

Challenges Faced by Teachers during the Implementation of Hybrid Learning at Higher Education Institutions in Karachi, Pakistan

Hina Zaheer¹, Dr.Aziz un nisa²

Abstract

Hybrid learning is a new approach adopted by many of educationists, particularly at the higher education level. It allows the synchronization of both online and physical learning which enhance the flexibility of learning opportunities. Implication of Hybrid learning during COVID-19 at Higher education level faced a lot of challenges. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the challenges faced by Higher Education Instructors affecting the implementation of Hybrid Learning at Higher Education level, in one of the Government University of Karachi, Pakistan. The challenges are classified as (i) personal (ii) professional (iii) institutional and (iv) contextual challenges. Qualitative research method is used where 8 instructors from one of the Government University of Karachi, Pakistan were selected from one of the department of social science faculty. They were interviewed personally through an adapted set of open ended questions. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The results revealed that a number of challenges were faced by the teachers among which professional challenges were most prominent for the ineffective implementation of Hybrid Learning. It was concluded that professional training of the teachers was requirement to adapt new education approaches in future.

Keywords: Hybrid Learning, Higher Education institutions, professional challenges, personal challenges, institutional challenges, contextual challenges.

1.Introduction

Vijayan (2021) stated that the phase of COVID-19 was the most disastrous phase that the world had ever faced, there was not only the threat of the virus and the lives of the people were at stake but the whole world has paralyzed not for a day or two for more than a year. All the sectors shifted to online mode for their survival and the education sector was no exception to it. At both government and private level a lot of remedies were introduced to continue

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, University of Karachi

² Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Karachi

the education such as tele-schools were introduced, broadcasting through radios was also done but, as the condition prevailed there was no other option left than shifting to online mode of teaching. It was followed worldwide and the Pakistan being a developing country also tried to cope up with the situation by adopting this method (Dison, Padayachee & Quicios, 2022). Akram, Anjum and Batool (2020) stated that a lot of challenges were faced by the teachers as well as students. Some of the challenges were: infrastructure and curriculum flexibility to incorporate technology, unavailability of the internet facilities, electricity issues, understanding of correct pedagogy, training of teachers and students, lack of vision and support from institution, reluctance to accept the change, technophobia etc.

According to Mercader and Gairin (2020) during COVID-19 the Higher Educational Institutes had shifted their focus from fully physical or the traditional learning method to a new approach of hybrid learning in order to continue the education during pandemic. A lot of challenges raised as the shift was sudden and the teachers as well as students were not prepared to adopt the new setup. It was also found during that time period that the education system prevailing at that time had a lot of leaks in it and was not fit to handle such situations. It demanded drastic change in order to survive in future. Ali (2022) stated that Higher Education level is the most crucial stage of education. As the students at this level have already invested a lot in their studies and are ready to move to the practical world outside and become the source of economical development of the country. Vijayan (2021) stated there are a lot of reasons for the implementation of the Hybrid learning system in all the educational institutes especially at higher education level. It has been valued by the educationist as it addresses towards the flexibility and the personalization of the curricula providing students with the distinguished instructions (Mercader & Gairin, 2020). It also enhances the engagement and indulgence of the students providing them variety of learning resources (Ali, 2022).

A lot of previous researches have evident and explored the factors responsible to influence the effective enforcement of the hybrid learning system at higher educational level. For example Akram, Anjum and Batool (2020) in one of their research identified that the institution plays an important role toward the successful enforcement of Hybrid learning, Ibrahim and Nat (2019) conducted a research on how the institutional strategies and policies play a vital role towards the enforcement of hybrid learning model. Sharjeel, Dool and Shah (2020) in one of their research found the perspective of the students towards the hindrance in the adoption of the hybrid learning system. It was found that teachers have substantial role and influence toward the changes in educational institutes. Effective and efficient enforcement of the hybrid learning system in

higher educational level not only requires the teachers to acquire new skill but also demand the change in their teaching pedagogy. They also address the beliefs and attitudes of teachers toward the technological and pedagogical changes (O'Dea & Stern, 2022). Khan and Abid (2021) found that teachers have emotional beliefs toward their practices and therefore require lot of practice to adopt the new techniques. Lack of training makes them less confident and therefore they rejects the new instructional processes. It is a teachers who make the successful or unsuccessful embedding of the new techniques, as they face a lot of challenges in implementing new teaching and technological skills. As hybrid learning system is one of the new pedagogical technique of teaching it also require the acceptance and positive attitude of teachers for its enforcement. According to Abuhassan, Megat, Yahaya, Azhina and Al-Rahim (2020) in-order to deal with change in the teaching pedagogy, changing curricula and the instructional techniques towards the Hybrid learning the amalgam of physical and online methods of teaching is required. According to Bond et al. (2020) many of the higher educational instructors have adopted hybrid learning system very positively and have redesigned their courses successfully on the contrary many of the university teachers fail to adopt this new technique due to some internal or external motivational factors such as: workload, limited time, lack of training, personal beliefs etc.

1.1 Problem Statement

O'Dea and Stern (2022) stated apart from all those problem one cannot deny the benefits of blended or Hybrid learning. The incorporation of ICT in teaching learning process has transformed it into a new learning environment which provides multiple choices to the teachers as well as the students. It provide flexibility of time and place particularly at higher education level. It has globalized the education system as the content or material can be transferred to anywhere by just one click. The education sector has discouraged both complete face to face and complete distance learning programs and has given an intermediate solution to it in the form of blended or hybrid learning. Alkhnbashi, Mohammad and Bamasoud (2024) stated that it is not only a medium of transferring information but it also helps in the development of other skills such as: creativity, association, information literacy, collaboration, communication etc. If blended or hybrid learning is properly adopted by the Higher Educational Institutes it will help them to be more flexible and agile which will ultimately help them to adapt the contextual changes quickly in a positive manner which is cost effective.

Sharjeel, Dool and Shah (2020) stated that in spite of the fact that digital learning has proven to be beneficial for students as well as for the teachers but

there are certain drawbacks. Implementation of the blended or hybrid learning is the concerning issue for its proper functioning. The institutes offering this approach lack the sharing of their vision with the concern staff. Lack of support from the institutes to implement the hybrid learning system also become a source of demotivation for the instructors as a result of which they deny acceptance of change. Capacity building for hybrid learning is lacking in institutes. Negative perception and beliefs of the instructors and students also diminishes the effectiveness of blended or hybrid learning approach (Abuhassna, Megat, Yahaya, Azlina, & Al-rahmi, 2020). Ali (2022) investigated through an active research the interaction of the instructor with the students and found a non-significant interaction between them in hybrid learning approach. The Higher Educational Institutes are focusing more on the online technologies as the medium of instruction but still the opinion and the beliefs of the instructors regarding hybrid or blended learning approach are negative.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Ali (2022) found that still more experience is require for the integration of blended or hybrid learning approach in teaching learning process. In order to effectively and efficiently implement it particularly at higher Education level, it is required to identify the challenges and eliminate them as much as possible so that smooth functioning of the mode is achieved. The study is important as the new era demands the implementation of blended learning in teaching learning process. It is said that blended or the hybrid learning approach will be the future technique of study. Therefore it is necessary to determine what were the challenges faced by the teachers during the implementation of blended learning at the Higher Educational level. Removing or minimizing those challenges will help us to have an effective implementation of the system.

1.3 Research Questions

- (1) What were the personal challenges in effective implementation of hybrid learning at higher education institutions in Karachi?
- (2) What were the professional challenges in effective implementation of hybrid learning at higher education institutions in Karachi?
- (3) What were the institutional challenges in effective implementation of hybrid learning t higher education institutions in Karachi?
- (4) What were the contextual challenges in effective implementation of hybrid learning t higher education institutions in Karachi?

2. Literature Review

Ahmed et al. (2021) explained hybrid learning as the combination of face to face and online teaching methods; it is the combination of synchronous and asynchronous teaching. It has been anonymously agreed by the researchers that hybrid learning is the form of pedagogy in which both online medium and face to face teaching had been incorporated. A lot of Higher Educational Institutes are adopting hybrid learning as a pedagogical approach and it has also been predicted that in future about 80-90% of the courses of Higher Educational Institute will be shifted to hybrid learning. At this time this approach is expanding at fastest rate and will become the normal way of education in future. But they also agreed that there exist some issues that are still the source of contention such as: what should be the hours either for face to face and for online learning, or what should be the curriculum design, what pedagogy should be used for effective implementation, what mode of assessment should be used etc.

Moeinikia et al. (2022) stated that contextual challenges refers to the specific challenges or obstacles that arise particularly in Hybrid mode of learning. They suggested a number of contextual challenges faced by the organization while adopting hybrid learning in their system, such as: making the policies regarding hybrid learning, deciding the degree of implementation, explaining the definition and purpose of hybrid learning. challenges regarding structure were also highlighted such as: governance of the system, establishing robust infrastructure, enhancing technological and administrative system. Some of the challenges regarding teachers were also addressed such as: incentive for faculty, training, pedagogical changes.

Akram, Anjum and Batool (2020) studied the context of hybrid learning practices and through the investigation of empirical literature found that there were six possible factors that influence the effective implementation of hybrid learning. Four external factors were identified out of which two of the factors were associated with teachers such as the interaction of teacher with the students and the academic work load of the teachers. Two of the factors were found to be internal which were: beliefs of the teachers regarding the integration of teaching and technology and the self-learning of the teachers. According to Okagbue et al. (2024) the personal beliefs, characteristics and the open mindedness of the teachers towards new approach is one of the basic reason for successful adoption of any new model. It was also found that the implementation of the hybrid learning in the teaching process require teachers to have sufficient knowledge of ICT. It also requires the synchronization of pedagogy between online and traditional. According to Suryadinata (2024)

there were four areas that were responsible for the acceptance or rejection of any of the new technology in educational institutes. First one is the human factor which include the confidence, belief or the mindset of the individual. Second, the intrinsic values which include the personal satisfaction and interest of the individual. Third one is the demand or the need of the technology in that time which include the adaptation, learning process or the need to become familiar with that process. Fourth one is the environmental factor which include all the other extrinsic values. According to Alkhnbashi, Mohammad and Bamasoud (2024) some of the challenges are classified as personal interest and learning of the teachers such as: self-efficacy of computer literacy, social and personal perception, experience, exposure, external expectation, skill for improvement etc. These challenges make the teachers reluctant to use the hybrid learning in their teaching learning process. Some of the other challenges which were faced by the teachers in the implementation of hybrid learning at Higher Educational Institutes are: interaction with technology, support from senior staff members, workload, incentives, professional and technical support, availability of time, infrastructure of the institute, etc. which become a source of demotivation for adopting hybrid learning by teachers (Owsuu-Fordjour, Koomson & Hanson, 2020).

Waseem et al. (2020) found that interaction of the teachers with the technology was less in hybrid model. They had technophobia which bound them to have prejudices towards the integration of technology in curriculum. Lack of digital literacy demotivated the teachers to adopt the new setup. Teachers were also not supported to get any training before using those digital applications or software which make them unaware of the correct use of blended or hybrid techniques. It also made them unaware how to incorporate their pedagogies along with technology and make their lecture effective. Availability of the trained faculty to teach students, complexity, difficulty level and the reliability of the technology were some of the major barriers to use the technology. According to O'Dea and Stern (2022) unavailability or the lack of access of the teachers to the appropriate software or the hardware, unreliable infrastructure also become a reason for the demotivation. It was also found that the use of some of the social applications were popular among the teachers but the use of technology as the facilitation of the teaching learning process was lacking.

According to Bond et al. (2020) it was found that academic work load of the teachers was one of the major concern which was the issue to employ online teaching. The implementation of hybrid learning in the normal setup is more challenging and demanding. The whole and sole responsibility of its successful integration lies on the shoulder of teachers. As a result the division

of hours per course for teachers has increased. Khan and Abid (2021) concern that the teachers lack the spare time to practice or learn the any other task as they have to give lot of time to learn and utilizing technology. The hybrid or blended system is time consuming and requires serious commitment of the teachers. If there is high workload then there will be a negative impact on the motivation of the teachers to adopt blended learning system. Akram, Anjum and Batool (2020) found one of the other problem was the interaction between the teachers and the students. The effective communication between the teachers and students was lacking as there was the barrier of the screen between them. The communication was not as satisfactory as was in face to face setup which made them both the teachers and students unsatisfied and unaware from the other side. Direct interaction of the instructor with the students give them confidence about their teaching and also enables them to remove their misconception then and there.

Abid, Zahid, Shahid and Bukhari (2021) studies that the implementation of Hybrid model at Higher Educational Institutions depend upon number of factors. The main cause of successful integration are found to be the teachers as they are the decision makers. Therefore, if their challenges and consensus are resolved; they would play a very significant role in the successful integration of Hybrid or Blended model. Most of the challenges were likely to be resolved by the professional development or training of the teachers (Moeinikia, 2022). According to Owusu-Fordjour, Koomson and Hassan (2020) found that the personal beliefs, characteristics, and the open-mindedness of the teachers towards new approach is one of the basic reasons for successful adoption. It was also found that the enforcement of the hybrid learning in the teaching process require teachers to have sufficient knowledge of ICT. Apart from it also require the synchronization of pedagogy.

3.Methodology

This is qualitative research as the in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by the teachers at Higher Education Level is needed.

3.1 Interviews of the Higher Educational Instructors

Those instructors were selected who were already familiar with the Hybrid learning and had incorporated it in their teaching learning process for at least one semester. As the main purpose of the study is to investigate the factors influencing the effective enforcement of hybrid learning and the teachers were the main focus of the study therefore the interviews were conducted by the teachers. According to Mestan (2019) interviews are considered to be the best

source to gather the in-depth understanding of a particular topic. The interview questions were self-administered. The consent was taken from the teachers for their voluntary participation and the ethical consideration were followed to keep the identity of the participants confidential. The questions of the interview were validated by the expert in the field of education and were modified according to their reviews.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The population of the research were the teachers of Higher Education Institutes who had experienced blended learning in their teaching learning process. 8 teachers from social science faculty from one of the Government University of Karachi were conveniently selected and interviewed. Non-probability and convenient sampling method was used. The teachers were selected on the basis that they should have enough knowledge of hybrid learning and must have used this set up at least for one semester in their teaching process. The interview was conducted bilingually in English and Urdu. The duration of the interviewed varied between 57 to 86 minutes. The prior consent form was signed by all the participants that the data provided by them will be treated anonymously and their identities would not be disclosed. Therefore, the participants are addressed with variables A to H. out of the 8 participant 6 were females and two were males. The participants were interviewed independently. A semi structured questionnaire was used as it allows the participant to express their views freely. First the data was translated in English completely and then was read thoroughly to generate the themes. It was the first phase for generating themes and categories. Themes were finalized for each of the participant and then were compared to see the similar and dissimilar results.

4. Data Analysis

All the participants were questioned on the factors that influence the effective enforcement of hybrid learning at Higher Education Level. The participants shared their experiences of the implementation of hybrid learning from teacher's perspective and discussed the factor which were the cause of demotivation for effective enforcement of hybrid learning. After interviewing all the participants the challenges identified by them were categorized into personal, professional, institutions and contextual categories.

4.1 Personal challenges

According to participant A hybrid learning means the synchronization of physical and online teaching which involve different technologies such as: online learning environment, social media, and external tools etc. She agreed that use of technology depend upon the personal beliefs and attitude of the person toward technology. It can be termed as anxiety towards technology. Participant B stated that “most of the teachers were still following the traditional setup base on lectures. They only believed in that particular method and were not ready to adopt new things”. According to the participant C “it was because of the reason that the teachers who themselves had not experience technology have an anxiety or fear toward it”. Participant D stated that the fear of embarrassment of teacher in front of the student make them reluctant to use blended learning in their teaching learning process. They fear if student came to know about their weakness they will become laughing stock for their students. Participant E stated that teachers believed that the use of new methods will bring no good to the student and their traditional setup was a good one to follow. Participant F stated that Teachers feared that something might go wrong if they will use technology. That will make them embarrass in front of student. Participant G and H stated that most of the teachers had got their education in traditional way. Although they had learned the new technology but they were still anxious while using it.

4.2 Professional challenges

According to the participants the basic reason for the demotivation of the teachers to implement hybrid learning in their regular teaching/learning process was the lack of training. Participant A stated, “use of digital apps was new for the teachers which consume lot of time and therefore increased their workload”. She also stated that in-spite of all the benefits hybrid learning approach lack in the interaction between the teacher and the students as it is possible in face to face set up. This made the teachers and students also less satisfied with the hybrid model. According to her it was difficult for the teachers to incorporate different pedagogies in their teaching through digital apps. Participant B said that the teachers received either no training or non-effective training to use any of the digital app which made it difficult and time consuming for them to understand it. She added that the teaching through digital apps was no more than virtual lectures. Even the teachers who use to apply different pedagogies in class were bound to lecture method while teaching through online mode. Participant C said, “this pedagogy was new for the teachers and had no back up in term of conduction, they had to design everything from the scratch which was time consuming and it made the teachers to reject the model”. She also stated that discussion between the

teachers and students was not that effective in hybrid mode as it was in traditional setup. If the students send any query through digital platform, then the teachers take lot of time to respond and the student do not get immediate feedback. She stated that the teachers had limited knowledge of digital apps that they were using to conduct the class and it was not possible for them to apply different pedagogies by using one application. Participant D stated, “teachers were not even able to use discussion method in their online lectures which is the most common pedagogy to be used by the teachers in their traditional setup”. She also agreed that as the model was new for the teachers so it was time consuming for the teachers to understand and apply it effectively. She stated that conducting a class through digital apps make it difficult for the teachers to carry out discussions as the class become chaotic and most of the time the students need to mute their microphones. If they have any query then they have to wait till they meet the teachers in person. Participant E stated that working from home also burdened the teachers as they had to perform the household activities as well as their academic responsibilities at the same time. Participant F stated that using hybrid model had increased the work load of the teachers as half of the students were taking physical class on one day and the other half of students were conducting class other day and the teacher was repeating the same lesson twice which had increased the academic workload of teachers. She also stated that teaching through physical activities or incorporating pedagogies like role play, demonstration or experimental method was not possible for the teachers through digital teaching. Participant G added that feedback from the teachers is immediately required by the students to remove their misconceptions which is less effective in online mode of learning. According to participant H, conduction of classes through online mode was a mere joke as teachers were not doing it professionally.

4.3 Institutional challenges

Participant A stated that the institutional environment played a very important role in motivating the teachers to adopt the blended learning model but unfortunately due to lack of the vision, provision of facilities and changes in pedagogical setup from the institution was one of the problems that demotivated the teachers. Participant B stated, “implementation of any new model requires a very strong leadership and support from the institutions and unfortunately it was missing”. Participant C added that the institution needed to decide what digital apps were supposed to use by the teachers and were supposed to provide support to the teachers. Participant D stated that the teachers were left alone to decide what to use and how to use. No support was

provided to teachers even in financial terms and teachers spend large sum of money on buying new gadgets or internet packages. Participant E stated that it was the responsibility of the institutes to provide proper training to the teachers to use any digital app or software. Participant F and H stated that no proper strategic plan was prepared by the institutes about how to incorporate hybrid learning in their setup. Participant G stated, “during the phase of the blended or online learning it was difficult to interact with the administrative staff or the other faculty members which made it difficult for the teachers to take decisions on their own”.

4.4 Contextual challenges

It was agreed by almost all the participant teachers that the concept and definition of blended or hybrid learning is still not clear properly to the teachers. It is said the challenges related to the context of digital application such as internet issues, electricity failure, hardware and software purchase etc. were the main hindrance in the successful implementation of this concept. Participant A stated that integrating technology in Pakistan was challenging as there were electricity and internet issues. Some of the areas of Pakistan still do not have internet connections and those areas where internet facility was available, it is still not very effective. Participant B and C stated that having stable internet connection was the biggest problem; due to unstable connection the classes got disconnected very much. It made the lessons ineffective and also make the teachers and students frustrated. According to the participant D “the shift to online mode was a financial burden for the teachers and students as they did not have the proper gadgets required for the integration of technology in their teaching learning process. It was also burden to buy some of the software that were required by them to use. Most of the applications and software are not free of cost and demanded money”. Participant E stated that many teacher lacked knowledge about technology they should relate to their subject specially the science teachers such as math’s, chemistry, physics etc. a teacher may have access to the desired web or online tool, but the students may not have access to it. Participant F stated that the institutions sometimes give limited access to the students to particular online tool, which they can only use within the boundary of institute. This also make it unclear how to use blended learning. Participant H stated, “using online mode of teaching required digital application and the people in Pakistan lacked digital literacy and ethics which made them novice for the virtual world”.

5.Results

The results revealed a number of personal, professional, institutional and contextual challenges faced by Higher Education teachers in the effective implementation of Hybrid learning. The personal challenges were identified to be the personal attitudes and beliefs of the teachers which make them stick to their regular and traditional setup. Pre-established practices of the teachers were also found as the personal challenges, as the teachers have themselves studied through traditional setup therefore, they feel comfortable and confident in that setup. It also causes techno phobia in teachers. These results coincide with the finding of the Okagbue et al. (2024) and Suryadinata (2024). the professional challenges were the lack of professional training of the teachers to learn new techniques and technologies, increase workload of the teachers, less flexibility in the curriculum to incorporate new approach, pedagogical concerns. These results coincide with the finding of Alkhnbashi, Mohammad and Bamasoud (2024). the institutional challenges found in this research were lack of administrative support, provision of facilities, inappropriate infrastructure and facilities. These results were supported by the findings of (Owsuu-Fordjour, Koomson & Hanson, 2020). The contextual challenges were found to be internet availability, electricity load shedding, internet speed and disconnection issues, home related issues as most of the families have small houses or shared devices. These results were also found by Moeinikia et al. (2022) and Akram, Anjum and Batool (2020). Among all the challenges professional development of the teachers was highlighted most by all the participants as they believed that it can minimize most of the issues and will help in smooth integration of Hybrid Approach in teaching learning process at Higher Education level.

6. Discussion

As the challenges are classified into four groups i.e. personal, professional, institutional and contextual so the challenges identified by the participants were also categorized in the following groups. The challenges such as: techno phobia, lack of motivation, personal attitude, beliefs, self-efficacy, reluctant to change, rejection to change, sticking to ease, comfort with old methods, lacking digital integration in their education, etc. were classified as the personal challenges. This study also found that the professional challenges were quite a lot which somehow prove them to be the root cause of the challenges. The professional issues identified in this study are: lack of digital knowledge, no or inadequate training of the teachers, lack of knowledge of pedagogical integration, access workload due to non-familiarity with digital apps., unavailability of single platform to teach desired content, unable to integrate practical work through online mode, inadequate interaction between teachers

and students etc. Some of the challenges identified by the participants are categorized as the institutional issues such as: lack of institutional vision and policies for the smooth integration of technology, rigid curriculum, unavailability of resources or digital hardware or software by the institutes, lack of financial incentives by the institutes, support from administrative staff etc. It was agreed that the vision, policies and support by the institution is very important source for the motivation of teachers. Some of the challenges identified by the participants are classified as the contextual challenges as they arise because of online learning such as, electricity failure, no availability of internet, weak internet connections, dis-connectivity issues, lack of awareness of digital ethics etc.

7. Limitations of Research and Future Implications

This research has only targeted the teachers of one of the Government University of Karachi. As all the districts of the city were not targeted therefore results of the research cannot be generalized but this research will give a future pathway to the researchers to conduct their study in this area. The sample size is also small targeting only a few teachers of social science faculty. Therefore, there is a lot more scope to be conducted in this area. The effect of the gender and the academic discipline were also not considered during the research.

8. Recommendations

It was concluded that if change is needed in the educational setup then teachers can play one of the vital roles towards the success or failure of that change. The findings of this research stated that professional training of the teachers by the institute is the key to resolve the issues of integration of the hybrid learning at higher education level. Training of the teachers will also help them to overcome their technophobia, personal beliefs and attitudes towards technology. This study also helped us to unlock the fact that the professional development of the teachers was required to strengthen their digital competencies which in return were responsible to improve their time management skills, training, pedagogical and teaching approaches, experiences etc. It is recommended through this research that institutes should focus on the professional development of their teachers to make them more efficient and capable.

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