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## **Journal of English Language, Literature and Education (JELLE)**

Journal of English Language, Literature and Education (JELLE) is a quarterly peer reviewed and open access research journal. The primary aim of JELLE is to generate and disseminate high quality knowledge about English language, literature and English Language Teaching (ELT) to promote advanced researches and the best practices in these fields.

It invites contributions from researchers, scholars, teachers, students, alumni, luminaries and policy makers associated with English language, linguistics, literature, English Language Teaching (ELT) and education across the entire globe. The journal seeks to publish original research, action research, review article and review of new book.

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## Online Learning Experience and Challenges of Undergraduate Students During COVID-19

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### Abstract

*The paper presents a comprehensive view of students' viewpoints on online learning and academic, psychological, domestic, and social problems. The study analyzed different aspects of online learning and their effects on students' lives. This research aimed to analyze the concerns of undergraduate students of the University of Central Punjab. Due to the closure of physical classes and institutes, the data collection for this study was done online through a survey questionnaire structured on google forms. A primary source of data collection was used and a sample of 100 students from different departments of the University of Central Punjab was approached. Responses to the survey questionnaire served to represent students' stance on online learning. A majority of respondents showed satisfaction over online learning and grading system. Similarly, most of the respondents had a neutral perspective on Microsoft Teams as a learning platform. Assignment submission and attempting quizzes was not a very difficult task for the university students. Poor internet connection was a major issue along with a lack of motivation for students in online classes. The study addressed major issues faced by students during online classes and learning feedback on the shifted system of online classes due to COVID-19.*

**Keywords:** Online Learning, Respondents, COVID-19, Google Forms, Feedback

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## **Introduction**

Covid-19 has divulged as an epidemic that has constituted a contemporaneous threat or warning to the whole of humankind. This epidemic has strongly enforced worldwide closure of various exertions or activities, as well as an educational enterprise, and this has emerged as an enormous response to the crisis's emigration of universities with distance learning operating as the academic platform. As we all know, Covid-19 has come across in Wuhan's seafood market in the end month of the year 2019. Online learning is frequently used conversely with overlapping and definite terms such as blended learning, distance, and e-learning. In the past three years, online learning has just internationally become a considerable and important part of educational learning (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Moreover, online learning is the use of several other dominant technologies and the internet to originate material only for academic grounds, administration of the program, and educational delivery (Fry, 2001). The whole world is attempting to evade the gap and lessen the loss of students produced by the ongoing epidemic. Nevertheless, the consequences of

online learning are not every time a blessing or favour to the student's community.

With contemplation to the reality, the current study is an endeavour to demonstrate the challenges and experiences faced by students of undergraduate during this Covid-19 epidemic. As we know, COVID-19 disease was identified in Pakistan in March 2019. About 150 countries worldwide have introduced e-learning platforms as a solution to continue the education process during the pandemic. Online learning has given ease to numerous matters such as time, recorded lectures, and as well as personal space. But at the same time, students faced many challenges and have experienced a lot in these online learning. If we talk about challenges then many students experienced technical problems such as taking classes on teams, difficulty in logging in or turning in assignments, a complication in joining the class, also getting grades during online learning is quite challenging for some students moreover, students encountered many domestic issues during this whole learning experience of online education. So, this whole online learning process was demanding and

complicated for learners, as well as they experienced much in online education. Online education can be a provocation or challenge for both students as well as facilitators (Jaques& Salam, 2007).

Some major challenges which students went through in online learning include technical problems, time management, distractions, staying encouraged, understanding course prospects, adjusting to uncommon technology, inadequacy in-person communication or interaction, and unpredictability about the future. Moreover, this study will also demonstrate what students like and don't like about this online learning, whether learners choose it or not, and how much students were pleased with the facilities during online education. The survey targeted 100 participants and we have got 100 responses. 46% of them were male participants and 54% of them were female. Candidates belong to several departments and semesters.

### **Research Objectives**

- I. To investigate the equivalent change in students learning and grades in shifted teaching practice.
- II. To investigate student's digital

literacy rate before and post online education in COVID 19.

- III. To analyze the circumstances of a pandemic on students to explore their results.

### **Research Questions**

The research work aims to answer the following questions:

- I. What difference E-learning has induced in student's education and what change has been noticing in the grading criteria in switching circumstances of online courses?
- II. How digital literacy has helped students in learning?
- III. How pandemic has affected the everyday life of higher education students?

### **Literature Review**

With the outbreak of the pandemic, the absolute systems were changed and institutions and industries were shut down for a long period (Urdan&weggen, 2000). The Sloan Consortium reports that the business of life started to resume partially. Educational institutes resumed their classes on virtual grounds. This was done through various online platforms

as Microsoft teams, zoom and dashboard. COV-ID19 has affected the entire world. Pupils, teachers, businessmen, employers and labourers all have faced difficulties in different ways. In this research, the researcher discussed problems that teachers and students have faced. This partial resume of curricular activities brought several problems for faculty as well as students in Pakistan (Urdan&weggen, 2000). Lack of resources and development is a major problem faced by Pakistan being a developing country (Rosenberg, 2001). Faculty members were equally unprepared for this emergency and this type of virtual classroom. Teachers were given basic workshops for this new system of teaching during pandemic situations but there remained a lot of problems and distress among students and teachers for this new system of online teaching and learning (Owusu-Fordjour et al. p15]. Students, on the other hand, were facing many problems regarding, connectivity, technical incompetence and household distractions. The whole shift in the system of education from physical to online classes was a new experience for teachers as well as students' issues (Aleksander Aristovnik \*, 2020). And besides all technical and domestic

issues, the distress of the pandemic situation and the stress of lockdown made things worse at both ends.

The expeditious growth in the usage of assimilating advancement, especially the use of network-based communication or automation has provided educationists much higher convenience to interrogate the most convenient learning conditions for their student's teaching and learning style (Akkoyunlu, B., &Soylu, M. Y. 2008). The motive of the present study was to scrutinize the students' views and learning style on blended teaching, defining blending learning as “to combine or blend modes of Web-based automation, for example, collaborative learning, self-paced instructions, live-virtual classroom and streaming audio, text and video (Driscoll,2002). The research was conducted at Hacettepe University, with thirty-four students. The two instruments were the questioner planned to recognize students' perspective on Kolb's learning and blended learning Style Inventory. Subsidiary data were assembled from attainment scores of learners and information exemplifies learner's participation in E-learning environment (Akkoyunlu, &Soylu, M. Y. 2008). E-learning is a usual or



ordinary method since it is accomplished to present the content of the course in an extensive period of setup compared to other procedures or practice and classroom environment; it authorizes teaching for seven days, twenty-four hours; it extends an additional number of students or learners; it certifies a teaching environment which is individualistic of place and time (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003) especially for grown-up learners. The use of web environment judgment and face to face conditions depends upon the learning styles. The face-to-face characteristic of the procedure has the highest mean score when the students' evaluation is taken for deliberation. The inclusive findings intimate no consequential differences between student's accomplishment levels as stated in their learning pattern and techniques (Soylu Akkoyunlu, M. Y. 2008).

This objective of the research was based upon seven factors, telling the standard or definitive of online learning during the pandemic, which includes administrative, learners, instructor and technical support which are the variables influencing e-learners (Elumalai, K. Sankar, J. P., R. K., John,

Menon, N., Alqahtani Abumelha. M. A. 2020). The Coronavirus has greatly influenced the educational system, introducing e-learning. Online learning and access to the portals are called e-learning. The findings divulged that there is a constructive connection amongst the standard of e-learning as well as the set of variants in the higher learning section, and during the pandemic of Covid-19 there is a consequential difference in the student's perception between levels, of course, gender-specific also the standard of online learning in the educational area (Elumalai, K, Sankar, J. P., R, K., John, Menon, N 2020). Administrative assist becomes a crucial factor in executing certain inventive online learning methods in universities (Barefield & Meyer, 2010).

We all know that covid-19 has affected the entire world. Pupils, teachers, businessmen, employers and labourers all have faced difficulties in different ways. In this research, the researcher discussed problems that teachers and students have faced. Students had never experienced e-learning before, the same is the case with teachers. It was difficult for both to take online classes. Many trials and errors occurred. Some students were

satisfied but the majority were unhappy. Some of the difficulties faced by people were environmental issues, some educational content which required physical class environment, lack of technical knowledge and also major internet connection problems. Some teachers who were familiar with online classes could easily make it. As it was a sudden shift to online classes so, teachers were unprepared. Many had environmental problems. The environment was not suitable for online classes. Despite facing all these real problems in online classes, the world health organization declared a pandemic to secure our country's assets. Children and students are assets of every country and for their health, a lockdown was essential. If we contrast online and physical classes then physical classes are better than online classes because teachers use different methods to teach students, teachers need immediate feedback so that they could evaluate easily the performance of students. The student's and teacher's environment was not suitable for online classes. Many had environmental problems. The environment was not suitable for online classes. Noisy background, internet problems, electricity problems, many difficulties were faced by teachers as well as

students. Pandemic has affected every country and city whether it's Europe, America or any other. In many studies before COVID-19, the possibility of online classes has been examined as a part of future education. So, a change in the curriculum of online classes was compulsory. If we contrast online and physical classes then physical classes are better than online classes because teachers use different methods to teach students, teachers need immediate feedback so that they could evaluate easily the performance of students. Not every subject is easy to like, math etc. Students must make an effort to actively participate in online physical education classes and record the process. Everything has an advantage and disadvantage. So as the online and physical classes. Online classes are not time taking whereas physical classes are (Hyun-ChulJeong& Wi-Young So, 2020). In online classes, you finish your class in about one-third of the time than it takes you on campus. Whereas on-campus classes take time. Online classes give you ease at many things like time, recording lectures as well as personal space. But at the same time, practical learning is only possible in physical classes. For Example, all the science practical's, art classes etc. are not possible in online classes.

By 31 July 2020, COVID-19 had spread across 217+ countries and territories, with almost 17.1 million confirmed cases and 668,073 deaths (Aleksander Aristovnik \*, 2020). Recent research conducted by researchers of Slovenia in October 2020 analyzed the global effect of a pandemic on students of higher education from various perspectives. Their study proposed that this shift from onsite to online lectures was marked by high levels of depression and anxiety of higher education students relating to their career, social and domestic issues as well as psychological and institutional issues (Aleksander Aristovnik \*, 2020). Specifically, students working along with higher studies and financially unstable students faced hardships more as compared to students with better resources. The study analyzed in-depth the response of students on demographic and geographic elements including comparative learning outcomes and online grading and assignments (Volery, 2000). The study also included responses of students on social, psychological and emotional experiences (Aleksander Aristovnik \*, 2020). Modes of teaching and evaluation as well as expectations of students and their performances were

recorded. Administrative and teaching criteria were analyzed and their respective outcomes were searched to observe a shift of teaching and learning patterns in onsite and online pedagogical approaches (Johnson & Berge, 2012). Besides recording the positive and appreciative approach of developed and urban students, the study also kept in view the responses and feedback of rural and remote area resident higher education students (Chang, et.al 2014, p.3). The study concluded its responses in an overall condition of destressing and anxiety in students of higher education (BussakornCheawjindakarn, 2017). Allen and Seaman (2014) stated the rate of satisfaction was greater in developed and relatively equipped areas whereas rural and remote areas show a sharp decline in educational progress and motivation in this epidemic situation.

## **Methodology**

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population was UCP undergraduate students. A sample of 100 students was selected randomly and data was collected from that sample. The respondents were both boys and girls. The sample included students of the Faculty of Arts and

Social Sciences, UCP Business School, School of Accounting and Finance, School of Media and Communication Studies, and UCP Law School. Responses included 46% responses from Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 20% responses from students of UCP Business School, 6% participants from Media and Communication Studies, 4% respondents belonged to School of Accounting and Finance and 24% responses from UCP Law School students. So, the sample selected randomly was highly representative of the population. Moreover, the participants of the survey were students of different semesters from BS Degree. All the respondents have gone through the online learning environment on Microsoft Teams, so the population and sample were the right respondents for our research.

### **Research Tool**

For data collection, a mixed type of questionnaire was adapted. The adapted questionnaire consisted of 15 items. Demographics include questions of gender, department, and semester of the respondent. The second section of the survey questionnaire was about online academic experiences that

included Likert scale questions. This section included 15 questions about student's satisfaction and viewpoint about the effectiveness of online learning as well as class interaction and response rate of students in online classes. The section serves to know the student's aspects of satisfaction with online grading and attempting online assignments and quizzes. The next section included some questions about student's online literacy and software issues faced by students during online classes on Microsoft Teams. This section included Likert Scale questions on experiences of students during online classes like joining meetings and turning in assignments and quizzes. After this section, domestic and social hindrances for students in learning online were discussed. The psychological concerns of this shift of learning system from on-campus classes to online learning environment were also analyzed through Likert Scale questions and a short question. The survey questionnaire was developed on Google Forms and circulated to respondents online due to physical classes and the closure of the university. The survey questionnaire was adapted with the ideological adaption from (Aristovnik, 2020).

## **Data Collection**

Data collection for this research work was done online due to lock down and shifted online learning environment. The survey questionnaire was developed online on Google Forms and the questionnaire was circulated to sample respondents through WhatsApp and email. The survey was circulated on 8<sup>th</sup> January; 2021 and remained open for responses till 11<sup>th</sup> January; 2021. After receiving 100 responses, the survey was closed and data were analyzed and discussed.

## **Data Representation**

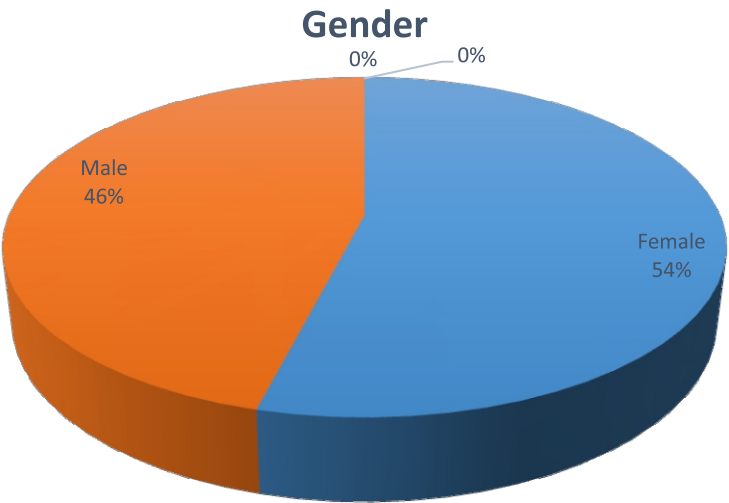
The data collected via google forms in the form of a mixed type adapted survey questionnaire gave an insight into student's perspectives of online education. The results achieved from the survey are given below:

### **Section 1: Demographics:**

Demographics of data collected through survey questionnaire show that

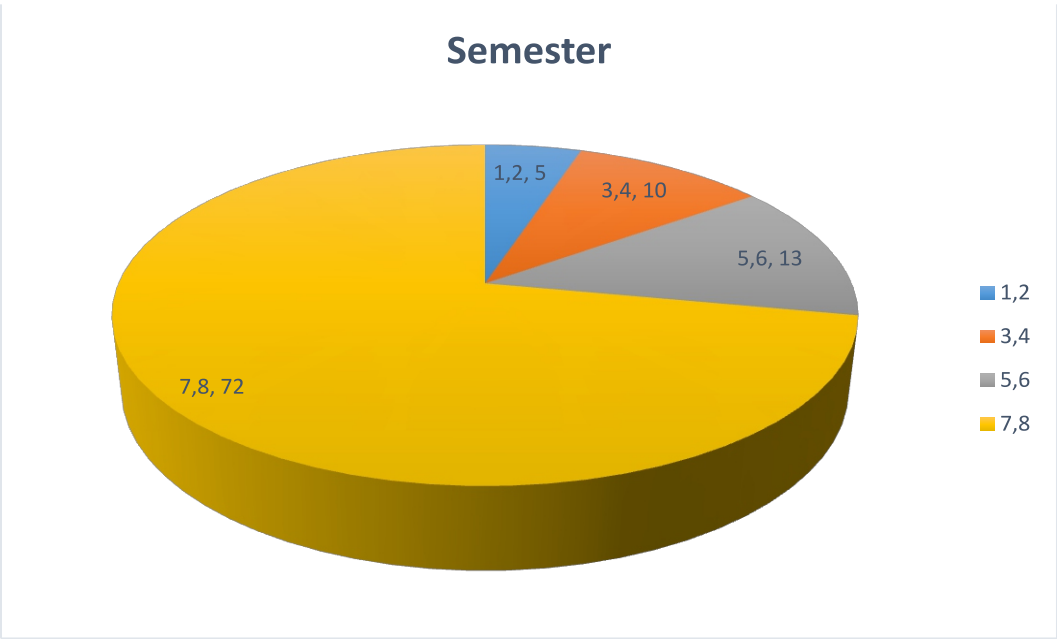
the sample of 100 students from the University of Central Punjab, 54% of whom were female and 46% male participants. Data shows that the sample had students from different semesters and at all levels, students have different experiences, so the sample was highly representative. Data shows that the sample consisted of 5% students of the first and second semester, 10% students of third and fourth semester, 13% participants were enrolled in their fifth or sixth semester whereas a majority of participants were mature students of seventh and eighth semester of undergraduate-level study. Moreover, the sample for data collection included students of different departments. For example; the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), UCP Business School, School of Accounting and Finance, School of Media and Communication Studies, and UCP Law School. The demographics data collected from the survey is given in the following table and pie charts:

Demographics: Gender of Respondents.



Section 1: Demographics. Graph 1.1: Gender

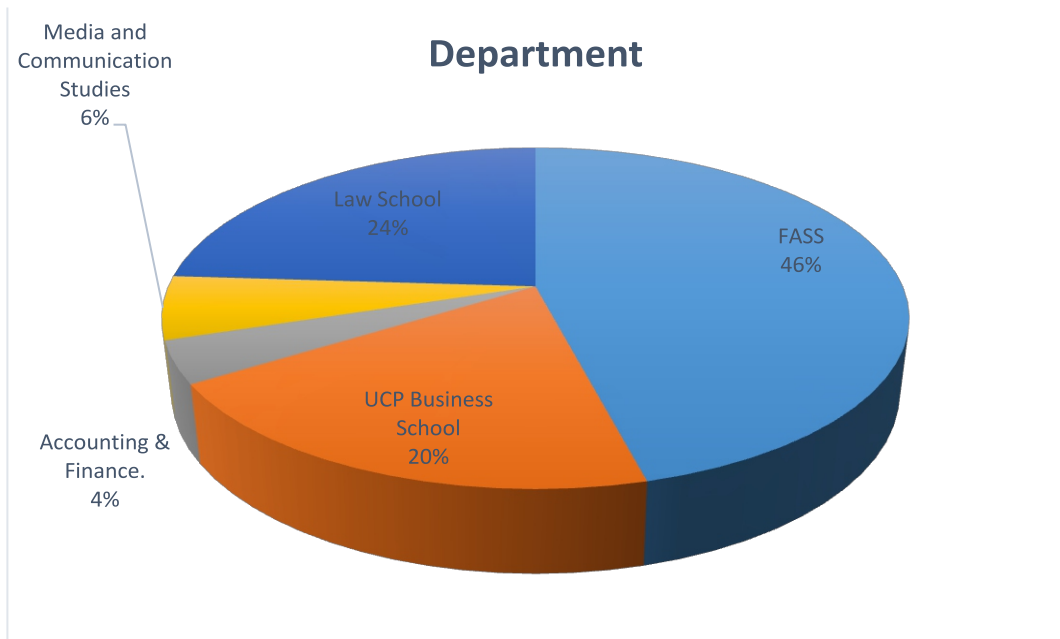
Demographics: Semester of Respondents



Section 1: Demographics. Graph 1.2: Semester

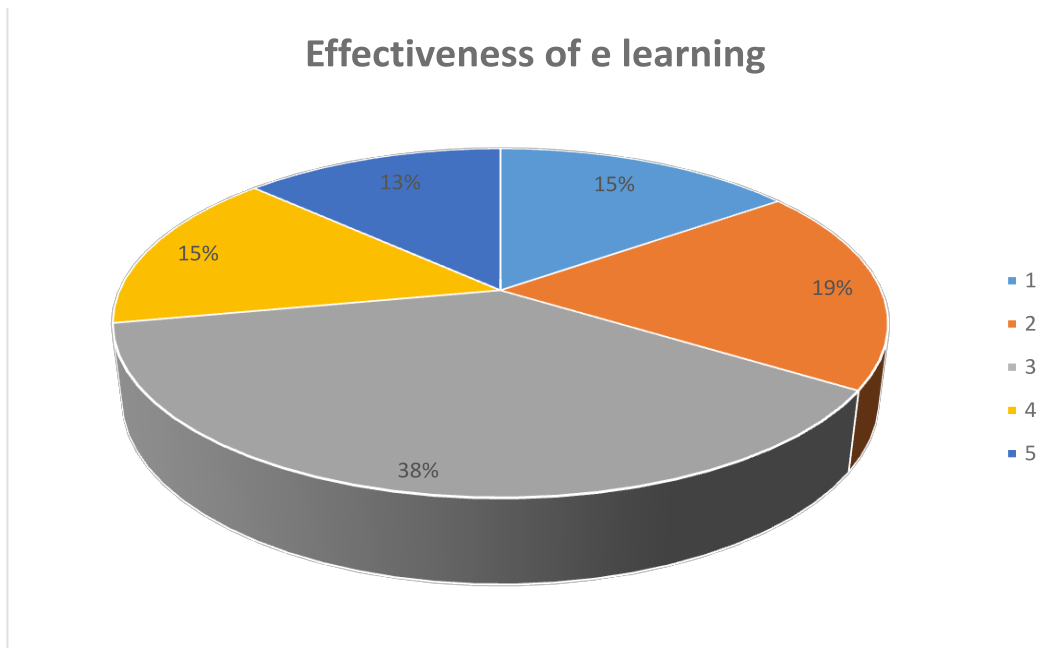
Section 2: Academic Experiences

**Demographics: Department of Respondents.**



**Section 1: Demographics**

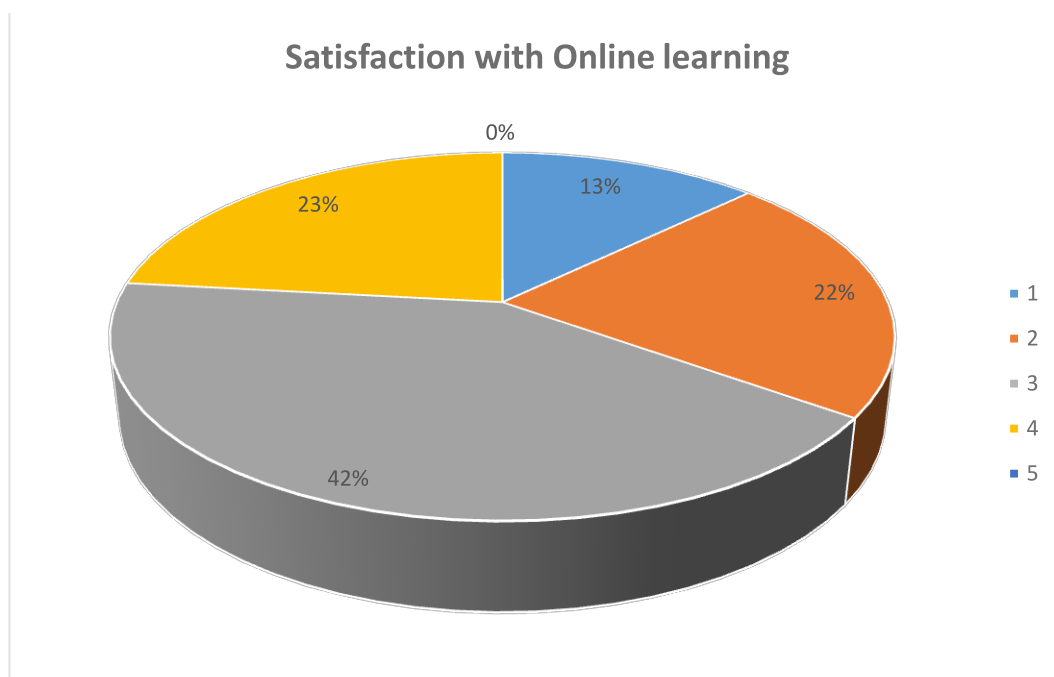
**Graph 1.3: Department of Respondents' Academic Experiences: Effectiveness of e-learning.**



**Section 2: Academic Experiences**

**Graph 2.1: Effectiveness of E-Learning.**

## Academic Experiences: Satisfaction with Online Learning.



### Section 2: Academic Experiences

Graph 2.2: Satisfaction of Students with E-Learning.

In this section, the academic experiences of undergraduate students of UCP students during online learning are collected through Likert Scale questions. Student's perspectives on different aspects of learning and academia in online classes are gathered.

#### \*KEY

*1=strongly satisfied*

*5= strongly dissatisfied*

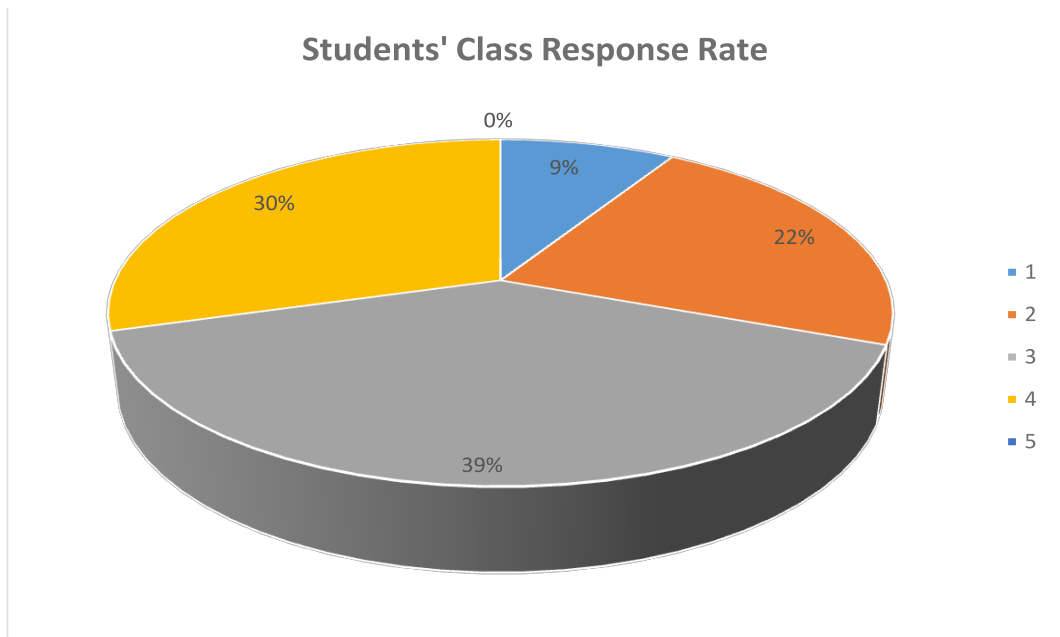
Student's perspective on effective e-learning in the light of results of the survey (graph 2.1; table 2/ annexes) says that 34% of students were

strongly satisfied with the effectiveness of online classes, whereas 38% of students had a neutral opinion on the stance. The results of the survey responses show that 28% of students were strongly dissatisfied with this online learning

About online learning (graph 2.2; table 2/ annexes), 30% of students were very much satisfied with online learning and their comprehension in online classes, 36% of students had neutral feedback whereas 34% of students showed dissatisfaction over online learning.



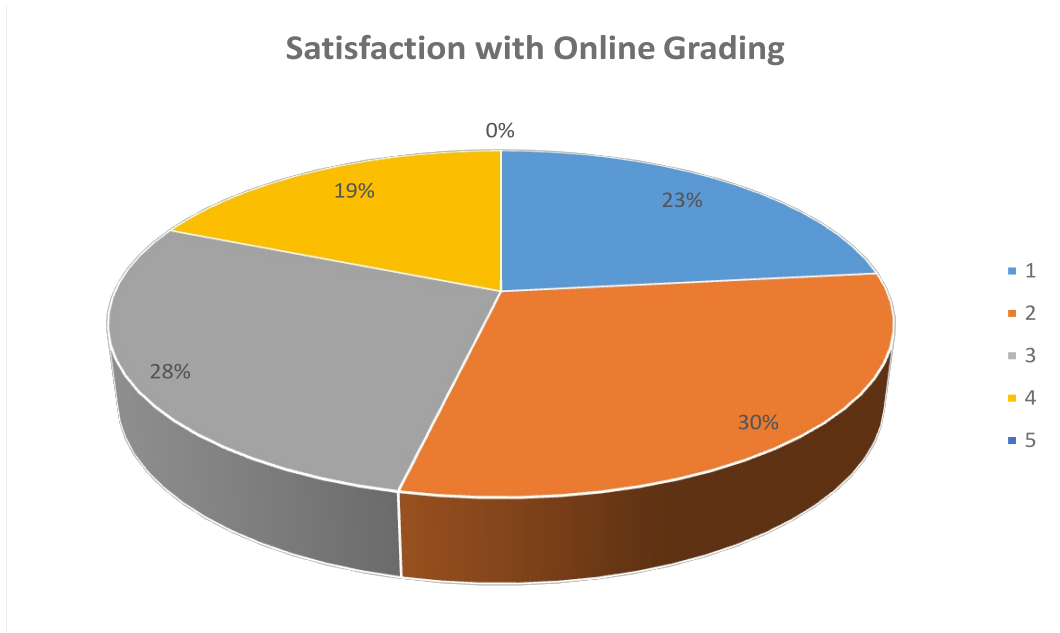
Academic Experiences: Student's Class Response Rate.



Section 2: Academic Experiences.

Graph 2.3: Students' Class Response Rate.

Academic Experiences: Satisfaction with Online Learning.



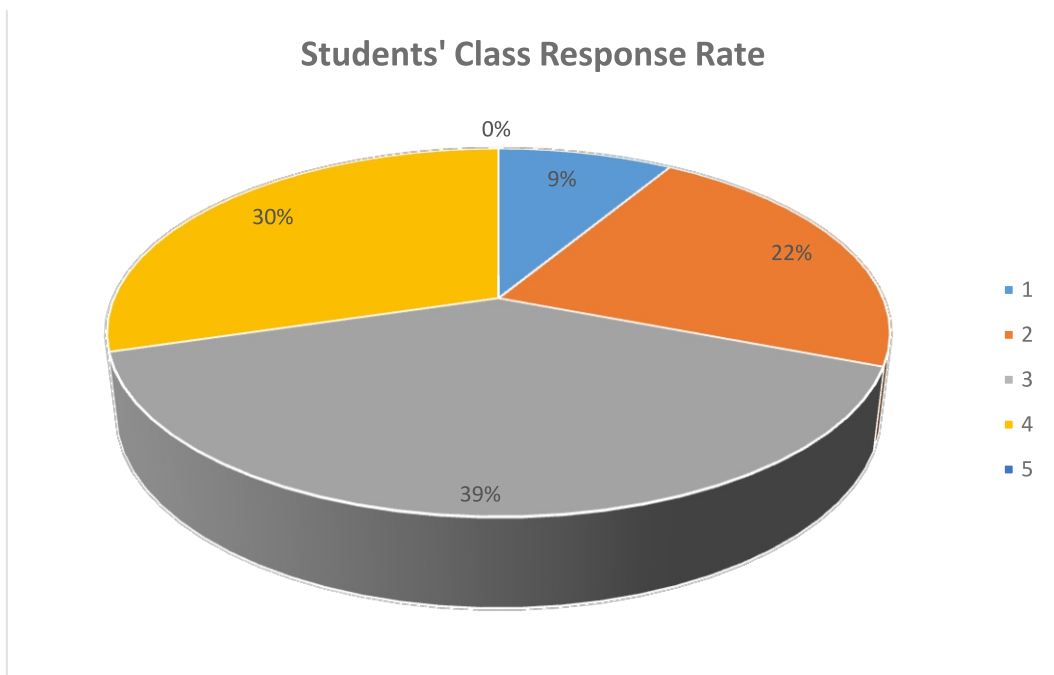
Section 2: Academic Experiences.

Graph 2.4: Students' Satisfaction with Online Grading

About academics, when student's perspective about student's class participation in discussions and activities was inquired (as illustrated in graph 2.3; table 2/ annexes), 32% of students said that the rate was not much affected, whereas 25% students presented their opinion as a positive change in class response rate in online classes. On the other side, 43% of participants agreed on a decline in the class response rate of students in online classes.

About academics, when student's perspective about student's class participation in discussions and activities was inquired (as illustrated in graph 2.3; table 2/ annexes), 32% of students said that the rate was not much affected, whereas 25% students presented their opinion as a positive change in class response rate in online classes. On the other side, 43% of participants agreed on a decline in the class response rate of students in online classes.

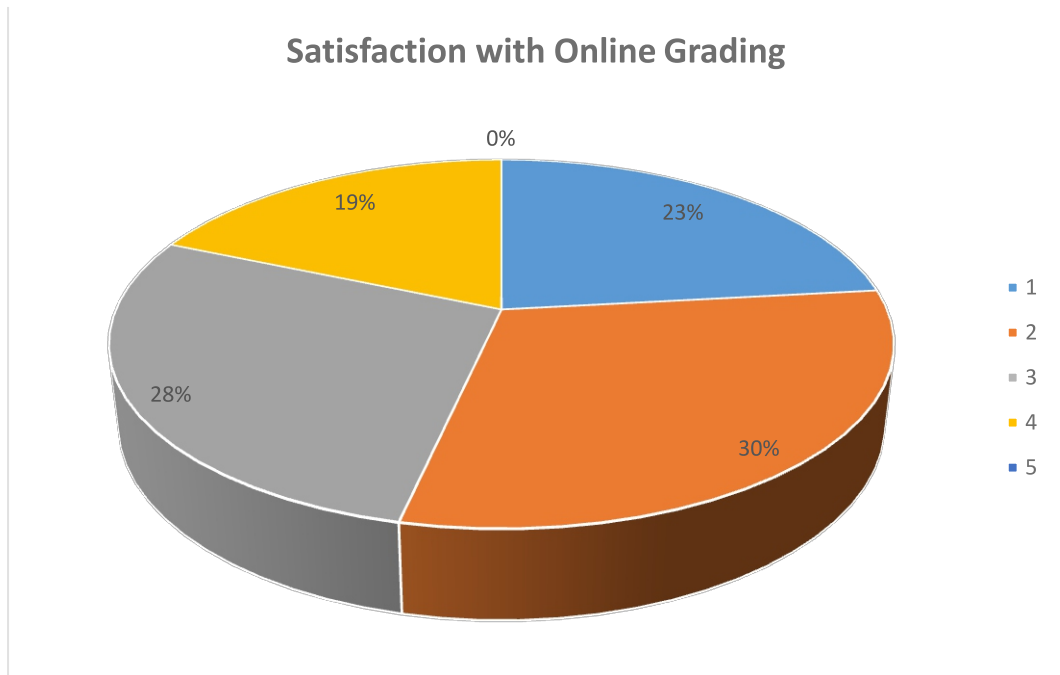
Academic Experiences: Student's Class Response Rate.



Section 2: Academic Experiences.

Graph 2.3: Students' Class Response Rate.

## Academic Experiences: Satisfaction with Online Learning.



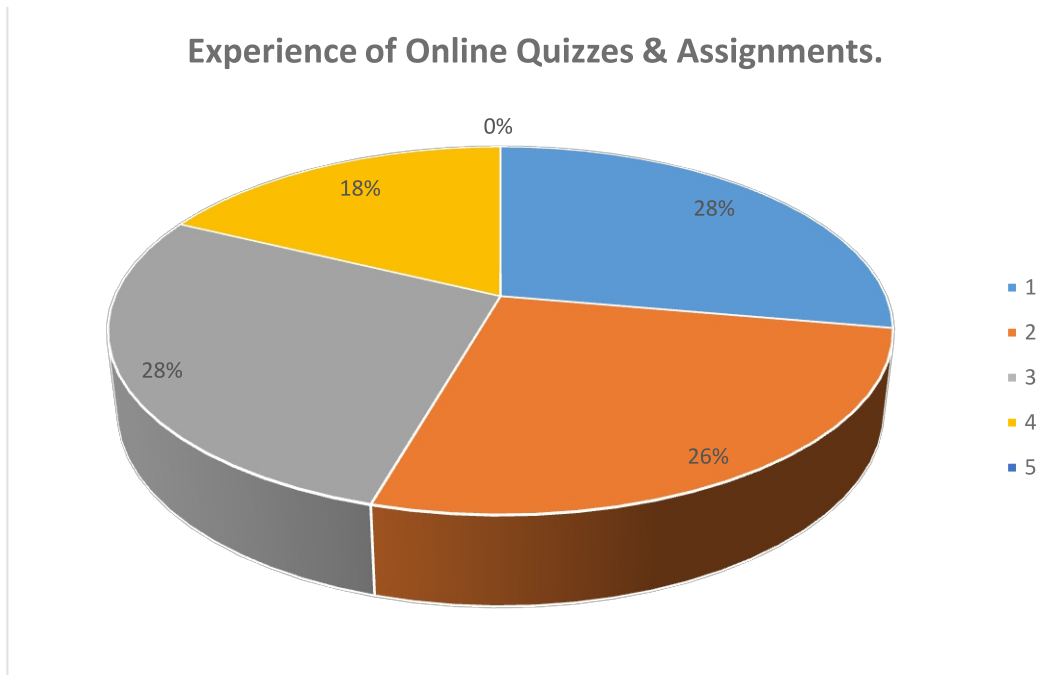
### Section 2: Academic Experiences.

Graph 2.4: Students' Satisfaction with Online Grading

The survey results show (as represented in graph 2.4: table 2/ annexes) respondents' views on the grading system in online classes and the marking criteria of teachers. The results show that 46% of students are very satisfied with online grades and 24% of

students see no drastic change in their grades during online classes as compared to physical classes. However, 30% of students show their dissatisfaction with the online grading system.

### Academic Experiences: Experience of Online Assignments and Quizzes.



#### Section 2: Academic Experiences.

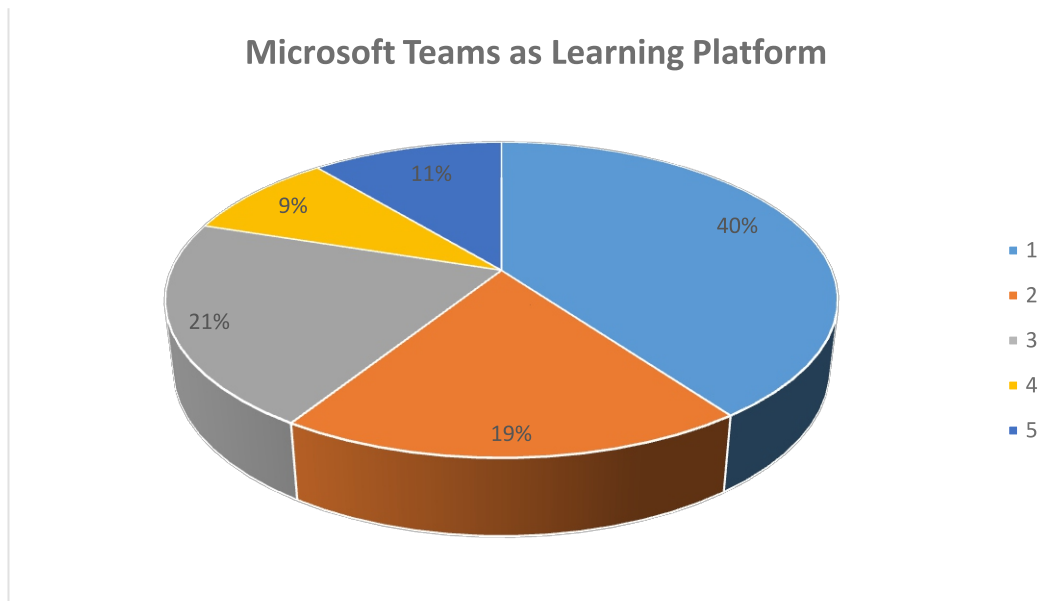
Graph 2.5: Experience of Online Quizzes and Assignments.

#### Section 3: Software and Online Literacy of Students:

In this section, questions were organized to study student's online literacy and software-related technical competence that were helpful in online classes. To log in to Microsoft Teams and working for projects and activities online, required a great deal of

knowledge of Microsoft Edge, Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Forms, Google Spreadsheets, and many other related apps. This section had questions like respondent's experience of logging in to Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Outlook turning in assignments and quizzes and sharing the screen, joining meetings, etc.

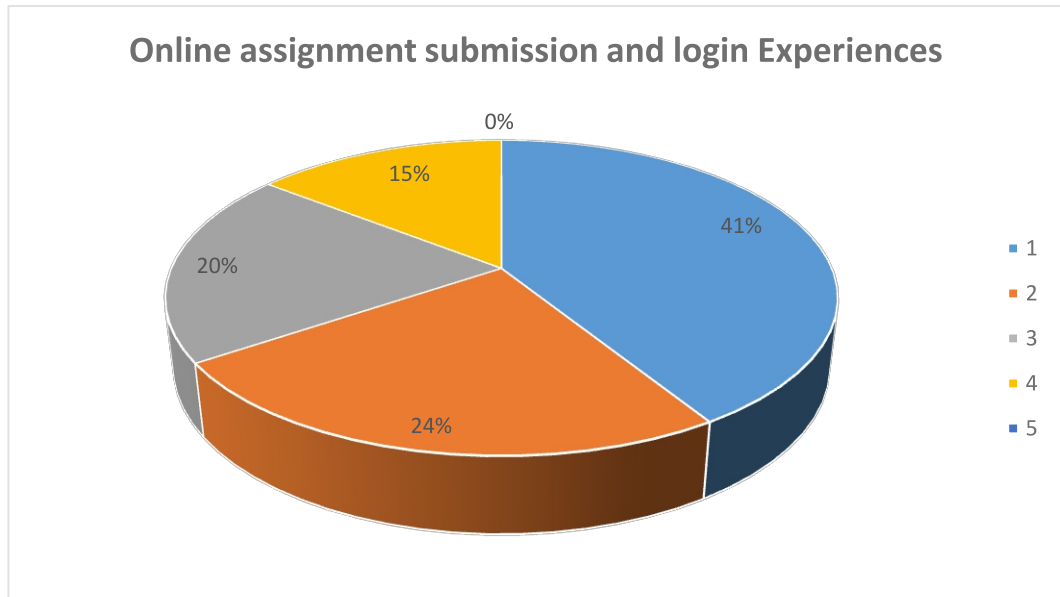
### Software and Online Literacy: Microsoft Teams as Online Learning Platform.



### Section 3: Software and Online Literacy.

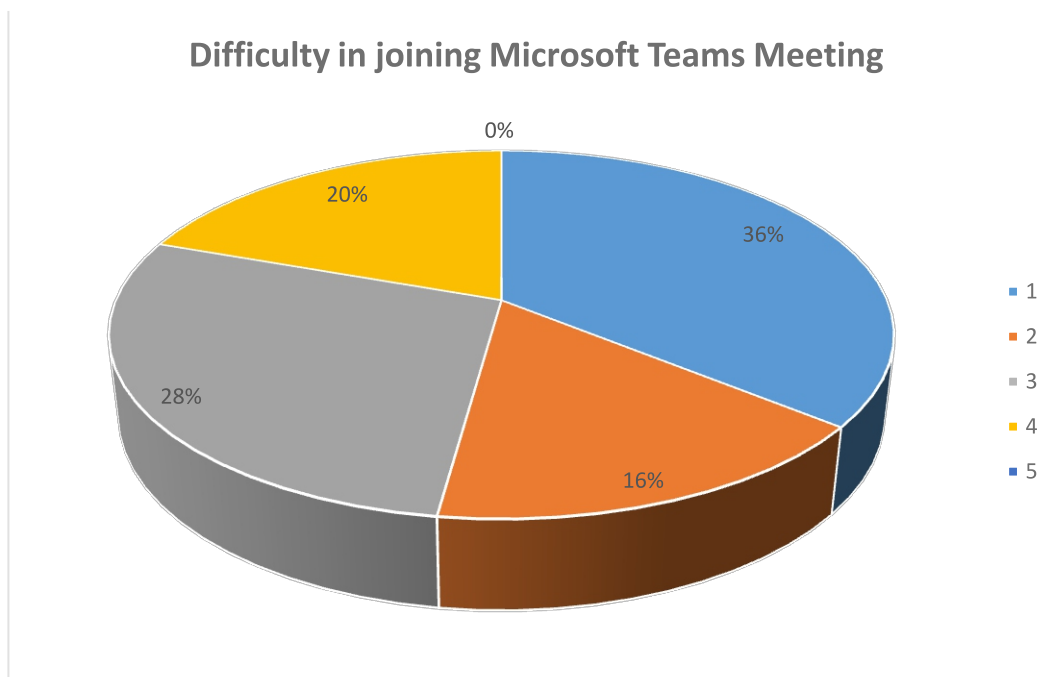
Graph 3.1: Microsoft Teams as Learning Platform.

### Academic and Online Experiences: Online Assignment Submission and Login Experiences.



Graph 3.2: Online Assignment and Quizzes Submission.

### Difficulty Level for Students in Joining Microsoft Teams Meeting.



Graph 3.3: Difficulty Level for Students in Joining Microsoft Teams Meeting.

#### \*KEY

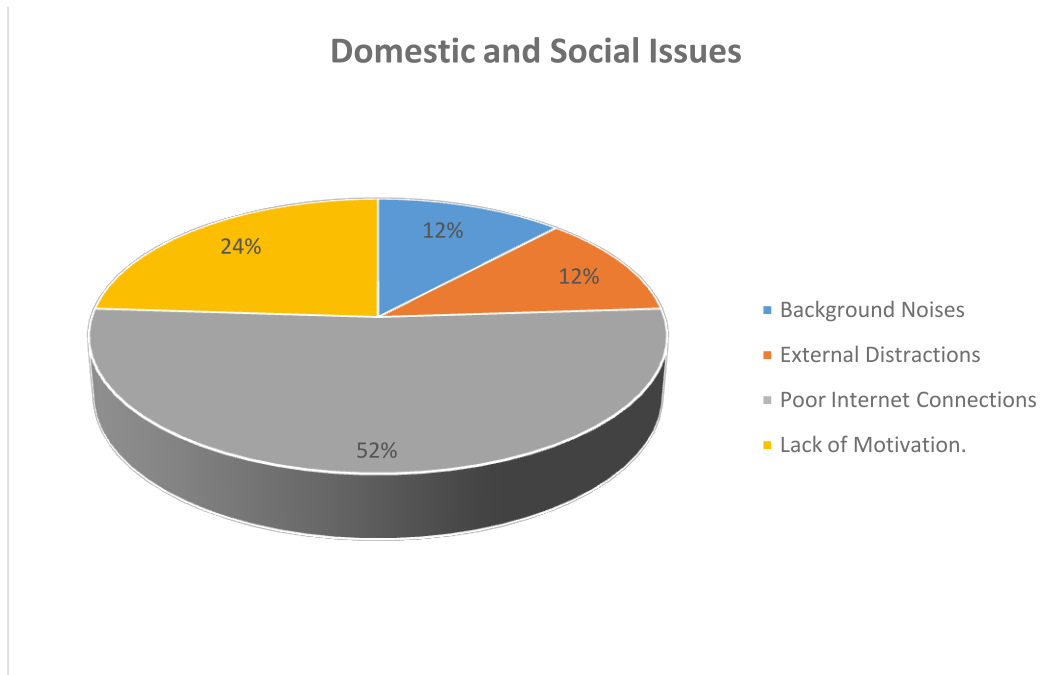
- 1 = *easiest*
- 5 = *most difficult*

#### Section 4: Domestic and Social Issues:

This section was designed to get insight into student's issues from domestic backgrounds. What problem the students considered the greatest in learning from home. For that matter, some major issues were given in the form of closed-ended multiple-choice

questions. Most of the students' considered poor internet quality the major issue in their online learning (as illustrated in graph 4.1: table 4/ annexes). Whereas lack of motivation for study at home was also a widely faced challenge in online learning.

## Domestic and Social Issues



### Section 4: Domestic and Social Issues

#### Graph 4.1

#### Section 5: Psychological Concerns:

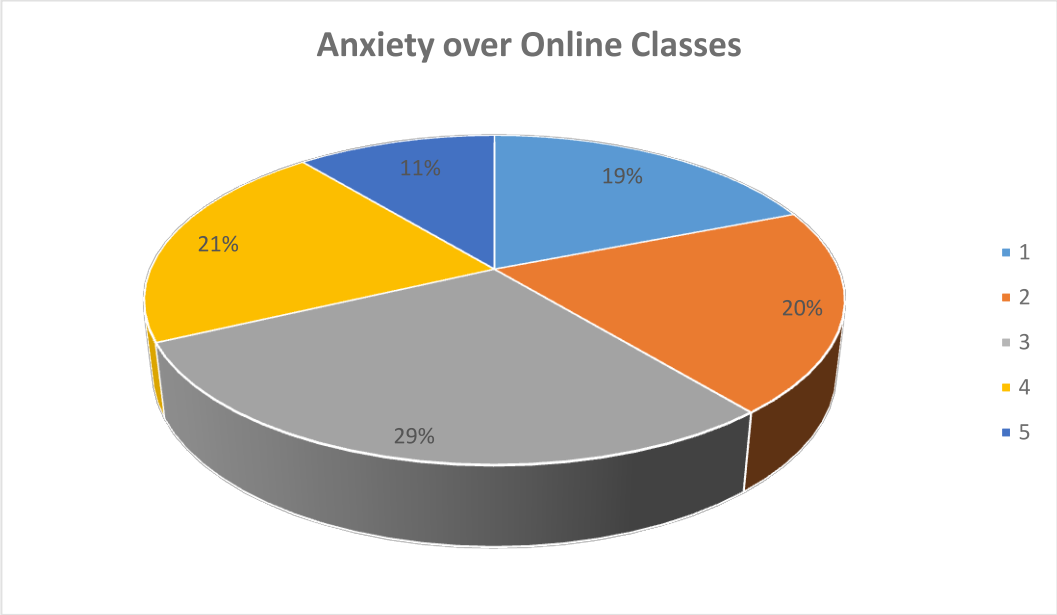
Psychologically, this pandemic has affected the overall world population greatly and students are also

affected by this shift in the learning system from on-campus classes to online learning. Some possible psychological concerns are tried to analyze in this study.

#### \*KEY:

- 1=*most*
- 5=*least*

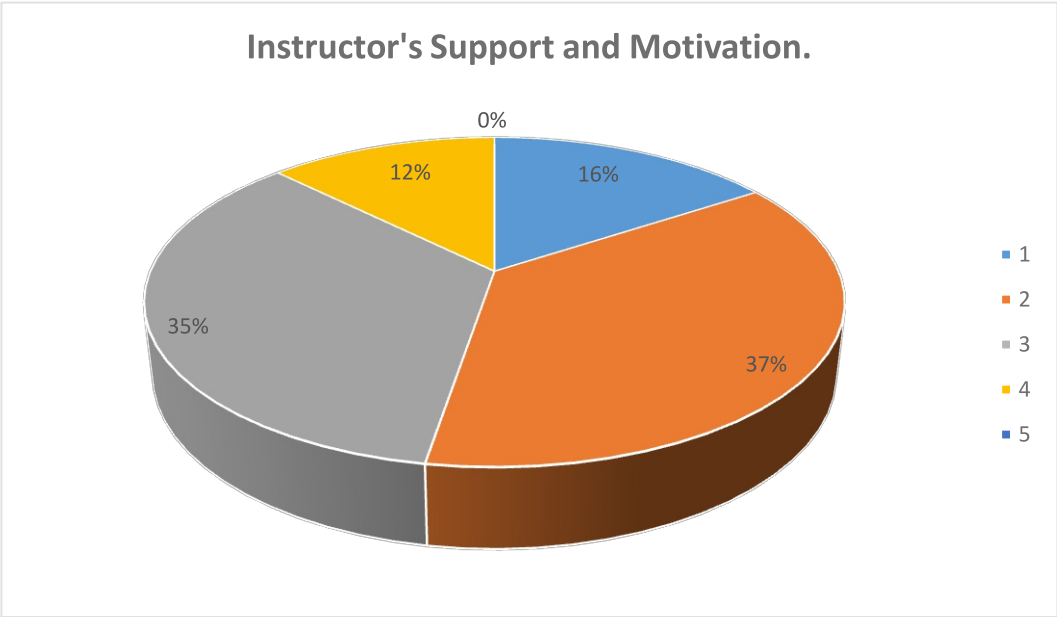
Psychological Concerns: Anxiety over Online Classes.



Section 5: Psychological Concerns.

Graph 5.1: Anxiety over Online Classes.

Psychological Concerns: Instructor’s Support and Motivation.

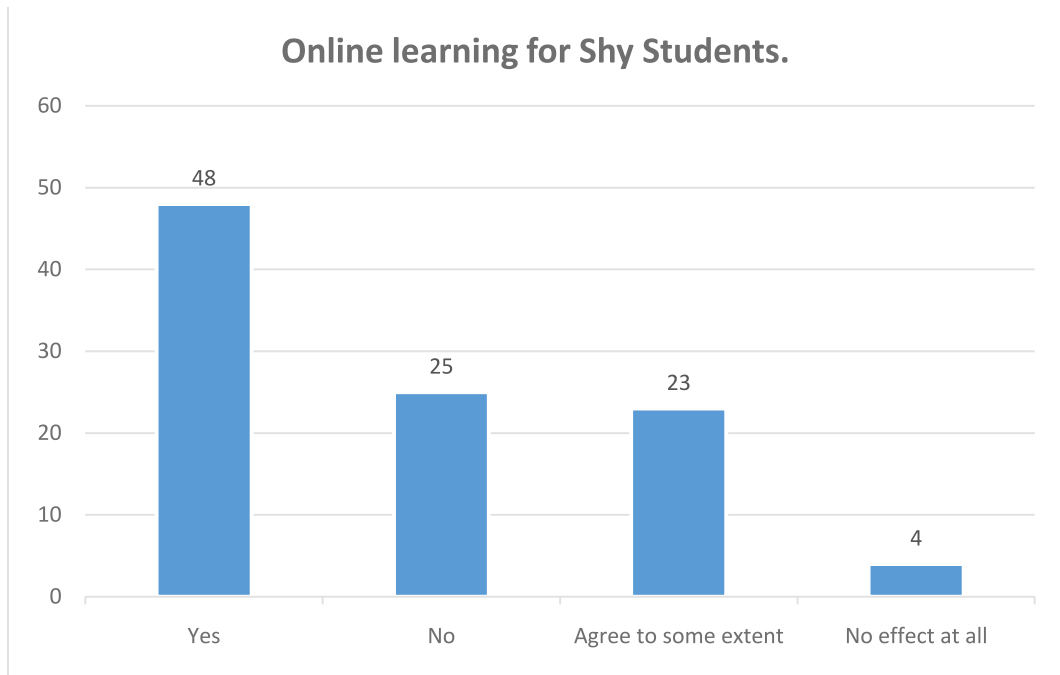


Section 5: Psychological Concerns.

Graph 5.2: Instructor’s Support and Motivation.



### Online Learning for Shy Students.



### Section 5: Psychological Concerns.

Graph 5.3: Online Learning for Shy Students.

At the end of this closed-ended survey questionnaire, an open-ended question was included that was "online learning is good for shy people. Your opinion?" for this statement, the results (from graph 5.3: table 5.2/ annexes) show respondents' views on the effect of online classes on shy students. 48% of respondents had a view that online learning is good for shy people to participate and learn. While 25% of students had a contrary perspective that online classes had no good for shy students. 23% of students agreed to some extent whereas 4% students

considered no reciprocal relation of online classes with introverted students.

### Discussion

In this paper, we have observed learners' online learning experience and what challenges they have faced during the pandemic. COVID-19 disease was identified in Pakistan in March 2019. About 150 countries worldwide have introduced e-learning platforms as a solution to continue the education process during the pandemic. The survey targeted 100 participants

and we have got 100 responses. 46% of them were male participants and 54% of them were female. Candidates belong to several semesters. A diverse range of students belongs to the seventh/eighth semester. There is 5% of newcomers. The majority of the participants were undergraduate students. The results of this study revealed different levels of challenges. The major issue observed is a poor network connection and 52% of a pupil are concerned to this specific problem. In the second level, comes the lack of cooperation from students. 32% of them have neutral responses and 24% are dissatisfied as students do not bother to participate in lectures. Our data showed that MS Teams platform has been satisfactory for students in a pandemic. 37% of the population is satisfied with MS Teams and about 10% felt difficulty. The result derived from data showed that 35% of the population was satisfied with instructors, satisfied with their cooperation and support but at the same time 33% of the participants fairly responded. A pupil has been anxious about e-learning. 20% of them were most anxious about distance learning, 11% were least anxious and simultaneously 29% were even-handed in responding. Our data showed that MS Teams have been the easiest in

using and 40% of the population have revealed this notion. We observed student's points of view by the result we have attained, the satisfaction of online learning. 36% of candidates gave neutral feedback. Results showed student's perception about attempting online quizzes and assignments, 25% were happy, online assignments and quizzes appeared to be easiest yet 25% responses were neutral. It seems like half of the population is happy and satisfied but half of them are not satisfied with the current learning system.

### **Conclusions**

The research work scrutinized the challenges and the students' experience in this Covid-19 pandemic about online learning. Covid-19 changed the procedure or way of learning throughout the world. The whole world is attempting to evade the gap and lessen the loss of students produced by the ongoing epidemic. An all-inclusive, online education environment authorized learning to take place in such a setting that's not limited by time or place. Online education has the potential to dissimulate hurdles that generally have been erected by disability, poverty, and location, together with other factors.

Nevertheless, the consequences of online learning are not every time a blessing or favour to the student's community, several obstacles and problems were faced by the students during this whole scenario of online education. The research focused to estimate or evaluate the perspective of undergraduate students in consonance with online learning. This research study is formed on a large population, which was studying at the University of Central Punjab, under different faculty using the mixed-method design. We adapted the questionnaire and it was conducted on Google forms, and the survey was performed by 100 students studying in different departments of UCP. We have got 100 responses. 46% of them were male participants and the rest 54% of them were female. We can distinctly observe a student's perspective and viewpoint by the result we have attained, the contentment of online learning. 36% of candidates gave neutral feedback. Results showed student's perception about attempting online quizzes and assignments, 25% were happy, online assignments and quizzes appeared to be easiest yet 25% responses were neutral. It seems like half of the population is content and self-satisfied but half of them is not pleased with the current learning

system.

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## Annexes:

### Frequency Distribution of Section 1: Demographics

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	54	54%
Male	46	46%
Total	100	100%
<b>Current Semester</b>		
1,2	5	5%
3,4	10	10%
5,6	13	13%
7,8	72	72%
<b>Department</b>		
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.	46	46%
UCP Business School.	20	20%
School of Accounting and Finance.	4	4%
School of Media and Communication Studies.	6	6%
UCP Law School.	24	24%

Section1: Table 1

### Frequency Distribution of Section 2: Academic Experiences

<b>Question</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Effectiveness of e-learning	15	19	38	15	13
Satisfaction with online learning	11	19	36	20	14
Student's class response rate	7	18	32	24	19
Satisfaction with online grading	20	26	24	16	14
Experience in online quizzes & assignments.	25	24	25	16	10

Section 2: Table2

- 1=*strongly satisfied*
- 5= *strongly dissatisfied*

Frequency distribution of section 3: Online Literacy and Software

<b>Question</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Microsoft Teams as a learning platform	40	19	21	09	11
Online assignment submission and login experiences	37	22	18	13	10
Difficulty in joining Microsoft Teams meeting	33	15	26	18	08

Section 3: Table 3

- 1= easiest
- 5=most difficult

Frequency distribution of section 4: Domestic and Social Issues.

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Background Noises.	12	12%
External Distractions.	12	12%
Poor Internet Connections.	52	52%
Lack of Motivation for Study.	24	24%

Section 4: Table 4

Frequency distribution for Section 5: Psychological Concerns

<b>Questions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Anxiety over online classes	19	20	29	21	11
Instructor's Support and Motivation	15	35	33	12	05

Section 5: Table 5.1

- 1=most
- 5=least

Responses to open-ended questions are given as:

<b>Question:</b>	<b>Frequency:</b>	<b>Percentage:</b>	<b>Coding</b>
Online learning is good for shy people?			
Yes	48	48%	A
No	25	25%	B
Agree to some extent	23	23%	C
No effect at all.	04	04%	D

Section 5: Table 5.2

### **Appendices:**

<https://forms.gle/KXaEnj2ZwpEhymuY9>



## Intersections of Memory, Politics, and Identity in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

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### Abstract

*This research analyses the role of cultural memory in (re)shaping identities in the memoir of Azar Nafisi's Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books (2003) to expose the hegemonic construct that silences and devalues women in society. The theoretical framework used for this research is drawn from New Historicism and Assman's Cultural Memory Theory. It explores how politics and religion eliminates one's private life. Women become instrumentalized as passive objects, living an act of meaningless existence under the gaze of the Blind Censor. Her work highlights the need to dismantle the political agenda that takes away one's identity. By recalling her experiences as a teacher, she foregrounds the stories of her girls to (re)invent a new meaning at the backdrop of the Islamic Regime. The author recounts memories of the past to fill the void left behind by the Iranian Revolution. By embodying the works of literature in her memoir, she forms a counter-reality, one, where memory acts as an escape from the strict policies and repression of women under the Islamic regime. It also observes how veiling had become a way of stripping away the individuality and personality of women. The research illuminates the author's aim to remember and expose the dehumanizing impact of the Iranian government on the lives of women. It also focuses on Azar Nafisi's writings to analyze how she has (re)shaped the identities of her students by constructing an alternative narrative and forming a link between fiction and reality.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Memory, Identity, Iranian Revolution, Veiling, Repression of Women

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### Introduction

The memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by the Iranian-American writer Azar Nafisi was first published in 2003. Her works are regarded as carriers of autobiographical accounts with her Iranian experiences to explore the issues of violence, gender inequality,

alienation, loss of identity, and repression of women, among many others. *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, like Nafisi's other memoirs, is an Iranian experience that amalgamates fiction and reality and allows the readers to experience being drawn towards a multi-textured tapestry of forgotten and discovered dreams. The memoir

focuses on the plight of women, highlighting the rigid policies of dominance that were used to create false identities of women in the Islamic regime.

The 1979 Revolution, which overthrew the monarch Reza Shah and established the revolutionary Iranian Republic and its principles, is celebrated in Iranian history. Ayatollah Khomeini was known as the "Father of the Revolution", because he led the revolution, Khomeini's followers were convinced that he would lead people down the Islamic way, and he was regarded as the savior of Islam. However, Nafisi's memoir focuses on the plight of women, highlighting the rigid policies of dominance that were used to create false identities of women in the Islamic regime. Her account of personal events, which includes traumatic situations and loss, alters the general view of the Iranian revolution as being the savior of Islam.

Through the memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, this research attempts to study the Iranian experience of the author and her girls, as she draws parallel between the Islamic totalitarianism regime and the 'Lolita effect' to (re)invent their own history that is not masked by tyranny and

injustice. By the textual analysis approach, this research explores the implication of the political form intruding into individual lives. It demonstrates how the blind censor rendered life unbearable for individuals as victims of the authoritarian regime, which interfered in individuals' personal lives and enforced its visionary dream on everyone. Because of this, the external reality restricted them from forming an individual identity separately from the "colourless censor of the blind censor" (*Reading Lolita in Tehran* 24). The memoir amalgamates both fiction and reality that focuses on personal narrative, which is linked together by both individual lives and their experiences. Nafisi links the past and present to construct an alternative narrative by amalgamating fictional texts to dismantle the historical reality of the Iranian Revolution.

The memoir combines fiction and reality and focuses on personal accounts, in which individual lives and experiences connect these two worlds. Nafisi has seen the fundamentalist Islamic state engage in inhumane acts in the name of religion. During the Iran-Iraq conflict, she experienced terror, endured sleepless nights, and felt

uncomfortable and constrained under the Iranian Regime. The memoir becomes a historical record of individual experiences across the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq civil war.

The research attempts at analyzing *Reading Lolita in Tehran* through the lens of New Historicism (Greenblatt, 2000), to explore and argue in what ways Nafisi transgresses the limitations of time by incorporating the fictional narratives of different times and linking them to the present socio-political, and cultural situation in Iran to produce a counter reality, one where memory acts as an escape from the strict policies and repression of women under the Islamic regime. New Historicists declared that every narrative of a culture should be unfolded and analyzed to showcase how all the other discourses interact with each other, people, and other elements of culture. By emphasizing how all texts are records of their social condition, not only showcase but also respond to their historical situation. Nafisi forms her own subjective history by documenting the atrocities committed under the banner of the Iranian Revolution. The study will also take into account the Cultural Memory

Theory of Jan Assman, from his book, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (1995) the research contends to highlights the hegemonic structure at the intersection of culture, politics, and religion in Iran. Assman (1995) notes, “cultural memory has its fixed points,” and it does not change with the passage of time. The cultural memory theory tries to connect the three sides of memory (the near past), culture, as well as society to each other. A memory may appear stuck, but a closer examination indicates that memory is fluid and links the three temporal components; it is recalled in the present and alludes to the past, but it is continually looking towards the future. It will focus on the role of memory in linking the past, present, and future together by documenting the individual experience of the common public.

New Historicism argues that reading and interpreting literature helps in uncovering the often overlooked but crucial political, social, and cultural aspects of a time from a subjective lens. It considers literary works to be historical records of the relevant time period. Stephen Greenblatt, an American critic, created the phrase "New Historicism," in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From*

*More to Shakespeare* (1980) which is regarded as its main source. New Historicism regards history books with skepticism, seeing them as nothing more than a warped, idiosyncratic account of records by those in power. New Historicism argues that history is simply a narrative that can be reinterpreted, based on the claim that it is moulded by the person who writes it. Louis Montrose, an American New Historicist defines it as a tool in which “the textuality of history and the historicity of texts” are expounded. Based on the idea that memoirs can also be read as a historical narrative, the study seeks to analyze Nafisi's subjectivity of the Iranian Revolution. Nafisi recounts her story by repositioning the centre and placing women in circumstances that undermine the concept of female sexuality, due to which they are reduced as objects for the state.

### **Research Methodology**

Since this research is text-based, it employs content analysis to study *Intersections of Memory, Politics, and Identity in Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) by Azar Nafisi. In addition to the primary texts, the above-mentioned variables will be compared to the references, articles, critics'

reviews from the secondary sources of the New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt (2000) and Jan Assman's *Theory of Cultural Memory* (1995).

Viewing the texts as a historical production of its time, the term New Historicism was coined by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt. New historicists focus on three aspects: 1) the life of the author, 2) the social rules and dictates found within a text, 3) the reflection of a work's historical situation as evidenced in the text. (Greenblatt 3-6). Similarly, Jan Assman, in his *Theory of Cultural Memory*, argues that “Memory also has a cultural basis since only then can we understand that human beings are anchored through their memories in a time frame reaching back over thousands of years” (1).

The research, by focusing on the relation between memory, identity, and politics, attempts to vivify the notion of how fiction and reality help to (re)shape identity and to form a counter reality.

### **Literature Review**

Based on the juxtaposition of past experiences and the fictional realm, Azar Nafisi invites seven of her female students to create a book club, a

'space of their own (7). Reading banned books then becomes a rebellious act for them because it enables them to cope with difficult sorts of circumstances by allowing them to create their own reality through fiction. As Nafisi says, to take influence from Nabokov, readers could see how the ordinary things of daily life could be turned into something grand "through the magic eye of fiction" (5). So, we see that cultural memory and identity bring together the espionage of landscape which defines an individual. It explores the dynamics of how memory is shaped and functions in society. It also has become an evocation of presenting the past as present by re-visualizing the forgotten truth.

Nafisi sought to recollect a lost dream by embodying fictional texts into her memoir. For instance, in the article, *Re-Reading "Reading Lolita in Tehran"* by Amy DePaul, the author argues that the readers found solace in literature during times of chaos, which demonstrates the true essence of fiction. The memoir's first few pages set the tone for the rest of the text. Nafisi compares the story she's about to share to that of *Lolita* in Tehran, explaining how *Lolita* gave Tehran a new perspective "how Tehran helped

redefine Nabokov's novel, turning it into this *Lolita*, our *Lolita*" (6). As Nafisi herself compares her girls to Nabokov's love interests, who are helpless in the face of male authority, the *Lolita* effect can be compared to an authoritarian dictatorship. *Lolita*'s predicament can be seen as, "Like my students, *Lolita*'s past comes to her not so much as a loss but as a lack, and like my students, she becomes a figment in someone else's dream" (27). As they delved into the fictional world, Nafisi asserts that it had led them to questions and probe deeper into their own realities, "about which we felt so helplessly speechless" (29). *Lolita*'s dreams of a normal life, like the ordinary dreams of the young Iranians who feel trapped by the strict policies of the regime, are subordinated to the fact that they, like *Lolita*, were enacting figments of someone else's imagination. As Manna points out that Khomeini imposed his vision of Islam on their personal lives and fiction (36). Through this interaction, we get to see how in the beginning, the girls could form no clear identity on their own, as their outside reality was formed by the people they despised, which allowed them to gain control and defy the repressive reality and (re)create their own through the world of fiction.

Another way Nafisi draws parallels between fiction and reality is when she asserts how Lolita “went against the grain of all totalitarian perspective” (26). She further draws a comparison between the authoritarian regime, and the plight of Lolita, by probing deeper into understanding other works by Nabokov, such as *Invitation to a Beheading*. These fictional works can be viewed as a subtext to understanding the political scenario in Iran. *Invitation to a Beheading* (1936) depicts a character called Cincinnatus, stuck in a society controlled by oppressive authorities with Russian names, whom Nafisi links to Islamists, exclaiming, between Iranian executioners and Cincinnatus jailers, there was little or no difference. They took control of all the private spaces, attempting to mold every act, “And that itself was another form of execution.” (77). Whereas Humbert's demeaning intentions towards Lolita are linked to Iranian authorities' view of women as sexually provocative. Nafisi recounts, “The nightmarish quality of living in an atmosphere of perpetual dread” (17), is the environment Nabokov produces for the readers in *Invitation to a Beheading*, not the real physical suffering and censorship of an authoritarian dictatorship. So, not only

does Nafisi intricately links the female oppression in Nabokov's stories, but she also links the fear of tyranny taking over the lives of women.

Extending Nafisi's point about the implications of the political intruding into people's personal lives, Walter Corbella in the article, “Strategies of Resistance and the Problem of Ambiguity in Azar Nafisi's '*Reading Lolita in Tehran*'” says that to be a woman in Iran within the Islamic regime is equivalent to existing as a non-identity, “and of meaningless existence, except in those terms dictated by the male-dominated cult” (3). In an attempt to dominate, repression of women at the hands of the regime can be seen with the restrictive dress code. Nafisi recognizes that for every woman for whom the veil is an eraser of identity, it is also a way to protect identity for others. Latter can be seen as a choice, whereas the former is cultivating someone else's dream. As Nafisi discusses her grandmother's opinion on veiling, the readers get to see how women became the victims of the authoritarian regime's repressive rule, “She resented the fact that her veil, which to her was a symbol of her sacred relationship to God, had now become an instrument of power, turning the



women who wore them into political signs and symbols” (68). The policies of control of women at the intersection of politics and religion can be seen stripping their identity.

Zahra Kamalkhani, in her book, *Women's Islam: Religious Practice among Women in Today's Iran* (1998), argues about the subjection of the female body as, “The sexual danger of the women in its visible and invisible forms is believed to be so powerful and impulsive that it can lead to the moral corruption of men and society” (136). Extending her argument, Helie-Lucas, in her article, “What is your Tribe? Women's Struggles and the Construction of Muslim-ness” argues that “all struggles for women's human rights, be they from within the frame of religion or from a secular perspective, are equally seen as a betrayal” (27). It can be noted how women's individuality becomes a threat to the ruling clerics. According to previous research, the representations of the veil are primarily influenced by the historical, cultural, socio-political, religious contexts in which it occurs. Many different interpretations of the veil can be found in Iran's history. Reza Shah's modern ideals and the notion of liberal women were a result of his

efforts to modernize and westernize the state by simply accepting western codes and culture in the 1930s, created various meanings for veiling in Iran. People's opinion toward the veil changed in the era of Reza Shah, as the ruling elite adopted a westernized code of life, which included the dress codes, whereas the working people recognized the veil as a symbol of integrity. The veil is still recognized as an important aspect of their identities and selves for Iranian diasporic women who had to flee Iran either hesitantly or willingly. Mahshid's father was a religious man, and Nafisi's careful study of veiling tradition and the fact that she wore the scarf well before the revolution placed veiling in question as a religion or a political power. Nafisi, while writing about Mahshid, describes her as, “before the revolution...she had worn the scarf as a testament to her faith. Her decision was a voluntary act. When the revolution forced the scarf on others, her action became meaningless” (RLT, p. 9).

### **Veiling and Religious Identity**

Referring to how the veil is interlinked with women's identity, which Nafisi notes as “When my students came into that room, they took off more than their scarves and robes.

Gradually, each one gained an outline and a shape, becoming her own inimitable self" (4). Women lose their individuality as a result of the enforcement of the dress code, which takes away their identity, and they can only be identified by the "oval of their faces and their hands" (2). As a result, the practice of unveiling enables the girls to create a new reality and become their individual selves. In Nafisi's memoir, the connection of unveiling with a burst of colour can be interpreted as two contradictory versions of the truth and identity of the women's existence. The analogy of colour relates to the state taking away women's autonomy by enforcing a code of conduct; they appear as each other's projections, one colour, and a mass without any discernible or definitive self or personality.

Nafisi depicts every woman's transformation into a new individual, each gaining "a form" and "an identity" after the imposed dress code is removed. This highlights how their seemingly homogeneous presence gives way to complex personalities, values, and viewpoints. The full overview of her seven students' appearances and perceptions show the extensive and yet unexplained

variability in their dress, personalities, and values. When the veils are removed, their selves and personalities are exposed; they take the shape of a new individual, with their individual opinions and values. Nafisi also addresses her inner attempts to stop being forced to veil that contributed to her dismissal from her job as a teacher. The memoir is indeed a discreet declaration by Iranian women for someone with the ability to experience the possibilities and for those who are practising mandatory veiling or unveiling, forces them to develop new identities. When women have to veil, it turns into a way of concealing their personalities, consequently, the issue of veiling turns more urgent.

Judith Newton argues, New Historicists talk about identities that are formed socially, developed from different contexts of a particular culture, rather than the 'autonomous 'self' or 'individual.' (88). By the textual analysis approach, this research explores the implication of the political form intruding into individual lives. Nafisi records the events through her 'subjective' lens and seeks to recount the story by reading different texts. The tasks of New Historicists are briefly described by Aram Veaser. According



to him, the New Historicists' primary purpose is to examine various texts to demonstrate that those writings play a vital role in regulating power relations inside the state. Second, they consider writings to be inextricably linked to other discourses and forms. Finally, they agree that literature, like various written narratives, increases the risk of revolution against the state. According to Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism is set on the postmodern premise that our views about core issues such as sex, women, colonialism, identity, and love are "taught" rather than "given" (Robson 27).

This "learning" occurs in the memoir as a result of reading *Lolita*, which leads to self-awareness and self-realization. While reading any text, Greenblatt points out that aim, genre, and historical context must all be considered. New Historicist texts record the changes in value and interest that result from social and political struggles (Goring 189). Meanwhile, Nafisi historicizes the memoir by reading four different texts in relation to the events in Iran. Through the reading of fictional texts, Nafisi and her students criticize the strict policies of domination by the Iranian Regime.

Forrest G. Robinson finds a distinct characteristic shared by New Historicists, which he refers to as a developed pleasure in the finding of 'doubleness and subversion' disciplined flexibility, a keen sight to the inaccuracy across all aspects (Guerin 248). Nafisi also employs this method to expose the deeper meaning within the texts to subvert the dominant narratives written both in fiction and reality.

### **Religion and Morality**

Morality is closely linked to religion as women are humiliated under the strict laws because the male gaze views women as sexually provocative. Nafisi highlights, disobedient young women are thrown into police vans, put in prison, beaten, charged, "forced to wash the toilets, and humiliated." (20). As a result, through the role of memory, Nafisi documents the conditions of women since 1979, as they were forced to undergo virginity checks by guards, stoning, ban on hanging out with male friends, strict dress codes, and even executions in jail.

Similarly, Gatsby's fate is inextricably connected to Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of taking back the illusory past. Embodying works of

fiction against the backdrop of the revolution helps to construct a non-fabricated counter-reality. At the time of executions, prisoner confessions, Nafisi selects *The Great Gatsby* (1925) instead of selecting Mike Gold. The book is placed on trial when her Marxist students start condemning *Gatsby* for his lavishness and the Islamists for his adultery. As she uses *Gatsby* to explore an individual's dream that took control of his reality, *Gatsby*'s predicament becomes interlinked with Iranian's fate. Nafisi exclaims, "Was this not similar to our revolution, which had come in the name of our collective past and had wrecked our lives in the name of a dream?" (96). The role of memory helps her to highlight how the regime had forced everyone to change internally and externally. To analyze how the memoir can be seen as a (subjective) historical record, the theoretical framework of New Historicism and Cultural Memory Theory has been used for this research.

The ideological dimension of the book begins to emerge in the way Western classics are interpreted. Despite the speaker's positioning as a rescuer, in the remembrance of Scheherazade, ultimately Western Classics are posed as the savior.

Donaday and Ahmed-Ghosh claim, 'that it was written exclusively in terms of an Iranian context, yet written for a U.S. audience' (628) that means they comprehend the work in any other way than through Western eyes.

She started writing the book after leaving Iran, before that she was unable to pen down her experience, says Nafisi when she thought of writing the memoir. Nafisi arrived in the US on June 24, 1997, and this book was released in 2003. The time and space gap between both the migration from Iran and the writing about Iran are many years, allowing for a time and space split in the narrative.

Assmann argues in his Theory of Cultural Memory that how do people recount their past and argues how memories are a social and cultural phenomenon. As a religious state founded on the principle of Sharia Law, Iranian society limits one's identity and deprives them of having their own voice, turning them into an object to control. The void within them is filled by reading four different fictional texts to find the freedom they lack. Nafisi wrote the memoir after arriving in the US, hence for her, memory served as an escape from the political scenario she was stuck in. Halbwachs claims that

human beings only develop their memory through interacting with each other (Assmann *Religion and Cultural Memory* 1). Our memory that we have as human beings with a consciousness lives only in ongoing contact with other human memories as well as "objects," external symbols (111). Similarly, like Cincinnatus C., Nafisi and her students don't give in to conformity and rely on their imagination and memories to form their own reality.

*Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) is about individual encounters during the Iranian Revolution that can be treated as a historical narrative. New Historicism focuses on understanding and analyzing literature with its social, cultural, and political details from a subjective perspective. So, according to New Historicists, history is also a text that can be analyzed through different lenses. Women are subjected to violence, killings, and abused under the guise of moral policing, which can be seen in the memoir. Nafisi was expelled from The University of Tehran for refusing to wear the veil in the university. As Nafisi laments, I asked myself, Are these my people, is this my hometown, am I who I am?" (74). Not only that, she also embodies and narrates other fictional texts from a

"subject position" (Newton 87).

The memoir breaks the limitation between fiction and reality and interlinks both to transgress the restrictions placed by the Iranian regime. Nafisi claims, "the living room becomes their space of transgression" (8). Nafisi manages to historicize fiction through the process of reading different fictional works at the backdrop of the revolution. In this way, she forms a counter reality that transgresses beyond the dominant historical discourse related to the Iranian Revolution. Nafisi proclaims in an interview with Asia Society on *Literature as Celebration and Refuge*, "I always had this preoccupation with the way reality and fiction mingle, the way that reality is transformed through fiction and vice versa," she notes that while writing the book, it fascinated her to write about different time periods while reading Nabokov. "In the last chapter of *Anti-Terra*, I did a little bit of that. But in Iran, I could not tell the truth about my life; not only in a political sense but in a personal one". (asiasociety.org)

The situation of *Lolita* is used to explain the idea of dominance. Nafisi manages to draw a comparison between Humbert and the strict Ayatollah

Khomeini. Following the death of Khomeini, she exclaims, "Like all great mythmakers, he had tried to fashion reality out of his dream, and in the end, like Humbert, he had managed to destroy both reality and his dream. Added to the crimes, to the murders and tortures, we would now face this last indignity the murder of our dreams" (246). By the act of writing this memoir, she questions the dominant power that Ayatollah withheld and the lives that were lost under the banner of religion and morality. The political intermingles with the personal, as through the work of fiction, the girls openly condemn the political sphere that had dominated their lives. Nafisi ponders the definition of the word "posh lust," which was a term created by Nabokov to explain the relation between banality and brutality. It is defined as, "Posh lust is not only the obviously trashy but mainly the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive" (17). The falsely historical and falsely factual can also be included to highlight how much of Iranian history is hidden. Moreover, the atrocities committed under the banner of the Iranian Revolution are not mentioned. Thus, this is how Nafisi manages to document the falsification of the

historical texts by closely reading the fictional texts. She states, "Sharia Law replaced the existing system of jurisprudence and became the norm" (197).

After the death of Khomeini, people felt disarrayed. As Nafisi recounts one instance where she was interrupted during her class when they heard a student had set fire to himself, she says, "It was one of those scenes which, while happening in front of everyone's eyes, have already acquired the quality not just of a dream, but of a memory of a dream" (165). Due to the revolutionary spirit, the students lost their individuality and turned into "revolutionary, a martyr, and a war veteran, but not an individual" (166). Similarly, at the intersection of culture and memory, Nafisi explores works of history to understand the dominant historical discourse. She reads *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) with keeping repression of women in mind. It helps them to give a voice to their predicament.

Her own self-reflection and conversations with her magician, demonstrates the vital significance of fiction can be seen as she states, "You know, I feel like all my life has been a series of departures." Then she goes on,

*I told him that I wanted to write a book in which I would thank the Islamic Republic for all the things it had taught me – to love Austen and James and ice cream and freedom... He said You will not be able to write about Austen without writing about us, about this place you discovered Austen... This is the Austen you read here, in a place where film censor is nearly blind and where they hand people in the streets and put a curtain across the sea to segregate men and women. (205).*

By narrating the dehumanizing impact of the Iranian regime on women's lives, Nafisi introduces her class to Western literature that helps them to take charge of their identities. We get to know, "Fiction was not a panacea" but it provided us with a critical lens through which we could assess and comprehend the world, not

only our own but also that other world that became the focus of their dreams (282). Like Nafisi, the girls also surpass the limitations of time and space, as in the beginning, the girls have no clear idea of themselves. When asked, "What is your image of yourself?" Nassrin had written, "I am not ready for that question yet" (38). Slowly, as they are exposed to the work of fiction, they are able to better grasp their realities and make something of themselves.

### Conclusions

The Revolution is viewed as a 'divine cause' in the Iranian historical narrative, instead of a brutal endeavour to showcase strict policies of domination. In her memoir, Nafisi appears to feel driven to write in order to give structure and order to her experiences, to come to grip with them, and, most of all, to give them significance in the act of remembering. Nafisi's idea of forming the book club, as well as her decision to write this memoir, is a protest by a woman who refuses to be confined to a ruling authority.

By taking control of their career and rigorously fighting for their lives, they manage to take hold of their identities. This research has shown the

role of memory at the intersections of culture, politics, and religion in the memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* to highlight the predicament of women under the Iranian regime. Chiefly it is the strict policies of domination and objectification that result in a loss of identity and reality that causes a *lack* of memory. My research by focusing throughout on the role of memory and history vivified the notion that the Revolution had stripped an individual's identity resulting in many deaths. However, by drawing parallels between fiction and reality, Nafisi managed to create an alternative narrative that helped (re)shaping the identities of her girls.

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## The Study of Multiple Jeopardy Mapping in Nervous Condition by Tsitsi Dangaremba

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### Abstract

*This research paper aims to make a personality analysis in the characters of Nyasha, Tambu, Maiguru, and Lucia from Tsitsi Dangaremba's novel Nervous Condition under the lens of Multiple Jeopardy. This research scrutinizes female suppression under feminist traditions. In Nervous Condition, Tsitsi Dangaremba explains that how women are facing multiple oppressions due to their class, race, and sex. Tambu the protagonist of the novel shows through her life that how their identities are intertwined between being White and Black and to show that there is need to unveil certain mysteries in the universe, which hold connections and ties among different phenomenon it would be discussed with reference of Nervous Condition by Tsitsi Dangaremba.*

**Keywords:** Nervous Condition, Multiple Jeopardy, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Black Feminism, Gender Bias, Male Oppressions

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### Introduction

We live in a society where being black is a curse or we can say worst than the curse, we are still in that post-colonial hangover where we are denying our own identity. In an article by Denise Lynn, 'Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism' a black socialist of United States of American Claudia Jones theorized this as triple exploitation where our race, class, and

sex is being targeted as "Double Jeopardy" (Lynn). It is also referred to as the Triple Oppression; when a person is being exploited the most common way colonized adapts of Hybridisms. It is the common factor to be close to the Whites and to be treated in a similar way i.e. to be the suppressor, or to be the one who is having no inferiority complexes, or any psychological crisis, these psychological crises also differ according to different phases and how they influence their unconscious minds.

Talking about Hybridity, Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham in their article 'Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha's Critical Literacy' shares Bhabha's Concept of Hybridity as the one which commonly depicts the mixture of two or more cultures that form a new trans-cultural form that is formed within the zone of colonization (Worsham). Bhabha elaborates that this hybridity forms something new as used for Horticulture; which is the crossbreeding between two species that gives birth to new "hybrid" species. Hybridization takes form in many ways like Linguistic (which includes Pidgin and Creole), Culture (whose most simplified example is our culture which is a mixture of Hindu Muslim Culture), race, etc. Bhabha's analysis of the relationship between colonized and colonizers pays to focus on their coherence and mutual erection of their subjects which also include mimicry and ambivalence; he believes that all the cultural statements and systems are built over a space which he names as "Third Space of Enunciation". It is the "in-between space that carries the burden and meaning of the culture"; this is the basic reason why the notion of hybridity is important.

Additionally, his term is highly criticized because it shows the negating and neglecting inequality and imbalance of power relations it refers, which also increases the post-colonial dependence in which the colonized want to be like Whites and are, unfortunately, 'Whitewashing' their own identity.

Similarly, there is another aspect that is suppressing and sowing the seeds of colonizers in the minds of colonized and that is the "Colonial Education". Colonial education is the term which is used for describing the education which we are getting in our institutes is coming from that colonial era. Frantz Fanon while discussing "Cultural Representation of Blackness" in his book *Black Skin White Mask* elaborates human psychological development through a common example of a child who is raised by listening to the stories about adventures of a person. He/she imagines Him/herself being that person and wants to eliminate bad from this society. However, when they grow up their personalities are shattered because there is a line in these stories that differentiate them through their race. As they grow up they start to realize that all of the goods are just

associated with Whites and bad things with Blacks which further leads to the inferiority complexes that a child faces in the earliest stages of his/her life.

In the simplest words we can understand this phenomenon as the idea of assimilation, colonized are being forced to conform to the culture of colonizers through the above-mentioned example of the child elaborates that how their young and fresh minds are being clutched between the jaws of racism at a young age. They spend their entire childhood recognizing him/herself as being White but when he/she understands that how reality works his/her psychology gets disturbed. Gauri Viswanathan; professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, in her book *Social Text* points out “supremacy of social group manifests itself in two ways,... a 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership' (Viswanathan). The above statement not only shares the control of a certain group over territory but also highlights that how much intellect works in this domination. As a citizen of the Third World country, we can also relate to this statement as, in our society even today English is not just a language or a means of communication, but, is

considered as a scale where intellect and knowledge is tested. The one with good English skills is considered as an intellectual person and unfortunately, the one without this skill is considered as nobody. This dominance is the result of our postcolonial hangover where since childhood we are taught to learn English and books from Oxford more than our native language; Urdu.

The Feminist tradition of every society is having its own rules, regulations, and rights for the women of their society, and these rights, regulations, and rules are however intertwined between culture and religion. In *Nervous Condition* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, we can see the trades of how women were exploited and how patriarchy worked as the main control of the system. Black women as mentioned above face a great deal of suppression due to their race, sex, and class. Black feminism is a term reflecting the voice of black females portraying the wider struggle of human dignity, empowerment, and social justice of Black Womanhood.

### **Literature Review**

Gender differences have been the central issue of feminist discourses. They have tried to establish a global

sisterhood based on gender differences. Women of color, however, do not face this discrimination merely based on gender, but they are facing double oppression from both White women and Black men. Sally McWilliams in her article talks about women and their history of oppression as “Women as historical subjects are complex interactions of not only sexual but also racial, ethnic, religious, class and cultural differences.”(McWilliams).

Additionally, Teresa de Lauretis an Italian author and Distinguished Professor of Emerita of History Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz in her article *Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness* states “a female subject is a site of differences, differences that are not only sexual or only racial, economic, or (sub) cultural, but all together, and often enough at odds with one another ... these differences than cannot again be collapsed into a mixed identity, a sameness of all women as Woman, or a representation of Feminism as a coherent and available image” (Lauretis) This statement by Lauretis, not only highlights the complexity of this subject but also sheds the light on how people complex situations when it

comes to the Black women of this society.

Feminist theorists have often drawn an extensive analogy with racism and the struggles of Black minorities, in developing theories of the women's liberation movements. These theories have also customarily assumed that the struggle against sexism encompasses the struggle against racism. In the liberation movement, the majority of Black women did not take part in them. This has been a source of concern for a moment anxious to expand beyond its white middle-class membership base and become an interracial and international movement rather than considering minorities as people who lack consciousness.

Several Black women writers have voiced their opinions. These opinions revealed the factors within minority community such as; lack of knowledge about feminism, the relationship between Latina and Black women in the church, the idea of Black matriarchy, and most importantly racism. It's been centuries since the Black community is thriving for their rights and identity that is clenched between the jaws of racial and gender oppression. However, a community

that has been thought to be at Periphery is now expressing their opinions and experiences on racism, class exploitation, and sexual violence. These voices can be traced in the work of Bell Hooks, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade, Alex Walker, etc.

Since, the development of feminism in literature, Black women have been recognized. Black women activists and scholars have traced an intellectual space to unveil, reconceptualize, and redefine Black women's realities. These efforts have been the cause of several developments including Black women studies and Black feminism or womanist theories. However, these theories differ in their emphasis and conclusion due to multiple interlocking levels of oppression, which was later on termed as Multiple Jeopardy by Deborah King in 1988 in her article 'Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology'.

These articulations of Revolutionary Black Feminism (RBF) not merely highlighted the experiences of Black females but also exposed the ugly face of White women and Black men's psychology which is based on slavery. Black feminism is a political,

social, and economic movement that shared the same goal as feminism to have equality in both sexes and that started to expose the multiple oppressions a black woman goes through which includes, patriarchy, white supremacy, psychological, domestic, and political oppression, sexism, racism and class discrimination, etc. being a few. The history of enslavement and colonization has been merged to a significant element of common experiences between women related to Africa and the Diaspora. In the article 'Critical Race Black Feminism: A "Jurisprudence of Resistance" and the Transformation of the Academy' author Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd mentions that the Black Feminist analysis is based on the principle of "simultaneity of oppression" (Alexander-Floyd).

Moreover, Gender identity is conceived as a link between class and race. Black feminists argued that the social constructions of black womanhood and black male are based on racial hierarchy and gender is placed under specific rules and regulations that are being contextualized by race and class order. This response was based on an assertion considering that women

share common lots; the factors like class, race, religion, sexual preferences, etc. do not create the diversity of experiences that determine to which extent sexism would be oppressive in the life of individual women! Sexism is an institutionalized domination system but it has never been determined to be a fate of women in society (Amos and Parmar in Bhavnani).

Black feminists challenge the notion of women being defined by class, and argue that women of different class interests vary in perception and experiences thus working-class women object to white feminist classism. They challenge and argue that radical feminists should recognize black women based on their experiences living in a racist society. Marry Church Terrell in her book *A Colored Woman in a White World* states "It cannot possibly be like a story written by a white woman. A white woman has only one handicap to overcome—that of sex. I have two—both sex and race. I belong to the only group in this country that has two such huge obstacles to surmount. Colored men have only one—that of race." (Terrell, 28) Black women have criticized feminism for ignoring black women's experiences of racism and

universalizing the superiority of white women.

Additionally, they insisted that black women's experiences cannot be traced in feminist theory there should have another account-able institution that will mark their experiences of racism and inequalities of power and resources that exist between white and black people. Sojourner Truths in her 1851 speech states; "And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?" (Woman?) Truths here is not questioning about her sexuality but she is asserting indeed I am. Through this speech, it is evitable that she is celebrating womanhood because she is cherishing the experiences she had, even though they were different then of white women. She says that that her suffering was equivalent to that of a man, she lost everything, but whenever she cried no one heard her but Jesus.



Bell Hooks in her book whose title is based on Truth's speech *Ain't I a woman?* Addresses her "white sisters" to show the true meaning of Black feminism and states, "White women were actively excluded from black groups. The distinguishing characteristic of the black 'feminist' group was its focus on issues relating specifically to black women (Hooks). It showcases the life and experiences of Black women specifically. She also points out that slavery was worse for black women than black men because they might have their testicles cut off but they were not being raped or forced into homosexual acts. They were obsessed with destroying Black women's femininity by forcing "black women [to] perform the same tasks as black men," (Hooks). This fear of destroyed femininity was to such an extent that slave parents begin to prepare their daughters mentally to be ready for experiences like rape, harsh beating, seeing their babies die in front of their eyes if they didn't eat their food, etc. She asserts that those contemporary black women could not join other fights because they did not see womanhood as an important aspect of their identity; ironically this assertion states the mindset of "white

woman" and white supremacy.

Black women writers' analysis of racism centers on the understanding of the shared history of colonization and oppression by black people. One of the core challenges that black feminists have faced is the patriarchal power relationship between a black man and a black woman. They denied radical feminist assertion about patriarchal power being related to trans-historical phenomenon and oppression by men being the most fundamental and intractable form of oppression. Black feminist argues that colonization and its policies have reinforced the existing gender equality or have reshaped a new form of oppression for women as they face different perspectives on roles within their family and relationships with members.

### **Research Methodology**

This entire paper is written by using the umbrella term 'Black Feminism' and the concept of double jeopardy has been used to analyze the novel *Nervous Condition* by Tsitsi Dangarembga. Since the topic demands justice and extensive research, therefore, an in-depth analysis of the novel is done by using all its characters.

Thus, the qualitative part of the novel heavily depends on the text itself that will be discussed in the aspects of psychological trauma, racism, classism, and sexism. Since Feminism discusses the equality between sexes, thus while discussing society and its oppression, another part of the research will discuss the trauma men of the society face as well. This will not only shed light on the aspects of equality in feminism but will also compare the status of both genders in our society. The term 'Double Jeopardy' is being used to evaluate the different types of oppression a woman goes through throughout her life that will not only discuss their life being in the cage but also their retaliation against these norms of the society.

### Research Questions

- 1) Can we say that women themselves are responsible for their condition in the society according to the Black Feminist?
- 2) Why are men in '*Nervous Condition*' an ignored matter?
- 3) How does suppression work in hybridity and

colonial education?

### Findings and Analysis

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* unveils the suffering of Black women. Treva Broughton has observed that *Nervous Condition* "is a hopeful book, both in its sense of impending change ... and in the scope and subtlety of its critique of gender relations within and beyond the boundaries of race and class" (Broughton). A first-person retrospective narration of Tambuzai's story. The novel examines unequal power relations between men and women of the Sigauk clan which is steeped in tradition. Women (Nyasha, Maigru, Tambu, Lucia, and Ma'Shingayi) challenge male dominance in various ways. Each of these women fights against a different aspect of patriarchy, they also attempt to break out the domesticity and servility to the surprise of men. In the final lines of the novel, Tambu says "the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved and our men, this story is how it all begins" (Dangarembga)

Her "story" begins concerning her family and her unapologetic stance concerning her brother Nhamo's death



when she was thirteen, "I shall not apologize but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led up to my brother's death. The event that put me in a position to write this account. For though the events of my story cannot be separated, my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion- Nyasha, far minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not, in the end, have been successful"(Dangaremba).

The narrative evolves into a retelling of Tambuzai going on to mission for her education where she lives with her uncle Babamuruku, his wife Maiguru, his son Chido and his rebellious daughter Nyasha. Tambu's life at the mission was the time of realization for her about female subjectivity and black politics.

Starting from the protagonist herself, Tambu a country girl who experiences sexism at a tender age, and witness that too happening to her outspoken cousin Nyasha; who was a student at the mission. Since the start of the novel, the groundwork of sexism was laid out as "I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologizing

for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling." (Dangaremba). in this statement, she has drawn a vivid picture of gender inequality. Tambu faces sexism at a tender age. She wanted to have education but these facilities were only provided to the superior gender and thus her brother (Nhamo) was sent to mission for education. Being a young girl Tambu was not allowed to get an education, even though she was equally brilliant in it as he was not merely on the financial problem but because she cannot "feed your (her) husband books" (Dangaremba) thus she should "Stay at home with your (her) mother. Learn to cook and clean." (Dangaremba). A stereotypical notion that states that a woman belongs merely to domestic purposes. Tambu finds strength in herself and decides to earn on her own to submit her school fee. She decides to take her life on her hands and announces to her parents "I will earn fees" (Dangaremba) "If you will give me some seeds I will clear my field and grow my maize. Not much just enough for my fees." (Dangaremba) She works day and night to achieve her dream of education at least through a local school and when she earns enough money. Tambu at an age where she should be

provided with everything was spending many “productive hours working with my (her) grandmother on the plot of land she called her garden” (Dangaremba) which traces her experience with the bitter reality of sexism. Her ability to stand up for herself and work at a young age was her first step as a rebel against this stereotypical notion of sexism

Dangaremba in *Nervous Conditions* unveils our hypocritical society where power decides about wrong and right. After Nhamo's death Babamuruku, who is a wealthy man and Tambu's uncle decide to take Tambu to the mission. Her father Jeremiah, who once went to her school to get her fees back which she earned on her own and confronted Tambu's school's headmaster “Then you have taken my money, my father told the headmaster. That money belongs to me. Tambuzai is my daughter, is she not? So isn't it my money?” (Dangaremba) Because he was against her education and due to the economic power Babamuruku had made him step down and send her to the mission. This act by Jeremiah not only highlights the duality of our society but also showcases that how Tambu was not merely fighting against the patriarchy but also against the

hypocritical society. At the mission, she lives with her cousins Chido and Nyasha, and her aunt Maiguru and uncle Babamuruku, she learned about her own identity and begins to realize the unjust she has faced throughout her life. Her education became the exposure she ever needed for herself.

However, Babamuruku who is here can be considered as a heroic figure, since, he took her to the mission was also the piece of this patriarchal puzzle that made Tambu realized that how this ironically heroic figure that she worshipped and idealized like a god was a monster in real life. In an episode where Tambu rebelled against Babamuruku's will of marrying her parents. She not only challenged the power of Babamuruku when she says “Naturally I was angry with him for having devised this plot which made such a joke of my parents” (Dangaremba). But she also questioned the perplexing concept of sin and virtue; a concept she got from Sunday Catholic Church. Her decision to listen to her will and stand up against Babamuruku's wish as she did not attend her parent's wedding. Being furious at how his power could be challenged he warned Tambuzai “I am telling you! If you do not go to the

wedding, you are saying you no longer want to live here. I am the head of this house. Anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying what I have made.” (Dangaremga). This episode not only depicts the notion of personal integrity but also shares that how religion is intertwined in culture. The concept of evil and good which is used to show the right path to individuals is being used to destroy the sense of individuality. Tambu's character is the depiction of women's sense development of personal integrity, their courage to speak out, and their determination to act as an expression of individual agency.

Similarly, while mentioning women voices being heard against by the patriarchal authority of the society, I would like to mention 1980's feminist strategies which included “speaking up”, “questioning the authority” and “expressing yourself” all these strategies could be traced in Nysha's character in the novel. She is a rebel who thinks about right and wrong and is out-spoken. Nyasha's character is tactless and head-strong, she reads what she wants to and needs answers if she is being jeopardized. In an episode of the dining table when Tambu went to the mission first time, food was being

served to Babamuruku first because he the head of the house, “Nyasha did not wait for him to finish. By the time he was on his third dish, she was helping herself with rice” (Dangaremga) she did not wait for her mother to have a portion for herself as she did not like cold food. Dangaremga uses food imagery to symbolize power consumption, resistance, and acceptance. In this episode, Nyasha not only resisted the cultural norms of oppression for women but also challenged the authority of her father Babamuruku. Babamuruku's concept of being a decent and traditional woman is being challenged here as well.

Furthermore, in an episode where Nyasha was reading Lady Chatterley's Lovers; a book that highlights the element of love based not only on the mind but on sexual experiences, Babamuruku asks Maiguru “Do you see what kind of books your daughter is reading?” (Dangaremga) It is a clear representation of subjugating women. And to make sure that women are not having any exposure which is not acceptable by the head of the family i.e. male members of the family. It is evident in our society as well. That

young woman is not considered to be so-called decent if they are having exposure to anything related to sexual pleasures they are forced to step down and learn to be submissive and live in the given circle drawn by the men of the society. When Nyasha demands her book back Babamuruku neglects her words and states “I expect you to do as I say” (Dangarembga). This statement is a lucid depiction of how our society's mentality works. Women are not even allowed to speak a word on their own. They are expected to walk on the path that has been traced by men. Nyasha's character has been portrayed as an unfeminine woman who is having Westernized habits. This westernized mindset of Nyasha not only speaks about the horrors of Colonial education but also shares that how lonely she was as a woman and how much she struggled to find herself as an individual. In her black community she was considered to be the one with the highest status due to her education and there in England with her white community she was being bullied for her color. Coming back to the previous point about Nyasha's rebellious nature; she is not afraid to challenge her father's patriarchal mindsets and is even not on good terms with her mother as she also

never tried to take a step towards her independence. Babamuruku's biggest concern for Nyasha is that she is trying to be the man of the house by living her life on her terms.

Additionally, this becomes evident in an episode where Nyasha, Chido, and Tambu went to attend a Christmas party at the Beit Hall. The first conflict between Babamuruku and Nyasha was related to Nyasha's dress because she wore a mini skirt which was handled by Maiguru and worked as the silence before the storm. After the party when got late because she was learning a new dance move from Andy Baker and was dropped by him. when she came back home Babamuruku asked her about the reason for being this late, and "he examined her as though she was an obstinate budget which ought to be balanced but wouldn't" (Dangarembga) when he confronted Nyasha of whoredom and making her a victim of her femaleness without any proof, Nyasha rebelled and said “You want me to admit I'm guilty don't you? All right then. I was doing it, whatever you're talking about. There. I've confessed.” (Dangarembga) this argument got heated and they both raised their hands on each other. When he was smashing Nyasha's face on the

floor the bitter reality of oppression and hunger for power was put into words by Babamuruku “today she will not live. We cannot have two men in this house” (Dangaremga). This statement screams the horrors of oppression, the hunger for power, and the hardships faced by women if they would ever rebel.

This statement also shows that the custom of victimization is not dependent on lack of education, traditions, culture, or poverty. Tambu faces victimization because Nhamo and Nyasha faced victimization because of her father. It is universal. Women are clenched between the jaws of oppression. But Nyasha was not marginalized in her home by her family but also in her school where “Nyasha didn't have any friends” (Dangaremga) because of her race. She was bullied and people used to imitate her behind her back. “It was not Nyasha's accent they disliked, but Nyasha herself” (Dangaremga).

This oppression was not merely based on young women but Tambu's ideal woman Maiguru as well. Maiguru is a well-educated woman who holds a degree of master's in philosophy. But Tambu's this illusion went down the drain when she realized that Maiguru

has no control over her life or on her basic needs or her income; her paychecks. Her character shows another side of oppression where an educated woman is forced to “choose between self and security” (Dangaremga). Maiguru in her conversation with Tambu mentions the sacrifices she has made for her family which includes people mentioning her as the one who went to South Africa just to take care of Babamuruku. She had to choose security in a society where if she is alone her life could have been disastrous. Even though later on she stands up for her and leaves Babamuruku for five days.

Similar to this situation about self and security, Lucia's character chooses self instead of security. Lucia is the sister of Ma'Singayi or Mainini (Tambu's mother) a strong, bold, and independent woman. She has a reputation for being a woman of loose character and witchery. When Mainini was pregnant she came to help her out. Soon she develops a sexual relationship with Takesure and Jeremiah her (brother-in-law). When she became pregnant and carried Takesure's baby, it caused several problems which made Babamuruku enraged because no one was listening to his instructions and

now Jeremiah wants to take her as his second wife. Lucia refused to let people decide about her life thus she interrupts the family meeting and says “even if you ignore me, Lucia continued, 'it doesn't mean that I'm not here” (Dangarembga) revealing the truth about both men and mentions their flaws of laziness and lying. She stands up for herself and says “I can do better for myself. So Babamuruku, don't worry. I'm going. Right now. There's nothing to keep me. But I'm taking my sister with me.”(Dangarembga).

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is a perfect example of a Feminist text since it not only traces a lucid picture of women being oppressed but also mentions that how men are being oppressed as well, by giving them equal space in the story. She has equally done justice to depict the life of men who are being oppressed through poverty and illiteracy by the one who is wealthy and educated. “My father was more afraid of Babamuruku's wrath which he has experienced than God's wrath which he had not.” (Dangarembga) This statement shares that the wrath of Babamuruku is not only because he is an elder member of the society but also because it marks a threat to their manliness. Being a male

in a patriarchal society, men are believed to behave in a certain way of life. This way includes responsibilities like decision making, control over the family, earning bread for the family, and to have control over the family, etc. which Jeremiah and Takesure were unable to get which made them have an inferiority complex. Due to this inferiority complex, they begin to fear Babamuruku as if he was, a God.

### **Conclusions**

To conclude this idea, I would like to say that the women of the novel are the portrayal of different kinds of oppression based on racism, classism, and sexism. Tambu narrates a story where every aspect of a woman's life is being touched. Whether it is the tension on the birth of a girl and celebration on the birth of a boy or girl's education and her marriage. Taming her to be a good woman or the rules and regulations that have been set for her by the men of the society. All these aspects can be traced in the novel but Nyasha's mental breakdown is of importance as it reveals “I'm not a good girl. I'm evil. I'm not a good girl” (Dangarembga) which depicts the pressure a woman undergoes on daily bases. Tambu concludes the patriarchy in the novel as



“The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, lack of education, or tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem. . . . all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness.” (Dangaremba) This emphasizes the complexity of patriarchy and the story of four women who broke the barriers for themselves, which includes them empowering others like Maiguru did when Tambu got selected for Catholic School, Maiguru stood against Babamuruku's authority.

Similarly, Dangaremba also gives a rare account of men being oppressed as well. It reflects that in our society men are often labeled as the privileged ones but in reality, they are an ignored matter. Just like women men are also being oppressed. Takesure and Jeremiah were oppressed by Babamuruku due to the lack of wealth and education. Babamuruku was also oppressed due to his behavior with others. Eventually, Babamuruku is so disturbed by the fruit of his behavior and was left with an unhappy and

functional home. To overcome his nervous conditions, he has been trapped and lonely as women around him.

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## Social Realistic Portrayal of Indian Society in the Selected Poems of Nissim Ezekiel

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### Abstract

*Literature is a potential impetus for social change. It provides intellectual consciousness to dismantle the implacable foes of the society. Moreover, it acts as an opportunistic tool for the representation of social crisis. Social realism shows injustice, racism, class differences, and draws attention towards the struggle of middle and poor-class protagonists in the society. In addition, it highlights social conditioning of the people. The present study pinpoints social realities of Indian society in the selected poems of Nissim Ezekiel under the theoretical framework of social realism by Prakash Khuman (2010). It also exhibits the social issues of the middle and lower class. Qualitative content analysis of Ezekiel's selected poems sheds light on the realities of Indian society. Result of the study unravels hidden social realities and the indifferent attitude of the upper class towards the lower class. Findings of the current study reveal significant implications of the root cause behind the unjustified attitude of the upper class. It also shows a strong reaction of Ezekiel to the intimidating behemoths of the social system. Furthermore, the present study gives a pathway to future studies to find out the different social problems prevalent in other societies.*

**Keywords:** Middle class, Nissim Ezekiel, Social realism, Society, Upper class.

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### Introduction

Literature is a medium through which we can see the harsh realities of

life. In simple words, it is the reflection of life. It represents social norms and also highlights the evils in society to revamp social conditions. Hence,

literature is an imitation of human behavior that does not only reflect society but also acts as a potential tool through which people amend themselves (Duhan, 2015). Moreover, Dubey (2013) claims that literature works as a mirror to the society, what happens in society is shown in literary works in one way or another.

According to Baharati and Ahmad (2015), literature has two main functions. Firstly, literature deals with ideologies that increase individual motivations and actions. Secondly, it reflects social life and encourages those thought patterns which raise questions against social injustices and give awareness about social issues and situations. Similarly, Sujit (2018) opines that literature is a catalyst for the political, cultural, and social attitudes of the society. Hence, literary works in any form portray the social and ideological realities. In addition, Ezekiel is one of those writers who has exposed the harsh realities of societies through writing. He has used poetry as an intellectual weapon to bring social awareness in Indian society.

Rana (2012) observed that Indian poetry in English has a different and long tradition. Indian poetry in

English is old and writers have played a significant role in the development of this genre. Writers play an important role in the progress of any literature. Ezekiel is one of those writers who has played his part in Indian English poetry and the representation of his society in a realistic manner. In addition, Ezekiel was conscious of his people and their living conditions, therefore he has realistically portrayed his society through literature. Ezekiel's most significant influence was the introduction of reality in English poetry in India. This influence gave readers a new way to create a deeper understanding of Indian culture and societal norms (Goel, 2017). Furthermore, Ezekiel is one of those poets who have highlighted social distinctions and inequalities. Despite his Jewish background, he has committed himself to Indian culture (Pramila, 2015). Ezekiel successfully identified himself as a part of Indian culture and traditions (Kumar, 2014). Moreover, Ezekiel is a religious and philosophical poet whose purpose was to observe human life experiences in society (Ramya, 2019). Hence, it shows Ezekiel's contribution to his society, language, and social values.

Different theories can be applied to literature for the identification of social values in societies and every theory has its importance. In the same way, realism is one of them, as it highlights the real issues of mankind. The term social realism is derived from Russian-inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a social realist society. It is inspired in different ways by Russians, stimulated by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism, and international Marxism (Khuman, 2010, p. 81).

Social realism is a theory that emphasizes social injustice, racism, class differences, and depicts the picture of the struggle of middle and poor class. The identification of social conditions of the lower and middle class has provided a rationale to this study. Ezekiel's poems are rarely explored from the perspective of social realism. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to expose the harsh realities of Indian society through the lens of social realism in the selected poems of Ezekiel. Furthermore, it also highlights the response of the poet towards those social realities.

The findings of this study will inspire other researchers in the future to

further investigate the representation of Indian society through lenses of social realism and other theories related to realism. The current study is delimited to investigate social realities in the selected poems of Nissim Ezekiel through the lens of social realism.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To explore the realistic essence of Indian society in the selected poems of Nissim Ezekiel
- To reveal the response of Nissim Ezekiel to the social life in India through his poetry

### **About the Selected Text**

The following poems are selected by the present study: "The Truth about Flood", "The Railway Clerk", "Under Trial Prisoner" and "Entertainment". In "The Truth about Flood", Ezekiel tells the plight of the ordinary people who are destroyed by the severe floods in the village. One villager mourns that he has left his two children to the mercy of God while his remaining children are begging to sustain their lives. All the houses are destroyed and they don't have any hope left because there is no help from the government. Ezekiel satirized the

government and their system in this poem.

“Entertainment” is about the monkey showman who, in the poem represents the hardships of the lower class. He entertains people to earn some money and is in search of money which is the essential requirement for living. In the poem “Under Trail Prisoner”, Nissim has portrayed the sufferings of a lower-class person who is a trial prisoner and is unable to pay for his bail. He remains in jail for the crime he committed five or ten years ago. In “Railway clerk”, he shows grievances of a railway clerk about his lower middle class that is full of hardships and difficulties.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Term Realism**

According to Khuman (2010), Realism started in France with the rejection of Romanticism in the 1850s. It can be seen as a major trend in French paintings and novels. It was based on the portrayal of nature and the contemporary life of ordinary people in a realistic way. In literature, Realism is described as a theory through which reality is represented in its actual form without the practice of idealization of

things. Furthermore, World literature has reached a new phase of development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century based on the method of realism. The work of realism displays the inner meaning of life events. Romanticism was dominated in art and literature, based upon the fact that emotions and imaginations were given the importance that had no concern with the real lives of common people. Realism rejects imaginative idealism and shows the life situations of common masses objectively (Zarnigor, 2019). Hence, result of the study shows realism in literature is a manner of depicting life as it is without idealism or romanticism.

Realism is the relationship between reality and literature and between what life is and how the world takes it (Taghizadeh, 2014). Moreover, realist's works can disturb, educate or please us by showing reality as not what we perceive we know but what it actually is in reality. It shows us those realities which we have never seen or dreamed of (Yan li, 2016). Such binaries are outlined by scholars to trace the relationship of literature and realism; however, the present study looks at it from the

perspective of social realism.

Social realism portrays social reality as it is in literature. The main difference between social realism and societal realism is the fact that social realism presents the reality the same way as it is in the outer world but societal realism suggests how it ought to be by using the term 'should be'. When it comes to social realism, it is necessary to have the complete knowledge of real situation so it's a barrier for realist writer because they have to represent social realities realistically. In short, they cannot exaggerate the realities (Khuman, 2010). Furthermore, when the industrial revolution came and scientific growth started, the way of living got changed.

Revolutionary writers of that time talked about all these difficulties and situations in their works as they rejected the works of Romanticism because of their unreal approach.

*In literature, realism is  
reference that gives an  
illusion of exact  
correspondence with  
reality in its limited  
aspects. It is not  
unlimited, ultimate*

*reality but the  
fragmented, flawed  
world of quotidian  
experience that literary  
realism seems to refer  
to; or, it may be  
something felt as  
borrowed from that  
kind of experience.  
(Slattery, 1972, p. 55).*

The above statement declares that realists give less attention to imaginations from their surroundings. It does not mean that realism provides the proper truth but the fragments from the outer world. Moreover, Realism does not only deal with the present situation but also exposes the hidden objectives that are affecting the lives of contemporaries. Realist artist and writers use their mental capabilities for keen observation of contemporary issues to give real lessons. There is no difference between art and reality, art is representative of reality. All artists' and authors' works are based upon the realities of the societies in which they are present, so, there is no dichotomy between art and reality. Realism uses both art and reality to highlight the common issues of the common man effectively (Todorovic, 2019).

Krystal (2013) displayed the views from Erich Auerbach's (1946) *Mimesis: Represented Reality* that the spirit of realism lies in the wholeness of real truth. It deals with everyday situations, incidents, and characters from the middle or lower-middle-class in the specific contemporary time. As mentioned earlier that realism tells the contemporary truth so it is worth mentioning that realism describes what life is i.e., presenting the real situation as it is, without the mixing of illusions and imaginations.

Realistic literature is completely devoted to the present world's situations and reality. As Prakash Khuman (2010) mentioned George Eliot's remarks in his article;

*I am content to tell my  
simple story, without  
trying to make things  
seem better than they  
were; dreading nothing  
indeed but falsity  
which, in spite of one's  
best efforts, there is  
reason to dread.  
Falsehood is so easy,  
truth so difficult  
(Khuman, 2010, p. 94)*

Keeping in view the above discussion, a reference in the study is made to highlight literature as a tool for the representation of social realities which is the core construction of this study.

### **Social Realism**

A type of realism that emphasizes the living situations of the middle and poor class of the society. The Industrial Revolution changed every aspect of life so the literature of that era also changed its ways of presenting things. The focus of the writers shifted toward the social issues of the society by putting more focus on the problems of the common men. They selected the protagonist for their works from the lower or middle class. Social realism emphasizes social injustice, racism, and class differences and draws accurate pictures of the life struggle of middle or poor-class protagonists (Khuman, 2010).

### **Nissim Ezekiel Poems**

Ezekiel opposed the idealism and romanticism of the earlier group of Indian writers in English and tried to look at any typical Indian situation with an Indian essence, and dynamic Indian insight. He cleverly manipulated Indian



English to bring out the Indian worldview. Indeed, Ezekiel's poetic intellectuality creates a complete Indian atmosphere by capturing the very Indian attitude expressed through the use of Indian English (Thorat, 2009).

Khan (2016) claims that Angelou and Ezekiel have to face a lot of discrimination but they never feared and thus struggled to rise and live in their motherland and serve the citizens and the nations of their birth continued in their life and thus alienation, racism, and identity crises are the themes which can be seen in their poems. He is a great writer who presented Indian ethos in his poetry because he also faced an identity crisis and racial discrimination in his native nation. These concepts of class difference and gender discrimination are relevant to the present study.

Ezekiel himself has gone through hardships therefore he knows his society better than anyone else (Phondani, 2016). Ezekiel is one of those writers who has played his part in Indian English poetry and the representation of his society. Patil (2012) states that Ezekiel has used simple language to present the conditions of his people realistically. In

addition, Santosh (2017) believes that Ezekiel was bold in the satirical representation of Indian society and people.

According to Hussain and Zaidi (2016), Ezekiel is known as the father of modern Indian poetry in English. Karmakar (2015) takes the previous idea further and argues, Ezekiel was a postmodern critic whose attitude towards the poor was sympathetic therefore, wanted to change the conditions of the lower class. The above discussions are relevant to the present study as it sheds light on the importance of Ezekiel's contribution as a changing paradigm for Indian society.

According to Chelliah (2018), the depiction of Indian reality was an important characteristic of Ezekiel's poetry. She further elaborates that in the poem "Entertainment" Ezekiel shows the true conditions of a lower-class family where the monkey showman tries his best to earn bread for his family, therefore he is entertaining people day and night. Similarly, the poem "The Truth about Flood" describes the harsh attitude of the government towards the victims of the flood.



Moreover, “The Railway Clerk” is a symbol of pessimism and desperation of the poor in India. This brings forth the terrible conditions of the poor. These poor people satiate their appetite by any means. Railway clerk works hard but doesn't get enough money to bear the expenses of his family. In the poem, “Guru”, he exposed the fake gurus who are loyal to the rich but behave badly with the poor (Beg, 2017).

### **Research Methodology**

The current study is qualitative. According to Cropley (2015), the core ideology in qualitative research methodology is to investigate the personal approaches of researchers which are based on real-life experiences. Qualitative research is a form of social action that emphasizes the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals (Mohajan, 2018).

According to Creswell and Ivankova (2009), the qualitative method is defined as a potential model that occurs in a natural setting and facilitates the researcher to establish a level of detail from a high level of

involvement in the actual experiences. The present study uses the content analysis technique for the analysis of the selected texts. According to White and March (2006), content analysis is a systematic approach for the analysis of documents in research. This method is highly flexible and used all over the world in research. The data of the current study is collected from primary and secondary sources. The text of the selected poems is the primary source of the study. For secondary sources, different research articles, research papers, and books are utilized.

Social realism is selected as a theoretical framework of this study. The term social realism refers to the social realities of the middle and lower classes. Writers present sociopolitical conditions of their society through writing which plays a key role in changing the conditions of these lower-class people. In the same way, the present study is conducted to highlight those issues of common people through the framework of Social Realism in the selected poems of Nissim Ezekiel.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Social Realities in Railway Clerk

When it comes to the representation of Indian society, Ezekiel is very bold in depicting the realities through his poetry. In “Railway Clerk”, Ezekiel shows the situation of the middle class through a railway clerk. The clerk represents the bad conditions of lower-middle-class people who suffer from extreme poverty.

*My wife is always for money  
Money, money, where  
to get money  
My job is such, no one  
is giving bribe.  
(Railway Clerk, lines 8-10)*

The above lines show the pathetic condition of the railway clerk who symbolizes the lower middle class. He has no money to give his wife who is always demanding money. He further says that in the offices, everyone takes bribe but no one is giving him which is a satire on the government officers. Railway clerk is forced to take bribes because he has to fulfill the basic needs of his family. Ezekiel was a keen observer of his society and was a social

reformer who wanted to change the conditions of those poor souls. He has beautifully uncovered the situations of the middle-class family in his poem “The Railway Clerk”.

The poor railway clerk finds it difficult to make money because his job is of low rank and no one offers him a bribe. His other colleagues get bribes and enjoy facilities. His wife demands money for household expenses but he doesn't know how to earn extra money. Despite his hard work, he doesn't get any promotion because he is not a graduate. He has to face many difficulties at the workplace. He is overstressed and burdened but not paid for his overtime work. He doesn't get any facilities at the office even the leaves were not granted. This poem is remarkable for its realistic representation of lower-class hardships and sufferings. It is a mixture of satire and irony on society.

*My wife's mother is  
confined to bed  
And I am only support.  
(Railway Clerk, lines  
34-35).*

This line better illustrates the financial crises of a railway clerk. The mother is on her deathbed and he is the only

support of his family. He is unable to give her treatment. Ezekiel wanted the world to pay heed to these problems of the lower and middle class. He felt the pain of those common people because he himself was a common person. The clerk mourns that some of his friends are going to foreign countries for work, but he cannot go with them because his mother is ill and he is the only bread earner in the family.

*My desk is too small,  
the fan is not repaired  
for two months,  
my children are  
neglecting studies,  
how long this can go.  
(Railway Clerk, line  
19-24)*

In the above lines, the clerk complains again that the desk is too small and the fan has not been repaired for two months which makes it hard for him to work but still he is fulfilling his duties honestly. He further says that his children are not paying heed to their studies because he is far away from them. He is in search of money to feed his family and bear expenses.

*I am never neglecting  
my responsibility,  
I am discharging it*

*properly,  
I am doing my duty,  
but who is  
appreciating?  
Nobody, I am telling  
you. (lines 14-18)*

This poem “Railway Clerk” is a monologue in which the speaker only talks to himself. The speaker is talking about his hard work that he is a responsible person who completes his work on time but no one appreciates his commitment and dedication. They always blame him because he belongs to the lower class. This poem is an epitome of the struggle and difficulties of lower-class people. This condition of railway clerk is similar to any other Indian clerk of his class. The clerk is surrounded by tensions. Nissim Ezekiel who is considered a poet of social consciousness has bravely exposed the harsh realities of the lower class in this poem.

### **Representation of Lower Class in 'The Truth about Flood'**

“The Truth about the Floods” describes the agony of the rural victims where flood stampeded everything. A flood came which destroyed everything and jeopardized their lives. Ezekiel examines the present life, society, and

situation very carefully and describes social, economic, and political scenarios, realistically. He is conscious about the life of common people and their condition. He makes sufficient effort to depict the problems of contemporary society, its dark and harsh truths, and its pessimism. He shows the attitudes of government towards the poor class in this poem "The Truth about the Floods".

*"but the villagers  
would not tell me  
anything  
until I convinced them I  
wasn't a government  
official" (32-33)*

The above lines show that villagers were so afraid of the intimidating behaviors of the government that they won't tell anything to a government official. The speaker has to prove himself that he is not a government official, to gain trust of the common public. The paupers were not given any attention from the government or its any representative who is meant to be a public servant and supposed to help people but in reality, the scenario is completely changed.

*A villager speaks:  
I have eleven children*

*Two I have left to the  
mercy of God  
The rest are begging,  
somewhere. (18-21).*

These verses show the miserable conditions of poor villagers who belong to the lower class. A villager speaks about his tragedy. He says that he has left his two children at the mercy of God while the rest are begging to fight for their survival. They don't have any money to sustain their lives and no one is helping them. People of the high class take advantage of their situations. All the houses have collapsed, and they don't have any optimism left because the government is not helping them. Nissim Ezekiel was a strong supporter of social reformation. He has this notion that class difference is the root cause of all problems. Ezekiel has used writing as a weapon to highlight the issue of middle and lower class realistically. It has been observed that his main goal was to reform the social norms of his society which is a doorway to all problems. He is a source of inspiration for the victims of a stratified society. Ezekiel wants to inculcate awareness about execrable social ills and has raised a voice for indigent souls to make their life better.

*The villagers ran to  
them they slapped their  
bellies and whined:  
'I have not eaten for  
three days.'  
My husband has been  
washed away  
My parents have  
abandoned me  
My son is dying I  
cannot find my  
daughter (47-51).*

The above-mentioned poem picturizes the indifferent attitude of the upper class towards the common people. He satirized the political and bureaucratic system. Ezekiel depicted poverty and its effects in the poem. Bureaucrats and politicians having power and status, don't care about the lower-class people who are dying of hunger. The villagers were slapping their bellies because they have not eaten for three days. One female victim of the flood says that her husband died in the flood and her son is dying of hunger, she further complains that her daughter is also missing. Ezekiel knew these harsh realities and portrayed them very realistically, because he himself has gone through all these destitutions in his lifetime.

### **Sufferings of the Lower Class in “Entertainment”**

“Entertainment” is the poem about a monkey showman, who represents a lower class and its hardships. He entertains people to earn some money but never gets the reward in return. Monkey showman is in search of money which is the essential requirement of a lower class.

*Anticipating time for  
payment,  
The crowd dissolves.  
some in shame, part  
with the smallest coin  
they have  
The show moves on.  
(22-26)*

These lines from “Entertainment” exhibits monkey showman in the poem who represents the lower class living in hardships. They are in search of money which is their essential requirement of life. The showman moves from one place to another in search of money. He entirely depends on the favor of the public. Even though, no one is willing to give him money, he continues his hard work to earn bread for their family. The lower class means the people who are living the life below poverty line. Ezekiel has shown his sympathetic approach to the same lower class and

opposition to the social ills of the society in the poem. That is why he is known as the champion of social reformation.

E z e k i e l ' s      p o e m  
“Entertainment” is one of the best examples of perfection in his art. He has a keen observation of the Indian realities. He seems to be the master in showing the selfish aspect of the gathered crowd which gets dispersed when the monkey showman demands money for the street show, they have recently enjoyed. On the other hand, he shows the sufferings of the life of the performers, who do everything to take care of their families. The monkey showman becomes sad when the crowd betrays him.

*Naked to the waist,  
The Master of  
Ceremonies  
drums frenzy, cracks  
whip,  
calls the tricks  
to earn applause and  
copper coins. (9-13)*

The above lines highlight that the poor monkey showman is a poor rural entertainer who moves from one place to another in search of money. He completely depends on the public to

gain money. Monkey showman tries his best to earn some copper coins against his great efforts. Monkey showman symbolizes lower class people who fights to survive in the war of the survival of the fittest. Ezekiel's sympathetic interest in the poor class reflects his social concern. The upper class is enjoying the privileges while the poor class is struggling to earn a livelihood. Ezekiel is the master of ironic representation of Indian society.

### Injustice in “Under Trial Prisoner”

In this poem “Under Trial prisoner” Nissim has laid out the life of a trial prisoner who is incapable to pay for his bail. Nissim's intellectual wisdom has displayed many paths of optimism to the pessimistic heads of Indian society.

*“We have our rules  
made long ago  
he's got to wait, the law  
says so.  
it's not our fault he  
lives in jail.” (Under  
Trial prisoner)*

Ezekiel rejects existing colonial Jail laws with their complex procedures to give justice to the people. The under-trial prisoners have to live in jails for

years together, before their trial comes. These prisoners mourn on their fate as the prisoner in poem says he doesn't have money to get himself out of the jail.

Ezekiel argues that the rules and regulations are made long ago before independence, therefore, it needs modification to provide justice. The poem emphasizes the quick way of justice to ensure that victims get justice at right time. Ezekiel has criticized the judicial system. This poem shows Ezekiel's desire of revamping social norms. Ezekiel has intentionally portrayed these images of Indian society and their culture to make his people aware of their bad consequences.

*“Thousands like him  
Who did something  
wrong five years ago  
or maybe ten  
They didn't know when  
They were offered bail  
but didn't have money  
so they live in jail”.*  
*(Under Trial prisoner)*

The above lines clarify the struggles of the lower class in Indian society. The prisoner claims that thousands like him were offered bail but they didn't have

money because they were from the lower-class so they remained there for five or ten years. The upper class is enjoying luxurious life while the lower class is not able to fulfill their basic survival needs. There is an elite class that rules over the middle and lower class who are considered backward. There is a lower class that falls below the poverty line and is the middle class which is a major part of society. Ezekiel promotes these people so they can improve their classes by doing hard work and through talent as well. The concept of hard work is always there for the improvement of standards or classes. In this poem, Nissim has portrayed the sufferings of a lower-class person who is a trial prisoner and is unable to pay for his bail. So, he remains in jail for the crime he committed five or ten years ago. Moreover, a man of the high class has power, high status and income and is able to use his power anytime but the lower class doesn't have the necessary tools to live life. Ezekiel ironically criticized the lower class too; he says everyone dreams about becoming a part of the elite class to obtain a high social standard but no one is willing to do hard work.



## **Conclusions**

Twentieth-century was a great time of social awareness. Writers took an initiative to highlight the social realities of middle and lower classes in society. Time has shown us a great revolution in the form of these writers. Different poets raised their voices against social injustice and discrimination and one of those writers was Nissim Ezekiel.

Ezekiel has become a protagonist of Indian society because he has realistically represented the social realities. Ezekiel is the one who has inculcated those thought patterns of awareness into the minds of pessimistic people through his poems. This study shows the successful attempt of Ezekiel's intellectualism in highlighting the social realities of Indian society. The selected poems of Ezekiel are realistically portrayed under the lens of social realism. Moreover, he has questioned the elite supremacy of his society; the issues of the middle class and lower class are depicted in his poems which show Ezekiel's consciousness towards the difficulties of poor people. The study also shows a strong reaction of Ezekiel towards those social situations. Ezekiel

wants to dismantle the dichotomy of the middle class and upper class. Therefore, he has criticized the corrupt system which is a hurdle in the way of revolutionizing society.

## **Recommendations**

These poems can be analyzed from the different perspectives of realism. The present study is limited to the only social realism of Indian society in the selected poems of Nissim Ezekiel but researchers can apply other theories of Realism as well. Furthermore, the Theory of Feminism also suits Ezekiel's poems because he has raised issues of women too. Researchers can also analyze the selected poems through the lens of Cultural Stratification. The study recommends paying more heed to the social issues of the entire world. It is recommended that the study can be applied to any culture.

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## Punjabi and its Future in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*When the largest community of Pakistan, the Punjabis, are abandoning their language, this paper aims to explore the maximum range of factors upon which the speakers of this language, who are worried about its dismal scenario, can cater to hopes for the survival of their mother tongue. Factors such as the stigmatization of Punjabi as a foul language at many of our educational institutions and having a little number of academic careers and job opportunities in private and public sectors make the future of Punjabi in Pakistan very grim. However, the future of Punjabi is not as dismal as it is propagated. This article investigates the future of Punjabi in the opinion of professionals. The researcher conducted interviews, as data, from five heads of the Punjabi Departments at public sector universities. The participants point out various hurdles in Punjabi and its establishment/ acknowledgment as a national language. Still, at the same time, they point out factors that give strength to this language and upon which its disappointed speakers can pave ways for its spread at a national level. The findings show that the demise of Punjab is nothing more than a misleading rumor. Due to time constraints, the researcher collected data from 5 heads of departments. Furthermore, the topic can be explored by probing businessmen, parents, and laymen to get a wider perspective.*

**Keywords:** Future, Language, Punjabi, National, Survival

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### Introduction

Pakistan is a home of 59 small and six major languages (Rehman, 2011). Most of its minor languages are on the verge of extinction. Major

languages such as Sindhi, Balochi, Saraiki Pashtu, and Punjabi are also experiencing potential threats from Urdu and English. In this era of globalization, both the youth and their parents in Pakistan are leaving their

native languages. Particularly, much stigma and shame have been attached to the Punjabi language. Arshad (2016) holds Punjabi has been banned at many educational institutions in Punjab because it is considered foul language. The government of Punjab has not taken any legal action against this.

Punjabi has a very rich cultural heritage as an Indo-Aryan language; its 33 million and 109 million speakers are present in India and Pakistan respectively. It has the status of the tenth largest language of the world; in the eleventh century, it was given the status of an autonomous language; it is mostly influenced by the Perso-Arabic sources. In India, it was influenced by Sanskrit and considered as the sister language of Hindi. Moreover, it has various dialects, such as Pothohari, Multani, Lehandi, and all its dialects are largely different in sound and vocabulary.

According to Zaidi (2010), Punjabi has become the victim of linguistic schizophrenia as the Punjabis are the most literate community in the country. Still, at the same time, they are highly illiterate in their mother tongue. It is because its speakers, instead of taking pride in the country's largest language, consider it a derogatory

language that should be spoken only in informal discussions. Zaidi (2010) further states that in the whole country, only 2% population is literate in Punjabi. This attitude of the Punjabi speakers is because of the language policies of Pakistan such as the language policy of 1973, 1989, 2007, and 2009 which promoted only Urdu and English.

Various studies show that little has been done on the part of Punjabi people to uplift the educational value of their mother language in Pakistan; we cannot see even a single school in the whole country where Punjabi is promoted (Rahman, 2005). Moreover, there is not even a single newspaper in Punjabi in the country, and if started, no one can guarantee the success of any journalistic endeavor (Zaidi, 2010). In this grim situation, some Punjabi speakers feel grieved and fear that their cultural language will become endangered over time.

By looking at the situation mentioned above, the researcher of this article aimed to investigate the future of Punjabi in Pakistan, which does not see as horrible as is propagated by some elements, for some organizations are working for the uplift of its status; several movies are produced in

Punjabi; Particularly in Indian Punjab, the Sikh community is concerned about Punjabi, and they have not attached any shame with their mother tongue; hence, they take pride in speaking and promoting Punjabi not only in India but all over the world as in 2019, the foundation stone of a Punjabi University was laid down in Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.

### **Literature Review**

Various studies show that the Punjabi language started becoming the victim of marginalization in British India. As soon as the English came into power in Subcontinent, they started promoting their language. Immediately after taking hold of the government, they abolished Persian as the language of the court. All high-level posts were to be filled by those who were proficient in English, and English also became the medium of instruction for the elite class. Only menial posts were given to the Urdu speakers (Rahman, 2011). Later, with the passage of time, English and Urdu became the medium of instruction at all higher education universities and colleges (Basu, 1952).

Consequently, the Hindi activists started propaganda against Urdu, which led to a 40.5 times increase

in Hindi magazines and newspapers (Bhatnagar, 1947). Hence, Punjabi and all the other regional languages of the subcontinent started to be dominated by English, Hindi, and Urdu. Similarly, after the creation of Pakistan, the government of Pakistan formulated policies that only favored Urdu and English (Zaidi, 2010 Rahman, 2011).

Liudmila (2014) contends that the Punjabis in Pakistan is, by all means, a community with a shared ethnicity, territory, culture, language, and geography, and most importantly, they are a community employing their language Punjabi. Liudmila (2014) further states that in today's Pakistan, the Punjabi speakers have become a highly disadvantaged group because the country's elite class is mainly comprised of Punjabi landlords who run the affairs of the government. The Punjabi middle class is a major workforce of the country, particularly the armed forces of Pakistan are mainly comprised of the Punjabis. But the mother tongue of the largest community does not find any institutional support in the country. Moreover, all community professional, cultural, and intellectual activities are conducted in Urdu and English.

In the same way, Rahman (2011) stated the number of Pashto-medium schools in KPK is 10,731, and Sindhi-medium schools are 36,750. In Sindh and KPK, Sindhi and Pashto are taught as compulsory subjects. But on the other hand, we do not see any school in the Punjab where the Punjabi language is compulsory. Only at the university level, a few students opt for Punjabi as an optional subject. Similarly, only a few TV and radio channels feature Punjabi films and programs with a limited audience.

Rahman (2002) and Mansoor (1993) contend that the two census' reports show a glaring reality about the decrease in Punjabi speakers; for example, in the census report of 1981, the number of Punjabi Speakers was 48.27%, but that percentage decreased to 44.15% in the census of 1998. The reason behind this is the speakers of Punjabi have started to identify themselves as speakers of the Urdu Language. They consider Punjabi as a stigma, and they feel embarrassed by speaking Punjabi.

Similarly, Rahman (1996) and Zaidi (2010) state that the main reason behind the deterioration of the status of Punjabi is the coalition of Punjabis with the Muhajirs at the name of national

solidarity after the creation of Pakistan despite many middle-class Punjabi speakers were against the marginalization of their mother tongue. The country's ruling class promoted Urdu on the pretext of political, religious, and cultural unity. Some Punjabi activists opposed that move and established the Pak Punjabi League 1951, which strongly demanded Punjabi as a medium of instruction at schools and colleges. Similarly, some other organizations also demanded the use of Punjabi in government services and schools. However, their demand was heeded by only making Punjabi an optional subject at the graduation level. Zaidi (2010) also states that some intellectuals and politicians demanded that Punjabi be made official. Still, there was no serious attempt on their part for the status uplift of the Punjabi Language. Regretfully, the official status was not accorded on Punjabi. On the other hand, in the Indian Punjab, Punjabi has achieved official status, along with other 22 regional languages (Ghai & Singh, 2013).

Rahman (2002) unveils that after the partition of the subcontinent, the strength of Bengalis in Pakistan was 55.6%, they were the largest ethnic group, and they demanded the



supremacy of their language; hence Urdu-Bengali conflict started at the expense of the Punjabi. Similarly, after the separation of East Pakistan, the Punjabi Landlords wanted the supremacy of Urdu again at the expense of all the remaining regional languages of the country. Moreover, Mehdi (1994) holds that the ruling class had the view that after the separation of Bangladesh, the other provinces will also demand their language rights. When the provinces demanded language rights, strict laws were enacted to crush any move against national unity. For example, in 1977, the military government and media labeled all the language activists as criminals against the state, and they were crushed with iron hands (Afzal 1986).

Shackle (2007) and Ayres (2003) say that only during Zulifqar Ali Bhutto's government a few language rights were conferred on the provinces. Still, the later regime of Zia ul Haq termed all the language movements as political. Hence, in the subsequent history of Pakistan, Punjabi greatly suffered, and many studies show that a lot of cultural shams have been attached to Punjabi.

Nazir, Aftab, and Saeed (2013) conducted a study on Punjabi in the

District of Sargodha, Pakistan, to find out the social processes that threaten the existence of Punjabi in the whole country. The study reveals that the Punjabis are not loyal to their language; consequently, the language is deteriorating with time, and this is because they have started identifying themselves with Urdu. A similar investigation was done by Gilani and Mahmood (2014). And their findings were further validated by the study conducted by Akram and Yasmeen (2011) and Nazir et al. (2013). These studies further exposed that the shift from Punjabi to Urdu shows that the speakers tolerate their language instead of promoting it. However, John (2015), in his Ph.D. study, found rather mixed views that some Punjabi speakers still claim Punjabi the part of their identity and hold it in good esteem. Still, as most of the studies showed, some feel cultural shame in speaking Punjabi, lowering the status of their native language.

### **Research Methodology**

The nature of the current study is qualitative, and interviews as a research tool have been conducted to collect data from the participants. Hence, semi-structured interviews were prepared, containing the



questions about the academic value of Punjabi, job opportunities for Punjabi graduates in Pakistan, its importance, the attitude of Punjabi speakers towards Punjabi, the reaction of parents and other authorities about its use, the influence of other languages on Punjabi, issues of its maintenance, the future of Punjabi and the factors upon which the speaker of Punjabi can pin hopes for the uplift of its status. The experts validated the research instrument of this study. A panel of four socio linguists completed validation. The interview protocol was finalized after carefully analyzing and incorporating the suggestions of the experts. To investigate the future of Punjabi in Pakistan, special interviews were constructed. Because the study was limited only to the opinion of the professionals in the Punjabi language, the standard for the participant's inclusion was that only the heads of the Punjabi departments of Public sector universities have considerable experience in teaching Punjabi were selected. The researcher selected a sample of five participants from five Public sector universities. The researcher personally administered the data. Only those participants were selected who were the native speaker of the language. Each interview was

transcribed before conducting the next interview to note that what remained unquestioned or missed could be covered in the next interview. For this purpose, transcribed interviews were read carefully and several times by the researchers. The interpretive phenomenological approach was used to analyze transcribed data, validate each interview's meaning, and explore themes; the triangulation method was used.

### **Results**

In the semi-structured interviews, the participants expressed their opinion to various questions about Punjabi; all the questions were related to the job and educational value of Punjabi language, the barriers in its preservation and maintenance, linguistic influences on it, perception of different people about the speakers of Punjabi, and its future.

The participants' answers to the questions related to the academic value of Punjabi and job opportunities for Punjabi graduates were not affirmative. They opined that Punjabi has very little academic value in the whole province of Punjab; there is no single educational institution where the medium of instruction is Punjabi. Even in their departments, the teachers during and

after the lectures speak Urdu with their students. The strength of the students opting Punjabi is decreasing gradually, and those who opt for it are not very brilliant academically, and their responses were as under:

“Academically, Punjabi has little value; it is not taught at schools; only at public sector universities students take Punjabi as an optional subject.”

"The number of students doing Ph.D. is decreasing gradually, and even those who opt for Punjabi as an optional subject take it as a last choice because it is easy to pass as compared to other subjects.”

“Many people in Punjab learn Punjabi not for reading books or preserving their cultural language but to communicate with their parents and grandparents, and for this, they do not have to join any institution, but they learn it informally.”

They seemed to be disappointed about very promising careers for the Punjabi graduates. The Punjabi graduates do not find jobs related to their degree. Rather, they have to do menial jobs, which greatly hampers students from pursuing their

careers in Punjabi. Following were their opinion.

“There are very fewer job opportunities for the Punjabi graduates. Only a few of them either become university lecturers or translators.”

“Those who do master in Punjabi have to do an extra master in order to strengthen their CV for a job; otherwise, employers prefer science graduates to degree holders in Punjabi.”

"Even the Ph.D. scholars in Punjabi have to strive hard to find a good job related to their degree"

Similarly, when they were asked about publications in Punjabi, their response was the number of publications in the largest language of Pakistan is almost non-existent. They said as under:

“The number of new Punjabi books is decreasing every year. The publishers are hesitant to take any Punjabi book, and this bars the writers from writing in Punjabi.”

“Research papers in Punjabi as compared to Urdu and English are very few every year. Mostly the lecturers in Punjabi publish some papers in Punjabi to get a promotion.”

The interviewees were positive about the importance of Punjabi; they opined that every language has its importance as far as the identity, culture, and traditions of a community are concerned. Similarly, according to them, Punjabi is the identity of the people of Punjab; it is the cultural language of Punjab; it has a very long history and tradition. Their opinion was as under:

“Punjabi has a history of about three thousand years; the people of Indian and Pakistani Punjab have been speaking it for centuries.”

Punjabi is the language of very famous poets, such as Baba Fareed, Baba Bhulay Shah, and Mian Muhammad Bakhsh; very rich literature has been produced in it; particularly, Punjabi poetry is famous all over the subcontinent.”

“The culture, folklore, and tradition of Punjabi people are very rich; a vast majority of Punjabis strictly follow their culture and tradition and consider Punjabi the part of their community. One cannot understand Punjabi culture without understanding the Punjabi language.”

The reaction of parents, according to respondents, was not

commendable for the use of Punjabi. Similarly, the authorities at schools do not allow children to speak Punjabi, and all the official correspondence takes place in Urdu and English in Pakistan. In cities, those who speak Punjabi are considered illiterate. The answers were as under:

“The parents in Punjab do not allow their children to speak Punjabi at home or outside the home. Even some parents admonish their children for speaking Punjabi.”

“This is ironical that parents speak Punjabi with their parents, grandparents, and servants, but they strictly allow their children's conversation either in English or in Urdu.”

“At educational institutions and in the classes, students are not allowed to converse in Punjabi. In the educational environment, Punjabi has no more than the status of sigma or foul language.”

“Even there are some schools which issued notices that those who were caught using Punjabi in the school premises would be fined.”

“The level of cultural shame has reached to a point that the Punjabis feel

sham using their own language; otherwise, they are branded as Pandoos (the illiterate from villages)."

"Punjabi has become an orphan language, its own speakers are leaving it. It has not been given the status of official language. In all offices, the use of Punjabi is strictly prohibited."

"In the offices, Punjabi is used only informally to crack jokes. Even the officers use it in informal discussions."

When the professionals were asked about the influence of other languages, they opined that in history, Punjabi had survived the influence of many languages, such as Hindi, Persian, and Arabic. And now it is under great dominance of Urdu and English. Their views were as under:

"Hindi is thought to be the sister language of Punjabi, and it survived centuries with Hindi, and Persian was the court language of the Mughal kings but it could not replace Punjabi in the subcontinent. But Punjabi has a lot of words of Hindi and Persian."

"The speakers of other languages in Pakistan do not feel any difference between Punjabi and Urdu because both languages share a big portion of their morphology, syntax,

and pronunciation with each other."

"Due to a huge similarity between Urdu and Punjabi, some activists of Punjabi consider that one day Urdu will completely replace Punjabi."

"Even the most illiterate people of the Punjabi language have started using the word of English language, so Punjabi is under great pressure from Urdu and English."

About the maintenance of Punjabi, the participants highlighted issues, such as lower language prestige, no international use, no official use, Urdu Punjabi controversy, no patronage from the government, and no promotion of language by the Punjabis themselves. About these issues following were their views:

"The governing elite which is mostly the landlords of Punjab does not use Punjabi; their children get an education at English-medium schools, so they do not take any step for the promotion of Punjabi language."

"The Punjabi landlords still consider Punjabi a hurdle in the way of national unity, so they promote Urdu as a national language instead of taking any step for the uplift of Punjabi."

“It is the common perception in the people of Punjab that Punjabi does not have any international use; hence there will not be any economic benefit of promoting Punjabi.”

“The number of activists and the organizations who work for the survival of Punjabi is very low; otherwise, most of the Punjabis do not see any advantage in promoting their mother tongue, and they consider any effort regarding it useless.”

“When the speakers of a language start feeling shame about the use of their own language and stop their new generation from using, the future of that language comes under jeopardy.”

When the professionals were asked about the future of Punjabi in Pakistan, they said that Punjabi is far from being called an endangered language due to several reasons but they also expressed a number of cautions regarding it. They said that Punjabi is the tenth largest language of the world, and it has more than 140 million speakers; particularly in Indian Punjab, the Punjabi Sikh community is very concerned about it, and all over the world, organizations are working for the uplift of all the languages which are

facing potential threats. In the same way, the educated youth of Punjab is also concerned about their language. They expressed their opinion in the following ways:

“The speakers of Punjabi are the tenth largest community of the world with speakers in India, Pakistan, and in some western countries. There is a large Sikh community in Canada who loves Punjabi as their mother tongue.”

“The Sikh community in Indian Punjab considers Punjabi the part of their identity and culture; hence, Punjabi has given the status of official language in India. Similarly, Indian Punjabi movies which promote centuries-old Punjabi culture and language are becoming popular all over the world.”

“There are many languages in the world which are on the verge of extinction, but there are many organizations in the world which are working for all the endangered languages of the world, and they have also documented a lot of dead languages; hence, it cannot be propagated that the Punjabi will become extinct in the world one day.”

"The educated middle class of Punjab, despite the fact they did not get their education in Punjabi, is concerned about the deteriorating status of their mother tongue, so they have started raising their voices for the protection of their language."

"When some schools issued notices to ban Punjabi in school premises, many Punjabis protested against that move."

Moreover, they also stated that there are also some hopes from the government side to promote regional languages in Pakistan; they said that the government of Pakistan has also started taking initiatives to promote Punjabi. In this regard, they emphasized constitutional guarantee, the eighteenth amendment, and the latest foundation stone of a Punjabi university.

"The constitution of Pakistan clearly states that the national language of the country will be Urdu, but the provinces will take steps for the promotion of regional languages."

"After the passage of the eighteenth amendment, the provinces have been given maximum autonomy; now provinces can easily promote their languages and culture through

education; otherwise before that only Urdu was promoted on the pretext of national unity."

"Recently, the government of Pakistan laid down the foundation stone of a Punjabi university, Baba Guru Nanak University, in the district of Nankana Sahib in Pakistani Punjab to boost the promotion of Punjabi culture and language."

Based on their years of language teaching experience, the study participants were asked to give suggestions to promote Punjabi in Pakistan. First, they laid down responsibility on the shoulders of Punjabi speakers that they should not feel any shame on the use of their culture language; they should hold seminars to make people aware of the worth of their regional language; it should be given the status of an official language. Moreover, the participants also emphasized that the role of media in this regard is also highly crucial. Their suggestions were as under:

"The Punjabi people like the Sikh community should love their language, and should not feel any shame for speaking their mother tongue rather they should feel proud that Punjabi is their cultural identity."

“India along with many other regional languages has given Punjabi the status of an official language. Similarly, in Pakistani Punjab, it should also be made an official language along with Urdu.”

"The government of Punjab should give incentives to the people who are working for the cause of Punjabi. Similarly, those who publish books in Punjabi they should be encouraged by giving financial incentives."

“For the promotion of Punjabi, seminars should be organized where people should be made aware of the worth of Punjabi as a cultural heritage and the identity of all the Punjabi community of the world.”

“Punjabi movies and dramas enjoyed a lot of fame in the history of Pakistan, and now the production of Punjabi films has become very low. So, Punjabi cinema should be promoted both by the government and the people of Punjab."

“The media of Pakistan is playing a vibrant role in highlighting different issues; in the same way, it should also play a constructive role for the promotion of regional languages of

the country, and particularly it should dispel the cultural shame attached to the Punjabi language"

### **Discussion**

The findings of the current study suggested that according to the professionals in Punjabi, Punjabi has very little academic value in the whole province of Punjab; there is not even a single educational institution where the medium of instruction is Punjabi as it was concluded that Punjabi is not enjoying such level of prestige in Pakistan as English (Naqvi, Nadeem, & Rahman, 2021). Even in the departments, the teachers during and after the lectures speak Urdu with their students, which is very demotivating for the students to take Punjabi as a language which they can use with confidence among peers, which was following the findings of the study conducted by Abbas, and Iqbal (2018) which concluded that speaking the English language is the connection to the sense of superiority among youth whereas speaking Punjabi is linked with integrative motivation. The strength of the students opting Punjabi as a subject is decreasing gradually, and those who opt for it are not very brilliant academically.



It reported their disappointment about the promising careers for the Punjabi graduates. The Punjabi graduates do not find jobs related to their degree. Rather they have to do menial jobs, which greatly hampers students from pursuing their careers in Punjabi. The research area in Punjabi is almost negligible and deprived of attention. Negligible research publications were reported by the respondents, which is a visible sign of the lack of interest of students in Punjabi and great damage to the reputation of Punjabi.

As every language has its importance and identity, the study explored that the Punjabi language has its importance as far as the identity, culture, and traditions of a community are concerned as it is the identity of the people of Punjab which is contributing to secure and maintain the heritage of Punjabi culture. Punjabi is the language of very famous poets, such as Baba Fareed, Baba Bhulay Shah, and Mian Muhammad Bakhsh; very rich literature has been produced in it; particularly, Punjabi poetry is famous all over the subcontinent. Liudmila (2014) contends that the Punjabis in Pakistan is, by all means, a community with a shared ethnicity, territory,

culture, language, and geography, and most importantly, they are a community employing their language Punjabi.

But the most damaging aspects of Punjabi heritage as language are lower language prestige, no international use, no official use, Urdu Punjabi controversy, no patronage from the government, and no language promotion by the Punjabis themselves. It was also reported that now the government of Pakistan has also started taking initiatives to promote Punjabi. In this regard, they emphasized constitutional guarantee, the eighteenth amendment, and the latest foundation stone of a Punjabi university.

Based on their years of language teaching experience, the participants of a study suggested that to promote Punjabi in Pakistan; every Punjabi has the responsibility to speak Punjabi with confidence as they speak English or Urdu and admire others who speak Punjabi rather than stigmatizing others. It was reported that to save Punjabi from social death, it should be taught in schools as well (Naqvi, Nadeem, & Rahman, 2021). Seminars should be conducted to promote the Punjabi language and to save the Punjabi heritage. Punjabi should be



given the official language status for which media can play a potential role in highlighting the endangering language, i.e. Punjabi in Pakistan. According to Zaidi (2010), some intellectuals and politicians demanded that Punjabi be made official. Still, there was no serious attempt on their part for the status uplift of the Punjabi Language. Regretfully, the official status was not accorded on Punjabi, which is hindering the development of Punjabi. Contrary to that in the Indian Punjab, Punjabi has achieved official status and other 22 regional languages (Ghai & Singh, 2013), which the Pakistani government should notice.

### **Conclusions**

After detailed discussion and analysis, the researcher of this study concluded that the current status of Punjabi is in a dismal state. Still, some factors show that Punjabi cannot be easily termed as an endangered language in the coming future. No doubt much cultural shame has been attached to the use of Punjabi at certain places like in the official environment and schools. Those who speak it at these places are called illiterate people from villages, and this is because both its speakers and the government of Pakistan did not take any step to

promote the Punjabi language. Punjabi has no educational value; those who pursue their career in Punjabi cannot find good jobs. However, the foundation of a university for the promotion of Punjabi and the increasing awareness of the educated Punjabi middle class shows that hopes for the survival of Punjabi are not dying at all. Punjabi is the cultural identity of more than 140 million people around the world, and it is very rich in culture, tradition, and literature; hence, it needs to be preserved. It can be preserved by uplifting its status through a media campaign, organizing seminars, giving incentives to Punjabi writers, and giving it official status. Due to time constraints, the sample selection population is limited to only five heads of departments. Heads of departments can only speak about the language's academic aspect, which is a limitation to the study. In the future, businessmen, parents, and laymen can be interviewed to dig into the abovementioned issues.

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