ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Teachers' Perceptions of Netiquette Practices by undergraduate Dental Students During Online Classes in Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Netiquettes are general rules and customs governing social and professional interactions that are considered acceptable.
Objectives: To explore Teachers' perceptions of netiquette practices by undergraduate dental students during online classes in COVID-19 pandemic**.**
Study Design: Descriptive cross-sectional Study.
Methodology: Research was conducted in two leading private dental colleges of twin cities. Convenience sampling was done to obtain data. A self-constructed questionnaire comprising of open and close ended questions was disseminated to the dental faculty of both colleges through What's App groups.
Statistical analysis: SPSS software, v 21 analyzed data.
Results: Responses from ninety-seven participants showed that students exhibited a casual attitude in online classes and showed lack of interest and motivation. Issues like absenteeism, distraction during classes and use of unfair means during exams were prevalent. Teachers were of the opinion that students should be guided properly on how to attend online classes and provided with constructive feedback. Faculty had a general idea about "netiquettes., however, there was a significant lack of formal knowledge regarding netiquette rules and standards. On account of this, most of the participants reported the lack of institutional guidelines for netiquette standards and practices. Therefore, a need for documented netiquettes policy in educational institutes was suggested.
Conclusion: We concluded that accrediting bodies and medical institutions should formulate a policy of netiquette practices. Implementation of netiquette practices in the undergraduate curriculum is the need of time.
Key Words: Netiquette Practices, Undergraduate Students, E-learning and Online Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented use of technology in daily lives has given birth to a unique question, "how to behave on the internet?"[1]. Etiquettes are general rules and customs governing social and professional interactions that are considered acceptable[2]. With the rising trend of using technology in all walks of life, it is vital to understand the etiquette essential for acceptable online behaviour[1].

COVID 19 pandemic has changed education globally; following the stay-at-home directives of WHO, medical colleges had to abruptly shift from physical face-to-face classes to online classes[3]. This sudden transition brought administration, faculty, and students immense challenges, as online teaching and learning was a novel experience for all stakeholders[4]. One of these challenges was effective communication among teachers and students. Interaction between faculty and students is imperative for successfully implementing online teaching[5]. Students and teachers are used to expressing themselves face to face; however, the online environment changes social interaction[6], for which no one was prepared.

To ensure an optimum learning experience for students, specific ground rules must be set before the commencement of online classes[7]. These rules set the tone for any online communication, be it synchronous or asynchronous, and are termed netiquettes[8]. Netiquette has been derived from the combination of network and etiquette[8]. It refers to a set of "ethical rules, politeness, convention and etiquette standards" that should be implemented, learned, and followed during all online interactions[9]. It has been observed that setting ground rules during online classes increases students' sense of community and motivation, encouraging active participation in discussions and enhancing the quality of online education[10]; therefore, it can be said that following online etiquette is not a choice. Instead, it is obligatory, as lack of netiquette destroys online communities by creating disharmony, fear and discomfort[2].

Netiquette has been identified as a new field of study that requires attention due to its significant implication on quality online education[1]. So far, the main focus of netiquette research has been on asynchronous communication like email, social media, students' knowledge regarding netiquette, or the use of netiquette on online discussion forums. Knowledge and practice of netiquettes are essential for students, faculty, and administration[2]; however, research on netiquettes is still limited.
Objectives: To explore teachers' perceptions of netiquette practices by undergraduate dental students during online classes in COVID-19 pandemic**.**

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted in two dental colleges of Islamabad, using purposive convenience sampling. A self-constructed questionnaire was shared with the dental faculty of both colleges via WhatsApp groups. The questionnaire was based on a thorough literature review, and three medical educationists had validated it. The questionnaire consisted of nineteen closed-ended while two questions were open-ended. Ethical approval was obtained from both colleges before starting the research—97 out of 125 faculty members responded. The response rate was 77.6%. Responses were coded, and themes were based on the two open-ended questions asked in the questionnaire.
Statistical Analysis: Data analyzed by SPSS v-21.0. Data was presented as percentage and frequency.

RESULTS

The total sample size includes 97 participants who were faculty members of two leading private dental colleges of twin cities of Pakistan. Among participants, the majority were female, comprising (88%), and the remaining (11.9%) were male. The mean age of the study group was (37.47+/- 1.74) years. It involves basics and clinical faculty members with a designation range that

includes junior faculty, i.e., demonstrators, senior lecturers, senior registrars with (57.36%) and senior faculty consisting of Assistant Professor and above (42.97%) were shown by table-1.

Table-1: Teachers' Perceptions Of Netiquette Practices In Covid-19 Pandemic

Students' and Teachers' awareness and practices about netiquette rules/ standards	Yes	No	May be
Experience of online teaching before the advent of Covid-19	9% (9.3%)	86 (88.7 %)	2 (2.1%)
Awareness of netiquette rules, standards, and practices before taking the online classes	26 (27.1%)	59 (61.5 %)	11 (11.5%)
Knowledge and understanding of the term "netiquettes."	56 (57.7%)	35 (36.1)	6 (6.1%)
Respectful communication between students and teachers during online classes	87 (89.7%)	2 (2.1%)	8 (8.2%)
Active participation by the students during online classes	31 (32%)	53 (54.6 %)	13 (13.4%)
Students respectfully respond to relevant online class questions	82 (84.5%)	7 (7.2%)	8 (8.2%)
Development and dissemination of rules and regulations before the start of online class	76 (78.4%)	18 (18.6 %)	3 (3.1%)
Rules followed by the students during online classes	62 (63.9%)	11 (11.3 %)	24 (24.7%)
Provide support to the students in understanding and practice of acceptable behavior in online learning	67 (69.8%)	16 (16.7 %)	13 (13.5%)
Feel motivated towards online teaching in future	59 (60.8%)	18 (18.6 %)	20 (20.6%)

Data based on challenges faced by the teachers regarding netiquette practices, and possible strategies to overcome the challenges were summarized in table-2.

Table-2: Frequency of Responses Gathered through Surveyed Questionnaire

Challenges faced by teachers due to lack of netiquette practices by students	Yes	NO	MAY-BE
A code of conduct provided to the students, including netiquette standards by the teacher during online classes	36 (37.5%)	48 (50%)	12 (12.5%)
Awareness of the students regarding etiquette expectations from teachers during their online classes	38 (39.6%)	36 (37.6 %)	22 (22.9%)
Possible strategies to ensure good netiquette practices in online education.	YES	NO	MAY-BE
Institutions included netiquettes in the online teaching and assessment policy	16 (16.7%)	60 (62.5 %)	20 (20.8%)
The necessity of a documented policy for netiquettes in educational institutions	83 (85.6%)	4 (4.1%)	10 (10.3%)
A need to include netiquette standards in the undergraduate dental curriculum	90 (92.9%)	0 (0%)	7 (7.3%)

DISCUSSION

The covid-19 pandemic has affected medical education throughout the world. Medical teachers faced numerous challenges during online classes. Despite lack of preparedness and training in delivering online education, the medical institutions underwent a forced transition from face-to-face to online teaching and learning[12]. This study was conducted to understand the perceptions of the dental faculty regarding netiquette practices by students in online classes.

During online sessions, teachers gave instructions for acceptable behaviour to their students, and these instructions were followed accordingly. The majority of the faculty in this study reported that students' participation in the synchronous and asynchronous discussion was courteous, classes were joined on time, and appropriate language was used during the online session. Though understanding the acceptable online behaviours, most teachers did lack formal knowledge of netiquette rules and practices. This finding is comparable with a recent study mentioning a lack of awareness of students regarding specific netiquette rules and practices[9]. Literature also reports that Netiquette awareness and practice are essential for both teachers and students[13]. Literature reports that strong internet etiquette is not an option; instead, it is necessary[14].

While sharing their experience regarding online teaching, medical teachers reported no formal experience and training in online teaching before the advent of Covid-19. This lack of teacher training is also reported by Aziz et al. identifying various challenges of online teaching and learning during the pandemic[12].

Though students generally behaved well in online classes, there was a lack of teacher-student interaction, students' active participation in online classes. Teachers reported a lack of interest and attentiveness shown by students in online classes. Farooq et al. have reported similar challenges in their study, like student engagement issues in the online learning environment, internet disruptions, lack of student attentiveness, and students' interest during online classes[4].

Other significant findings from the study are student engagement issues, lack of class participation, and unfair means in online assessments. This corroborates with the findings from another study reporting students using unfair means in online assessments[15,16]. While proposing strategies to improve netiquette practices in online classes, teachers mentioned making class participation in online classes a part of the internal assessment. The effectiveness of using this method has been reported in a recent study[17]. Giving significant weightage to online classroom participation and quizzes helped enhance student participation in online classes and increased student engagement[18]. Participants also recommend using interactive gamification tools like Socrative, Kahoot for student engagement, tasks reflecting interactive small group discussion, and faculty training for effective teaching in the online learning mode. Online interactive assessment tools foster student engagement and prove effective in online assessments[19]. It was also recommended by the participants of this study that student counselling and providing students with constructive feedback can positively affect netiquettes. Literature reports that giving a set of prior netiquette rules, creating online communities, encouraging discussion, and providing positive feedback hampers student learning and engagement in online learning[20]. Constructive feedback positively affects students' learning and behaviour in online classes[21].

Limitations: The study has few limitations as well. The size of the sample was not enough to generalize the results. Limited resources were available.

CONCLUSION

We concluded that accrediting bodies and medical institutions should formulate a policy of netiquette practices. Implementation of netiquette practices in the undergraduate curriculum is the need of time. This study is a baseline investigation towards the teachers' perceptions of netiquette practices by medical students in online classes. Further research would build a consensus on netiquette rules and practices that can be documented in policy formulation on Netiquette rules and practices.

Authors' Contribution:

SI&RH: Conceptualized the study, analyzed the data, and formulated the initial draft.

FA&MT: Contributed to the histomorphological evaluation.

RM,RY&AK: Contributed to the analysis of data and proofread the draft.

TL: Proofreading of whole manuscript.

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