

Effect of COVID-19 and emerging trends of Higher Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

Governments around the world decide to close the educational institutions after rapid spread of COVID-19 as per instructions of WHO and public health officials that closure of educational institution could be helpful in flatten the curve of spreading COVID-19. Pakistan Government decides to close all educational institutions as per precaution to eliminate the rapid spread of pandemic. Present study argues that the threat of spreading pandemic is high if socialized and face-to-face schooling is also a threat. This is an online review of different researches. Researchers analysed that eLearning is only significant way of teaching and learning after emergence of pandemic. New teaching learning pedagogies can be introduced for effective eLearning and blended learning can be adopted by educational institutions after pandemic. It will help educational system to cope with similar emergency situations.

Key Words: *Pandemic, closure, education, eLearning, innovation, digital, social distancing*

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Introduction

Almost every government recommended the closure of educational institutions as a potential component of alleviation strategy during the period COVID-19. Keeping this strategy in view, Pakistan government announces the closure of educational institutions around the country to alleviate the quick spread of pandemic and instruct all educational institutions to be performing duties online i.e. eLearning and advice to continue it after the removal of pandemic. After emergence of COVID-19, we witnessed a rapid change in the educational system around the world. These changes are the glimpse of educational reshaping in future for the better or the worse.

While the pandemic is spreading rapidly around the world, countries have taken swift and decisive measures to mitigate the burst of pandemic. There were low attendance in educational institutions was reported in the start of pandemic. The OECD estimated on 13th March'20 that 421 million children are affected due the closure of educational institutions around the globe (Drell, 2020). Millions of students led to start home-schooling in the result of risk-control decisions. Undoubtedly these changes brought inconvenience but the resulted into educational innovations (Wilder-Smith, 2020). It is uncertain that how COVID-19 will affect the educational system in Pakistan in the long term, but anyone can predict that these impacts are long lasting on the trajectory of learning innovations.

Objectives

This review summarizes literature published during COVID-19 investigating school closures as an alleviation strategy for pandemic:

- i. Review studies of the effects of eLearning during COVID-19
- ii. Review studies of the effects of eLearning after COVID-19

Effects of COVID-19 on Education

After Second World War, the awaken of COVID-19 is biggest disastrous situation in human history, although the scale and human impact of the COVID-19 is far greater than any war in human history and UNESCO shared many detailed researches on the unprecedented current situation of education in the world (Bai, et al., 2020). UNESCO has summarized the catastrophic impact on society after closure of schools (Weeden & Cornwell, 2020). Some of them are as follows:

Interrupted learning

Educational institutions provide essential learning and closure of schools brought deprivation of opportunities of growth and development for

children and young students. Moreover, closure of educational institution limits the educational opportunities for under-privileged learners outside the walls of educational institutions.

a. Poor nutrition

In developing countries, a large number of school going children rely on free or discounted food provided by government and international children's right protection organizations. Closure of schools is compromising on child nutrition.

b. Stress and confusion among teachers

Closure of unexpected and for unknown duration of educational institutions creates uncertainty of obligations among teachers. Confusion prevails among teachers on maintaining connections with their students to support and help in their learning. Transitions to eLearning can be messy and frustrating specifically in countries like Pakistan. Rottenly this transformation and transition lead to furloughs or absenteeism by teachers.

c. Unexpected situation for parents

Parents are instructed for home-schooling of their children during the closure of educational institutions. This situation is not only struggling for the limited educated parents having limited resources but privileged and educated parents are also complaining.

d. Challenges for eLearning

Closure of educational institutions resulted in the skyrocket demand of eLearning which usually overwhelms existing portals to eLearning. It is enormously challenging for human and technology to move from traditional class rooms to homes at scale and in a hurry.

e. Gaps in childcare

When educational institutions closed, working parents are forced to leave their children alone because of non-availability of other options. Leaving kids and teen agers alone can lead to risky behaviors i.e. bullying, peer pressure or abuse.

f. Financial distress

Working parents substantially miss their work to take care of their children when the educational institutions are closed. This absenteeism negatively impacts the productivity and resulted in wage loss.

g. High dropout rate

It is difficult to ensure that all students will return to educational institutions when they will re-open after closures. This is especially true of protracted closures and when economic shocks place pressure on children to work and generate income for financially distressed families.

h. Social isolation

Due to the closure of educational institutions, students feel isolated. Educational institutions are the main hubs of socializing for children and youth and their social development depends on the environment they are provided in their educational institutions.

Challenges measuring and validating learning

Time and again assessments, home assignments and final examinations create motivation and sense of achievement among students. The unexpected closure of educational institutions triggers disarray, demotivation and disengagement among students.

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Emerging Trends in Education

Abrupt closure of educational institutions brings transformation in educational system of Pakistan which is expected to continue in long term. Below, we follow three trends that could hint at future transformations (Bowen, 2012):

a. Education - nudged and pushed to change - could lead to surprising innovations

It is lamentable that the change in traditional education system was slow in pace but COVID-19 performs as a catalyst of innovation in education system, globally. To stop virus spread, educational institutions were

closed and traditional method of teaching and learning transformed into eLearning. Students and teachers communicate through interactive applications to help in lessen the negative impact of educational blockage. In future, we expect to prevail blended learning in educational system. Teachers and students are now used to of eLearning and they experience the benefit of “learning anywhere, anytime”. This type of learning will become a habit that will integrate into lifestyle.

b. Public-private educational partnerships could grow in importance

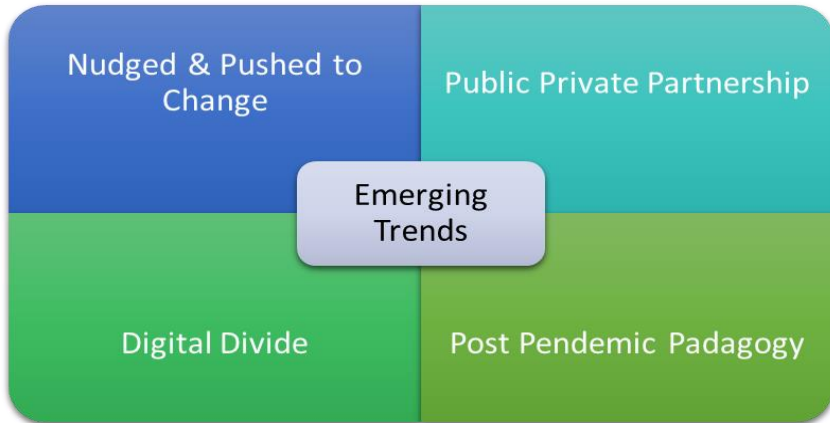
In past few weeks, numbers of stakeholders of education system are increased noticeably. The new consortium includes government, educationists, publishers, technology providers and telecom networkers. It is predict that this coalition will last even after the pandemic due to its benefit of “learning anywhere, anytime.” Dilemma is, Pakistan is far behind in technology but federal and provisional education ministries and Higher Education Commission is trying to bring investment for eLearning with the collaboration of educational institutions and other partners. Unluckily pandemic situation create hurdles in prevalent of eLearning at waste scope but it is expected that after the betterment of situation eLearning will be pave the way for much larger scale.

c. The digital divide could widen

In Pakistan digital technology is not accessible for everyone. It is suggested that no-gap solution should be introduced to continue eLearning. Many students in Pakistan depends on WhatsApp and email for their assignments and lectures. In addition, a large number of our population is less affluent and have less knowledge of digital technology. Many students are forced to lose out due to the cost of devices and data plans. Without decrease in cost and increase in quality, we will not be able to stop the gap to continue eLearning effectively in the long run.

d. Toward a post-pandemic pedagogy

Although it is unpredictable about the landscape of educational system after COVID-19 passes. Still it is under discussion among educationists, researchers and parents of students to move towards blended learning or eLearning after the pandemic passes (Wilder-Smith, 2020). This



movement may end in emergence of new pedagogies. Those pedagogies may include new applications and devices which again would be costly for the less affluent families unless the cost may be accessible for every student.

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

WHO and other health organizations suggested abandoning the face to face interaction during COVID-19 to reduce its transmission and in this regard government of Pakistan closed all educational institutions which lead towards the teaching and learning through digital technology. Pakistan is unfortunately one of those countries who are far behind in digital technology. Federal and provisional education ministries are trying to collaborate with technology providers, data providers and educationist for better eLearning system as many researchers predict that eLearning is the future of teaching and learning. To match the pace of eLearning in the world, we should make fool proof plans, develop eLearning model and make it accessible to every student.

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