EXPLORING STUDENTS' VIEWS ON LEARNING ENGLISH ONLINE VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY

Abstract

I have witnessed the massive impact of COVID-19 on human lives. As a professor, I have used many pieces of software, like Google Meet, Zoom, etc., to teach my students during lockdown. Recently, the university authorities where I work have asked me to use a new application to continue teaching online. So, the paper explores students' experience of using Microsoft Teams. The present study is aimed at exploring students' views on learning English online through Microsoft Teams software during the sudden outbreak of Omicron, a new variant of COVID-19 in the month of January 2022 in Gujarat. The study was carried out at Charotar University of Science and Technology (CHARUSAT), Changa, with 50 B. Tech. first semester students of 7 batches such as CS, IT, ME, EC, CE, EE and CL. The present research is a case study in nature. All 50 participants were learning English as a foreign language. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams. Through content analysis, the collected data was analyzed. The findings of the study revealed the reality of e-learning, the accessibility of Microsoft Teams, and lastly, the experience of learning English online as a foreign language. With all these concerns, the researcher tried to shed some light on learning a foreign language with a particular software.

Keywords: Covid– 19, First Language (FL)**,** Microsoft Teams

Author

Dr. Tushar Sumanchandra Brahmbhatt
Assistant Professor (English)
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (DHS), IIIM
Charotar University of Science and Technology, Changa
 Anand, Gujarat, India
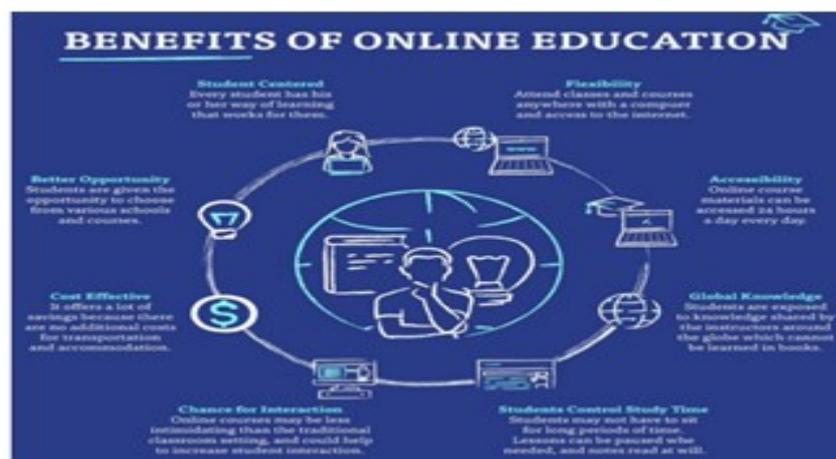drtusharbrahmbhatt@gmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

In this digital era, it is undeniable that online learning, known as E-learning, has gradually proven to be an indispensable tool in education. With online courses, learners can popularize and improve their knowledge. During the Covid-19 epidemic, member institutions of the Charotar University of science and Technology (CHARUSAT) deployed online teaching and learning on the Microsoft Teams platform. This has been considered a timely solution that helps keep teaching uninterrupted and provides teachers and educational administrators an opportunity to promote creativity in online training. This study explores students' views of learning English online through the Microsoft Teams application in the classroom environment during the outbreak of COVID-19 in Gujarat.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Wagner et al. (2008), e-learning could benefit students through the exploration of discussion boards, including forums, email, and chats, which motivated students to interact, expose and respect different standpoints without any fear of losing face. Hence, students can have continual access to materials regularly, seek help from teachers or peers, explore lessons at his/ her own pace, use preferred learning devices, and gain timely feedback in order to reflect upon their own learning.

In the review of recent relevant studies and related books, Seragen (2020) proposed a diagram presenting eight different benefits of e-learning, including flexibility, accessibility, global knowledge, students control study time, a chance for interaction, cost-effectiveness, better opportunity, and student-centered as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Benefits of e-learning (Adapted from Aragon, 2020

III. METHODOLOGY

The research is a descriptive case study. The basic purpose of the present study is to understand students' attitudes towards using Microsoft Teams during the COVID–19

pandemic. The students are learning English and other subjects using Microsoft Teams software continuously for one and a half years at CHARUSAT.

1. **Participants and Context:** The research was carried out at Charotar University of Science and Technology (CHARUSAT), Changa (Gujarat) during the academic year 2021-22 with B. Tech. first semester students. The students were learning English as a first language (FL). I have been teaching English to B. Tech. first semester students for 7 batches, such as CS, IT, ME, EC, CE, EE, and CL. I decided to randomly choose 50 students to learn their views on the software. Even if I talk about their background, it is quite similar. All the students are learning English as a foreign language in their high schools. Furthermore, all participants have been learning online for more than a year at CHARUSAT.

2. **Data Collection:** While data collection, two students faced technical issues joining teams, and the problem was resolved with the assistance of one of the technicians from CHARUSAT. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Microsoft Teams to collect the data for the present study. Based on the participants' experience of learning, taking examinations, submitting assignments to teams and so on, I asked the questions as follows:

    *   What is your reaction to e-learning and online learning?
    *   What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of learning English through Microsoft Teams software?
    *   Would you agree that Microsoft Teams is easy to use as a learning software?

    I took all 50 interviews in the department of Humanities and Social Sciences at CHARUSAT and it took almost an hour and 56 minutes to finish. For the analysis, I recorded all the interviews with the kind permission of the participants. Consequently, the data was transcribed carefully. I gave a code to every student, and their details were kept strictly confidential. (For example, BT1 for student No. 1, BT2 for student No. 2, BT3 for student No. 3, etc.)

3. **Data analysis:** Content analysis was conducted in order to analyse the collected data online. In the beginning, I found it a bit difficult to analyse, but after listening carefully twice, I understood the views of all 50 participants. I also used an open-coding approach for analysis.

4. **Findings:** This section discussed various topics comprehensively as follows:

    *   **E-Learning: the facts:** The truth about E-learning is the first topic of the study undertaken. So far as online learning is concerned, the majority of students believed that technology serves as an oxygen in our lives. It is indeed an irreplaceable part of life and it is hard to survive without it. They further say that technology is needed for hours during this particular outbreak. Technology will play a crucial role in the decades to come, they said.

➢ "COVID 19 caused complete chaos and anarchy throughout the entire world, but it has had no effect on our education to date. We are able to continue our studies with the blessings of technology." (BT4)

➢ "It is no wonder to say that, with the blessings of e-learning, the sessions were transformed from theory to practice. This will certainly help us to use English as a first language in our personal as well as professional development." (BT 41, BT 58)

➢ "Because of online learning, we could access a lot of reading materials, take an exam online and attend sessions at our pace smoothly." (BT 09)

➢ "E-learning saved us from COVID-19 above all. I have been attending classes throughout as if I was there in offline sessions. There is no discrepancy as such." (BT 36, BT 47)

➢ "E-learning helped our families from the infection of severe virus Covid." (BT 12, BT 18, BT 33)

- **Advantages / benefits of e-learning:** Few students believe that online learning offers many benefits as follows:

➢ "I thank you, sir, because you keep on sharing recordings with us. Many a time I fail to attend your session on account of poor internet connectivity as I live in a village. " (BT 26)

➢ "I could save my travel expenses and save time." (BT 15)

➢ "Sir, you are used to showing us animated and informative videos on a particular topic you are teaching, and this multimedia sustains our interest, I would say. It is sincere learning along with joy." (BT 19, BT 28, BT 34)

➢ "I think there is no effective and another method to teach and learn during the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 across the globe." (BT 50)

➢ "My classmates often crack jokes in the serious ongoing sessions of yours. Online classes save me from such situations, as I am able to work at my own pace. (BT 11, BT 39)

➢ Of course, online learning is the only option to save me and my entire family from the COVID-19 infection. It would not be an exaggeration to say that online learning saved thousands of students and their families. (BT 01, BT 17, BT 38, BT 48)

➢ "So far as my online examinations are concerned, I did not even use a single piece of paper. I took my examinations and even today I am submitting my assignments online. Hence, I will save trees and the environment of my India. " (BT 40)

- **Disadvantages / Limitations of E-learning**

➢ "Sir, I We are four silbings. Due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, we middle-class families cannot afford four mobile phones as per usual. So another method of teaching or face-to-face learning should be thought upon. " (BT 31)

➢ "I recently had an eye operation and continuously looking at mobile displays causes some issues for me." (BT 45)

➢ "I belong to the rural area and am often unable to connect my device to the internet." (BT 23, BT 48)

➢ "Sir, I apologies that sometimes I pretend as if I am attending a session by connecting myself through my laptop, but actually I do so just for the sake of attendance." (BT 03)

➢ "Sometimes, while taking an examination on any difficult subject, we are used to sharing our answers through whatsapp with other friends. (BT 04, BT 17, BT 21, BT 22, BT 32, BT 39, BT 44)

➢ Thus, students have different reactions towards online learning. The majority of the students are of the view that learning online is an incredibly fascinating experience, except for certain limitations.

5. **The Features of Microsoft Teams:** The next section of the discussion is the user-friendliness of the Microsoft Teams software. The following are some reactions of the participants.

- "I could upload my assignments without facing any difficulties given by my teachers." (BT 17, BT 21)
- "Through the software, the professor can share his or her screen so that we experience face-to-face learning." (BT 13, BT 02)
- "It automatically records our attendance just with a click by the professor. So we do need to report individually after the end of the sessions. " (BT 01, BT 22)
- "I can message my professors in case of any doubt or query without disturbing my class. By the end of my session, the professor could see that message and explain it." (BT 48).

6. **Learning English as a Foreign Language Online:** In this section, students have different opinions on learning English as a foreign language via MS Teams. Some of them believe that it has some benefits which should be highlighted. Some of the pros and the cons are as follows:

- **The Pros:** Some students believe that learning a foreign language online is much more advantageous than face-to-face method.

    "Learning English as a foreign language online is indeed a fascinating experience for me. I could watch recordings of the sessions frequently as and when required. I experienced it while my professor had a session on "writing skills in English." He gave me an assignment to develop a paragraph on a specific theme. I could do the exercise well by watching the recording many times. While in a face-to-face classroom, I should ask the same question over and over again to my professor, and he may get irritated. Now, if I have any doubt, I only use this method. " (BT 17)

    Another participant confesses that it helps to rectify errors while speaking in a foreign language.

    "Many thanks to online learning and my professor. I was learning four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. While extemporaneous speaking, my professor records the speech of each student and afterwards shows it to us. He also

offers necessary suggestions, and we are getting better at using English as a foreign language in class and outside the world. " (BT 24).

- **The Cons;** Like every coin has two sides, online learning has some handicaps. Some students think that learning a foreign language online has some handicaps.
  - ➢ "I cannot maintain eye contact during a session and my speaking test in English." (BT 11, BT 47).
  - ➢ "I get no motivation from my classmates and feel less confident when speaking in a foreign language. The students keep their cameras and mics turned off, and there is no applause. " (BT 18, BT 44)

IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to explore students' views on learning English via Microsoft Teams Software during the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in Gujarat. The result of the study showed that students have different perceptions about e-learning and learning English through Microsoft Teams.

I have covered three main areas in the present study, such as **"The Facts of E-Learning,"** "The Accessibility of Microsoft Teams," and finally, "Learning English as a Foreign Language Online."

The first section of the study is on the realities of e-learning. I divided the entire batch of CSPIT B. Tech. students into two sections: those who believe that online learning is advantageous and those who believe that e-learning has some disadvantages/limitations. The group who believed that online learning is beneficial remarked that we can re-watch the sessions in case we miss any of the sessions on account of technical defects; online sessions save travel expenses and time; multimedia creates interactivity in the classroom; reduces distraction ratio, keeps safe from the infection of COVID-19 infection; and it is eco-friendly as it saves paper.

Another group reported that online learning is problematic to a certain extent. They think that in the case of 3–4 siblings, it will be difficult to attend the sessions simultaneously. Middle class families can't afford 3-4 mobile phones on a limited family income; continuously looking at the mobile display harms eyes and causes other physical issues; and issues with internet connectivity in rural areas of Gujarat.

The second section of the present study is the accessibility of Microsoft Teams. The students said that it was user-friendly and easy to use. Postal et al. (2019) found out that using Microsoft Teams helps professors in terms of its organized interface and provides many different opportunities, such as chatting with students, posting images and notes, recording and posting videos easily, which are similar to the findings of this study. Tran (2021) also revealed that using Microsoft Teams for teaching English to freshmen was helpful and students found it beneficial thanks to its features such as accessibility, and user-friendliness.

The third and final section of this paper is learning English as a foreign language online. It has the pros and cons of both. The recording of the sessions helped students to

develop their productive skills, such as speaking and writing in English. Besides, some students believe that there are some problems with learning English as a foreign language as well. They underlined that proper eye contact between professor and teacher is always lacking in online learning. Furthermore, they also remarked that after speaking in English, they had no motivation or appreciation from their peers. While in face-to-face learning, everyone does.

Every study has limitations. The research was carried out at a state private university in Gujarat state (India). More research should be carried out to get a deeper understanding of the software useful for classroom teaching. A similar study was conducted in Turkey to teach French online through Microsoft Teams. Similar research from other countries should be carried out so that readers and scholars have an opportunity to compare and contrast how things are going on all around the world. This would give an idea to policy-makers and education planners about how to make the situation better for all students in the whole world during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing equality of opportunity.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that online learning via Microsoft Teams supports the students' learning environment optimally. Most respondents of this study gave their positive perception toward the students' learning environment in an online class. The positive judgment from the respondents came from their experience in online learning by using Microsoft Teams. Furthermore, online learning supports their interaction between student-student interaction, as well as student-teacher interaction.

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