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The Perceptions of Veterinary University Students towards Online English Learning Classes during COVID-19

Abdul Khaliq [*] Rasheed Ahmad [†] Noor Ul Ain [‡]

Abstract *Online learning has got penetration in the system of formal teaching-learning in covid-19 context. It has transformed the teaching methodology from traditional Physical classes to online classes due to the closure of educational institutes. The current study is significant as it aims to explore the perceptions of veterinary University students towards online classes using self-determination theory. The data were gathered from150 above stated English learning students through a questionnaire and analyzed by SPSS. The findings support that learning can happen within online classes, depending on the teacher's methodology and strategies in online classes. The results are effective for higher education institutes in determining the level of motivation and perceptions respondents have while taking English courses online, which can be made interactive by developing outcome-based courses with the integration of technology to fit the needs of modern education in the post-Covid-19 world.*

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Introduction

The academic challenges are more important as it facilitates the smooth flow of education and the quality of educational instruction in online classes. As every institute selected its own teaching portals like Blackboard, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). The teachers and students lack of knowledge about operating and taking classes online on these platforms due to accessibility issues reported to be the major obstacles in online education (Xu & Jaggars, 2014; Edgecombe et al., 2014). According to PTA (2020), there are 62 million broadband subscribers in Pakistan, yet many still do not have internet facilities available most of the time due to frequent power cuts for long hours. In such circumstances, institutes and teachers have to rely on the available infrastructural resources to teach, especially English language teachers who were teaching language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) virtually for the first time. Consequently, motivation, attitudes, and perceptions of students towards English language courses in online education is of significant importance. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by examining the perceptions of undergraduate students towards online engagement. Motivation is one of the most important components that affect the online teaching-learning process. (Firat et al., 2017). Motivation is defined as students' active involvement in interaction and desire to be part of an activity being carried in the classroom for successful learning outcomes. (Artino & Stephens, 2009; Goh & Kim, 2020).

COVID-19 transformed the living styles of people and also changed the teaching-learning process. Academic activities were transformed from Physical classes to online. This enabled individuals to live in the new normal by practicing social distance, self-quarantine, and virtual interaction (Sigala, 2020; Yezli & Khan,

[*] Assistant Professor, Department of Social and Allied Sciences, Cholistan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: abdulkhaliq@cuvas.edu.pk
[†] Visiting Lecturer, Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.
[‡] Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology (KFUEIT), Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan.

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2020; Maqsood et al., 2021; Radwan et al., 2020). WHO (2020) declared the first case of coronavirus in December in Wuhan, China. However, the first case in Pakistan was reported in February. WHO (2020) recommended strong actions to be taken in order to save the public from the effects of coronavirus. In this scenario, the government of Pakistan decided to impose a lockdown in the whole country. Subsequently, all the business centers, public offices, and educational institutes were closed. Importantly, the Higher Education Commission and Ministry of education and vocational training, in coordination with provincial education ministers, decided to suspend physical, academic activities and started online education to save the future of students (Quraishi et al., 2020; Bailey, 2020). Higher Education Commission in Pakistan advised universities to develop a mechanism for online classes, which was to be developed using a Learning Management System (LMS). Quraishi et al. (2020) reported that online education had many administrative, management, and academic challenges, but there are certain benefits as well, such as convenience and flexibility (Mejia, 2020; Sisson & Kwon, 2020).

Research studies have categorized motivation into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic. So in order to attain the particular objective, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is essential. Moyo (2009) and Utvær and Haugan (2016) define extrinsic motivation as the one in which people are involved in different activities because of external reward (marks, grades, and punishment and are interested in how others perceive them. Whereas intrinsic motivation is the one in which people are engaged in different activities due to internal wishes and desires and apply different learning strategies for achieving a learning outcome (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) and engage in fun learning rather than rote learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Both of them have essential roles in the achievement of different goals and aims. Moreover, English language classrooms in Pakistan focus on rote learning rather than skill-based learning. Also, students from different disciplines have low motivation for English courses as compared to their major discipline courses. In these circumstances, Covid-19 introduced a situation where learners, because of social isolation in their homes, were already facing mental health issues. Therefore, their personal motivation, connectivity with the learning material, and engagement with peers and within groups is of significant importance in the context of psychology students (Chen & Jang, 2010; Chiu & Hew, 2018).

Chiu and Hew (2018) narrated that online resources and teaching activities ultimately enhance students' interest and facilities' learning process. Holistically the performance of the learner gets improved. In this regard, motivation plays an important role, especially in learning English for specific purposes, because the course objective is to learn the skills to attain a language outcome in the future. As Cook (2008) explained that "high motivation is one factor that causes successful learning; in reverse, successful learning causes high motivation" (p. 139). Therefore, the choice of teaching material, content, and activities of the lesson needs to be appropriate. It should correspond to the motivations of the students. Online language teaching introduced many challenges especially developing motivation among learners for learning English. It has become a challenging task as it affects the attitudes and perceptions of the learners towards online education. With this dramatic shift in the online classes, it is important to investigate the perceptions of psychology students towards online engagement in ESP courses by analyzing their self-motivation, preference for student autonomous and feelings to connect with the learning material.

Online education started even before the pandemic in most of countries. However, in Pakistan, it became the only medium of teaching in the post-COVID world. Jeffery, Oberlander, MacDonald, and Bhatti (2016) conducted a study for the British council and reported that Pakistan lacks infrastructural assistance like the effective use of technology for successfully running online education. Shah (2017) had a similar view that universities' lack of infrastructural support and economic issues were the major hurdles in transforming traditional face-to-face classes to digital education. The first survey-based study exploring the perspectives of students, both undergraduate and graduate students, was conducted by Adnan & Anwar (2020). The results reported that 67.5% of students narrated that online learning is very different from the traditional classes, while 18.3% felt no major difference between online and physical classes because of the teaching practices. But 10.3% of respondents elaborated that online learning is

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more encouraging and motivating than conventional classes.

In another study, Abbasi, Ayoob, Malik, and Memon (2020) explored the perceptions of medical students regarding distance learning during Covid-19 using the quantitative descriptive cross-sectional method. Data was collected using an online questionnaire to 382 (245 female and 137 male) participants. The findings showed that 77% of the respondents had negative perceptions about distance learning, and students find online education less appealing than face-to-face sessions. Drenan, Kennedy, and Pisarki (2005) explored the attitudes of learners towards online education even before the world entered into the deadly pandemic. The study focused on two key attributes, students ease in terms of access, flexibility, and learning styles, using a survey questionnaire and technology acceptance model. Data was collected from students enrolled in the introduction to management course. The findings suggested that students' satisfaction is related to building positive perceptions on the effective use of technology and empowering independent learning. Similarly, Wei and Chou (2020) developed a structural model to determine the satisfaction and readiness of learners in online classes using a questionnaire. The data was collected from 356 students enrolled in Taiwan. The analysis showed that students' knowledge of computer skills and technology-enabled them to actively participate in online classes. Also, students' positive motivation and eagerness for learning had a direct relationship in shaping their perceptions towards online classes. Previous studies have mainly focused on determining the advantages and disadvantages of online learning (Bolliger & Halupa, 2018; Liaw & Huang, 2013; Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2018).

As the focus is on students' attitudes towards technology which includes computers and the internet. However, with the advent of easy access to social media platforms, blogs, and websites, students' perceptions towards the use of technology are changing (Alzahrani & O'Toole, 2017; Joyce & Kirakowski, 2015; Wei & Chou, 2019). Therefore, webbased resources and videos can be used as instructional material and incorporated to teach four language skills. This would ultimately enhance the motivation of learners in online classes. Liaw (2007) explored the perceptions of college students towards online learning and concluded that students' responses have four dimensions. This four dimensions had e-learning as its central dimension, which promotes self-independent learning with the practical learning environment, totally virtual interaction, and teacher as the role model for e-learning. In the same way, Wei and Chu (2019) applied Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) as a framework to investigate the perceptions and motivation of learners.

As Bertea (2009) and Morris (2009) concluded that learners performance improved with a positive experience of technology. Duggan (2001) explored the educational use of the internet and their behavior towards it. The findings suggested that if the students' perceptions are positive, they are likely to choose a course that applied to learn on the digital forum. Additionally, Yang and Lin (2010) identified that if learners have positive perceptions, they are interested in interacting and participating in digital forums, discussions and posting their assignments and write-up virtually. Therefore, a positive perception in using the internet for educational purposes can shape the minds of learners. Consequently, Paechter and Maier (2010) examined perceptions of students that constitute a favorable environment for learning from 2196 students in Australian universities. The results supported that good online learning material and monitoring one's progress throughout the semester promote positive perceptions among learners. Past research has been done to examine the factor of students' motivation and perceptions towards online classes and technology using survey-based studies. Studies have relied on final grades and feedback at the end of the semester, which mostly students fill out to achieve academic benefit. Subsequently, this study focuses on continuous assessment and language development in identifying the effect of online education on the motivation of learners and their perceptions towards online engagement in English for a specific purpose course which focuses on the four skills of language. Therefore, this study aimed to explore perceptions of students towards their performance and engagement in online English language classes.

Real learning happens when the teacher understands and tries to resolve the problems of learners. As in ESL classes, the teacher's major focus has to be the different skills acquired

during the courses. "English classes were different because we learned everything steps like speaking, reading and writing skills" (MLE01). While narrating about teacher effective use of technology and content delivery, one of the respondents said, "Teacher's lecture delivery in the online classes was interactive and supportive, as the teacher used a variety of activities" (MLE07). In the online classes' students' major concern, as highlighted by Quraishi, Asif, Sheeraz, and Amer (2020), has been network issues, speed, and flexibility. Similarly, respondents narrated that the teacher used a variety of platforms for learner's ease and as per instructions of the university management, "We took our ESL classes on different platforms Google Meet, Team, Zoom and even WhatsApp to become familiar with all the applications" In the same way another respondent said "We were more comfortable in using Google meet as it provided good voice and visual quality as compared to others" In short, the respondents appreciated the efforts of the teacher and strategy for tackling the attendance and internet issue and the use of technology and all the applications.

The respondents shared that the teacher used a variety of activities and quizzes to assess during the semester. As the respondents said, "I really like Kahoot, we used to compete among ourselves and the teacher at last used to congratulate the three winners" The teacher used different applications like Kahoot, Quiz, and Poll everywhere to assess and practice content. In the same way, one respondent narrated that "the best part was that they were not marked and used for practice purposes" While remarking about assessment, one respondent said that "these activities helped us to get good marks." Subsequently, to check the amount of learning in each class, one participant remarked that "the teacher used an exit ticket activity towards the end of the classes to check our understanding." "The best part was that the teacher right after the class asked which one was your favorite and least-favorite activity". And student remarked, "The next day, we would see some change" In the same way, dividing students into groups in online classes is difficult. However, the respondents give a contrastive view. As one participant said, "the letter-writing task was interesting, as we were divided into groups and wrote the letters collectively and the teacher frequently joined each group to give feedback". Similarly, another participant said, "we had an online reading race, the teacher assigned a passage and asked us to write the questions and answers and then in the online classes we had a competition". In the same way, another participant said, "peer-writing task was the best because we learn about editing our work before the teacher points out our mistakes" In the same way, another respondent said that "we had a movie-watching class as well and after that, we were assigned a writing task in groups, where we recreated different characters, and it was the best class of the semester." Assessment was difficult in the beginning, but as necessity is the mother of inventions it also transformed from Physical to online.

As other online classes promote teacher-centered classes, ESL classes were unique, as we were engaged in a variety of online and offline activities, and the lecture span was short as well. "The teacher used different confidence-building measures to give us confidence and make us independent learners. As one respondent narrated that "teacher promoted student-centered classes and gave everyone an equal opportunity to speak up." Similarly, another participant said that "the teacher uses different strategies to empower us". English learning classes focus on real learning.

Most of the learners believe that teacher training is an important factor in online classes. As a respondent said, "English classes made us realize that online learning can be engaging and interactive." In the same way, another respondent said, "It was because our English teacher was self-proficient in using the different tools that he was able to use them effectively with us". Also, the teacher's support and positive approach is essential, as one respondent said the teacher considered the learner's home environment in mind while designing and drafting different activities. In the same way, another participant said, "The teacher used different confidence-building measures; it was because of the support and motivation that we were able to give recorded presentations by switching on our camera and final exam live. Therefore, teacher training before online classes, motivation, and interactive teaching methodology is highly important in online classes.

Hence in online classes, teachers and learners' positive approaches towards learning, teaching methodology, approach, material, lesson plans, interaction, student interest,

teacher support, and the continuous assessment result in an effective learning environment. Hence, the modified self-determination theory framework (Deci & Ryan, 1985) considering the perceptions of learners can be utilized in future studies.

Aims and Objectives

The main objective of the paper is to explore the perceptions of veterinary university students towards online English learning Classes as students are significant stakeholders in the teaching-learning process. Therefore the current study is important to find out the perceptions of students about online English learning. The findings of the study would provide a significant guideline for the improvement of quality education in online andragogy.

Research Question

Keeping the above-stated objectives of the research following are research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of veterinary university students towards online English learning Classes?
2. Do the students of the veterinary university have positive perceptions about teachers in online English class teaching?

As the present study aims to explore the effect of online classes on the perceptions of learners in online English classes. Therefore, it uses the self-determination theory (SDT) developed by Deci & Ryan (1985) as a framework to examine the perceptions of students regarding engagement in learning the four skills of language. As self-determination theory denotes that student engagement is activated and energized by motivation and positive attitude. It tells us about the three parameters that humans require in a learning process: needs, motivation, and well-being of learners within the social context. This theory explains that the three factors autonomy, competence, and relatedness make the learners to act or not to act in a certain way. If the learner's needs are fulfilled, than the learners have high motivation and psychological well-being, but if the needs are not satisfied, then the learner experiences isolation and low motivation to be engaged in a learning process. Therefore, classrooms and teaching methodology where these three needs are activated promote a positive learning environment and high motivation (Reeve, 2013).

Chiu (2021) and Wei and Chu (2019) used the same framework to explore the motivation and perceptions of students towards online learning. Hence, the present study used the SDT framework to explore the needs, competence, and relatedness of learners in motivating them to be engaged in online ESP classes. The SDT framework is mostly used in face-to-face classes. However, Chiu (2021) suggested that in the present scenario studies that all future studies must focus on online and distance learning and their effect on the motivation and engagement of learners during the online classroom. Consequently, the present study uses SDT to identify the perceptions of students towards the online engagement in ESP classes, which was previously primarily identified using survey-based studies. In this study, SDT has been utilized for exploring learners' autonomy, personal motivation during online ESP classes, and their relatedness i.e., connectivity with the learning material. Thus, this study provides an in-depth first-hand respondent's viewpoints towards online engagement as this is relatively a new area of exploration in Pakistan. This study contributes in the underexplored area of ESP in online classes and SDT by discussing in detail the effect of motivation and perceptions of learners.

Methodology

The study aims to identify the perceptions of students towards online engagement in English course classes. This study utilizes a qualitative approach to know about the skills of learners and engagement practices during online classes focusing on three factors in SDT theory. As this study focuses on one classroom, therefore it utilizes a case study design. The population of this study includes undergraduate veterinary students of the Cholistan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Bahawalpur. The population includes both male and female students, and the reason for selecting the institute is its specific population. The target population is undergraduate psychology students enrolled in the 3rd semester studying English III course. This course is designed to specifically meet the needs and improve the skills of learners; it includes four skills, business communication and writing, grammatical knowledge required to deal in professional life in

the future. These students have been selected because English III is the compulsory subject offered at the university in learning and developing competence in the four skills of language for professional life. The sample consists of 150 participants. All the respondents were asked to fill the sociolinguistic profile, which collects demographic profiles, perceptions about online classes in general and language skills. The sociolinguistic profile was piloted and validated by external reviewers (one international and two local). After careful analysis of the questionnaire, 15 respondents were interviewed after formal written consent using the semi-structured interview to know about the perceptions of students regarding online engagement. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to know about the feelings, opinions, and views of the learners during online classes and engagement strategies and techniques used by the teacher. This tool was used as it provides in-depth analysis. Interviews were taken online on Google Meet because of Covid-19 as per university instructions, following the SOPs issued by HEC. The interviews were scheduled in consultation with the interviewee, and the interview schedule and consent form was shared through email and WhatsApp contact number. Upon acknowledgement and prior consent, interview data were recorded, transcribed and the data was coded, categorized, and themes were generated. The interviews with an individual student lasted for 35-40 minutes, and overall it took 06 to 07 hours to collect data from the 15 participants. The interviews were taken in English, video recorded, and transcribed in English; the grammatical errors were edited for analysis. During the interview, ethics and interview protocol were followed as the learner's convenience, time, and the setting was given priority, and the respondent was given a choice whether to open the camera or not in the virtual recorded interview on Google Meet.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through a questionnaire comprising 11 questions about students' perception about their online learning and 06 students' perceptions about teachers in an online teaching context.

Table 1. Shows the Gender and Mother Tongue Variables of the Participants.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	68	45.3
Female	82	54.7
Total	150	100.0
Mother Tongue	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Urdu	26	17.3
Punjabi	50	33.3
Saraiki	69	46.0
Other	5	3.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 1 reveals 68 male and 82 female veterinary English learning students with mother tongue categories 26 Urdu,50 Punjabi, Saraiki 69, and 5 other.

Information Technology Used Knowledge

Table 2. Showing self-rated IT Competence of the English Learners

IT Used Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage
Good	32	21.3
Better	80	53.3
Best	38	25.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 2 tells self-rated frequency of the learners about their IT knowledge. 32 having good, 80 better, and 38 with good status of IT competence.

Table 3. Indicates the IT devices self-reported status used by English learners.

IT Devices status	Frequency	Percentage
Latest	19	12.7
Good	48	32.0
Normal	83	55.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 3 shows 19 students have the latest IT devices, 48 good, and 83 normal type of IT devices for learning online English classes.

Table 4. Shows students' Perceptions about online English Course Classes

Item no	Statement		SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	M	SD
1	I like online classes.	*F*	29	93	16	4	8	3.87	.936
		%	19.3	62.0	10.7	2.7	5.3		
2	Physical classes are better than online	*F*	40	95	8	3	4	4.09	.797
		%	26.7	63.3	5.3	2.0	2.7		
3	I understand activities in physical classes	*F*	30	91	20	6	3	3.93	.820
		%	20.0	60.7	13.3	4.0	2.0		
4	I feel easy to understand learning tasks of the English language in online classes	*F*	34	91	17	6	2	3.99	.790
		%	22.7	60.7	11.3	4.0	1.3		
5	It is easy to communicate in online classes	*F*	36	94	16	2	2	4.07	.720
		%	24.0	62.7	10.7	1.3	1.3		
6	Online classes give me confidence	*F*	35	91	17	4	3	4.01	.798
		%	23.3	60.7	11.3	2.7	2.0		
7	Online classes are easy to understand	*F*	34	87	15	10	4	3.91	.912
		%	22.7	58.0	10.0	6.7	2.7		
8	Online classes are interesting to learn the English language	*F*	34	92	12	11	1	3.98	.815
		%	22.7	61.3	8.0	7.3	.7		
9	Online classes are innovative for English language learning	*F*	26	100	19	4	1	3.97	.685
		%	17.3	66.7	12.7	2.7	.7		
10	Online classes feedback is rapid	*F*	27	86	22	13	2	3.82	.875
		%	18.0	57.3	14.7	8.7	1.3		
11	I face difficulties in online classes in English language learning.	*F*	32	84	17	14	3	3.85	.930
		%	21.3	56.0	11.3	9.3	2.0		
Average								3.95	.825

Table 4 reveals that students like online classes (M= 3.87 SD=.936) while they think physical classes are better than online (M= 4.09 SD=.797). They admit comprehension of activities in physical classes (M= 3.98 SD=.720) at the same time they acknowledge to understand English learning tasks easily in online classes (M= 3.99 SD=.790). They reported easy communication in online classes (M= 4.07 SD=.720), and online classes give them confidence (M= 4.01 SD=.798). Online classes are easy to understand (M= 3.91 SD=.912) and Online classes are reported as interesting for English learning (M= 3.98 SD=.815). Students reported, "Online classes are innovative for English language learning" (M= 3.97 SD=.685). "Online classes feedback is rapid" (M= 3.82 SD=.875). "I face difficulties in online classes in English language learning" (M= 3.85 SD=.930). Overall, Means values indicate that veterinary English learning students like online classes even they have some difficulties may be in-network issues.

Table 5. Shows Students Perception of teachers in online English Course Classes

Item no	Statement		SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	M	SD
12	Teachers are well trained for online classes.	*F*	48	89	5	7	1	4.17	.757
		%	32.0	59.3	3.3	4.7	.7		
13	Teachers feel comfort in teaching English online classes.	*F*	27	101	15	5	2	3.97	.732
		%	18.0	67.3	10.0	3.3	1.3		
14	Teachers use suitable software for English teachers.	*f*	30	98	9	11	2	3.95	.822
		%	20.0	65.3	6.0	7.3	1.3		
15	Teachers feel problems in teaching online English classes.	*f*	33	100	10	4	3	4.04	.759
		%	22.0	66.7	6.7	2.7	2.0		
16	Teachers give feedback in online classes.	*f*	34	92	15	6	3	3.99	.819
		%	22.7	61.3	10.0	4.0	2.0		
17	Teachers need training in teaching English online classes.	*f*	22	93	28	5	2	3.85	.754
		%	14.7	62.0	18.7	3.3	1.3		
	Average							3.99	0.773

Table 5 indicates that students have positive perceptions about teachers' competence and performance in teaching English online classes. At the same time, students have the perceptions that teachers need training teaching English online classes.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows that the learners had positive perceptions about online education in general, as reflected through the analysis of the sociolinguistic profile. Students have positive perceptions about teachers' competence and performance in teaching English online classes. At the same time, students have the perceptions that teachers need training teaching English online classes. The analysis shows that an individual teacher used digital technology and applications to teach language skills efficiently to learners. In the same way, other studies can be conducted in a different context. Most of the studies conducted focused solely on the impact and preference of students towards online education. (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Jeffery, Oberlander, MacDonald and Bhatti, 2016; Shah, 2016). But this study explores the real life experience and feelings of undergraduate students while taking online sessions. Also, mostly medical and engineering field has been explored more, which require practical lab classes (Abbasi, Ayoob, Malik, and Memon (2020). This study focuses on English course learning which intakes the instruction for teaching and learning four skills of language that require practical work as well. Online learning has become the new norm for educational institutes as accessibility and flexibility of learning from their home with feedback, and quick assessment has a positive impact on the students.

This methodology and activities can be adopted by other course teachers to address the specific needs of their learners. For readers, some suggestions are given to adopting the best possible method for online classes, along with the names of some online tools. Online teaching has changed the traditional role of teachers, and now the 21st-century teacher has to be a counselor, learning facilitator, assessor, curriculum evaluator, teaching-learning material organizer, supervisor, and creator. As highlighted in this qualitative case study that an individual teacher can create an impact in the online ESL classes. Therefore, the same approach can be adopted by other teachers in online classes. In this regard, HEC has already started Online Teaching Module for Higher education teachers. This study suggests that a three dimensional approach must be adopted by teachers using different activities, games, and applications for online classes, namely synchronous, asynchronous, and Look-away from screen teaching (See Figure 4 for best practices). Also, the teacher should revise the lesson plans into the following units: warmup: recalling back the information in the previous class; pre, while and

post-teaching activities, which may involve using online tools like Padlet, word wall, Jamboard (for speaking and writing), Quiz, Kahoot and Poll everywhere (for assessment), YouTube, Tedtalks, ESL lounge and ESL lab (for listening), Google slides, canva and PowerPoint (for design instructions), screen-casting, flip grid (for short videos and presentations) and other online tools according to the objective. In this way, synchronous and asynchronous online teaching models can be followed. On the basis of findings, it is concluded that English language learning is interesting for veterinary university students as it is an innovative technique of teaching-learning. There is a need of teachers' training about online teaching and selection of good, easy and prominent software. University should adopt LMS (Learning Management System)

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