CHALLENGES TO ONLINE EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: STUDENTS' RESPONSE AND LESSON LEARNED FOR SHAPING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN DISTRICT BAGH AZAD KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Nature: The covid-19 crises have forced education systems worldwide to find alternatives to face-to-face instructions. Online education has traditionally been viewed as an alternative pathway. Secondary school students were the most susceptible ones to face social and academic challenges.

Purpose: The current study is designed to identify and assess the challenges faced by secondary school students' online education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method: This study employed the descriptive survey design using the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In the survey, method interviews were conducted for the collection of data. Descriptive design of the studies comprised of a quantitative approach. The study was carried out in District, Bagh Azad Kashmir, with an estimated population of about 9,553 according to the District Education Officer.

Findings: online learning cannot produce effective results in remote areas like Kashmir, where a huge majority of students are not able to access the internet due to technical and financial issues.

Implications: This study is expected to help in shaping the education system for the future. The study is further expected to help the policymakers and stakeholders to equip the students and educational institutions in Pakistan with more advanced skills and technologies to respond to such situations efficiently and effectively.

INTRODUCTION

The sudden emergence of Covid-19, a deadly disease caused by the Corona Virus (SARS-CoV-2) shocked the entire globe. On December 8, 2019, the first novel Covid-19 case was reported in Wuhan, China (Liu, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) later declared COVID-19 a pandemic on May 30, 2021, due to its rapid spread and casualties throughout the world. According to the World Health Organization, there have been 202,608,306 confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, while 4,293,591 deaths (WHO, 2021). In Pakistan, the total numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases were1070000 while the total deaths reported were23,918. According to the National command of operation center,The authorities at the international and national level introduced various preventive measures including, lockdown and closing of businesses, schools, universities, and bans on travel, cultural and sports events. All these restrictions put people's health, education, and businesses at risk. The education sector faced various challenges while shifting the education practice online. Understanding the challenges and/or opportunities created due to this pandemic would provide better preparedness for shaping the education system, which this research focuses to address.

The current epidemic is having a significant impact on the education sector, and this concern is expected to remain globally(Sintema, 2020) and more specifically in the developing world. The Covid-19 pandemicinitially forces the temporary closure of schools and universities. However, it is become normal now to close the educational institutions or switched them to an online mode of learning for a longer duration. Educational institutions throughout the world are impacted and there is still a risk of further disruption. In-person teaching has been phased out in several schools, colleges, and universities. (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, & Althunibat, 2020). The ways and means of education and learning will be drastically changed in the post-COVID-19 world and will need a lot of effort for restoration and up-gradation. Similar to other developing countries Pakistan is also suffered from the different waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. In such a situation, where the country is coping with the pandemic through various measures, it is also a critical time for Pakistan to brace for the transformation in the education sector. (Tamanna 2020).

Covid-19 has wreaked havoc on every aspect of life, including health care, tourism, and livelihood. Part of the preventive measures to prevent the infection was closing down educational institutions. As an alternate solution to the closures of the schools and face-to-face teaching, the Government decided to shift the education practices to online mode. However, the challenges remained profound in operating education online. The difficulties that teachers and students had while participating in online education and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic are mentioned here. Many obstacles were

encountered throughout online learning, including issues with students, teachers, and content. Secondary school students were the most susceptible ones to face social and academic challenges.

Far below work has been done to identify and assess these challenges. Lack of faculty training and institutional support, internet connectivity concerns, maintaining student interest, online assessment, and issues with understanding the unique dynamics of online education, such as infrastructure and learning in technology/digitization, are also among them. A collaborative approach involving all stakeholders, institutional support, and the use of free online training resources and out of box thinking can help overcome these challenges. Therefore, the current study is designed to identify and assess the Challenges faced in online education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Pakistan, an educational institution (schools, colleges, and universities) was mainly based on the traditional learning methods and practicing the traditional set-up of face-to-face lectures in a classroom(Basilaia et al., 2020).Even though many academic units have begun to use blended learning, many are still using outdated practices (Kapasia, et al., 2020). This situation is a challenge for the students as well as for the government as this is one of the important sectors. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". While education quality always remaineda concern in Pakistan, 22.8 million of the country's 70 million children are out of school which shows that access to education is already a concern for students in Pakistan. (Rehman, 2020). In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed the education challenges in the country. As there is no social distancing in the schools and hundreds of kids at one place making it ismore vulnerable places for the infection to spread. Therefore the closure of schools and suspension of in-person classes was a positive response from the government to protect students and children from the potential infection of Covid-19. (Rasheed, 2020).

As an alternative to the closures of the schools and their in-person teaching, they shifted to online mode. However, the challenges remained profound in operating education online. According to Rehman (2020), online learning faces a wide range of challenges including issues with learners, instructors, and lack of resources. Institutions face a difficult task in engaging students and getting them to participate in the teaching-learning process.Teachers face difficulties in transitioning from offline to online mode, adjusting their teaching approaches, and managing their time. It's difficult to create content that not only meets the curriculum's requirements but also engages students.Similarly, Dhawan (2020) argues that multi-faceted challenges were observed belonging to societal, technical, and regulatory aspects.The majority of the challenges are related to people's behavior and societal limitations.Students are not mentally prepared for the online and using gadgets for online learning was one of the challenges they faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, in joint family systems, where parents and children both need to work and study from home, the lack of private space at home, as well as the unfriendly atmosphere is another serious challenge students faced(Kebritchi et al., 2017). While people's shyness towards e-learning and being camera conscious are both realistic challenges experienced by both students and professors, which shows that previously less attention has been paid to this sector. Another important challenge is the lack of tolerance for technical faults, as well as the outbursts of wrath in response to frequent connectivity disruptions, interruptions, and so on. The situation has gotten worse due to a lack of understanding regarding digital learning ethics(Dhawan, 2020).

The list of technical challenges is not as large as its predecessor's, but the foremost difficulty is the lack of internet access in rural areas, which prevents students in those areas to get benefits from online education. The broad range of limitations across the country with few exceptions along the poor internet access adds more misery to the student's problem. Though, COVID-19 has an impact on education, particularly on the assessment of secondary school students, particularly those who have taken their board exams. However, the government later announced that secondary and higher secondary

students would be promoted to the next class based on their previous results. (Malik 2020). This is also a new challenge for the country's education as the students didn't go through the exam assessment.

As educators scramble to put in place workable short-term solutions for remote teaching and learning, particularly in emerging markets, where students and schools face additional challenges related to financing and available infrastructure, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been dramatic and transformative.(Jamerson, Josh, & Joshua, 2020). Students in secondary school face social and academic hurdles. It's critical to recognize some of the particular issues that this group is currently facing, as well as to comprehend where our pupils are in their learning. This is to verify that their requirements are met.

Concern exists regarding the psychological impacts due to COVID-19, and individual actions that have been taken in response to the pandemic. (Liu, 2020). Based on these gaps the current study is designed aimed atlearning assessment and challenges faced by secondary school students during the COVID-19 Pandemic.In addition,secondary school student's response to deal with the situation of Covid-19 in district Bagh Azad Kashmir is also focused. Moreover to determine the responses of teachers towards Covid-19 while taking online classes were also assessed. A descriptive and mixed-method is followed to conduct this study. A cross-sectional Survey method or interview method is followed for data collection. This study is the first of its type to be conducted in Pakistan and is expected to helppolicymakerswith better strategies. This study is of practical significance and could be equally applicable to such challenges in other contexts as well.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following were the objectives of the study:
1. Identify the challenges and obstacles of e-learning throughout the COVID-19 crisis faced by secondary school students.
2. To find out the difference between public and private school students regarding challenges faced during online learning.
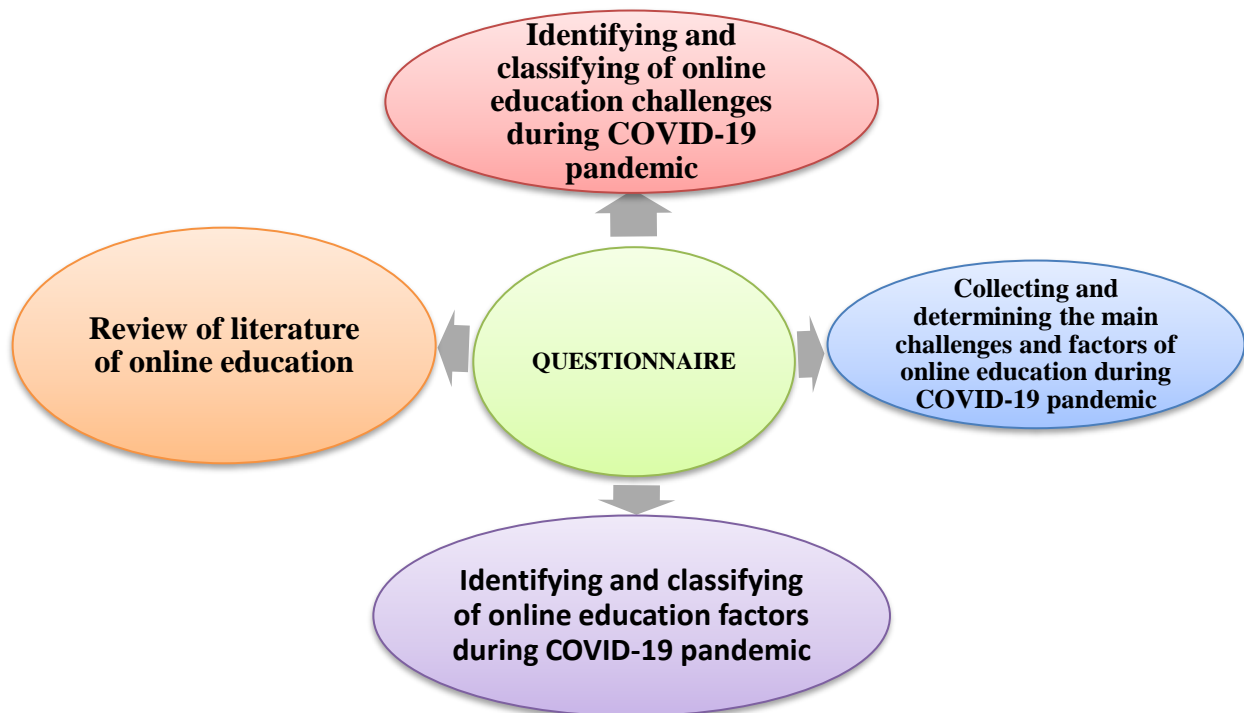
RESEARCH QUESTION OF THE STUDY

The following were the research questions of the study by keeping in view the objectives of the study:
1. What are the Challenges to Online Education during COVID-19 Pandemic: Students' Response and Lesson Learned for Shaping the Education System in Pakistan?
2. What are the main challenges to online education during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive survey design using the quantitativeresearch approach. As survey methodswere used for the collection of data.The descriptive method collects the facts and information which are established on the existing situation according to the problem. Descriptive design of the studies comprised of a quantitative approach. The quantities approach is used to accumulate numerical records for defining and controlling the happening of the situations. The study was carried out in District, Bagh Azad Kashmir. The researcher sampled students from secondary public and private sector schools.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure: 1. The theoretical framework of the study

SAMPLINGTECHNIQUE

The cluster sampling technique is being used for the collection of data as the researcher divides the population into two separate groups' i.e. Public and private sectorstudents. Whereas the Simple Random sampling technique is used for the selection of schools from which the researcher collects the data.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The total numbers of 200students of which 100 were from the public sector and 100 from private sector schoolsselected for the sample of the study.

Table 1: Students' Responses about Online Education Challenges during Covid-19 (N=200)

Statements	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	Mean	Standard Deviation
OEC1	0%	9%	3%	81.5%	69.5%	1.50	.513
OEC2	61%	0%	0%	21%	18%	.50	.513
OEC3	5%	0%	0%	75.5%	24.5%	4.55	.510
OEC4	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	87.5%	4.45	.945
OEC5	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%	4.55	.605
Total						**16.97**	**1.35**

Table 1 indicatesthe percentage of the participants, different questions were asked from the students regarding challenges faced during online learning. From which 200respondents (81.5%) answered agree, (69.5%) were answered strongly agree that they faced internet speed issues during online classes. (18%)

answered strongly agree and (21%) were answered agree against the statement do they feel comfortable while taking online classes? Out of the 200participants (24.5%) answered strongly agree and (75.5%) were answered agree that there was no Online access to download the material, Out of the 200 respondents (87.5%) answered strongly agree and (12.5%) were answered agree that there was no Online access to download the material I faced Issues in conducting online exams score. Out of the 200 respondents (80%) answered strongly agree and (20%) were answered agree that I continuously faced Internet connectivity problems.

Table 2: School Wise Comparison of Students' Response (N=200)

School	M	SD	T	DF	Sig(2-tailed)
Public	16.84	1.17			
Private	17.09	1.50	-1.31	198	0.19

Table No 2 shows the comparison of public and private school students responses regarding "Challenges to Online Education during COVID-19 Pandemic: Students' Response and Lesson Learned for Shaping the Education System in District Bagh Azad Kashmir" by conducting an independent sample t-test and revealed that there is no significant difference between the means score of public and private school students response, as p=0.19 (p>0.05), for public school students (M=16.84, SD=1.17) and private school students (M=17.09, SD= 1.50); T= -1.31). It is revealed that public students and private school students have the same level of online learning challenges.

3. PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The education sector is badly affected. During online learning, many challenges were faced by secondary school students. This study highlighted the effectiveness of online education and the challenges faced by students who are taking online classes. As per this study, 80 to 87% of students had not proper internet facility and they faced lots of internet issues and 80% of students were not satisfied with online learning. While it may sound obvious, technical is one of the main stumbling blocks of online training. Very often, there are compatibility issues (with operating systems, browsers, or smartphones), the courses never get off the grounds or the student doesn't know how to continue. All this adds to their frustration and reduces learning experience is disrupted and probably abandon the course.

All the students were facing the same issues either they were at school or university level. Public and private school students were facing the same challenges in online classes. The majority of the students have objections about online/digital learning. Lack of access to internet facilities, lack of proper interaction and contact with students and teachers and ineffective technology were among the major challenges faced secondary school students of district Bagh Azad Kashmir. These types of online lectures and training and this lack of engagement and motivation aresome of the main reasons E-learning classes fail.Simply students are not interested in taking the training, do not access the platform, and don't complete the courses. The sudden shift from traditional classrooms and face-to-face learning to online learning has resulted in a completely different learning experience for students. Most students do not have access to high-speed or reliable internet services and are thus struggling with online learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that online learning cannot produce effective results in remote areas like Kashmir, where a huge majority of students are not able to access the internet due to technical and financial issues.

Students cannot effectively manage their study time online and cannot manage easily tasks in time. To ensure an effective and productive online program, students must not only know how to cope with fast-paced online courses, but they also need to have sound computer and technical skills to learn from seminars. To prevent boredom the online lectures should be more interactive. Dynamic, and engaging for both students and teachers. Currently, students can't cope with such issues, students are facing many

challenges in online learning and it is impossible to continue this system in district Bagh Azad Kashmir.
If all these issues overcome then might be taking online classes for students could be fruitful.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based onfindings, the following suggestions were made:
The result of this research study will serve as a guide and recommendation manuscript for teachers,
students, other policymakers, and stakeholders to give a better response in an emergency.It will prove as
a knowledge base for the education sector how stakeholders dealt in the situation to take measurements
during the deteriorating situation and would be the great source of knowledge for the community and for
the development of the education sector which could automatically lead towards the beneficial for the
economic development of the country. It is hoped that other researchers will consider the teachers'
response to the potential impact of COVID-19 on educational planning at the national level. The results
of this study can further be validated by considering a wider study that would collect both quantitative
and qualitative data to give a deeper understanding of the effects of this epidemic.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Sumaira Khan1, Dr. Maria Khan2, Shamillah Bano3, Dr. Matiullah4, Dr. Irfan Ullah Khan5, Muhamad
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Authors' Contribution: 1-Data Collection, 2-Literature Review, 3-Manuscript Preparation, 4-
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