

## Distance Learning, Pedagogical Practices and Communication Problems: A Learner-Centered Approach

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### Abstract

*The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes and opened new horizons in every field of human life. This development has altered ways of learning and pedagogy generally all over the world but particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. Due to closure of institutions, distance learning (online classes system) has been emerged as an alternate that includes revised content, assessment procedures, teaching approaches, novel learning experiences, modern ways of communication and interactional patterns. The study is an effort to examine the role of technology in effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication in online classroom, students and teachers participation in online class communication and communication issues that are faced by the students and teachers in distance learning classroom. The current study is based on qualitative descriptive case study approach. The sample for the study was purposively selected 20 students and 20 teachers from the Department of English Language and Literature, UOL, Lahore, Department of Linguistics and Communications, UMT Lahore, Department of Zoology, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore and Department of Humanities, COMSATS Lahore. Equal number of students and teachers were chosen as respondents from each of the aforesaid universities. This study is embedded in the communication interpersonal theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) by W. Barnett Pearce & Vernon Cronen (1980). The interviews data was categorized and organized into content themes for interpretation. This study provided an insight into students' experiences and teachers' perspectives while they communicate during online classes. The current study findings provided information about role of technology in effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication in distance learning settings, reduction in student-teacher and student-student communication in online classes and problems that teachers and students faced when they communicate in online class.*

**Keywords:** Distance Learning, Online Class, Pedagogical Practices, Communication Problems, Learner-Centered Approach, Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM).

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### Introduction

The very first human case of the pandemic (COVID-19) was identified in food market of Wuhan (China) in December. In Pakistan, the first confirmed case was detected on 26 February, 2020. Consequently, the Pakistani government announced lockdown on March 14, 2020 and closed all educational institutions including universities. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes and opened new horizons in every field and department of human life. This development has altered ways of learning and pedagogy generally all over the world but particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. Due to closure of

institutions, distance learning (online classes system) has been emerged as an alternate that includes revised content, assessment procedures, teaching approaches, novel learning experiences, modern ways of communication and interactional patterns.

Bates (2005) opines that learning mode in which teachers and learners are located at different places and keep on learning at their time and pace is known as distance learning. The student-teacher relation which exists when teachers and students are separated by time and or space (Moore, 1993). Audio tapes and teaching material in printed forms sent through mail were used chiefly for distance education in the past. Kamal, et.al. (2003) say that the advancement in technology and communication system has introduced new trends in distance education. Multiple media as radio, television, social media, online learning programs and videoconferencing are being employed for distance learning. Dimbley et.al. (1992) state that communication in educational context is linked with transmission of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, values, culture, skills, habits and customs effectively.

Many universities started distance education (online classes) for almost all educational programs. The online system or distance learning is new in Pakistani context because as a developing country the institutions and involved stakeholders (students, teachers and educational administrators) were not prepared for it. Distance learning is different from on campus learning because new technology and devices are involved in it that cannot be tackled unless the participants have appropriate training and skills required for it. The pedagogical practices used in online classes are completely different from the on campus teaching methods and techniques. It may be said that it is entirely different world of learning as compared to on campus learning.

Online learning environment may be classified into asynchronous, synchronous and hybrid. Asynchronous teaching/learning mood is the most prevalent and adopted in distance learning. This mood provides students articles, handouts, presentations and audio/video lectures as readily available learning material. It is not time-bound and students can access anywhere anytime through course management system (CMS), virtual learning environment (VLE) and learning management system (LMS). The feedback is delayed in asynchronous classroom. Synchronous mood involves real time interaction that requires simultaneous teacher-student presence such as video conference, question-answer session and lectures with question-answer facility. Video conference permits learners efficient interaction (Yob & Crawford, 2012; Akarasriworn & Ku, 2013) that is significant because it provides social presence of higher levels (Sivunen & Nordback, 2015; Borup, West & Graham, 2012). The synchronous online classroom provides opportunity to students and teachers for interaction and communication in real time and it has close resemblance with traditional (on campus) classroom. According to Rudd & Rudd (2014), the students have opportunity to keep eye contact with the teacher in video conferencing (synchronous mood) and consequently they can hear voice tone and read face expressions that are misinterpreted or missed during online classroom environment. Instant feedback, voice tones and facial expressions make it more like traditional classroom. The hybrid distance learning classroom combines synchronous sessions with asynchronous online tasks or activities for learning.

The University of Lahore (UOL) started distance learning (online classes) using hybrid (asynchronous and synchronous) mood as SLATE and ZOOM applications are being utilized for this purpose. SLATE (Sakai Learning and Teaching Environment) the leading collaboration and learning management system. It supplies online room where learners/students access resources of learning within course sites, take part in online activities and communicate with other students, faculty and staff. The online quizzes are created and administered and results are fed in the grade book. The students take their online exams and quizzes and submit course assignments via SLATE. The courses offered by the concerned university have a corresponding site for the course. SLATE permits private file-sharing between student and teacher. It also contains community websites that are utilized for supporting a range of other learning and teaching activities. UOL is using SLATE for quizzes, exams, assessments, assignments, file-sharing and lecture organization. The SLATE is being employed for asynchronous communication.

ZOOM is USA based communications technology enterprise that provides video communications with an easy and reliable cloud platform for audio and video conferencing, chat, collaboration and webinars across room systems, mobile devices, desktops and telephones. ZOOM Rooms is the original software-based room solution utilized all around the world in conference, training rooms, board, huddle and distance learning classrooms. The pandemic COVID-19 has forced people for adopting quarantine and social distancing measures. The users of ZOOM has spiked 200 million in March 2020 from 10 million in December 2019. Although it is being utilized for social gathering as well but this spike in users' number is mainly due to its use for distance learning (online classes). ZOOM is being used by UOL teachers and students as video-conferencing software in distance learning classes for synchronous communication. Hence, the online communication system that is being used in UOL distance learning programs is hybrid because it contains both synchronous and asynchronous channels for communication.

University of Management and Technology (UMT) is using its LMS for online assignments, quizzes and exams. A link is shared on the UMT participants Email IDs group. They can join classes providing the shared link in their UMT Email addresses or LMS. The online session is conducted through ZOOM. CU Online is the platform of COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore campus for asynchronous online teaching mood which has been introduced during COVID-19 lockdown. The faculty members can use other platform i.e. Google Classroom, ZOOM, MS Teams or WhatsApp etc. as add-on facility. Mostly, MS Teams is being in COMSATS for live online class sessions. In COMSATS University LMS, there is facility for online quizzes, assignments, projects, articles, exams and live sessions where participants can listen and view presentations, take part in conversations and ask questions.

Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore started its online classes a bit late as compared to aforementioned three institutions. MS teams is being used for online discussions and classes in this institution. Assignments and projects are uploaded by the students using MS teams. No quizzes and exams have been conducted yet due to late beginning of online classes.

People express their desires, emotions, transfer information and socialize through interpersonal communication. The process of teaching and learning is impossible without effective communication. The effective communication is the life-blood for teaching-learning phenomenon. The communication problems is one of the most important factor for distance learning because students and teachers face a number of communication barriers during online classes that are not encountered by them during traditional on campus classes. Lack of face-to-face communication and existing physical distance can alter online class communication patterns. Technology is another factor for making communication effective or ineffective. These barriers can render distance learning less productive.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the current research study are:

- i. To explore the role of technology in effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication during distance learning (online classes).
- ii. To find out how and how much students and teachers participate in online class communication despite their physical distance and lack of face-to-face interaction.
- iii. To investigate communication problems faced by teachers and students in online classes.

## **Research Questions**

The study will investigate following research questions:

1. How does technology play role in effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication during distance learning (online classes)?

2. To what extent and how does student-teacher and student-student communication occur in online classroom?
3. What sort of communication problems are faced by the students and teachers in online classes?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for elaborating the role of technology in online classroom communication and involved stakeholders (students and teachers) in this system will be able to use technology more efficiently for effectiveness of communication without which teaching-learning process remains unaccomplished. As the focus of study is on student-teacher and student-student communication patterns and durations, both for teachers and students will have clear picture about changes that are being happened due to shift from face-to-face on campus communication to online classroom communication. This study will give opportunity to students and teachers and future researchers to know about communication problems faced by the participants during online classes. Overall, this research study will be helpful to know about pedagogical practices employed in distance learning and communication techniques, patterns and problems during online classes.

### **Literature Review**

Littlejohn & Foss (2005) say that to define the term 'communication' is the most difficult task. In 'The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach' Dance and Larson identified 126 definitions of communication. Trenholm (2008) opines that experts of communication have been using list of communication definitions given by Dance and Larson (1976) in their book since from the publication of this work. Many experts have made efforts for defining communication but producing a single definition for this discipline has been proved impractical. Griffin, E. A., Ledbetter, A & Sparks, G.G. (2019) have defined communication as the relational process for creation and interpretation of a message that illicit a response.

Dimbleby et al. (1992) say that communication can be effective through the provision of a process of communication that contains diminishing trend in barriers to communication. These problems can be physical barriers that focus on technology related facilities during process of communication, psychological problems linked with stereotype culture and students' backgrounds that refer to miscommunication basic and sematic barriers that begins due to language problems.

İşman et al. (2003) state that the process of communication involves linear, interactive and transactional views from varied barriers perspectives. The linear view is one-way communication in which message sender or creator cannot get any response. The interactive view is two-way communication process that includes nonverbal communication and feedback. The transactional view also contains simultaneous process of sending and receiving feedback. Hence, all communication psychological, semantic and physical barriers are removed through the creation of mutual understanding.

Perreault, Waldman and Alexander (2002) have discussed the manners for getting over obstacles in distance learning programs efficient accomplishment through his effort to eliminate the related issues and barriers. They have pointed out in this study that students enrolled for the distance learning courses face a number of technology related problems. The study participants shed light on existing technical support, communication between students and teachers and accessibility difficulties. Moreover, it is the view of respondents that dependence of technical issues is on technology competence level of students and teachers. Lack of face-to-face communication or interaction with other peers and teachers is reported by majority of the students. Furthermore, the respondents consider technical support centers major factor for enhancing effectiveness of distance learning classes. It is recommended in this research study that adaptation creation about teaching and learning styles in distance classes, provision of training combined with flexibility and enlarged chances to overcome hindrances in online courses delivery, including students' access to resources



for their communication to the with peers and teachers are significant for fostering accomplished and effective communication.

Barrett (2002) elaborates the ways for overcoming the barrier of transactional distance to make communication effective through internet. He states that amount of effective communication barrier can be restricted by making people feel vulnerable. Barrett in this article indicates existence of cultural variations among study participants in university as a barrier. Hence, creation of socio-emotional connection between students and their postings is essential through disciplinary discourse adaptation and online courses knowledge. In addition to it, it is discussed in this study that forms non-verbal communication are needed for reduction of distance among people. The researcher has described delayed arrival of teaching related material, incapacity for responding errors or deletion in teaching material, delayed provision of feedbacks, extensive communication lack among students and students and teachers resulting isolation feelings as barriers in distance teaching and learning programs.

Sharma & Maleyaff (2003) claim that internet education has potential issues and their solutions. According to them, the ethic problem, judgment issue and the distance problems are the major categories of these problems. The distance problem is linked with psychological obstacle in internet education because people have less awareness of how others perceive them. For the psychological distance problem solution, they propose incorporation of face-to-face interaction between teachers and students to hinder isolation feelings though integration of activities of students, course design and pedagogical solutions.

Burch (2003) indicates the communication nature considering current context and combining with effective components of web because of escalating universities online programs. He lays stress on change in nature of communication that has become receiver based from source based due to effect of internet regarding educational goals through the embodiment of the newest mass communication form that depends on individual person basis. Moreover, regarding barriers in two way website communication culture, language, geography and individuals are significant and vital factors for internet environment and effective communication.

Godschalk & Lacy (2001) carried out a research study on distance learning by managing the interactions among participants and expected hindrances in distance learning using survey through e-mails. The results of this study indicate availability problems, technology unfamiliarity, deficiency in student interest and lack of technical support as the expected hurdles in future.

Meyer (2003) clarifies issues and differences in threaded and face-to-face discussions in which the major difference is sharing students' needs linked with gestures, timing, feelings for reaching critical thinking and facial expressions that are converted into meaning. Galusha (1997) describes of distance learning education. In his study, reduction in students' motivation due to insufficient face-to-face interaction, contact with teacher, feedback, support and services for the student, isolation and alienation due to lack of training and experience and students' performance assessment have been explored as problems in distance learning. The reviewed literature makes it quite clear that no research study has been conducted in Pakistan which discusses the distance learning (online classes) communication problems. The current study will fill this existing gap.

## **Research Methodology**

The current research study is based on qualitative approach. The first reason to select qualitative approach is that this approach facilitates in-depth analysis and understanding of the reality and phenomenon. Another reason is that the qualitative approach specifically suitable when a research finds that quantitative techniques are not appropriate for interpreting or describing a particular situation (Bryman, 2008). The researchers utilize a number of tactics or strategies for qualitative research study. The research strategy for this study is case study. The unit for analysis in case studies may be varied from individual to a corporation

or organization. The analysis unit for this study is distance learning (online classroom) that has been inspected by taking information from the students and the teachers who are stakeholders in this system. The intrinsic case study design has been employed in this study because it is used to gain in-depth understanding of the situation. Yin (2009) presents descriptive, explanatory and exploratory forms of case studies. The descriptive case study has been chosen for this study as it is helpful for full description of any phenomenon within its own context. Overall research design for this study is qualitative intrinsic descriptive case study.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The semi-structured interviews have been used as data collection tool for this study.

### **Interviews**

According to Bryman (2008), interviews are the most extensively used in qualitative research and useful in gaining profound understanding of the fact that how participants view this world. He further says that qualitative interviews include semi-structured and unstructured interviews. But semi-structured interviews have been selected for this research study because they ensure maximum pertinent information in limited time. Interview guide that contain particularly reasonable topics relevant to teachers and students' viewpoints about distance learning (online system), their opinions about interactional and communication patterns during online classes and their perspectives about communication problems in distance learning. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

### **Population Description and Sampling Technique**

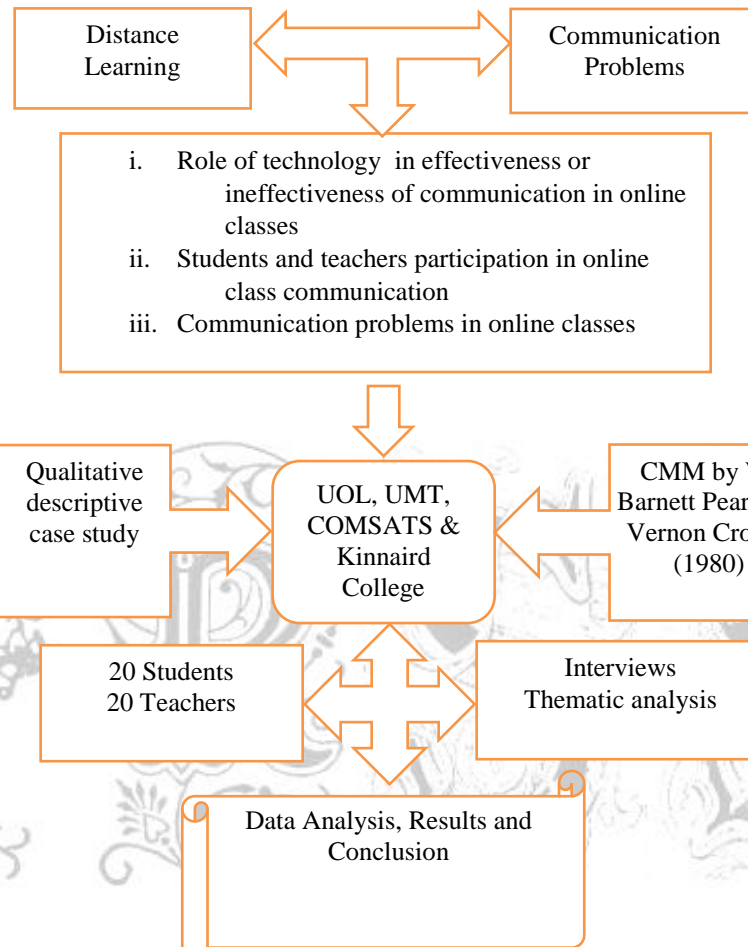
Research population or sample can be a group of people (participants) chosen from a huge population for the goal of an in-depth or survey study. Purposive sampling technique has been employed in this study. The general population for this study includes all students and teachers who are part of distance learning (online classes) at Department of English Language and Literature, UOL, Lahore, Department of Linguistics and Communications, UMT Lahore, Department of Zoology, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore and Department of Humanities, COMSATS Lahore. Anyhow, keeping in view the purposes of this research study, the sample for the study was purposively selected 20 students and 20 teachers from the Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Department of Linguistics and Communications, UMT Lahore, Department of Linguistics and Communications, UMT Lahore, Department of Zoology, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore and Department of Humanities, COMSATS Lahore. Equal number of students and teachers were chosen as respondents from each of the aforesaid universities.

As far as UOL study participants are concerned, 5 students have been selected from the Ph.D. (Linguistics), M.Phil. (Linguistics) and BS (English). The target population of the teachers includes 5 teachers who are teaching Ph.D., M.Phil. Linguistics and BS English online classes. The sample from UMT Lahore included 5 students of M.Phil. (Linguistics) and BS (Linguistics) and same number of teachers who are teaching M.Phil. and BS classes in the Department of Linguistics and Communications, UMT Lahore. The researcher selected 5 teachers and 5 students from Department of Zoology, Kinnaird College for women, Lahore. The participants from COMSATS Lahore included BS (Media and Communication Studies) and MS English (Linguistics & Literature) 5 students and online classes teachers whose number is similar to other universities population sample.

### **Data Analysis**

This study is embedded in the communication interpersonal theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) by W. Barnett Pearce & Vernon Cronen (1980). The CMM has been employed as theoretical framework for this research study. The interviews data have been categorized and organized into

themes for interpretation. As the semi-structured interviews have been used for data collection, the researcher wrote the questions in order to foreground particular themes. This approach has helped researcher for coding and organizing the data through the identification of certain patterns and themes and linking them to the research questions of this study.



Steps and Diagram of the Methodology

## Data Analysis and Results

This study has been conducted to access role of technology in effective or ineffectiveness of communication during online class, extent of student-teacher, student-student and student-content communication occurrence in online classroom and communication problems faced by the students and teachers during online classes. The themes emerged from the collected data though interviews are discussed below.

### Role of Technology in Communication

The teachers and students were asked about role of technology in communication effectiveness or ineffectiveness during online class. Using their responses, the main themes are discussed under.

### **Significant role of technology in communication effectiveness**

Both the teachers and students responded that communication is the life blood of any classroom activity whether it is traditional on campus class or online class. According to respondents, technology has played significant role in effectiveness of communication in general but its role is more prominent when we talk about online communication. In comparison with teachers, the students were more in favour of technology role in the betterment of communication in our daily routine life. One of the students opined that technology has made our communication effective in terms of ease and quickness as it assists us to contact and interact with others. A teacher remarked in this regard that technology has revolutionized in the field of communication but its effectiveness is still questionable in developing countries like Pakistan particular in distance learning due to technical issues.

### **A way-out in crisis and technology**

It was pointed out by the majority of the respondent teachers and students that technology provides way-out at the moment of crisis. It means that technology facilitates us when we are facing any problem. According to them, pandemic COVID-19 has created problems for educational institutions, administrators, teachers and students. The modern communication technologies have provided solutions in the form of online classes under distance learning system. Online classes are not possible without these modern communication technologies. Therefore, technology has played significant role in making online communication effective.

### **Adaptability and skill in use of technology define its role**

Majority of the teachers and students believed that adaptability and skill in use of technology define its role for effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication. As the rate of adaptability and skill in use of technology is not high in our context, the technology is not playing as important role in communication effectiveness during online classes as it should.

### **Need for appropriate training**

It was collective response from the students of all classes that they and their teachers had not been trained properly before starting online classes under distance learning education initiative during COVID-19 pandemic by their respective universities. Consequently, they faced communication issues during online classes. The teachers were divided responding about it.

A few said that institutions provided them required training for online classes but most of them said that they were not provided training but if training sessions were conducted, these were not useful because of technical complexities, shortage of time, lack of practice and non-availability of required gadgets in the situation of lockdown where everything was stand still. As a result, they faced issues while communicating with their students in online classroom.

### **Compatibility with ethical and moral norms**

A few respondents from teachers and students (M.Phil. and Ph.D.) were of the view that importance of new technology is directly linked with the ethical and moral concerns of the concerned society where this is being introduced. If new technology is compatible with existing ethical and moral norms, it is accepted by the majority and it plays positive and constructive role in its concerned field. But if it is contradictory to the prevalent moral and ethical values, people reject it and this rejection disables new trend from playing effective role in the relevant field. They added that technology for online class communication is not contradictory to our ethical and moral norms and it is helpful in the effectiveness of online class communication.



### **Student-teacher and student-student communication in online class**

The students and teachers were asked questions about student-teacher and student-student communication during online classes under distance learning. The themes generated from their answers have been discussed below.

#### **Reduction in communication in terms of frequency and quantity**

All the respondents were agreed that student-teacher and student-student communication reduces in terms of frequency and quantity. Now the participants only communicate for a limited time of class and this interaction also lacks many aspects of communication. One teacher said that there are many factors for this reduction in communication e.g. situational variation, dependence on gadgets, sending-receiving problems, cost etc. The students claimed that student-teacher communication decreases more as compared to student-student communication. The reason is that they cannot communicate with teachers as freely as they do during on campus classes because they are not sure about teacher's availability for addressing their queries.

#### **Feelings of isolation and alienation**

Majority students expressed that they felt isolation and alienation due to physical distance in online classes. They were of the opinion that these feelings of aloofness and aloneness become reason of communication reduction with peers and teachers. A similar kind of view was expressed by the teachers with a little difference. They believed that co-presence is one of the inevitable elements of effective communication and learning. But the co-presence is nowhere in online classes which renders process of learning and communication less productive and effective.

#### **Hesitation and hindrances in communication while offline**

According to students, they feel hesitant in communicating with teachers and other students when they are offline. It is due to infrastructural (facilities, services, instruments and installations), psychological (interest, motivation and desire) and physical hindrances. Most of the teachers have not expressed any hesitation to communicate with students when they are offline but one teacher said that 'he feels awkward and finds himself in problem when he is in need of communicating his offline students because his message is not understood appropriately by all the students due to different interpretations'.

#### **Comparison between on campus and online communication**

The teachers and students had agreement on the point that student-teacher and student-student communication has no comparison with online communication in terms of quality, quantity, effectiveness or any positive aspect. Consequently, they rated on campus communication preferable to online communication.

#### **Sociability, intimacy, emotional and personal bond**

Most of the respondents among B.S. students and a few M.Phil. students expressed that online classes reduce sociability and intimacy that is required for effective communication. The emotional and personal bond among participants do not remain as strong as it is in on campus traditional classroom. Hence, communication reduction is the natural phenomenon that occurs as a result of this change.

#### **Communication Problems**

The respondents mentioned a wide range of communication problems during online class. The following themes have been evolved from these responses.

### **Lack of face-to-face interaction and physical distance among communicants**

The students and teachers explained that lack of face-to-face interaction and existence of physical distance function as barriers for communication during online class. One teacher said that we are accustomed to 'seeing is believing' during on campus teaching. Contrary to it, it is advised by the universities to keep students camera off due to privacy and some other problems. The students can see their teachers during online session but teachers cannot. As a result, it becomes impossible for them to convey what they want. The students said that we can see our teacher though video during online class but it cannot be alternate of face-to-face discussion where we are so close that we may understand so many things focusing on nonverbal components of communication.

### **Issue of time management and lack of flexibility**

It was told by the teachers that they face issues related to time management during online class. While on campus classes they can extent, reduce or exchange time schedule considering the requirement of topics and even they can make changes in an on-going session but in online class everything is predefined due to involvement of gadgets that lack human flexibility and one cannot make changes if needed on the spot. One of the respondents stated that 'it is not easy to teach a complex and lengthy topics effectively in a class of more than hundred students (BS) within a specific time-limit. In such situations, questions arise and one needs more time for better elaboration but it seems impossible due to rigid time-limit.' Another teacher opined that time management is not an issue in M.Phil. and Ph.D. because number of students is less and they are mature whereas this problem arises in BS classes where students are more than one hundred and they keep on trying to create hurdles for teachers due to immature behavior and foolish responses. Hence, teacher cannot convey what he desires due to non-availability of flexibility in time management.

Time management problem was reported as problem in online class communication by the students of M.Phil. and Ph.D. classes when they give presentations and take quizzes. They claim that most of their time for presentation is wasted due to technical issues and they cannot present his ideas comprehensively in the remaining time. Similarly, their quizzes are subjective as compared to BS objective quizzes. It means that they have to type answers of quizzes but their typing speed is not so much better as their writing speed so it becomes difficult for them to write in the given time.

### **Written communication problems**

The written communication issues faced by the teachers and students during online classes are linked with quizzes, projects and assignments. Some Ph.D. and M.Phil. students pointed out typing speed as a problem in their quizzes when these are subjective. This problem has not been mentioned by BS students because their quizzes are objective. The teachers described less use of on the spot writing facility (whiteboard) during online class as an issue in written communication. Though online software provide this whiteboard facility yet its use is complicated and most of the teachers do not use it.

### **Oral communication issues**

Oral communication issues stated by the respondents are connected with lecture delivery, presentations, oral instructions and question answer sessions. The students had the view that they face oral communication problem when they take part in question answer sessions and give presentations in online class. The teachers were of the view that they encounter barrier when they deliver lectures and instruct orally.

### **Environmental factors that cause communication problems**

Environment is one of the main factors for effective communication. The respondents described that traditional on campus classes are held in peaceful formal environment where nothing untoward happens

whereas generally teachers and particularly students attend online classes from informal settings. The reason is that they have no specific arrangements for this in their homes specifically in Pakistani context. Informal environment lessens students' motivation and also mentally divided when they attend classes. In the same way, the teachers also feel somewhat awkward taking classes in informal environment. Many types of interferences may also be observed during online classes such background movements, sounds and gesturing someone in house. All these environment factors become hurdle in online classroom communication.

### **Communication and technical issues**

No doubt online classes depend on technology and technical issues is the major communication barrier. The teachers and students stated a number of technical problems. These are issues of internet speed, connectivity, gadgets availability, software compatibility to their devices, electricity problems, file uploading issues, audio-video problems and sharing screen issues. All these issues ultimately affect the standard of communication that takes place during online sessions.

### **Privacy issues**

New technology and internet have affected privacy. It was told by the interviewees that sometime communication in online classroom is affected due to privacy issues. Sometimes, teacher wants to watch the students while attempting quizzes and giving presentations so that they may be graded accordingly. But institutions do not let them do so and a part of communication that remains hidden from them. One teacher added by saying that 'students make pictures of them when video camera is on or even other students' camera is on and they edit these photos and ridicule them on social media. This situation forces us to keep not only students' cameras off but also our cameras too. One may clearly understand that how much effective communication will be, when online video class is converted into audio class.'

### **Voice quality, distractions and paralinguistic features**

It has been stated by the respondents that voice quality and other paralinguistic features are vital ingredients for effective communication in classroom. But the voice quality is distorted and paralinguistic features are missed in online class communication. Distractions due to network problems also disfigure voice and paralinguistic features. Paralinguistic features and voice quality are essential for meaningful and effective communication which are missed during online classroom communication.

### **Lack of simultaneous verbal and nonverbal communication**

Verbal and nonverbal communication are interconnected and inseparable and the separation of them leads toward ineffectiveness of communication, stated the respondents. They were of the view that the students have facility to see teachers during online class while teachers are instructed by the institutions to keep students' cameras off during class that prevents teachers of having their students view. Even students cannot view their teachers clearly and consistently due to weak internet signals and technical issues. Consequently, students in general and teachers in particular sometime cannot receive other communicant's verbal and nonverbal responses simultaneously which results in communication problem.

### **Jumbled responses, turn-taking and delivery of message**

Among the teachers who are teaching BS classes, they delineated that most of the time they get jumbled responses from the class when they ask questions. The number of students in their classes is high and a group of students receive question at the same time, start to answer simultaneously. Their sounds mix up and teacher gets nothing out of this conversation. Another group receives the same message with a bit delay and they also join the first group of speakers that makes the conversation more chaotic. As one teacher remarked, 'the jumbled responses and fluctuation in the delivery of same message make the whole

communication in online communication a mess'. This kind of problem was reported in very less frequency in M.Phil. and Ph.D. online classes.

### **Lack in coordination of meaning and discrepancies in perception during communication**

Another barrier that is mentioned by the respondents was coordination of meaning and discrepancies in perception during online communication. They believed that this issue also persists in on campus communication but its intensity and frequency is greater in online classroom communication. They explained that coordination of meaning exists when sender's meaning is rightly perceived by the receiver but they said that discrepancies in perception regarding meaning during online classroom communication is very common factor that causes semantic barrier in the process of communication. This tendency is more in BS students due to limited vocabulary, exposure and thinking capacity.

### **Non-seriousness of BS students**

Almost all teachers of BS classes pointed out non-serious attitude of students as hurdle in effective communication during online classes. Some teachers reported that BS students only join class for attendance after that they put their mikes on mute mood and do not listen or respond teacher. It is not possible for teachers to keep watching all the students when number is so high.

Even if any student is asked by the teacher, he or she complains about weak internet signals. One of the teachers said that 'teacher delivers lecture, initiates a discussion or pass instructions but when he asks something in this regard from the students, they pretend that they are facing network problem and they could not listen what he said, some of them even do not respond to the teacher. This show non-serious and careless attitude of students towards online class. Such attitude is a prominent communication problem in online classroom.'

### **Shorten communication and loss of communication art**

Some Ph.D. and M.Phil. students said that online classes shorten our communication with others and consequently participants lose art of communication with passage of time which may be destructive and dangerous for their practical life. The teachers expressed in this regard that art of communicating with others determines our success in practical life and online classroom communication damages this essential art.

### **Teaching and learning about real world**

The interviewees were of the view that teaching-learning process involves transferring truths and realities of the real world to others but this process is not successful when controlled artificial environment is used for this. The online classroom is a controlled artificial system of communication which is miles away from the real life world. This remoteness from real life makes online classroom communication less effective for the participants.

### **Feeling of talking to an anonymous**

It was told by almost all respondents that they have feeling of talking to an anonymous while they communicate in online class. The reason is that most of the time a speaker cannot see others in online classroom and the mikes of listeners are also kept mute. The listeners only unmute their mikes when they have to say or ask something from the speaker. This situation makes speaker feel that he is talking to someone anonymous because he does not see or listen those to whom he is talking and it hinders communication process.



### **No active listening during online class**

Active and reflective listening on the part of the listeners is necessary for effective communication. The importance of listening escalates in online classroom because the participants of communication depends upon audio of the others and video is used scarcely. The respondents stated that listeners do not listen actively during online class due to various informal distractions and attitudinal tendencies. Absence of active listening is major communication issue in online class.

### **Delayed feedback in asynchronous mood of online class**

Asynchronous mood is characterized having delayed feedback. The use of asynchronous mood is required with synchronous mood in distance learning system. Asynchronous mood is useful when all participants of a group or community are responsible and keep themselves update while checking their respective devices and accounts for communication with others. The respondents said that they get delayed response and feedback when they communicate with other members of their community using asynchronous mood of communication. They consider this delay major communication obstacle.

### **Reversal of performance due to typing instead of writing**

The students discussed about their problem of typing instead of writing for their quizzes, exams, projects and assignments. The students showed their concern specifically about quizzes and term exams in which they are given fixed time to type their answers and they are not expert and so good in typing and use of gadgets which they need to utilize for this purpose. Some students who were not good in writing but they are expert in typing and required gadgets usage expressed satisfaction in this regard. This situation shows a reversal in terms of their grades and performance in the class. The same thing was discussed by one of respondent teachers in this way, 'The students' performance grades have been changed in online classes. Those who were good during on campus class and are not so impressive perhaps because of sudden changes in their assessment ways and technicalities of online classes.'

### **Practical work and online classroom**

The students and teachers were agreed on this point that online classes are not feasible for disciplines where practical or lab-work is essential. They were of the opinion that practical work cannot not be understood or done only listening lecture about it or seeing a procedure how it is being performed by another person. It is a matter of personal experience that can be acquired in a purposively designed laboratory. They believe that lack of this practicality in such disciplines also causes communication problem during online class interaction and discussion.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Pedagogical practices used in distance learning (online) classes go side by side with communication. Effective communication is as essential for distance learning as it is for on campus classes. Emergence of distance learning in Pakistan in the wake of COVID-19 has opened new horizons in the field of education but the results of this show that this trend has brought new communication trends, patterns and problems. The participants need to update themselves to be efficient part of virtual communication environment and they are to focus issues connected with online classroom communication for making it more effective. Griffin, E. A., Ledbetter, A & Sparks, G.G. (2019) have defined communication as the relational process for creation and interpretation of a message that illicit a response. Consequently, it is necessary to make online classroom communication a system that involves relational creativity, message interpretation and feedback.

First, communication is an inevitable element of any classroom setting and technology is useful in making communication effective whether it is traditional on campus class communication or online class communication. But new technology creates a sense of fear among new users which can be tackled by providing appropriate training for its use. Second, student-teacher and student-student communication reduces substantially. The decrease in student-teacher communication exceeds both in terms of frequency and quantity. Furthermore, online classes develop sense of isolation and alienation among participants and on campus class communication is better with regard to quality, quantity and effectiveness. Third, physical distance, lack of face-to-face interaction, issues of time management, non-serious attitude, privacy issues, perception discrepancies, environmental factors, lack of active listening, absence of lab or practical work, effect on performance due to changes, feeling of talking to anonymous, technical issues, jumbled responses and turn-taking, voice quality and paralinguistic, simultaneous verbal and nonverbal communication, problems linked with written and oral communication have been identified as major problems in online class communication under distance learning.

This study is limited to four universities which are housed in Lahore. Moreover, it has focused only linguistics and communication departments of aforesaid three institutions and department of zoology of one institution. The study is qualitative and sample size is small. The following suggestions are for future research studies:

Similar studies may be conducted in other universities and in those departments of the universities where lab work or practical work is essential in class because only one practical work department has been included in this study. The future researchers may conduct research study with large sample using quantitative research paradigm. A study can be conducted about changes in communication patterns of on campus and online classroom communication.

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### **Appendix**

#### **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

To collect information from the students and teachers about online classroom communication issues, the following questions were added in the semi-structured interview guide.

1. How much importance has communication in distance learning?
2. Do you think that technology contributes to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of online communication? If either way yes, how?
3. Do you feel any difficulty when you join online class communication using existing new technology?
4. How do you rate this sudden change from on campus classes to online classes with regard to communication?
5. In your opinion how much student-teacher and student-student communication take place during online classes?
6. How often do you communicate with participants (teachers and students) of online class?
7. What place would you accord to physical distance among communicants and lack of face-to-face interaction in online classroom?
8. Is it possible to convey what a communicant wants while communicating through online system?
9. How do you compare your communication in traditional on campus classroom and online classroom?
10. Do you think online classes are feasible for practical subjects?
11. What kind of difficulties do you have for lab-work or practical work in online class communication?
12. How do you view written (quizzes, exams, assignments and presentation) and oral communication in online classroom?
13. What are the major written or oral communication problems and issues that are encountered by you during online class?