This study draws on the existing literature and consolidates evidence that contributes to the understanding of online learning and teaching, learning practices during lockdown, and the challenges and opportunities involved. Some studies compared offline and online learning (Dawadi et al., 2020; Wendelboe et al., 2020). These studies show that classroom teaching is preferred by teachers and students. The current study concludes that the preference of teachers and students for offline learning over online learning is due to various challenges related to online learning. While the traditional approach was preferred by most teachers and students, the shift to online learning presented a new challenge for them. The key question that interests many is whether online learning is better and more effective than face-to-face learning. Few studies (Mariia, & Strzelecki, 2020; Wendelboe et al., 2020) have attempted to answer this question. They show that given the challenges that come with online learning, traditional face-to-face learning is still preferred. Based on the results of Wong's (2012) study, students' attitudes towards online learning are generally positive. However, students still preferred the classroom lectures to be delivered face-to-face using technology. In the present study, the proportion of respondents who had a positive attitude towards online teaching was comparatively high.

Conclusion

In summary, the outbreak of Covid-19 has brought many challenges and reconsidered the teaching and learning process in many academic institutions. Rapid technological development can be observed in Uzbekistan, particularly in the communications sector. This technological development in the communications sector had spawned a new approach to teaching called online classes or e-learning. The education system has started to move from face-to-face classes to partially, mostly or fully online-based distance learning. As discussed in this study, it can be concluded that pre-

university students at WIUT have a positive attitude towards e-learning. Based on the results of the present study, it can be summarized that a majority of the students had a positive attitude towards online teaching. The current research dealt only with online learning, but further studies may also involve a blended learning form.

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