

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Learners' Perceptions of the Role of Learner-Centered Online Education in Transforming Legal Education

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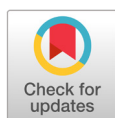
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ABSTRACT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions worldwide quickly transitioned to online learning, and Pakistan's law schools were no exception. Since, the country's law departments are renowned for their traditional, lecture-based teaching style. To investigate the impact of this transition, this study analyzed the responses of 111 law students from Pakistan universities regarding the quality assurance of students, their online learning experiences, interactive relationships within the online courses, and challenges faced by them in online education. The study's findings suggest a transition from traditional instructor-centered legal education to a more learner-centered approach during the experience of online education during the pandemic. However, despite this transition, students still highly value instructor-centered classes based on lectures and evaluations, indicating that more work needs to be done to fully embrace a student-centered learning environment in online.

Key words: COVID-19, online learning, student-centered education, law students, Pakistan, interactive relationships, legal education



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INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the lives of individuals and groups alike, and the global education community was faced with the rare situation of almost simultaneous school closures and an emergency shift to online education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). The closures were meant to last for a few days, then weeks, and were later extended to several months, with the world still grappling with the pandemic two years later (UNESCO, 2021). Sixty percent of the students throughout the world were impacted in certain way by shifts, such as the closure of schools (OECD, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic threatened the entire system of higher education in Pakistan, and universities were compelled to implement online classes to prevent the loss of student learning. In

Pakistan, educational institutes were first ordered to close for one week on March 13th, 2020, with the period of closure extended multiple times thereafter. In response, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) issued guidelines to higher education institutions in Pakistan mandating the implementation of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guideline of HEC demanded universities providing technical assistance to faculty, facilitating them with computers and laptops along with internet bandwidth (Kakepoto et al., 2021). These guidelines of HEC addressed the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff, as well as the readiness for the preparation of online learning to commence (Kakepoto et al., 2021). However, Pakistan's status as a developing country not all universities were prepared to provide instruction through online learning environments as well as to possess skilled manpower or trained staff for the environments in university (Kakepoto et al., 2021; Memon et al., 2019). The responses to COVID-19 were challenged by the reality that Pakistan's higher education institutions were not well-versed in information technology infrastructure and its resources for education, and online education was provided to a very limited extent (Kakepoto et al., 2021). Moreover, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of online learning was not established in Pakistan (Mahmood, 2021). As a result, a considerable proportion of students and faculty in Pakistan universities encounter challenges to online learning, such as insufficient equipment and limited access to high-speed internet (Waqer, 2020).

To understand the process and challenges of adopting online learning in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to first comprehend a common mode of instruction at the university. Before the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan, universities made use of four approaches. First, the most traditional method is instructor-led (face-to-face) teaching without the use of online resources. Second, instructor-led teaching partially incorporates online technologies, such as the use of Google Classroom or other Learning Management systems for sharing of reading materials, assignment submission, and other activities. Third, distance learning is mostly implemented by one university in Pakistan, Allama Iqbal Open University, which was founded in 1974, provides opportunities for those in remote areas or with working commitments to complete their education (AIOU, 2023). Also, the Virtual University is the sole institution that offers online education. It was founded in 2002 with the purpose of utilizing information technology for online instruction. The high dependence on instructor-led instruction in universities had been negatively impacted on Pakistan's response to COVID-19. This dependence had resulted in a lack of the necessary infrastructure and resources to enable the quick transition to online education. Furthermore, both instructors and students were insufficiently prepared for this transition, leading to delayed responses and a decline in the quality of higher education.

Pakistan universities faced a number of obstacles when it came to pursuing education through online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Internet access was not widely available in urban and rural areas of Pakistan. It is necessary to present for showing that, across Pakistan, many regions lack internet access and that the quality of internet connection in many of these regions is poorer to that of Pakistan's cities. Moreover, after covid-19, all professional and academic institutions shifted their operations online, increasing the reliance on internet facilities. Thus, there was a high demand for internet-related services. As online learning was fully implemented at the university, each discipline encountered obstacles in addition to the traditional lecture format. For example, engineering or science majors requiring laboratory experiments could not be conducted in a fully online environment, nor could majors requiring professional training. Similar to other academic programs, law schools, which require students to participate in extracurricular activities such

as moot court, encountered difficulties.

To overcome these obstacles during the protracted COVID-19 outbreak, law schools in Pakistan have established and implemented online learning to implement law school curriculum. The legal education curriculum consists of lectures, court visits, internships, and research projects. Teaching methods are highly interactive, involving classroom discussion and discussions of case law. It is essential to note that law schools are not available in every institution or city in Pakistan. Thus, students from remote areas migrate to Pakistan's major cities for legal education. So, during the time of the lockdown, students were required to relocate to their hometowns, which presented a significant barrier to online teaching availability. First obstacle was gaining access to students. In Pakistan, it is important to point out that students from rural areas pursue legal education in urban centers. Then during the covid -19 shutdown, they were forced to return to their hometown. This made providing access to students a terrific challenge and turned out to be a major challenge. Many challenges were faced to turn to the online mode (Adnan et al., 2020). Most law schools have chosen for online education and have begun providing lectures online. After completing two years of legal study, it is important to assess law students' experience in the field.

Online Learning Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During COVID-19, university students around the world have been required to study mostly online, transitioning suddenly from face-to-face instruction to remote learning and lecture video instruction. In response to fully online education, universities have started utilizing and enhancing their existing e-learning platforms. While the most university in Pakistan have an e-learning platform, its utilization in learning activities is still restricted because universities generally employ face-to-face instruction in Pakistan before the pandemic. However, when the pandemic struck, higher education institutions and the entire academic community of Pakistan had to adjust to this new manner of teaching and learning. Both instructors and students were unprepared for this abrupt adjustment, which may have substantial effects on students' academic performance (Chiner et al., 2021).

During the covid-19 pandemic, higher education institutions did a great deal to ensure that their education system functioned efficiently. Despite universities providing guidelines, tools, and training to instructors, many were ill-equipped to handle the transition, leading to variations in instructional strategies and methodologies. Consequently, students were forced to navigate new learning modalities and adapt to instructors' digital skills and preferences (Chiner et al., 2021). Throughout the pandemic, course structure and design, interaction within the course, teacher knowledge and facilitation, and learning functionality were found to have affected online learning experiences (Baber, 2020).

In the experiences, students' learning outcomes and satisfaction with online learning during the pandemic were affected by many factors including broad, fast, effective, and efficient access to technology, high-quality instructors in knowledge and facilitation, access to course content, supporting services, high levels of interactive relations with peers and faculty, online learning design, active collaboration in learning, online communication with classmates, online platform usage (Salas - Pilco et al., 2022; Su & Guo, 2021).

In higher education institutions, students with a more online experience like online courses and environments during

the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of instructor-student interaction in universities has always been significant in all contexts of online and offline learning, however, it is particularly significant in the context of the pandemic, as the level of formal and informal interaction that is typical in face-to-face education is typically absent in online education (Baber, 2020). As a critical determinant of the success or failure of online education, students' satisfaction with online learning reflects on students' perceived learning experiences (Kuo et al., 2014; Rabin et al., 2019). Interaction in online learning has been considered a significant determinant leading satisfaction with online learning (Cidral et al., 2018). A high degree of interaction with the instructor, other students, or content leads to high levels of satisfaction and, thus, demonstrates a high level of engagement in online learning (Kuo et al., 2014). The low level of student satisfaction in online learning is related to poor student engagement and lower student satisfaction (Martin et al., 2018). Interaction in online learning often correlates to students' engagement in their academic activities prior to positively influencing students' satisfaction (Kim & Kim, 2021).

Recent empirical studies have revealed that a significant relationship between the degree of interaction in an online learning setting and students' learning satisfaction and performance. Students' satisfaction and performance are positively related to the degree of teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, and platform-student interaction (Alves et al., 2021; Laksana, 2021). Moreover, She et al. (2021) have established a causal pathway of the relationship between online interactivity and student satisfaction and outcomes. It is suggested that increased interaction in online learning environments fosters student engagement and a sense of belonging in the learning process, which has a positive impact on student learning satisfaction and learning outcomes. Furthermore, students who interact more are more likely to increase their academic self-efficacy, think they can do online activities and are more engaged in their learning, all of which contribute to their satisfaction with the online learning experience.

Legal Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Pakistan, a common law nation, possesses a legal system that encompasses a unique fusion of common law and Islamic law principles. The country's legal education framework adheres to a conventional methodology, placing significant emphasis on the acquisition of both substantive and procedural law expertise. This educational system is grounded in a comprehensive five-year undergraduate law degree program, which is provided by an array of distinguished universities and colleges throughout the nation. Before the year 2018, a three-year Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree had been accessible to students; however, following a momentous decision rendered by the Supreme Court, the abbreviated three-year program was phased out. Consequently, a more comprehensive five-year LLB program was instituted, which commenced after the fulfillment of 12 years of pre-university education (2018 SCMR 1891). Even in early days after independence from British colonial, Pakistan offered a two-year law degree program. Students who have completed 12 years of education with any major are currently eligible to apply for admission to the program. Post-2018, LLB degree aspirants are mandated to secure a minimum of 50% marks in the Law Admission Test (LAT) administered by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The LLB is a five-year degree that includes the instruction in various subjects. In addition, students have to finish a supervised internship and a research project as required components of their curriculum. The LLB curriculum requires students to take a variety of subjects, such as sociology, psychology,

political science, logic and reasoning, and economics. This interdisciplinary approach promotes a more robust legal education for law students, enabling them to make significant contributions to the professional realm (Zahoor et al., 2021).

Graduates of the five-year Bachelor of Laws (LLB) program may choose to continue their legal education by enrolling in a Master of Laws (LLM) degree, which is offered at certain institutions in Pakistan. The LLM program offers students the opportunity to specialize in a particular area of law while pursuing advanced coursework and research. Pakistan typically offers a two-year LLM degree program. Although Pakistan's legal education system follows to a traditional paradigm, it provides students with an adequate foundation in law and the required skills for succeeding in legal practice or pursuing further academic activities.

In Pakistan, legal education is mainly teacher-centered, with lectures provided as the major educational method in law departments of educational institutions (Reayat et al., 2020). This method, however, fosters a culture of monologue, limiting students from the opportunity to participate in the learning process. Unfortunately, Pakistani law students are not exposed to enough student-centered approaches to strengthen their legal knowledge and abilities through role-playing activities such as moot and mock courts, which are necessary for the development of effective advocacy skills, and placement and internships. Although such activities are provided during the training phase for judges and prosecutors, legal students in developing countries have less training opportunities than their counterparts in developed countries. Even though a few law schools have begun introducing moot/mock courts, more efforts are required to close the training gap in legal education for Pakistani students. Moreover, law departments in Pakistani colleges lack agreements with local courts or law firms to give students with field experience during their time at university. However, a few law schools are taking the initiative to go the extra mile in arranging law internships for their students. Pakistan's legal education is regulated by the Pakistan Bar Council and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Pakistan Bar Council Legal Education Rules 2015 (PBCLER, 2015) and Higher Education commission rules are relevant rules and regulations. According to the rules, legal education can only be provided in the traditional mode; online learning is not allowed, according the Pakistan bar council and supreme court judgment (2018 ScMR 1891).

However, law schools in developed countries have adopted student-centered learning, such as problem-based learning, as a practical approach to teaching legal knowledge and skills, allowing students to engage with real-world legal problems and develop critical thinking skills (Reayat et al., 2020). The forced transition from instructor-centered classroom legal education to online learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the potential for a new, learner-centered model to legal education in Pakistan. The essence of legal education lies in the widely accepted notion that no institute can teach every law to students; instead, the focus is on developing skills that enable them to understand legal texts, while taking into account language requirements and relevant contexts (Sial, 2020).

Online learning in developed countries is one of the most popular teaching and learning settings to improve law students' training opportunities, since it provides access to course module contents and participation in in-person seminars (Reayat et al., 2020). The course allows students to choose of attending live lectures or watching recorded versions. Seminars offered weekly encourage active participation and the practical application of concepts, consequently improving learning outcomes and communication skills. Online learning is an alternative approach that allows students

to access education from anywhere and at any time, making education more accessible and convenient. In addition, online learning provides students with a variety of tools and resources that enhance their learning experience and encourage more engagement, resulting in enhanced learning results. There are several benefits to online education (Valentine, 2002), which may be strengthened through time.

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The aims of this study were to examine students' experiences and satisfaction with online learning in a Pakistani law school during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to review the traditional education methods previously employed. This study specifically addressed the following research questions. (1) How satisfied are law students with their online learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) What were the interactions between law students and instructors like during online learning in the COVID-19 pandemic? (3) How has the law school curriculum been implemented through an online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic? (4) In light of these changes, what indications are there of a transition towards student-centered learning?"

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 111 law students in Pakistan who were enrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic at seven universities in Pakistan. These students ranged from 1st-year students to alumni from public and private universities. Respondents' demographic details are shown in Table 1. From Table 1, the number of male participants in the study is 21 (18.9%), while the number of females is 90 (81.1%). The age groups consist of 18-20 years (23.4%), 21-23 years (46.8%), 23-25 years (27.0%), and over 26 years (2.7%). The education levels of the respondents are 1st year (1.8%), 2nd year (14.4%), 3rd year (17.1%), 4th year (9.0%), 5th year (30.6%), and alumni (27.0%). The type of university is mostly public (98.2%) and private (1.8%).

Table 1. Demographic details of respondents

Variables	Number of respondents	%
Gender		
Male	21	18.9
Female	90	81.1
Age		
18-20 years	26	23.4
21-23 Years	52	46.8
23-25 years	30	27.0
Over 26 years	3	2.7
Year		
1st year	2	1.8
2nd year	16	14.4
3rd year	19	17.1
4th year	10	9.0
5th year	34	30.6
Alumni	30	27.0
Type of university		
Public	109	98.2
Private	2	1.8

Procedure

This research employed a survey research design as its methodology, which is a widely-used quantitative research approach. Survey research designs refer to a collection of research methods in which researchers administer a survey to either a sample or the entire population to describe the population's attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Specifically, this study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, wherein data was collected at a single point in time. The cross-sectional survey design offers the benefit of measuring current attitudes or practices and providing information in a relatively short period, encompassing the time required for conducting the survey and gathering the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). To obtain the sample, the researchers utilized a convenience sampling procedure with an online questionnaire using SurveyMonkey at [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). An online questionnaire is a survey instrument for collecting data that is available through the Internet and accessed through a computer, tablet, smartphone, or other Internet device (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In the study, an online questionnaire was designed and administered to law students to examine their experiences with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey questionnaire was administered to law school students engaging in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic after the study. Due to its advantages in data collecting speed, response time, cost-effectiveness, and ability to reach students during the pandemic, an online survey platform was selected.

Data were collected in October 2022 from undergraduates through permission obtained from the professors at targeted universities. The researcher made personal contacts with the professors of the department of law in universities and explained the study's objective and scope to professors. The professors made arrangements for the administration of the online survey questionnaire. The online questionnaire was completed on a voluntary basis by them.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed through the SPSS Statistics program (version 26). Data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviations. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation) were used to describe the data of gender, age, year, and type of university, and education level). The independent samples t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation, and hierarchical regression analysis were used to find out whether students perceived their experiences of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pearson's correlation was used to determine the correlation between satisfaction and preparedness and academic attainment through online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The multiple linear regression was used to predict the value of the dependent variable, through independent variables.

Results

The findings were divided up into three themes to examine students' online learning interaction experiences and relate them to how satisfied they were with it throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Law Students' Experience with Online Learning

Table 1 describes the results of remote learning in law schools in Pakistan. More than 99%(n=110) of law school students have been provided remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 2). Remote learning covers both online learning (use of internet) and offline learning (TV, radio, CD/DVD in areas with no internet). Online learning is the delivery method most used by students, most (84.7%, n=94) learn online. For their coursework, most students have used technology tools every day (80.2%, n=89) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, teachers have used in class to support teaching with web conferencing technologies, such as Zoom (47.75%, n=53), Google Meet (69.37%, n=77), Microsoft Teams (18.02%, n=20), others (1.8%, n=2), and none used (0.9%, n=1). Students consider the primary benefits of online learning as follows: students can study at their own pace (n=57, 51.4%), the flexibility of learning anytime, anywhere (n=52, 46.8%), quick access to video-based lectures(n=33, 29.7%), easy information sharing (n=30, 27.0%), free access to vast online resources (n=28, 25.2%), no benefits (n=26, 23.4%), and students can study more effectively (n=12, 10.8%).

Table 2. The delivery method

Items	Yes (%)	No.
Delivery method for online learning		
1. online learning Mostly (Internet-based)	84.68	94
2. offline learning Mostly (TV, radio, CD/DVD learning materials)	0.90	1
3. Both online and offline learning	14.41	16
Technology tools for course work		
1. Everyday	80.18	89
2. About 2-3 days a week	15.32	17
3. About one day a week	4.50	5

Experience of Interaction Between Students and Instructors

In terms of interactions with their instructors, more than 71% of Pakistani law students indicate poor levels of interaction, while only 28.8% report high levels of interaction during the three years of COVID-19. This indicates a lack of interactional variety and experience. The interactions of law students with their peers are not considerably different from their interactions with professors, with 37.8% reporting high levels of interaction and 62.1% reporting low levels. By grade level, neither the mean for interactions with peers ($F(5, 105)=1.195, p=.317$) nor the mean for interactions with professors ($F(5, 105)=1.174, p=.327$) differed significantly amongst the responding students. This contradicts the commonly held belief that engagement with professors increases with grade level.

Table 3. Interaction experiences with classmates and professors

Year	Interaction with classmates			Interaction with professors		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
1st year	1.50	.71	2	1.50	.71	2
2nd year	1.88	.96	16	1.88	.72	16
3rd year	2.37	1.01	19	2.21	1.08	19
4th year	2.10	.74	10	2.30	1.06	10
5th year	2.44	1.02	34	2.44	.79	34
Alumni	2.33	.84	30	2.23	.90	30
All	2.27	.94	111	2.23	.89	111

It is claimed that first-, second- and third-year students who had COVID-19 upon arrival and during their college years had fewer opportunities to interact with classmates and professors during campus life, resulting in lower interaction levels and fewer opportunities overall.

A three-stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with satisfaction with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as the dependent variable (Table 4). Student preparedness was entered at stage one of the regression to control for prepared students' responses. The level of adaptation to the learning experiences in online learning classes (Class preparation, Instructors' lectures, Use of class materials, Team project, Assignment, Assessment, and Feedback) were entered at stage two, and Background (Public or Private, Grade year, and gender) at stage three. The hierarchical multiple regression revealed that at Stage one, Preparedness contributed significantly to the regression model, $F(1, 100)=8.337(p<.01)$ and accounted for 7% of the variation in Satisfaction with online learning. Introducing the variables of the level of adaptation to the learning experiences in online learning classes explained an additional 29% of variation in Satisfaction with online learning and this change in R^2 was significant, $F(8, 93)=6.222 (p<.001)$. Adding background to the regression model explained an additional 31% of the variation in Satisfaction with online learning and this change in R^2 was significant, $F(11, 90)=5.046(p<.001)$. When all independent variables were included in stage three of the regression model, neither Preparedness nor most variables were significant predictors of Satisfaction with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The highly important predictors of Satisfaction with online learning were Instructors' lectures and Assessment which uniquely explained 31% of variation in Satisfaction with online learning. Together the 11 variables accounted for 31% of the variance in Satisfaction with online learning.

Table 4. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis on satisfaction in online learning

Variable	B	95% CI for B				R ²	ΔR ²
		LL	UL	SE B	Beta		
Step 1						.08	.07
Constant	3.32	2.99	3.65	.16			
Preparedness	-.19**	-.33	-.06	.07	-.28**		
Step 2						.35	.29
Constant	1.50	.72	2.27	.39			
Preparedness	-.05	-.18	.08	.07	-.07		
Class preparation	-.10	-.27	.08	.09	-.12		
Instructors' lectures	.29***	.12	.47	.09	.36***		
Use of class materials	.14	-.03	.31	.09	.19		
Team project	.01	-.13	.15	.07	.02		
Assignment	-.04	-.22	.15	.09	-.04		
Assessment	.19*	.03	.35	.08	.25*		
Feedback	.00	-.16	.17	.08	.00		
Step 2						.38	.31
Constant	2.11	.77	3.46	.68			
Preparedness (1-5)	-.05	-.18	.08	.07	-.07		
Class preparation (1-4)	-.10	-.27	.08	.09	-.12		
Instructors' lectures (1-4)	.31***	.13	.48	.09	.38***		
Use of class materials (1-4)	.13	-.04	.30	.09	.18		
Team project (1-4)	.04	-.10	.19	.07	.07		
Assignment (1-4)	-.06	-.24	.12	.09	-.07		
Assessment (1-4)	.19*	.03	.35	.08	.25*		
Feedback (1-4)	.01	-.16	.18	.08	.01		
Public (1) / Private (2)	.00	-.85	.85	.43	.00		
Year (1-6, 6=Alumni)	-.02	-.10	.06	.04	-.04		
Gender(male=1/Female=2)	-.31*	-.61	-.01	.15	-.18*		

This study examined the learning motivation, major knowledge and skills, collaborative learning experience, and learning engagement of Pakistani law students during COVID-19, as they experienced and perceived their academic attainment via online learning. Three years after the pandemic, law students who participated in online learning scored their perceived student 's performance as 2.32 (SD=0.83) on a 4-point scale for learning motivation, 2.45 (SD=0.77) for major knowledge and skills, 2.45 (SD=0.74) for collaborative learning experience, and 2.49 (SD=0.77) for learning engagement. Additionally, the overall satisfaction with the online learning experience is 2.89 (SD=0.67). Table 5 shows correlations, means, and standard deviations of factors to explain the relationship between students' overall satisfaction with online learning and their academic attainment (learning motivation, major knowledge and skills, collaborative learning experience, and learning engagement). Although students have expressed satisfaction with online learning with instructors' lectures and assessment during the pandemic (Table 4), their satisfaction shows strong correlations with student-centered learning experiences. This is evident in the collaborative learning experience ($\alpha=.418$) and learning engagement ($\alpha=.352$). These results indicate that more student-centered learning experiences can significantly contribute to successful academic attainment in online learning

Table 5. Correlations between satisfaction and preparedness and academic attainment through online learning

	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
1. Overall satisfaction					2.89	0.67
2. Learning motivation	.509***				2.32	0.83
3. Major knowledge and skills	.345***	.690***			2.45	0.77
4. Collaborative learning experience	.418***	.531***	.569***		2.45	0.74
5. Learning engagement	.352***	.628***	.681***	.603***	2.49	0.77

Discussion

This study analyzed the experiences of law students with online learning, focusing on factors that influence their satisfaction and outcomes. These students are typically engaged in instructor-centered, face-to-face education before the COVID-19. The poor online learning environment prevailing in Pakistani universities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for the rapid and effective transition of higher education online after the pandemic. As a result, Pakistani law students have experienced a variety of challenges arising from the poor online learning environment, including poor internet connection, which is particularly relevant as more than 60% of the respondents reported feeling fatigued by online education and tired of looking at online screens for long periods. This suggests that learners' adaptation to online education is low due to their unfamiliarity with it, which is also affecting their learning outcomes. This is because the typical form of law school education was mainly instructor-centered lecture-based education, and the educational method and infrastructure situation without any online education, and the face-to-face intensive education and typicality of law education are factors that make it more difficult to make an urgent transition to online education.

The emergence of COVID-19 forced higher education institutions to transit to an online learning environment, emphasizing personalized student learning and enhanced online interactions. Emergent remote learning outcomes reported by higher education institutions around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic include increased faculty-student and student-student interaction and a relatively significant impact on learning engagement and satisfaction. Previous studies have shown that faculty to student interaction in online learning environments affects learning satisfaction and outcomes (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Kuo et al., 2014). However, in this study, the interaction did not have such an effect on law students' satisfaction with the online learning environment, and perceptions of professors' teaching and assessment were significant factors. This may be due to the knowledge-intensive nature of law as a discipline, which could result from law's unique nature, involving in-depth analysis of legal texts and cases, leading students to prioritize quality instruction and assessment for a better understanding of complex concepts.

Modern legal education emphasizes not only professors' lectures but also practical educational activities (pro bono, internships, moot courts, etc.), and law students develop their skills as lawyers through major and non-major activities. However, during COVID-19, the online education environment was vulnerable due to the challenging transition process. The fact that 56% of students did not experience these activities even in 2022, when the survey was conducted, indicates that students during this period did not have a good online experience of legal education activities that they used to do in face-to-face education. 30% of students report that their experience with moot court competitions or mock trials was not successful. It strongly suggests that educators need to closely review and monitor the lack of competence of law students in this period and provide remedial education to improve their competence as legal professionals.

While there have been various reports of challenges for students and universities in transitioning to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other hand, the shift to online education can be viewed as facilitating the transition to modern education methods to secure and expand learning opportunities. Legal education is traditionally instructor-centered in developing countries, but in modern developed countries, law education tends to be learner-centered, meaning that it focuses on the needs, interests, and abilities of students to facilitate effective learning experiences. This approach encourages active participation, critical thinking, and the development of practical skills, which are essential for future legal professionals.

During COVID-19 pandemic, law education as a knowledge-intensive field in developed countries has been seeking to improve the quality of education through online education and blending (Pearce & Lochan, 2023). However, in developing countries, where online education has not been largely implemented, it can be seen as an opportunity for blended legal education that complements the on-site capabilities of developed countries. The results of the students' perceptions show that even after COVID-19, legal education in developing countries can be an opportunity to combine online education. However, given that the students were still accustomed to traditional education, the time to adapt to the new form of education was compressed by necessity, suggesting a pedagogical roadmap for the introduction of online education.

The study's findings cannot be generalized to the Pakistani context due to an unbalanced representation of genders in the sample group. One of the universities that responded had a high response rate, and it was a women's university. Female students at law schools had a higher level of responsiveness to the survey, despite the largely male composition of the legal sector (Mehdi et al., 2012). Future research should aim to undertake further investigations using a more diverse and inclusive sample of law schools to get more empirical data that strengthens the current findings. Also, doing a qualitative study is necessary to thoroughly investigate and get a more profound comprehension of the effects of online learning adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, future studies might investigate the long-term impact of online learning on the academic performance and professional preparedness of law students in Pakistan, especially in fields that have traditionally depended on face-to-face instruction.

Conclusion

In the study, we analyzed law students' responses from Pakistan universities regarding the quality assurance of students, their online learning experiences, interactive relationships within the online courses, and challenges faced by them in online education to investigate the impact of this transition. This study suggests that in the era of digital transformation, enhancing face-to-face education and providing diverse and high-quality educational experiences utilizing online learning environments as a catalyst of student-centeredness is a matter of effort and investment for higher education institutions. The conditions of higher education in Pakistan, a developing country, are not only urgent due to COVID-19, but we should utilize the experience as an opportunity to strengthen the educational experience of students.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflicts of interest.

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