



Attitude to English Learning: A Study of Peer Group Influences during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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Abstract: *The aim of this study was to explore the students' attitudes toward learning English as a second language in Pakistan at the secondary school level during the COVID-19 pandemic. A quantitative research design was adopted for research and a descriptive research method was used for the research study because the descriptive research method was used to explain the attribute and characteristics of the population. Pakistan was considered as the population for the whole research but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was not possible to select the whole population the study concluded that educational institutions have adequate knowledge of the pandemic threat and the situation of unexpected illness transmission. Friends enjoy English learning; friends believe that learning English is not essential; friends believe that English is difficult; friends think that studying English helps them progress in other areas of study, and friends motivate each other to improve their English during COVID-19. The study recommends that if students had the technology, they would not panic. Thus, technology may be used in general classes also.*

Key Words: Attitude, English Learning, Peer Group

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Introduction

Students' mentality towards school is one of the most crucial factors in modern education. Students' attitudes matter because of their impact on their academic success. The success of pupils' attempts to learn English could be enhanced if their teachers took the time to gauge their moods and respond accordingly. According to Gomleksiz (2010), when teachers have a positive outlook on

their work, it rubs off on their students and helps them develop a more secure sense of who they are as people. One's feelings toward studying a foreign language could be complicated. It is possible that they have positive feelings about studying a new language but that these positive feelings are overshadowed by the learners', other students, or teachers' unfavourable feelings about studying a new language, which might slow their language acquisition.

Students' attitudes matter most when studying English as a second language. According to Zaman and Shahid (2011), students' motivation to learn English indicates their dedication to achieving their long-term objectives. The demands of other required courses, long school times, and the application of other disciplines mean that students still need help learning English at the secondary school level.

Education has the power to mould student behaviour to meet specific requirements. Teachers of languages other than English should prioritize cultivating positive attitudes among students. Attitudes toward learning affect actions like selecting or increasing one's reading of books, trying to learn a new language, etc. (Lakshmi, 2013). Particularly in education, students can excel in their area of interest with a positive mindset and approach. There is a connection between the learner's upbringing and how well they pick up a new language. Attitudes, both positive and negative, have a significant impact on the success of language learners.

In order to compete on a global scale, mastering English is essential. According to Fatiha, Sliman, and Yahia (2014), English is the most widely utilized worldwide language for communicating ideas and information. It is a tool for connecting with people of different backgrounds and sharing what you have learned. For success in many fields, students must acquire fluency in English. Learning is a lifelong process that can affect a person profoundly, from the day they are born until the day they die.

There is a pressing need to make the vast body of research that can be accessed with a single mouse click in today's highly sophisticated environment accessible to our generation. The next generation, in particular, must become fluent in English to access the world of information at their fingertips. This study investigates how students feel about studying English as a foreign language. What sets this study apart

from others is its narrow focus on students' perceptions of English as a medium of instruction. New studies conducted for COVID-19 look at how students feel about studying English as a second language.

The study of attitude has attracted much interest as of late. Most research on this issue concluded that a positive mindset on the student's part is crucial to academic success. Studying students' mentalities during COVID-19 is essential for several reasons. To begin, one's mindset unquestionably affects one's ability to learn. Second, there is a close relationship between one's attitude and their ability to learn. Teachers share their expertise, the values and norms they have learned throughout their lives, and how they have seen their communities and schools tackle problems. Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of schools and the adoption of distance learning, educators have had to adjust their methods of interacting with their students. A pandemic alters how instructors and students share information but also influences how those students feel about school generally.

The current scenario with the COVID-19 pandemic presents many difficulties for kids, teachers, and parents. Even if new schools have been set up to accommodate COVID-19, prospective students still have many doubts. Students' bad attitudes toward schoolwork can be attributed to the pandemic's continuing effects on teachers and students. The students' poor attitude towards English is notably noticeable during COVID-19. The COVID-19 period did not help students' mindsets. Primary, secondary, tertiary, and tertiary-high school pupils and those in higher education all feel the effects to varying degrees. The study highlighted students' perspectives on learning English as a second language amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

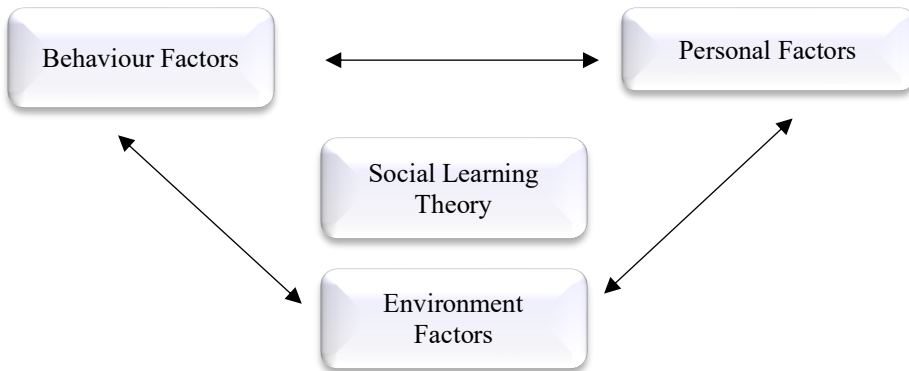
One of the most intriguing topics for discussion at COVID-19 is the changing perspective of students on learning. The student's demeanour indicates a capacity for

forming distinct opinions and responses. A student's mindset determines how well or poorly they respond. A restricted definition of attitude would be a mental stance towards

a sure thing, fact, or circumstance. One's mind, heart, will, character and actions can all work in harmony for the good of society. Theory of attitude;

Figure 1

Social Learning Theory



The study was research objective to find out peer group attitudes toward English learning as a second language as narrated by their fellows.

Review of Related Literature

An attitude is a way of thinking about or feeling about something. According to Jose, and Zainol (2012), one's disposition can be used to measure how well one achieves their desired results and carries out their desired behaviours. Therefore, a person with a firm belief in good values will inevitably have a favourable disposition toward the action. A similar consequence might be expected from the mentality of a person convinced that negative values are correct. Since Graddol (1997), students have spent over a decade studying at various levels, and their positive attitudes toward English have maintained a central role throughout. While most students speak English as a second language, they are trying to learn Chinese because they recognize that it is an increasingly important skill. Students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language dramatically

improve when taught using traditional methods.

According to Khalid (2016), an individual's attitude towards a particular object reveals their general attitude towards it through how they respond. The first, most crucial step in changing something is changing your attitude towards it. Every student goes through a wide range of both positive and negative situations. Attitudes are formed mainly based on students' past experiences, both positive and negative.

Students' perspectives on the English language have shifted drastically in the post-COVID-19 era, as they can no longer pursue the conventional route to education. Even though the classroom environment could be better, providing the kid with the most excellent education possible is always a primary priority. Utilizing web-based learning, which provides a novel environment for students and instructors, is becoming increasingly urgent. Learning a second language is challenging, but adapting to a new environment can profoundly affect students' feelings about using English.

During COVID-19, students' attitudes toward learning English as a second language went through several stages at the secondary school level in Pakistan.

Components of Attitude

An individual's motivation for learning a language is crucial. How you feel about learning a new language can significantly impact how well you do. Learning a new language is essential, and the psychological and social benefits cannot be overstated. Attitude towards learning a second language is just as important as intelligence or linguistic ability regarding a student's motivation to learn and master that language. A positive outlook has a catalytic role in a student's increased motivation to study a second language.

According to Jose and Zainol (2015), an individual's belief in the outcome or qualities of a behaviour (behavioural, faith) is best identified through their attitude towards the outcome or qualities of the behaviour. People confident that their actions will lead to desirable outcomes are more likely to view their behaviour favourably. A person's attitude towards a behaviour will be harmful if they are convinced it will lead to unfavourable consequences.

Students need the proper knowledge, interest, basics, motivation, and, most importantly, attitude to learn English and master any language. When students aim to become fluent in a particular language, their mindset is critical. Adaptation is at the root of attitude, which derives from the Latin *aptus*. An individual's attitude reveals how they will react in a given circumstance. One's attitude towards a given behaviour can be inferred from the strength of their beliefs about the value one attaches to the outcomes that would follow from engaging in that behaviour.

On the other hand, a negative attitude is

present when an individual is convinced that a set of undesirable consequences will follow from a particular course of action. It is not easy to describe how an individual feels about a topic as reflected in his or her attitude. According to Jain (2014), attitudes in language are laser-like in their focus and pinpoint-precise in their detail.

The Affective, behavioural, and Cognitive Elements: The affective dimension reveals how one feels about a thing in general. Feelings of either love or hate can accompany an emotional reaction. The behavioural aspect refers to what people do due to their thoughts and feelings about a topic. The resulting behaviour could be encouraging or un-encouraging. The cognitive component shows individual opinions about the object. Opinions exhibit individuals' beliefs or disbeliefs about the object. Affective components show feelings for the attitude object. This object may be English, depending on whether someone likes or dislikes the language. The second component is a behavioural component which shows readiness for action. If an individual has good conative in English, that individual will be good at English speaking. The third component is the cognitive component, as it is believed that the cognitive components include beliefs and thoughts. If someone learns English, it means that he/she believes English is a critical language.

According to Khalid (2016), an attitude directly influences behaviour because someone's attitude toward a particular thing shows how that person responds to that particular thing. The first, most crucial step in changing something is changing your attitude towards it. Every student goes through a wide range of both positive and negative situations. These pleasing or unpleasing experiences are the fundamental causes of the formation attitude of students.

According to Kartubi (2017), attitude is

usually someone's opinion or perception toward something. It further could be positive or negative depending upon the situation or condition. One's attitude towards a given behaviour can be inferred from the strength of their beliefs about the value one attach to the outcomes that would follow from engaging in that behaviour. On the other hand, a negative attitude is present when an individual is convinced that a set of undesirable consequences will follow from a particular course of action.

According to Delic (2020), attitude is essential for students' success because languages are tools to communicate with others. It is well known that attitude and languages are interrelated, so it is difficult to separate them from each other. Someone's attitude demonstrates interest in learning a second language. Attitudes are more complex than it seems. They are difficult to observe directly. Behaviour is an indicator by which someone can gain knowledge about a person's attitude; It means attitude comes first and later behaviour. However, attitude in terms of language is comparatively easy to observe by how someone talks in communication and how to use language.

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impacts on Learning Language Attitude

Hussein and Rabha (2020) argue that students' mentality toward studying English is crucial to meet the demands of the modern world successfully. The worldwide panic caused by the COVID-19 epidemic has affected the education sector more than any other. Both students and instructors are struggling to adjust to the pandemic. Students are unfamiliar with the manner of learning, and teachers need to be more comfortable with the new teaching technique, so adjusting to the new scenario is a problem for everyone involved. While the internet can be used as a teaching and learning tool in the classroom, requiring

students to rely only on it presents significant challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced students' perspectives on English education. Everything that used to be given regarding classroom responsibilities and rules has been updated.

Hughes (2020) claims that the widespread consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic on children's education have left important research gaps. The social aspects of education have been brutally interrupted. The COVID-19 epidemic has had far-reaching effects on the lives of people of all ages, touching on education, economics, and equality, among others. In particular, the learning environment has undergone a drastic shift. How children feel about learning can impact how well they do in school. Students' perceptions of risk related to the COVID-19 pandemic may also influence their attitudes toward learning English as a second language during the coronavirus outbreak. It is because students may find studying English as a foreign language other than their mother tongue challenging. Students' attitudes towards learning English and their exposure to the pandemic virus COVID-19 reveal a lack of social cohesion during this crucial transitional period between elementary and secondary school.

Kaharuddin (2020) claims COVID-19 impacts students' attitudes toward studying English. Also highlighted is the cultural context within which these students study English to gauge how this influences their outlook and progress in the language. When comparing students' perspectives on learning English, there is a large discrepancy between those who acquire the language through face-to-face interaction and those who acquire it through Internet media. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic was a trying time for students' motivation to study, especially for English as a second language.

The COVID-19 epidemic impacts kids'

schooling, claims Spiterii (2021). Organizing their schoolwork from the comfort of their own homes presented a new challenge for students. The trend toward replacing traditional forms of classroom exercise with virtual ones is not promising. Schooling requires a lot of time and effort and a setting that is inviting and conducive to learning. The goal of education is to give students authentic sensory experiences, as it is at this stage a child needs the correct concept that may be seen as a brick that allows him to construct a solid foundation.

Positive and Negative Attitudes

Attitude refers to one's general demeanour and demeanour toward life. Attitudes are affective and cognitive, as explained by (Brown, 2000), which means that they are connected to one's way of thinking and emotional state. Learning a second language is a challenging endeavour made more so by the fact that doing so requires exposure to new cultural norms and practices, which affect one's attitude toward the work at hand. Attitudes are shaped from a young age by various factors, including interactions with carers, peers, and the larger community, all of which share and contrast. As such, attitudes "comprise a component of one's evaluation of oneself, other people, and the society in which one resides."

From this, we deduce that we have encountered primarily two mentalities across all species of humans and animals. These include

1. Positive attitude
2. Negative attitude

Both of these perspectives have distinct outcomes and effects, particularly in education.

Those who consistently look for the best in others and life as a whole will always focus on the positives rather than dwelling on the negatives. When you are having bad luck but

still greet the day with "Good Morning" instead of "What is good about this morning," that is a small but meaningful example of an optimistic attitude.

Those with a perpetually pessimistic outlook seldom see the positive aspects of anything and instead, focus solely on the negative ones. If someone is fortunate in life but, despite this, still finds time to criticize others and fly into fits of wrath, they have a pessimistic outlook. A poor outlook on the target language and culture (which may result from more formal, external interaction with the target civilization and society) might impede learning progress. Their optimistic outlook on the process greatly enhances a person's success in learning a second language. "constructive attitude towards the individual, the essential/intrinsic language group, and the second language group boosted up the skills," as defined by several kinds of research (Brown, 2000).

Students with positive perceptions tend to improve and become more united about negativity in their language learning attitudes. In contrast, students with negative perceptions may fail to improve and advance in their language learning. Through exposure to different methods of teaching a language and some professional guidance, students' perspectives on the language they are learning could shift to be more positive. It is hard to tell whether someone is positive or negative just on their attitude. People can have contrasting attitudes. Therefore, it is possible to have a favourable outlook on some things while harbouring a negative outlook on others. This difference wholly depends on the aspirations, financial stability, motivation, skills, confidence, and opportunities of the person in question.

Learners' Peer Groups

The attitude of a language learner can be significantly influenced by his or her peers. According to (Morgan, 1986), the influence of

peers over parental influence can be significant, regardless of the motivations behind the influence. Attitudes are inseparable aspects of developing awareness and agony in humans; they emerge in early childhood due to exposure to parental and peer models, interaction with those different from oneself, and related schmalzty factors in human participation. One's self-perception, other people's perceptions, and understanding of one's culture are all shaped in part by one's attitudes.

Morgan (1986) claims that by senior year, most high school students have established close relationships with their families and peer groups. The habits they have formed with their peers and elders in the past help shape their perspectives on those essential people in their lives. Peer groups like class, mergers, alliances, brotherhoods, and basilicas differentially foster the appearance of self-assured attitudes pertinent to the group, which can determine whether or not one is accepted and actively participates in the group.

Research Methodology

In this study, the descriptive method was used for the research to explore the students' attitudes toward English learning and peer group influences during the COVID-19 pandemic. A *descriptive study* is a quantitative method in which the researchers use different formulas and numeric values to accomplish the research study.

According to Hughes (2020), a population is the collection of a specified group of human beings or non-human entities like objects, educational institutes, geographical areas, and time units. The population of the present study consisted of secondary school students in the southern Punjab region. According to Hughes (2020), a sample is necessary and better

representative of the population. A sample is an accurate picture of the population. It is essential because it gives accurate results. Due to limited time and sources and the deadly period of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not easy to take the whole population, so the researchers randomly selected the sample. The present study used simple random sampling to identify and select the respondents. The sample size for the study was 407 students.

A questionnaire was used to collect data from the representative sample of the study. Finally, the questionnaire was finalized with 12 items after performing the procedure of pilot testing, validity, and reliability. The questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire was constructed very actively because of the need for the questionnaire to get responses from students. The experts checked the face validity and content validity of the questionnaire. Some items from the questionnaire were dropped, and necessary amendments took place. Then the final draft of the questionnaire was discussed and approved with the kind help of the advisors. After approval from the experts, the questionnaire was administered to the decided sample of the study. At the same time, the overall reliability of the questionnaire was 0.81 coefficient alpha.

The researchers personally contacted respondents and provided questionnaires by hand or postal mail. Respondents received clear instructions. Analysis of data is a compassionate part of fundamental research. The data was collected through a questionnaire. Close-ended data was initially handled in Microsoft Excel. Then the data were analyzed with the help of a statistical package for social science (SPSS, 22.0) and applied the percentage method.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1

Peer Group Attitude toward English Learning as Second Language

S. No	Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
1	My friend/friends communicate with me in English.	43.0	26.8	16.5	10.3	3.4
2	My classmates feel happy whenever I speak English.	29.0	37.1	18.4	9.8	5.7
3	My friend/friends motivate me to improve my English during COVID-19.	24.4	25.8	24.1	10.2	9.6
4	My friend/friends do not feel good whenever I speak English.	24.1	17.9	22.9	20.6	14.6
5	My friend/friends feel bored when I speak English during COVID-19.	15.2	17.4	21.9	25.8	19.7
6	My friend/friends always skip English homework during COVID-19.	20.4	20.6	17.1	23.6	18.3
7	My friend/friends enjoy English learning during COVID-19.	26.0	28.3	23.3	12.5	9.8
8	My friend/friends believe that learning English is not important during COVID-19	17.7	20.4	28.5	23.1	10.3
9	My friend/friends feel that English is difficult during COVID-19.	18.9	15.7	21.4	27.5	10.5
10	My friend/friends think that studying English helps them to make good relationships with others.	25.3	26.0	17.0	18.4	13.3
11	My friend/friends feel jealous when I speak in English.	16.7	17.7	15.0	32.9	17.7
12	My friend/friends distract me from my passion for being fluent in English speaking.	21.1	21.9	16.5	23.3	17.2

Item 1 shows the peer group's attitudes toward ESL learning. The data shows that 69.8% of students agree with "My friend/friends communicate with me in English." The pupils (10.3 + 3.4 = 13.7%) disagree with the preceding statement; my buddies speak English. Students (16.5%) also said, "My friend/friends communicate with me in English." Most students (69.8%) agree with the statement, "My friend/friends communicate with me in English."

Item 2 shows the peer group's attitude regarding English as a Second Language. The primary data shows that (29 + 37.1 = 66.1%) of

students agree with the statement "My classmates feel happy whenever I speak English," while (9.8 + 5.7 = 15.5%) disagree. "My classmates feel happy whenever I speak English" was UD for 18.4% of kids. Students (66.1%) agree, "Whenever I speak English, my classmates feel happy."

Item 3 shows peer group attitudes regarding ESL. The data shows that 50.2% of students agree with the statement, "My friend/friends motivate me to improve my English during COVID-19," while 19.8% disagree. "My friend/friends motivated me to improve my English during COVID-19" was

UD for 24.1% of students. "My friend/friends motivate me to improve my English during COVID-19" is supported by 50.2% of students.

Item 4 shows peer group attitudes regarding ESL. The primary data shows that 42% of students agree with the statement, "My friend/friends do not feel good whenever I speak English," while 35.2% disagree. The statement "my friend/friends do not feel good whenever I speak English" was UD for 22.9% of students. "My friend/friends do not feel good whenever I speak English" is supported by 42% of students.

Item 5 shows peer group attitudes toward ESL. The results show that 32.2% of students ($15.2 + 17.4 = 32.2\%$) agree with the statement, "My friend/friends feel bored when I speak English during COVID-19," while the students ($25.8 + 19.7 = 45.5\%$) disagree. My buddies get bored when I speak English during COVID-19. Students (21.9%) also said they were UD about "My friend/friends feel bored when I speak English during COVID-19". Most pupils (45.5%) disagree with "My friend/friends feel bored when I speak English during COVID-19."

Item 6 shows peer group attitudes regarding ESL. The data shows that $20.4 + 20.6 = 41\%$ of students agree, "My friend/friends always skip English homework during COVID-19," whereas $23.6 + 18.3 = 41.9\%$ disagree. "My friend/friends always skip English homework during COVID-19." (21.6%) was also UD. Students (41.9) disagree that "My friend/friends always skip English homework during COVID-19".

Item 7 shows peer group attitudes regarding ESL. The research shows that 54.3 per cent of pupils agree with the statement, "My friend/friends enjoy English learning during COVID-19," while 22.3% disagree. "My friend/friends enjoy English learning during COVID-19" was also UD for 23.3% of students. "My friend/friends enjoy English

learning during COVID-19" is supported by 54.3% of pupils.

Peer group attitude toward English Learning as Second Language is item 8. The research shows that 38.1 per cent of pupils agree, "My friend/friends believe that learning English is not important during COVID-19," while 33.4 per cent disagree. Students (28.5%) agreed, "My friend/friends believe that learning English is not important during COVID-19". Most pupils (38.1%) agree with the statement, "My friend/friends believe that learning English is not important during COVID-19".

Peer group attitude toward English Learning as Second Language is item 9. According to the data, $18.9 + 15.7 = 34.6$ per cent of students agree with the statement, "My friend/friends feel that English is difficult during COVID-19," while $27.5 + 10.5 = 38.0$ per cent disagree. 21.4 per cent of students agreed, "My friend/friends feel that English is difficult during COVID-19." Most pupils (38%) disagree with the statement, "My friend/friends feel that English is difficult during COVID-19".

Item 10 depicts ESL peer group attitudes. "My friend/friends think that studying English helps them make good relationships with others," says 51.3 per cent of students ($25.3 + 26.0$). "My friend/friends think that studying English helps them make good relationships" is rejected by 31.79 per cent of students. "My friends think studying English helps them make good relationships" (17.0%) was also UD. "My friend/friends think that studying English helps them make good relationships with others" is supported by 51.3% of students.

Item 11 shows peer group attitudes regarding ESL. The research shows that 34.4 per cent of students agree with the statement, "My friend/friends feel jealous while I speak in English," while 50.6% disagree. "My friend/friends feel jealous while I speak in English" was UD for 15.0% of

pupils. "My friend/friends feel jealous while I speak in English" is rejected by 50.6% of pupils.

Item 12 shows peer group attitudes regarding ESL. According to the data, 43% of students agree, "My friend/friends distract me from my passion of being fluent in English speaking," while 40.5% disagree. "My friend/friends distract me from my passion of being fluent in English speaking" was UD for 16.5% of students. "My friend/friends distract me from my passion for being fluent in English," 43% of students agree.

Findings and Conclusions

The findings of the study are as under;

1. The study reveals that most students (69.8%) agree with the statement, "My friend/friends communicate with me in English."
2. The study found that Students (66.1%) agree, "Whenever I speak English, my classmates feel happy."
3. The study also found that "My friend/friends motivate me to improve my English during COVID-19" is supported by 50.2% of students.
4. The result informed us that "My friend/friends do not feel good whenever I speak English" is supported by 42% of students.
5. The study found that most pupils (45.5%) disagree with "My friend/friends feel bored when I speak English during COVID-19."
6. It is clear from the result that Students (41.9) disagree that "My friend/friends always skip English homework during COVID-19".
7. It is clear that "My friend/friends enjoy English learning during COVID-19" is supported by 54.3% of pupils.
8. The study shows that most pupils (38.1%) agree with the statement, "My friend/friends believe that learning

English is not important during COVID-19".

9. It is found that most pupils (38%) disagree with the statement, "My friend/friends feel that English is difficult during COVID-19".
10. The study clears that "My friend/friends think that studying English helps them make good relationships with others" is supported by 51.3% of students.
11. The study reveals that "My friend/friends feel jealous while I speak in English" is rejected by 50.6% of pupils.
12. The study also found that "My friend/friends distract me from my passion for being fluent in English," 43% of students agree.

Based on the findings, the study concluded that educational institutions have adequate knowledge of the pandemic threat and the situation of unexpected illness transmission. Friends enjoy English learning; friends believe that learning English is not essential; friends believe that English is difficult; friends think that studying English helps them progress in other areas of study, and friends motivate each other to improve their English during COVID-19. As a result, it was deduced that most respondents disapproved of sharing the narratives of their peers' attitudes about second-language English acquisition.

Most students said their peers did not complete their English assignments during the COVID-19 outbreak, leading teachers to draw that conclusion. Some students display a different perspective on their peers, such as the idea that working together might improve education, and others show that they like studying English through online platforms.

Recommendations

The study ended with the researcher making

some suggestions based on their findings. Regarding success, one's attitude is the first and most important factor. Self-care education must be accessible in Pakistan so that people there are prepared for emergencies like natural disasters and pandemics. For better future decision-making, the government should provide specific counselling centres for young

students. They can better handle unexpected events.

Students should learn to use technology effectively and understand its role in life decisions. Everybody had problems during COVID-19. If they had the technology, they would not panic. Thus, technology may be used in general classes also.

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