

Language Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Teaching English Language Online During the Pandemic

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Abstract

During COVID-19 pandemic, instructors and learners had to master new tools with little direction or experience, and they struggled with availability and material aid, as well as illness and economic challenges. The study used a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design to process the data. Data were collected from 100 ESL university teachers from 37 different universities, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 ESL university teachers from six different universities. Using purposive sampling, data were collected from participants from all parts of Sindh except Karachi. The descriptive statistical analysis was done using SPSS, and thematic analysis was performed to get the results. According to the findings of this study, teachers were moderately familiar with online teaching and strategies. However, the students in online courses were less engaged in learning and more inclined to participate in behavioral misconduct; therefore, they preferred face-to-face classes. Teachers experienced challenges in class preparation, exam administration, students' learning assessment, and a lack of resources including digital skills and internet access. Teachers' approaches were significantly influenced by online teaching because they learned and employed a variety of digital tools to make learning more

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engaging for students. This research has implications for pedagogical design and implementation.

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Introduction

English Language Teaching Worldwide

Millions of students and teachers globally are involved in English Language Teaching (ELT), making it a worldwide phenomenon (Selvi et al., 2023). The need for people who speak English well has significantly increased worldwide (Ahmad, 2024). According to Rahman et al. (2025), English is currently the most studied language worldwide, and its global reach has given learners a variety of purposes. The main motivations for learning English across national boundaries and cultures are economic opportunity, educational motivations, and intercultural communication (Selvi et al., 2023).

Researchers have examined how ELT can promote the growth of multicultural skills and global citizenship since English language proficiency enhances cross-cultural contacts (Song et al., 2023). Hidayah et al. (2024) highlighted the significance of multicultural communicative proficiency in language teaching to foster respect, empathy, and understanding among students from different cultural origins. Pastor (2020) Researchers have also examined ELT techniques in various sociocultural and educational settings. Sulashvili et al. (2025) investigated English instruction in non-English-speaking nations, highlighting the importance of context-specific methods and culture's part in language acquisition. Similarly, Ratri et al. (2024) investigated English learning in Asian nations, emphasizing how cultural norms impact language teaching practices.

English Language Teaching in Pakistan

Since English Language Teaching (ELT) is vital to Pakistan's educational system, it has become the current research and development focus. English's status within Pakistan's educational system has been the subject of disagreements. The challenges faced in implementing into practice the policy of the government to support English as the primary language of teaching in public schools are highlighted by Phulpoto et al. (2007). The study strongly emphasized the requirement for teacher preparation programs and the creation of helpful teaching resources.

Numerous studies have also examined the perceptions and attitudes of English among Pakistani teachers and students. According to Noor et al. (2020), in a poll performed among university students, there is a concern about sacrificing cultural identity connected to the English language's dominance even though it is seen as a doorway to better prospects. Similar findings were made by Saha (2023), who examined linguistic attitudes among ELT instructors. He discovered that attitudes impacted the teachers' relationships and instructional strategies.

In recent years, changes have been witnessed in Pakistan's ELT pedagogy. In contrast to conventional grammar-focused methods, the effectiveness of communicative language instruction was compared in a study by Anwar & Sultan (2020). Through the research, communicative language instruction improved language competency and raised students' motivation. On the other hand, due to large class sizes and inadequate resources, Fitria (2023) found issues teachers experienced while implementing communicative language instruction. Researchers have been studying how technology is incorporated into ELT classrooms because of its growing importance in education. Further, the usage of mobile-assisted language learning apps was investigated by Mahmood and Indrasari et al. (2024), who discovered that it had a good impact on vocabulary learning and language proficiency. To make full use of technology in ELT, they also emphasized the necessity of professional development of teachers.

Literature Review

Online Teaching

Recent years have dramatically transformed the educational landscape due to technological breakthroughs and shifting student needs. The birth and spread of online education, which has become a vital part of the scholarly ecosystem, is a crucial aspect of this shift. Online teaching, commonly called e-learning or distant learning, distributes educational materials and instruction to students online utilizing various digital resources and platforms (Sofi-Karim et al., 2023). Owing in large part to the unusual difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, this training method has grown in popularity (Siakat et al., 2021).

The earliest attempts with computer-assisted instruction and distance learning in the middle of the 20th century can be seen as the predecessors of online education (Oey et al., 2021). However, the emergence of the internet and the quick advancement of digital technology sped up its acceptance. From K–12 schools to higher education and business training, worldwide educational institutions have included synchronous and asynchronous online instruction modalities (Zeng et al., 2024). Online education is a flexible tool for reaching various learner demographics and overcoming time and geographical constraints because of its accessibility, adaptability, and scalability (Najjar et al., 2025).

Various instructional methods are used in online education, from completely online courses provided through learning management systems (LMS) to blended learning, which includes online and in-person components (Wang et al., 2024). Because of the flexible nature of online

learning, instructors can use various pedagogical techniques to engage students in meaningful learning experiences, including multimedia resources, discussion boards, interactive assessments, and virtual labs (Richards, 2023).

Online Teaching Models

Hiltz (1997) Asynchronous learning is when students receive course materials and take part in discussions at their own pace and on their own schedules. Students with busy schedules or who live in different time zones can be flexible with this idea. Email and discussion boards are frequently utilized for communication, allowing for considerate responses and in-depth conversations (Nurmi, 2011). Unlike asynchronous learning, synchronous learning involves instructors and students interacting in real-time, frequently via video conferencing services (Camilleri et al., 2022). This concept encourages instant feedback and an atmosphere of community, but it also necessitates scheduling coordination, which could be problematic for participants in different time zones. In addition, hybrid learning, commonly called the "flipped classroom," turns the conventional teaching methodology upside down. Before attending in-person or virtual sessions for conversations and application, students initially engage with the curriculum material online, frequently through pre-recorded readings or lectures (Zhuang et al., 2025). This educational paradigm encourages students to take charge of their education and promotes active learning. Massive Open Online Courses are extensive online courses created for open enrollment (Virani et al., 2023). They frequently provide a wide choice of disciplines and are accessible to students anywhere.

In conclusion, distance education models give teachers a wide range of tools for providing education and meeting different learning preferences, time constraints, and objectives. The suitable model should be chosen based on the unique educational goals, available materials, and student demographics, emphasizing the value of pedagogical adaptability and flexibility in the age of technology.

Empirical Studies

The shift to online English language teaching during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has been explored extensively across global contexts. Researchers have shown that ESL university teachers encountered both pedagogical opportunities and psychological challenges when transitioning to digital platforms (Alharbi, 2025). Many found themselves experimenting with new methods to sustain interaction and engagement in virtual classrooms (Leong, 2025).

Several studies conducted in the United Kingdom, the United States, and East Asia reveal that the effectiveness of online ESL teaching depended

on teachers' prior digital experience and institutional support (Alenezi et al., 2023). Where universities offered training and resources, teachers reported increased confidence and satisfaction (Harrison et al., 2023). Conversely, lack of preparation often led to frustration and burnout among educators (Noor et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the collective literature, both international and Pakistani, shows that ESL university teachers' perceptions of online teaching evolved from anxiety to adaptability. While infrastructure and training remain vital concerns, online experiences have broadened teachers' pedagogical imagination, encouraging more inclusive and technology-integrated practices (Mahlo, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to study Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences about teaching ESL courses online during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural universities in Sindh, Pakistan. The study focused on the following research questions:

- i) What are Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences about teaching ESL courses online during the Covid-19 pandemic in rural universities in Sindh, Pakistan?

Methodology

This study was carried out in one of the mixed-method studies methods, the explanatory sequential method, in which the practice of investigation was the combination of quantitative & qualitative methods. It is because of the nature of the topic that requires analysis through both ways to get reliable data. This method was preferred based on a shared distinctive approach by Plano-Clerk and Creswell (2007). The bond of methods helped the researcher collect valid data and provided reliability compared to only one method. The target population was the university English language teachers in Sindh where survey questionnaire was conducted from hundred ESL teachers and semi-structured interviews from ten selected teachers using purposive sampling method.

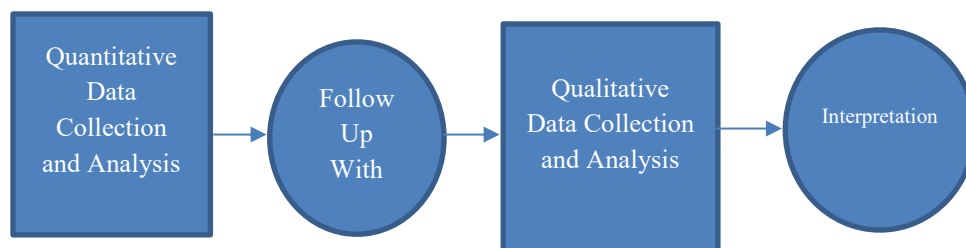


Figure 01. Explanatory Sequential Design

Demographic Summary

The demographic details of the ESL university teachers who participated in the survey questionnaire are given in the table appended below.

Table 01

Demographic Details of the Main Study

		N	%
Age Group	20 - 30 Years	56	56%
	31 to 40 Years	34	34%
	41 to 50 Years	8	8%
	51 to 60 years	1	1%
	More than 60 years	1	1%
Gender	Male	63	63%
	Female	37	37%
Job Status	Permanent	54	54%
	Visiting	46	46%
Experience	1 to 5 years	55	55%
	6 to 10 years	27	27%
	11 to 15 years	9	9%
	16 to 20 years	7	7%
	More than 20 years	2	2%
University	Public	88	88%
	Private	12	12%

Findings

This section contains an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative phases and the responses to the study's research question. The descriptive analysis was done to examine the data collected from 100 male and female ESL university teachers through a survey questionnaire. It was also followed in the qualitative section. In the second section, ten (10) university ESL teachers answered the questions, the data were coded, and the content was thematically examined.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The researcher examined the teachers' perceptions about the transition to online teaching, their perceptions and experiences before online education, and their perceptions regarding resources, support, teaching strategies, practices and changes in teaching quality adding to learning outcomes. The responses collected in the Likert scale were tabulated and presented in descriptive statistics including a data summary.

Experiences Before the Transition to Online Teaching

This section of the questionnaire aimed to explore the Pakistani ESL teachers' experiences before the transition to online teaching. It mainly talks about the online teaching expertise of an ESL teacher and their familiarity with online teaching and learning strategies and tools. It showed that, although most teachers had less experience, they felt knowledgeable enough in this area. Fewer teachers resisted learning about online teaching; however, most opposed the idea, with a moderate mean in all statements.

Moreover, they responded that 69% of teachers already had familiarity with technology for online teaching, whereas only 20% still needed to become familiar with it. Further, 56% of the participants positively reported that they were familiar with strategies in online teaching, and 25% were not. It appeared to have two ESL teachers' groups who have reported the transition to online teaching.

Table 02
Before the transition to online teaching

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
Online teaching conflicted with my personal identity as a teacher.	10	39	21	27	3	3.26	1.06
I resisted learning about online teaching and learning.	24	49	10	11	6	3.74	1.12
I was familiar with technology for online teaching and learning in my discipline.	3	17	11	47	22	3.68	1.09
I was familiar with strategies for online teaching in my discipline.	5	20	19	40	16	3.42	1.12

SD= Strongly Agree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Experience during the Transition to Online Teaching

This section shows the experience of ESL teachers during the transition to online teaching, and it mainly talks about the teachers' technical support and their preparedness regarding teaching online ESL classes.

It can be comprehended from the results in Table 03 that more than 70% of the ESL teachers knew where to go for pedagogical or technical support, and 62% of them agreed that their institute provided sufficient resources for online teaching. Whereas 71% of teachers felt prepared for online teaching, and 55% were willing to continue teaching online. The least agreed responses were received in the institution's preparation, where the ESL teachers expressed that their institutions were not well prepared.

Table 03
During the transition to online teaching

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
I knew where to go for technical support for online teaching.	3	7	19	53	18	3.76	0.93
I knew where to go for instructional support for online teaching.	3	7	17	60	13	3.73	0.89
My institute offered sufficient resources for online teaching.	9	13	16	46	16	3.47	1.18
I was able to find sufficient resources for online teaching.	4	11	13	54	18	3.71	1.02
I felt like my institute was well-prepared.	8	20	27	33	12	3.21	1.14
I personally felt well-prepared.	1	10	18	51	20	3.79	0.91
I am willing to teach a 100% online course in future.	5	26	14	33	22	3.41	1.23

SD= Strongly Agree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Interactions during Online Teaching

In this segment, the interactions of the ESL university teachers during online teaching are explained as per the responses received from the participants. Table 04 shows that ESL teachers found comparative advantages and disadvantages of the interactions during online teaching. There was a marginal ratio of teachers who found it challenging to know what their students were doing than those who knew about it. And 42% of

teachers found it challenging to resolve the issues of the students during online teaching, whereas 40% of them found it easy. However, 52% of teachers felt disconnected from the students, and 40% did feel connected with them.

Table 04
Interactions during online teaching

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
It was easier to keep track of how my students were doing.	6	33	20	37	4	3.00	1.05
It was easier to resolve my students' challenges.	10	32	18	30	10	2.98	1.20
I missed more emails from students than usual.	8	39	19	28	6	3.15	1.10
I felt disconnected from my students.	8	30	10	40	12	3.18	1.22
I felt like my students needed more motivational support.	4	7	10	51	28	3.92	1.01

SD= Strongly Agree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Material/Resources in Online Teaching

This section aimed to explore the Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding using materials/resources in online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. It mainly reports on the usage of materials used in online teaching.

Further, it can be explicitly seen in Table 05 that 49% of the teachers asked others to share classroom material with them, and only 39% of the population got positive responses. Although, 81% of ESL teachers prepared their classroom material by themselves.

Table 05
Material/Resources in Online Teaching

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
I am concerned about whether I maintain ownership of the class materials I post online.	2	10	29	46	13	3.58	0.91
I am concerned that the material I post online might be copied and shared on the internet.	4	20	16	48	12	3.44	1.07
I am concerned about others perceiving me as technologically illiterate.	7	39	21	27	6	2.86	1.08
I asked others to share their instructional materials with me.	4	27	20	40	9	3.23	1.07
Others were willing to share their instructional materials with me.	4	23	34	32	7	3.15	0.99
I created my own instructional materials.	3	3	13	62	19	3.91	0.84

SD= Strongly Agree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Change in Teaching after the Transition to Online Teaching

This section aimed to explain the Pakistani ESL teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding change in teaching after the transition to online teaching.

Furthermore, this change in ESL teachers' teaching after the transition to online teaching is apprehended in Table 06. A moderate response was received from participants about the difficulty of online teaching. However, 51% of participants were motivated to teach the English language online, and 83% considered themselves good at teaching because 77% invested more time teaching courses online than in normal circumstances.

Table 06
Change in teaching after the transition to online teaching

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
It was more difficult to teach online.	11	32	17	32	8	3.06	1.19
I was more motivated to teach online.	2	22	25	37	14	3.39	1.04
Teaching became a more important aspect of my job.	1	2	14	49	34	4.13	0.80
The time I invested in teaching this course increased.	2	5	16	55	22	3.90	0.87
My students' learning outcomes became less important.	5	20	21	46	8	3.32	1.04
My students got higher grades than they would have under normal circumstances.	5	29	17	34	15	3.25	1.18
The quality of my students' work decreased.	14	43	18	20	5	2.59	1.11
I was able to stay true to my original teaching values and objectives.	1	9	17	54	19	3.81	0.88
I think students committed more academic misconduct.	5	17	14	47	17	2.46	1.11
My students received a lower-quality learning experience.	4	25	15	46	10	3.33	1.08
I think my students will struggle in their future courses because my course had to be offered remotely.	5	32	27	30	6	3.00	1.03

SD= Strongly Agree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Perceptions of Teachers about Outcomes of Students in Online Teaching

This section aimed to explore the Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions about the outcomes of students in online teaching, where it reports on the comfortability of students regarding future online teaching.

Furthermore, in Table 07, it can be read that 55% of the teachers perceived that students would feel comfortable in online learning in the future, although 25% disagreed, and 20% remained indecisive. The majority of the participants agreed with the statement positively.

Table 07
Perceptions of teachers about outcomes of students in online teaching

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
I think my students will be more comfortable learning via remote instruction in the future.	2	23	20	46	9	3.37	1.00

SD= Strongly Agree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation

Strategies in Online Teaching

This section aimed to explore the Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences about strategies in online teaching during the pandemic. It mainly reports on the practical strategies used in the online teaching for teaching English language skills to the ESL students.

Moreover, it is described in Table 08, about strategies in online teaching, where the majority of the practices were considered significant components to have in language learning classes, and they admired practicing them in their classes. However, teachers preferred short videos over long videos on interactions, and only 37% of the teachers practiced interacting with online laboratories, except these two others were significantly practiced in their classes.

Table 08
Strategies in Online Teaching

Statement	No, it was not my intention to make this a significant component.	It was not a significant component, but I wanted it to be.	Yes, it was a significant component.	Not applicable to my course.
Answering practice questions.	6	11	73	10
Taking online quizzes or exams.	3	11	83	3
Working on projects independently.	9	16	61	14
Working on projects with other students.	5	14	65	16

Participating in live video class meetings.	7	19	67	7
Giving presentations.	7	9	80	4
Watching short instructional videos.	6	13	73	8
Watching long instructional videos.	26	20	33	21
Reading a textbook.	17	12	61	10
Reading source material (books, articles, etc.)	6	5	86	3
Discussing course topics with other students.	7	14	75	4
Writing essays, reflections, analyses, etc., independently.	6	7	82	5
Writing essays, reflections, analyses, etc., with other students.	11	19	61	9
Interacting with online laboratories/simulations.	11	20	37	32
Making a portfolio.	6	19	57	18

Summary of the Key Findings

The results of the analyses suggest that out of 100 ESL University teachers, 69% of teachers were already familiar with online teaching, and 56% had positively reported that they were familiar with strategies in online teaching. The majority of them did not resist learning about online teaching. A significant number of teachers were found motivated and optimistic about learning online instructions; however, there was a slightly negative response received by teachers from the end of students with academic misconduct and lower-quality learning experiences by students. However, teachers reported positive thoughts about online teaching and perceived that students would be able to learn online in the future. In contrast, still, several teachers disagreed with this. All the practices of ESL university teachers were significantly reported by them, except long instructional videos and the use of online interaction laboratories.

Qualitative Data Analysis

In this study section, the researcher examined the perceptions and experiences of online teaching by applying the qualitative reflexive thematic analysis method. The researcher created the focus codes of the

data by keeping in view the principal codes and lastly created themes of the study. The 10 ESL university teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews of this study are entitled from Respondent-01 to Respondent-10.

Analysis of semi-structured interviews

The interviews of the participants were thematically analyzed by keeping in view the research question of this study. The themes were created in light of ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching online during the pandemic in rural Sindh, Pakistan.

(i) *Lack of Preparation for Online ESL Classes*: One of the major themes that was found in the data is the lack of preparation for online ESL classes. The respondents reported the issues that are responsible for the lack of preparation for online ESL classes.

Most respondents expressed that lacking technical knowledge hinders them from preparing well for their ESL online classes. It represented teachers struggling to use online platforms and digital tools to execute online teaching; as Respondent 8 said, 'Teacher must be a computer-oriented literate person, who should know all the options, but I did not know that much when we started teaching online classes that created difficulty for me to prepare for the classes. In other words, we can say command of the information technology.' It was reported that teachers did not have enough knowledge of using online applications and they faced difficulties in preparation for the classes. As Respondent 3 stated, 'I struggle using online applications because I have never used them before and it affects my class preparation.' Moreover, Respondent 4 expressed 'Before online classes, I never used a computer in my life.' It shows how literate the participants were in the digital skills and it ultimately affected their preparation for the classes.

The majority of the participants also expressed their notion of conducting classes on different platforms and they were not assigned a single platform to conduct their classes. As Respondent 5 reported 'Initially, on Microsoft teams, we started conducting classes then another, it was Zoom. So, we were conducting through teams, and then Zoom and every teacher was applying whatever the tool was accessible and it brought many problems for teachers and students to understand the platforms.' It created difficulty for the teachers to learn the usage of those platforms in the meantime of struggling to adjust to the new normal world. In contrast, there was a minority of participants who did not encounter a lack of preparation as they were provided with the

facilities from their universities. As Respondent 1 reported, 'Our university has this readily available language learning management system called LMS. Many universities have this, so we shifted all our material online on the LMS. I prepared all my lectures in the form of PPTs, and then I pasted and uploaded all these PPTs on the URL. So, that the students would use them as well.' It showed that there was an important role of the university to carry out the online instruction correspondence and ESL teachers did not feel any difficulty in teaching students through LMS.

(ii) *Challenges in Teaching ESL Online Classes:* The respondents significantly expressed the challenges in teaching ESL online classes. This theme describes the numerous difficulties ESL university teachers faced in teaching students during the pandemic.

Most respondents reported that ESL teachers and students needed more resources and knowledge of Information technology. It did not make only students suffer, but teachers were primarily affected by it. Even if they could manage gadgets, the internet issue remained constant in Pakistan. As Respondent 6 said, 'Most of the students cannot afford such type of gadgets that we have. And also, we live far away, and most of us have signal connectivity problems.' It was also reported that many teachers did not have proper access to the internet connectivity and it caused difficulty in conducting classes properly. As Respondent 7 said, 'Teachers and students are also having difficulty with the internet; access to the internet all the time is impossible in Pakistan.' The absence of digital materials and internet connectivity remained a major problem for students and teachers during the pandemic in rural Sindh, Pakistan.

However, some said we should apply such new strategies in online classes to keep students focused and attentive toward learning, as Respondent 7 reported, 'If you teach them online, they need motivation, as long as they are university students, and they can understand the essence of instructions. We can better deliver them online.' It showed that the engagement of students remained a concern for ESL teachers during the pandemic. Furthermore, the participants considered preparedness as one of the major challenges they faced while teaching ESL online classes. They shared their perceptions about the preparedness of online teaching, where they all significantly focused on learning the

online platforms before teaching the English language online. Moreover, they also stated that teachers and students should have a proper internet connection, which was amply faced during online teaching and learning by the teachers and students.

(iii) *Advantages of Teaching ESL Online Classes*: One of the major themes reported in the data of the study was the advantages of teaching ESL online classes, where participants expressed the positives of ESL online classes and how they benefitted them to become good ESL online teachers.

Most of the respondents stated that the sudden emergence of technology initially created problems for them, but ultimately it made them tech-savvy. Many participants reported that the transition to online teaching largely impacted their digital literacy skills because it was the need for an hour to learn all these skills. Almost all the participants turned to YouTube and Google to learn digital skills. As Respondent 2 expressed, 'At first, I learned through different YouTube channels, now I'm good at using Zoom properly, making PowerPoint presentations, and sorting out the online problems.' Further, Respondent 5 said, 'Well, for getting knowledge about digital skills for online classes, I used to go through YouTube channels and also got the assistance of my friends who are good at technological skills.' The pandemic helped teachers to become technologically skilled and teachers learned various things that they can incorporate into their language classes today. The other respondents also supported getting information by watching videos and getting help from the seniors assisted them to do better in their classes; as reported by Respondent 8, 'If one watches some videos or gets the guideline from the seniors, he can perform well.' Conclusively, it helped them to become efficiently good at technological skills.

Moreover, the respondents at large described their notion about the recorded lectures and readily available material that students have in ESL online classes making them relieved of explaining again. This helped students to listen to lectures numerous times and read material to understand concepts and provided teachers a space to work on other lectures efficiently. As Respondent 1 said, 'You can send all the material online to the students, if they do not understand you, they will have the recorded lectures with them. So, they can go back to the lectures over and over again. This was one advantage of online teaching that the material was readily available for them.' It helped teachers and students efficiently.

Further, many of the respondents reported that they recorded their Zoom lectures and sent them to the students as they may not have any confusion left after listening to them a number of times they wanted. As Respondent 3, 'I record Zoom classes and provide them to my students and they attend it many times to understand well.' It shows that recorded lectures helped teachers to avoid clearing things and students could directly have referred to the recorded class instead of asking the teacher.

(iv) *Disadvantages of Teaching ESL Online Classes:* One of the major themes reported by the respondents in the data is the disadvantages of Teaching ESL online classes during the pandemic where they shared different problems they encountered while teaching to the students.

The majority of respondents stated that internet connectivity remained a prevalent and pressing problem for instructors in online teaching. In internet connectivity, the constant disruption, slow bandwidth, and unstable service were the major causes in rural Sindh. As Respondent 2 said, 'The Internet is the biggest issue in Pakistan. We live in a small city, when we talk about rural areas, the rural area constitutes a majority 70% of the population. So, we have to think holistically. For Karachi, it can be acceptable, but when we talk about the whole country, the internet problem is very crucial.' The respondents also expressed that many of the students did not have a proper networking system in their villages and they constantly complained about dropping signals. As Respondent 7 stated, 'Our students belong to Nara and Thar and their internet connections are slow and they cannot attend classes, it is also with some teachers too. It is a big problem.' It shows that internet connectivity with the people belonging to these areas was a big problem and they could not attend their classes properly and it ultimately affected their learning.

Furthermore, the respondents also expressed that student readiness remained one of the dominating disadvantages of teaching ESL online classes. It created problems for instructors in that they could not know whether the students were available from the other end to listen to lectures or not, as Respondent 5 said, 'If we continue teaching them, we have no guarantee either they are listening to us or they are asleep. Students were not ready all the time to attend classes.' It shows that respondents did not know about the students' availability in the class. As Respondent 4 stated, 'Sometimes I feel that I am only speaking in the online

class and there is no response I get from students.’ It expresses that the students only clicked the button to join the class but they were not there to attend it properly. The respondents considered it one of the biggest disadvantages of online teaching.

- (v) *Qualities of an Effective ESL Online Teacher:* One of the major themes that was identified in the data is the qualities of an effective ESL online teacher. The respondents reported traits of an ESL online teacher that make them effective in teaching online.

The majority of the respondents stated that an effective online teacher is the one who is capable of using all sorts of digital tools and must have knowledge of learning applications that are used for ESL online teaching, as Respondent 3 stated, ‘I believe they must be quite familiar with the technological tools. They are going to use it in the classroom.’ It is important to be well-equipped with technological skills, too, as it is said by Respondent 4, ‘You should be good at ESL teaching technological skills.’ It has become a compulsion and a need because we rely on it. As it is said by Respondent 7, ‘Teachers and students rely more on Google and other sources.’ It shows that the teachers must be computer-literate and capable of using modern tools to be good online teachers. Further, it is stated by the various respondents that an ESL online teacher must have skills of teaching English language skills online along with technical skills, as Respondent 8 reported, ‘Teacher must be a computer-oriented literate person, who should know all the options, along with the extensive subject related knowledge. In other words, we can say command of the information technology and English subject.’ It emphasizes the in-depth knowledge of the digital skills to be attained by a teacher to be a good online teacher.

Most of the respondents expressed that a teacher must be supportive, capable of meeting the needs of students, and cooperative to become an efficient ESL online teacher. As Respondent 2 said, ‘A good teacher should be very much cooperative, polite, and have a very simple way of teaching.’ Further, Respondent 6 added, ‘They should be teaching according to the expectations of their students in online classes.’ This theme emphasizes the behavior of a teacher toward students and the sincerity of a teacher toward the job. The majority of the respondents said that a good online teacher must have skills to engage students in the class. As Respondent 10 stated, ‘A good online teacher must know how to keep students connected to the

class because in online classes students lack connectivity and teacher cannot engage them properly.' It shows that, to become a good online teacher one must learn how to engage students in the class, otherwise, it is hard to convey your message to the students effectively.

(vi) *Difference between Online & Face-to-Face ESL Classes:* One of the major themes identified by the respondents is the difference between online and face-to-face classes where they largely talked about the various nuances that create variance between these two forms of teaching.

The majority of the respondents reported the difference in practices that followed in physical ESL classes and now in online ESL classes. As Respondent 6 said, 'Online classes are based on the content level, and face-to-face classes are based on activity-based level. This means one is skill-based teaching, and the other is skill-based learning. So, this is the great difference between these two.' They believed that the physical classes were based on activity-based learning and online classes content-based learning. Further, most of the participants also expressed that they enjoyed teaching physical classes in comparison to online classes, as Respondent 7 stated, 'I also teach as joy in physical classes, there is a joy of being attached to the students, and I also learn a lot from their feedback reviews. But, in online classes, I unilaterally speak without knowing if it is being understood or enjoyed by students. It is to keep talking to fulfill the responsibility. So that joy, that learning, that entertainment, and mutual understanding are being missed.' The ESL teachers significantly did not like online ESL teaching because they could not carry out activity-based learning and missed the learning connection of a student with a teacher.

Most of the respondents reported that they could not properly measure the students' learning in online ESL classes which was easy to measure in physical classes. The teachers also faced challenges in measuring the students' learning because most of them were not responding to them; as shared by Respondent 9, 'I faced one issue that I observed during the online classes, the students' response was not good. Hardly a few students responded to me, which created an issue to measure the students' learning, however, in physical classes I used to ask them directly in class.' The participants reported that they failed in assessing students learning and they could not do anything about it.

Internet connectivity remained an important aspect of measuring students' learning during this period; as said by Respondent 10, 'During online teaching, we face that students lack interest because of having nothing before them and listening to what we say. So, we could not make eye contact with them; we could not have facial expressions with them; we could not have any other sources that could connect them properly with us. I did not have anything to know that either they understood the concepts or not and remained there due to slow internet connection.' It shows that participants blamed the internet connectivity at large as they could not measure the language learning skills of the students effectively.

- (vii) *Challenging Experience of Online ESL Classes*: One of the major themes that is identified from the respondents' data is the challenging experience of online ESL classes where participants expressed their positive and negative notions regarding teaching ESL online to the students of the rural university of Sindh, Pakistan.

The majority of the students positively reported that they enhanced their technological skills, initially, even being very uncomfortable and naïve to this system. As Respondent 8 said, 'I have been teaching communication skills to the students for years but when I started teaching online, I started to bring in various activities; sometimes, I used to come up with reading comprehension. I used to bring Young World or Dawn newspaper articles and share them with my students through WhatsApp.' It shows that the participants brought many changes to teach online effectively and engage students in classes. Further, most of the participants also expressed that they were new to the digital tools and they never used them before in their classes and outside but the challenging online teaching experience made them good users of technology. As reported by Respondent 4, 'Yeah! None of us was able to use the technology at the time but by the passage of time it positively impacted my usage of digital tools.'

The majority of ESL teachers described that their practices of conducting examinations were quite challenging because it was changed due to an adequate ratio of students copied from each other. As Respondent 9 said, 'Most of the answers were the same because students were sitting at one place writing the test. So, it was difficult to handle a system that either may be doing it themselves or getting it done by others.' It shows that the

participants felt that the students sent the same copied assignments from each other. Further, the participants also reported that students sent direct Google material to the teachers, as Respondent 6 stated, 'Students cheat in assignments and annual examinations and send the Google material to us.' It shows that the majority of students cheated in examinations and it created a difficult situation for the teachers to handle it.

Summary of the Key Findings

The results of the thematic analyses were categorized into codes, focus codes, and themes. ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences of online ESL teaching during Covid-19 were examined through reflexive thematic analysis method. The total number of participants was ten (10) in semi-structured interviews who reported about the themes, accordingly. The participants stated that the perceptions of students' online engagement as moderate because they felt it was hard to achieve in online classes. In preparation and digital literacy, they reported having a better internet connection and knowledge of technological tools. In practice, they described that only content-based learning was available for the students, and most participants still preferred face-to-face teaching. The participants described challenges in examination/assessment, as they encountered that most of the students practiced copy and paste in the exams, the student's learning could not be measured because they found less responsive in classes, however, many difficulties faced by the participants in preparing for an online course, further, they also reported shortage of resources at the ends of teacher and students. A significant number of participants expressed that they could deliver the courses properly and commented upon their poor digital literacy, which improved over time. Moreover, the ESL teachers changed their teaching practices; some took it to only content-based learning, some reduced their course outline, and others remained with the same activity-based learning but increased their time to give to the students. However, online teaching positively impacted the digital literacy skills of teachers and changed examination patterns.

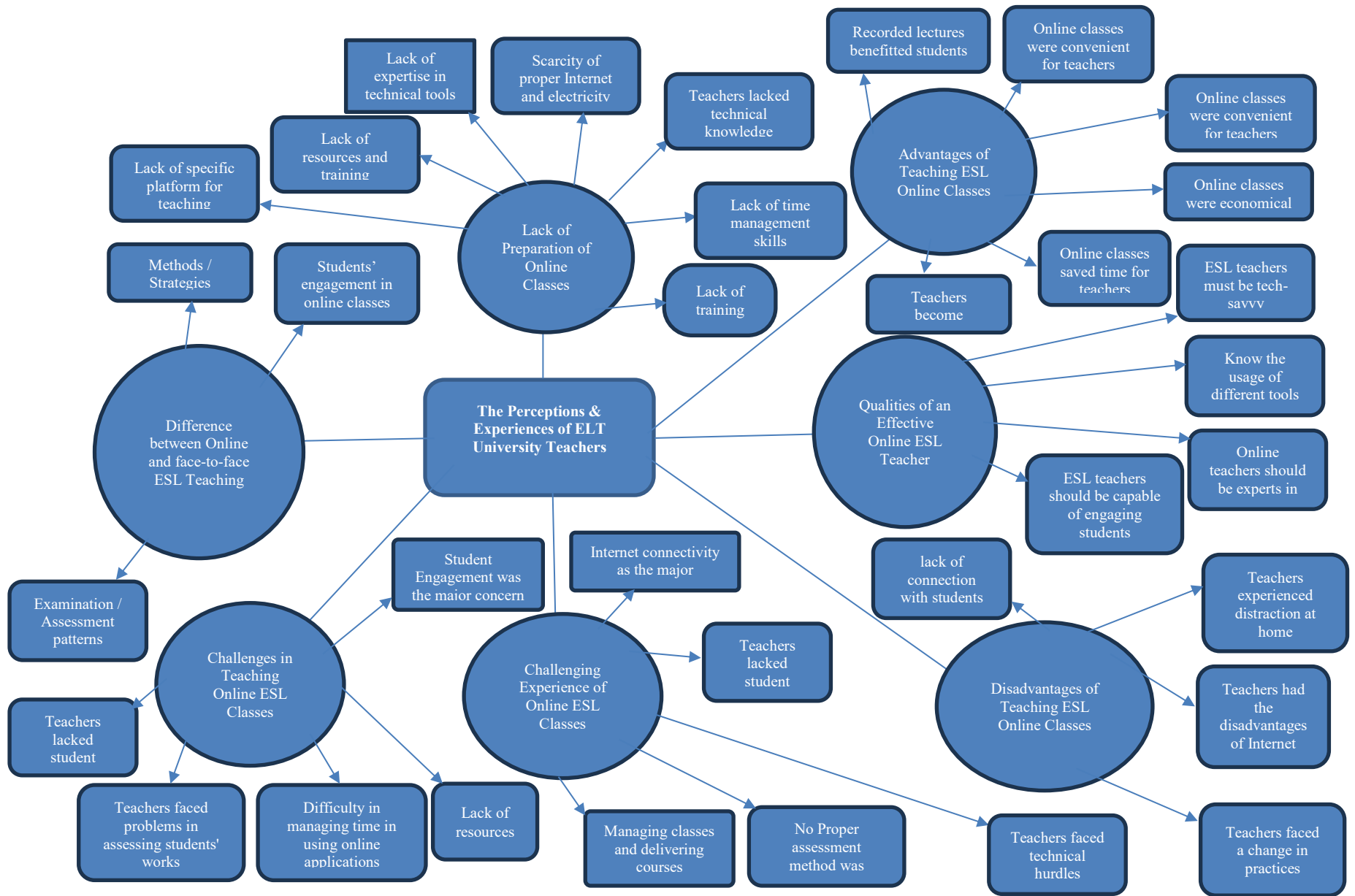


Figure 02 Thematic Analysis Map

Discussion

Researchers conducted a descriptive and thematic analysis to learn more about how ESL university teachers felt about online teaching during the pandemic. A significant number of participants were already familiar with online teaching, and a moderate number of participants were aware of how to use methods in online teaching. This finding is similar to the study carried out by Al-amin et al. (2021) in one of the universities in Bangladesh. It has become possible because Bangladesh had probably the same modes of education during Covid-19. On the other hand, the remaining teachers believed that their students required encouragement to continue learning through an online system. Similarly, the findings were found in an Indonesian study where the students needed motivation to continue learning (Dewi et al., 2023) Furthermore, 71% of teachers felt prepared to teach online, and 55% were willing to continue online teaching. This finding is similar to the study carried out in the 58 countries with a marginal difference, in Europe and Asia (Khong et al., 2023).

In semi-structured interviews, most participants stated that online instruction does not provide enough student engagement. They believed that one must have strong digital skills to become an online teacher, and their techniques were shifted to content-based learning. This finding is similar to the study where Spanish ESL teachers recommended the same skills for becoming the online teacher (Rahman et al., 2025). According to the findings, many teachers wish to return to face-to-face classes even after gaining competence. It's due to a lack of student participation, as well as a lack of knowledge about their learning status and internet access concerns. This finding of the study is dissimilar to the results of the study carried out in Australia where the teachers reported that the students were responsive and active in online classes (Karacaoglu, 2025). It is because of the advancement and new methods of the teaching are followed in Australia.

The results of the descriptive and thematic analysis revealed that a significant number of teachers were motivated and optimistic about learning online instructions; however, teachers received a negative response from students who engaged in behavioral misconduct and had a lower-quality learning experience. This finding of the study is similar to the results of the study carried out in Hong Kong (Yeung et al., 2022). It was possible because English is a foreign language and probably being taught in a same way like Pakistan. Participants also mentioned a lack of resources, a lack of awareness of digital skills, and an issue with internet connectivity in their local regions. While successful, the transition to online teaching looks uptight with difficulties, primarily due to the additional strain of learning modern technology, using materials, and

adapting lessons to the unfamiliar online learning environment. As a result, recalling previous results that proper material support and teacher training are required as preconditions for effective online teaching transition (König et al., 2025).

Participants described challenges in examination/assessment, where they encountered that most students copied and pasted in exams, the student learning could not be measured because they were found less responsive in classes, and the participants faced many difficulties in preparing for online courses. This finding is similar to the study carried out in India where ESL teachers faced same problems because of the same standard of teaching English to the students online (Rahman et al., 2025).

These themes were categorized under the influence of online teaching, where the teachers changed their teaching practices: some went to purely content-based learning, others lowered their course outline and stayed with the same activity-based learning but gave more time to the students. Furthermore, online training had a positive impact on teachers' digital literacy skills as well as examination habits. McCabe et al. (2020) What works in a traditional classroom should not be mindlessly applied to online teaching because the medium involves unique communication and class participation. It should come as no surprise that these factors have been identified as critical in developing an effective virtual learning environment.

Conclusion

This study examined Pakistani ESL university teachers' perceptions and experiences of online teaching during the pandemic in Sindh, except Karachi, regarding their perspectives on online teaching, challenges encountered, and the experiences of teachers' practices during the pandemic.

According to this study's findings, incorporating online language teaching in ESL classrooms significantly affected ESL university teachers. Teachers were moderately familiar with online teaching and strategies. Still, they preferred face-to-face classes because students in online courses were less engaged in learning and were more likely to engage in academic misconduct. Teachers faced numerous problems in class preparation, test administration, and student learning assessment, as well as a scarcity of resources, a lack of digital skills, and internet access.

On the other hand, online teaching significantly assisted teachers' practices since they learned and used many digital tools to make learning more engaging for students. The study recommends that more research may be carried out to look into how the present context has affected

instructional methods, particularly how teachers' perspectives and strategies for online teaching are associated and how their interdependencies make comparisons to pre-pandemic frameworks, teachers' attitudes, and approaches to online teaching.

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