

COVID-19 IN PAKISTAN: CASE OF IMPLICATIONS IN EDUCATION SYSTEM OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

COVID is an acronym for "Coronavirus Disease". Was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and has since spread globally, leading to a worldwide pandemic. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the education system in Pakistan. With the outbreak of the pandemic, the government closed all educational institutions in the country in March 2020 as a precautionary measure to control the spread of the virus. Schools and universities remained closed for several months, and students were forced to switch to online learning. However, the transition to online learning was not smooth, as many students in Pakistan did not have access to the necessary technology or internet connectivity. The education system in Pakistan has been further affected by the economic impact of the pandemic. Many families have lost their sources of income, making it difficult for them to afford education-related expenses such as tuition fees, textbooks, and internet connectivity. Additionally, the closure of schools has had a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of students. Many students have reported feeling isolated, anxious, and depressed due to the lack of social interaction and the uncertainty surrounding their education. The Pakistan's government has taken numerous steps to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the education system, including the launch of a nationwide e-learning portal and the provision of financial support to students from low-income families. However, much work remains to be done to ensure that all students have access to quality education and support during this challenging time. In this research through secondary sources analyzed how government overcomes anxiety among students and which types of the steps taken by government to continue student educational activities.

Keywords: COVID, Education, Challenges and Opportunities, Digital Divide, Online Education

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 was first identified in December 2019 in China and has since spread globally, leading to a pandemic. The virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes. Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild to severe and may include fever, cough, fatigue, body aches, loss of taste or smell, and difficulty breathing. Some people infected with the virus may experience no symptoms at all.

COVID-19 has had affect the global economy and health, leading to the implementation of various measures such as social distancing, quarantine, and vaccination campaigns to control its spread. Moreover, corona pandemic has had a significant impact on Pakistan's education system. In March 2020, the government ordered the closure of all educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, to prevent the spread of the virus. The closure of educational institutions

disrupted the academic calendar, and many students faced challenges in completing their studies. Geographically, Pakistan is located in South Asia, sharing borders with India to the east, Afghanistan and Iran to the west, China to the northeast, and the Arabian Sea to the south.

The affect of COVID-19 on Stock Exchange of Pakistan

During COVID as other economic losses become in Pakistan, meanwhile Karachi stock exchange affected and below chart highlighted the Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE) trade.

However, the market recovered gradually in the following months due to several factors, including stimulus measures by the government and central bank, improving economic indicators, and lower interest rates. Despite the overall recovery of the market, certain sectors were more affected than others due to the pandemic. For instance, sectors such as aviation, hospitality, and tourism were hit hard by travel restrictions and reduced consumer demand, and their stock prices declined significantly. Conversely, other sectors such as pharmaceuticals, technology, and telecommunications saw an increase in demand and benefited from the pandemic, leading to a rise in their stock prices. Pakistan government has taken safety measure to overcome the COVID spread in Pakistan safety message communicated to the people of through print, social and electronic media.

Messages was based on wear a mask in public places and practice social distancing by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from others. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Avoid large gatherings and crowded places. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, stay home and contact a healthcare provider for advice. If you test positive for COVID-19, follow the instructions of your healthcare provider and local health authorities regarding self-isolation and contact tracing. Get vaccinated against COVID-19 when a vaccine becomes available to you.

COVID 19 Challenges for Educational System in Pakistan

Like many other countries, Pakistan has faced numerous educational challenges during the pandemic of COVID. Here are some of the challenges faced by the education sector in Pakistan:

Digital divide: There is a significant digital divide in Pakistan, with many students not having access to the technology and internet connection needed for remote learning. This has led to disparities in educational opportunities, particularly for students in rural areas and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Inadequate infrastructure: The pandemic has highlighted the inadequate infrastructure in many Pakistani schools, including poor ventilation, lack of clean water and sanitation, and overcrowded classrooms. These factors have made it challenging to implement social distancing and other safety measures.

Limited teacher training: Many teachers in Pakistan have not received adequate training in digital pedagogy and remote teaching, which has impacted the quality of instruction delivered during the pandemic.

Learning loss: The shift to remote learning has resulted in learning loss for many students in Pakistan, particularly those who are already disadvantaged or struggling academically.

Mental health challenges: The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of students, teachers, and parents in Pakistan, with increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression.

Financial constraints: The financial crisis of the pandemic has left many families in Pakistan struggling to pay for education-related expenses, including tuition fees and technology.

Limited social interaction: Students have had limited opportunities for social interaction with peers and teachers, which is essential for their social and emotional development.

Learning loss: The shift to remote learning has resulted in learning loss for many students, particularly those who are already disadvantaged or struggling academically.

Mental health challenges: The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of students, teachers, and parents, with increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression.

Lack of extracurricular activities: Many extracurricular activities, such as sports, music, and clubs, have been canceled or limited due to the pandemic, reducing opportunities for students to develop their interests and skills outside of the classroom.

Uncertainty about the future: The pandemic has created uncertainty about the future of education, with questions about when schools will reopen and how to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Educational institutions have had to adapt quickly to address these challenges, with many implementing new technologies and pedagogical approaches to support remote learning. However, dire need to ensure that all students have access to quality education during the pandemic and beyond.

Furthermore, many students faced financial difficulties, and some could not afford the necessary equipment for online classes. As a result, the pandemic widened the gap between students who had access to online education and those who did not.

Lack of access to technology: Not all students have access to the internet, computers, or other necessary technology to participate in online classes. **Financial difficulties:** Many families faced financial challenges due to the pandemic, making it difficult for them to pay for necessary equipment or even basic education expenses. **Learning loss:** The extended closure of educational institutions has resulted in significant learning loss for students.

Assessment and examination: The pandemic has also affected the assessment and examination process, as many students have not been able to take exams or complete their coursework due to schools, colleges and closure of institutes.

Government Taken Steps During COVID

The Pakistan's government has taken many steps to overcome the impediments caused by the pandemic of COVID and to run the system of educational smoothly. Some of these measures include:

Launching online learning platforms: The government launched several online learning platforms to provide students with access to educational resources, including lectures, videos, and study materials.

Providing tablets and laptops to students: The government distributed tablets and laptops to students in remote areas to ensure they have access to online education. **Introducing televised educational programs:** The government launched a television channel dedicated to education to provide students with access to educational programs and lectures.

Reopening schools with strict COVID-19 protocols: The government has reopened schools with strict COVID-19 protocols in place, such as mandatory masks, social distancing, and frequent disinfection of classrooms. Waiving off fees:

The government waived off the fees for public school students to help families facing financial difficulties. Delaying exams: The government delayed exams to give students more time to complete their coursework and prepare for exams.

Training teachers: The government provided training to teachers on how to conduct online classes and use technology to facilitate distance learning. Providing financial support to educational institutions: The government provided financial support to educational institutions to help them purchase necessary equipment and technology to facilitate online learning.

Significance

Research on the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic is significant for several reasons: It can help identify the challenges faced by students, teachers, and policymakers and inform the development of effective policies to address these challenges. It can provide insights into the effectiveness of different teaching and learning methods, such as online education and distance learning. It can help identify the impact of the pandemic on student learning and achievement, which can inform efforts to mitigate the impact of learning loss. It can provide insights into the effectiveness of different measures implemented by the government and educational institutions to address the challenges posed by the pandemic. It can help inform decisions related to the reopening of educational institutions and the implementation of COVID-19 protocols to ensure the safety of students and teachers. It can help identify the long-term impact of the pandemic on the education system and inform efforts to build more resilient and adaptive education systems in the future. Overall, research on the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential for informing policy and practice and ensuring that students can continue their education despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Research Methodology

In this research paper through secondary source literature has collected and descriptive approach adopted for further achieves the research objective. Overall, observational research can provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important to ensure that the observations are ethical and conducted with informed consent from the participants.

Literature Review

Kuhfeld et al. (2020) study, "Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement," examines the potential impact of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic on student academic achievement in the United States. The authors utilized data from prior research on summer learning loss and estimated the potential loss of learning during the pandemic based on varying durations of school closures.

The study's key findings indicate that students could experience significant learning losses as a result of school closures. The authors estimated that students could lose between 10 and 23 months of learning in reading and between 12 and 14 months of learning in math, depending on the duration of school closures. The authors also found that the potential for learning loss was higher for low-income students and students of color.

The study highlights the importance of mitigating the potential loss of learning during school closures, particularly for vulnerable student populations. The authors suggest that schools and policymakers consider various interventions to help students catch up, such as extending the school year or implementing targeted tutoring programs.

Calina et al. (2020) discusses that the pandemic brought forth a myriad of challenges worldwide, impacting public health, economies, and daily life. Overwhelmed healthcare systems faced shortages of medical supplies and the need to rapidly develop vaccination strategies. Lockdowns and travel restrictions disrupted economies and led to job losses. Educational systems adapted to remote learning, posing challenges for both students and teachers. The pandemic mental health toll, stemming from isolation and uncertainty, was significant. Moreover, misinformation and vaccine hesitancy complicated public health efforts. This multifaceted crisis highlighted the need for global cooperation, preparedness, and resilience in the face of future health emergencies. The study findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities for teacher education in Israel. On the one hand, the shift to online teaching has highlighted the need for teacher education to adapt and incorporate digital tools and methods into their programs. Additionally, the shift to online teaching has increased the accessibility of teacher education programs, particularly for students in remote or underserved areas.

Farooq et al. (2020) COVID-19 had a profound impact on the education system in Pakistan, causing widespread disruptions and changes in how students learn. Lockdowns and social distancing measures forced the closure of schools, prompting a shift to remote or hybrid learning, which exposed disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity. Students and educators faced challenges in adapting to these new modes of instruction, and concerns about learning loss, especially among disadvantaged students, emerged. The pandemic also emphasized the importance of mental health and well-being in educational settings. As the world navigated these challenges, it prompted discussions on the future of education, including the role of technology and the need for flexible and equitable learning models.

Noor et al. (2020) COVID-19 suggested in research that the education system to adapt and innovate. It accelerated the integration of technology in education, creating opportunities for online and blended learning. These approaches, if harnessed effectively, can provide flexible and accessible education options. Additionally, the pandemic underscored the importance of teacher training in digital pedagogy and highlighted the need for greater investment in equitable access to technology for all students. Education stakeholders are now more attuned to the mental health and well-being of students and educators, resulting in a renewed focus on holistic education. As a result, the challenges posed by COVID-19 have spurred discussions and actions to build a more resilient and inclusive education system for the future.

Sutarto (2020) mentioned that teaching skills during COVID-19 could be enhanced through adaptability, technology integration, and a focus on student engagement. Educators learned to navigate virtual platforms and use technology effectively for remote teaching, improving their digital literacy. Flexibility and creative lesson planning became vital, as teachers had to adapt to changing circumstances. Additionally, empathy and understanding were essential to support students facing various challenges. The pandemic reinforced the value of continuous professional development and collaboration among educators to share best practices and innovative teaching methods, ultimately leading to more resilient and adaptable teaching skills.

Qazi et al, (2020) suggested that online education system during COVID-19, while presenting its own set of challenges, proved effective in maintaining educational continuity. It offered a lifeline for students to access learning remotely when in-person classes were not feasible. The flexibility of online platforms allowed students to adapt to their own pace and schedules. It also facilitated global access to educational resources, enabling diverse learning opportunities. However, the effectiveness hinged on digital infrastructure, access to devices, and digital literacy, which highlighted the need for equitable access and support for all students. Despite its challenges, online education demonstrated its potential to enhance educational delivery and expand learning options in a rapidly changing world.

Shahzad (2020) research examines the Virtual learning played a crucial supportive role in the education system during COVID-19. It provided a lifeline for students to continue their education from the safety of their homes when in-person classes were not feasible due to health concerns. Virtual platforms enabled teachers to deliver lessons, share resources, and maintain connections with students, contributing to educational continuity. The flexibility of online learning allowed students to adapt to their individual circumstances, providing a degree of autonomy in their education. However, the effectiveness of virtual learning depended on access to technology and digital literacy, highlighting the importance of addressing the digital divide to ensure equitable access and support for all students. Despite its challenges, virtual learning demonstrated its potential to be a valuable and complementary tool in the education system, offering flexibility and adaptability in times of crisis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the education system. The shift to remote learning has resulted in learning loss, exacerbated existing inequalities, and posed significant technological and pedagogical challenges. Additionally, the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of students, teachers, and parents. To overcome these challenges, the education sector has had to adapt quickly, with many institutions implementing new technologies and pedagogical approaches to support remote learning. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure that all students have access to quality education during the pandemic and beyond.

Governments and educational institutions need to prioritize health and safety, enhance teacher training, address learning loss, promote mental health and wellbeing, and ensure equity in education. By taking a multi-pronged approach, it is possible to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19 and ensure that the educational system continues to deliver quality education to students, regardless of the circumstances.

Suggestions

Here are some suggestions for how the government can overcome COVID-19 challenges to run the educational system smoothly:

Online Learning Platforms: Utilize online learning management systems and virtual classrooms to facilitate remote teaching and learning.

Digital Literacy: Ensure students and educators have access to the necessary technology and digital literacy skills to navigate online resources effectively.

Flexible Scheduling: Implement flexible schedules to accommodate diverse learning needs and home environments.

Support for Teachers: Offer professional development and support for educators to adapt their teaching methods to the online environment.

Parental Involvement: Encourage parental involvement and support in facilitating their children's education at home.

Improve access to technology: The government can work to improve access to technology, such as providing low-cost laptops or tablets to students who do not have access to them. Additionally, they can work to improve internet connectivity in areas with limited access.

Enhance teacher training: The government can provide training for teachers to develop their digital pedagogy skills and teaching methods that are effective in a remote or hybrid learning environment.

Prioritize health and safety: The government can prioritize health and safety measures in schools, such as providing personal protective equipment, improving ventilation systems, and reducing class sizes to allow for social distancing.

Address learning loss: The government can implement strategies to address learning loss caused by the pandemic, such as providing additional resources and support for students who are struggling academically.

Promote mental health and wellbeing: The government can prioritize mental health and wellbeing in schools by providing counseling services for students and teachers, and implementing strategies to reduce stress and anxiety.

Increase funding for education: The government can increase funding for education to ensure that schools have the resources they need to deliver quality education during the pandemic and beyond.

Ensure equity in education: The government can work to address equity issues in education by ensuring that all students have equal access to educational opportunities, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographic location.

Overall, the government needs to take a multi-pronged approach to address the challenges facing the educational system during the pandemic. By prioritizing health and safety, enhancing teacher training, addressing learning loss, promoting mental health and wellbeing, and ensuring equity in education, the government can help to ensure that the educational system runs smoothly during the pandemic and beyond.

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