

Social & Political Challenges of Online Learning in Pakistan amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Tahira Mumtaz

Assistant Professor, Department of Politics & International Relations, University of Sialkot, Pakistan.

Email: tahira.shahzad@uskt.edu.pk

Ammara Tabassum

Assistant Professor, Department of Politics & International Relations, University of Sialkot, Pakistan.

Email: ammara.tabassum@uskt.edu.pk

Rooma Shahzadi

Assistant Professor, Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sialkot, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has been an outlandish and bizarre confrontation for all strata of the world's social, economic and political structures. Education sector has also faced many challenges and to meet the need of the hour, they have converted face-to-face learning to online learning just because the health and safety of everyone is the utmost priority for everyone. Same like this, political socialization and political participation is the core value for the development of a society. In that conflicting and skirmish situation, one thing has left indelible marks on the sands of time that is online mode of learning for it was the best option in continuity of uninterrupted smooth learning and political process. At first, it seems convenient for individuals but after spending many hours, it impacts on individual's mental health. New term "Zoom Fatigue" is introduced in COVID-19 era. It refers to feelings of exhaustion after taking long zoom sessions or video conference calls. On the other hand, COVID-19 situation posited opportunities while researchers, teachers, politicians, civil society groups and students communicated through online mode, find out online jobs opportunities at national and international forum. The primary purpose of this research is to investigate challenges faced by academia in political and social spheres amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Key words: Challenges, Online learning, Physical activities, Social and Political domain.

Defining the Social & political challenges during pandemic

A disease that breaks out somewhere and then spreads all over the world is called a pandemic. Pandemic takes the world to the worst circumstances as it leaves no choice other than lockdowns and the restrictions that eventually lead to economic

tension, educational loss, and the rise of crimes and other malicious acts. The pandemic situation is unavoidable and only restrictions are effective to reduce it. But restrictions are not suitable for underdeveloped countries like Pakistan where 25% of the people are living below the borderline of poverty. In Pakistan, people are already struggling for their livelihood and if they have face restrictions and lockdowns, they lose their struggle and eventually face the worst repercussions. Other than the economic crisis, the department that is next more affected is political system. Due to pandemics, governments are forced to close the institutions that lead to the major loss of economy and time, and political decisions are left in a state of chaos. Politicians who are intelligent and hardworking have to face a lot due to this situation as the cancellation of meetings creates a very bad influence on them whereas the groups who are not used to working hard get a threat from this situation and they are passed and done without any struggle. This is alarming and needs to be sorted out on a priority basis.

Emergence of COVID-19 as a challenge

COVID-19 virus emerged at the end of December 2019 in China and started to spread all over the world in 2020. Before the arrival of this virus, no one was having any idea about the pandemic situation. As it came and started to spread, there was no choice but to shut down everything and restrict people to their homes. According to WHO it was the only solution to keep safe from this virus and it was inevitable. The first-world countries shut down their business activities, educational institutes, traveling, and recreational activities but they were reluctant to do so (Campbell, A. L., & Shore-Sheppard, L. 2020) So far as underdeveloped countries are concerned, they were forced to put the lockdown and were left with no choice. The developed countries were able to bear the loss and with their effective and strong medical system, they overcame the situation fast.

Social & political dissonance in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the lockdown was imposed in March 2020 and everything went under the state of lockdown. The business was closed, education was ceased and everything was chaotic. People were forced to beg especially daily wagers. The economy went to the lowest level and even the middle class started to lose their jobs. Only those who could work from home or the government sector employees could retain their livelihood otherwise many lost their jobs and faced the worst circumstances. The economy was indeed the most affected department but on the other hand, education also saw great turbulence and it was changed inside out and upside down. According to an analyst, one of the more extensive issues is the crack in the learning frameworks of more than one billion understudies around the world. As indicated by UNESCO, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the most unsettling influences in training frameworks of history and has influenced right around 1.6 billion understudies across the landmasses over 190 nations.

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Terminations of schooling have influenced 94% of the country's understudy populace, up to 99 percent of poor people, and low-medium-profit nations. Because of the financial repercussions of the pandemic alone, exactly 23, 8 million youngsters will exit school or not one year from now. This distinction, for instance, had hit an astounding \$148 billion yearly for low-pay nations and low-center-pay nations, and could now extend by dependent upon 33% (UNESCO, 2020). The misfortune of COVID-19 and the uncommon annihilation of schooling is a long way from being done (Rehman 2020: pp 1). In the year 2020, the government of Pakistan decided to promote students to the next classes without any examination but it is not a permanent solution. So what the government decided in collaboration with the education ministry was the introduction of online education across the country and in this way, according to them, students were going to continue with their studies and the system of education was never going to fall. It was a very good and workable idea but with its limitations and had has its social and political aftereffects in the society.

Online learning with political participation

COVID-19 has turned the whole structure of the world by changing its norms and values and introducing new norms. Before the arrival of this pandemic, the world was different as compared to what it is today. After it became a pandemic, the whole world went into a state of lockdown and everything was closed including business centers, restaurants, hotels, recreational places, and educational institutions at all levels. Due to the constant fear, the lockdown has not been lifted till now as after one wave ends, the other comes with its even worse effects and leaves the world in a state of chaos. As it can be foreseen, this situation cannot come under control until all the people are vaccinated against all types of COVID-19 variants. But the question arises that are we going to keep the online learning with political participation till then? Is it possible to educate students online on such a massive level with political participation too? Is it practically good to take interest in political participation through online mode? Online learning needs a strong technological system and the availability of all the resources that are necessary to take online communication and some sort of interaction. They include the availability of gadgets, internet connection, and most importantly devotion. First of all, the availability of gadgets and the internet should be discussed in Pakistan, where 25% of people are not even able to eat three times a day, is it possible for them to participate through online mode? Is it feasible for those who only have one phone for a whole family? Is it possible for the government of Pakistan to make sure of the availability of gadgets and the internet to every student? No, not. The country where people are struggling for daily bread and the government is under heavy debts is not ready to be taken to the next level of technology (Rehman, A. U. 2020). Moreover, in Pakistan, the literacy rate is

already too low to understand the importance of political participation. Most of the people who belong to the labor class do not understand the idea of political participation. According to them, online political participation is just a waste of time and money. In this way they do not encourage their children to take the interest and children are deprived of their basic right to get an education. Another reason is the unavailability of any gadget or more than one gadget at a time. In institution, they have the support of their teachers so at home they need to work under the supervision of parents. To give this support, the parents must be educated and learned enough to understand what they are being taught, what are their rights and duties? This happens mostly in the case of adults but unfortunately, the literacy rate is very low in Pakistan that means less supervision and understanding by the parents. In this case, political participation loses its worth and children start losing their interest too. It shows that in Pakistan, online political participation is a very big challenge because it needs the whole to be educated. It is not about the children only but parents also need to get educated about this new method of participation in political affairs.

Social values and norms are the most important thing in the life of an individual. Ethics teaches people the code of life. It teaches basic manners and etiquette to the people. It shapes the personalities and behaviors of the people. During the time of the pandemic, when educational institutions were closed down to reduce the spread, the process of education was supposed to go on. It was inevitable for the children to acquire ethical education to shape their spiritual believes and to maintain their sanity and goodwill in the society.

Government's role

The government of Pakistan approved the idea of online learning with the help of the ministry of education and also introduced classes on television for different levels in different slots. Moreover, the private school association started classes on different online forums such as Whatsapp, Zoom, and Google Classrooms. Different slots were given to different classes and teachers started to take classes from home. It introduced a whole new system that took the world into a whole new experience of learning. From then up till now, this process continues with innovative ideas that are introduced everyday by the authorities and the teachers as well. This new system prevents children from being completely deprived of edification and allows them to get educated by sitting at home. It also allows children to see innovative ways of learning and learn according to the latest technology. It also introduces children to the new technology and they learn how to use gadgets other than watching videos and playing games. Furthermore, it involves parents in the process of children's training like they were never before. Now parents are aware of the learning of their children and can supervise them to bring betterment. On the other hand, the absence of the school environment inculcates a casual attitude in children and they think it's not important to take these classes regularly. They are more involved in other activities than education.

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This system has both merits and demerits as well. As Rehman Continues in his article, the new examination by UNESCO has shown that even half a month out of school has a backward impact on the students. For more youthful youngsters, the impacts are amplified by extra psychological movement, engine, and thinking abilities. Also, an investigation distributed by the World Bank showed those three months after the 2005 tremor, the misfortunes in schooling in Pakistan were equivalent to 1.5 to 2 school years. A Gallup overview shows that 74% of guardians as of now concur that schooling time limitations ought to be lifted (Sattar, 2020). Thus, howhomeroom learning used to work should change so a lot, pioneers throughout the planet have made critical moves to manage the issue and protect the fate of the school. Their steady business sectors, specialized turn of events; also, instructive objectives have diminished the probability of disappointment. A great many educators and understudies have been left on account of internet learning by the speed and size of the instructive disorder, a strategy that is generally obscure and untested in Pakistan. They are playing with various e-learning destinations, for example, Zoom, Google study hall, Hangout, Edmodo, Facebook live, and WhatsApp courier to guarantee that instruction isn't bartered during lockdown (Jahangir,2020) (Rehman 2020).

According to another analyst, the pandemic of COVID-19 hit Pakistan but it is difficult to understand what it affected the most. It is not yet clear that whether the casualties are caused by the COVID-19 virus or its threat and the restrictions imposed by it. However, the academics are highly disturbed due to the restriction and still, there is no way out to be seen (Mumtaz, Saqlain, Mumtaz 2021) Problematic situation is also seen in political and social spheres too during this time of pandemic.

Finding the solution in social and political arena through online learning

With the danger of the spread of infection, scholastic establishments are faced with the approaching ghost of advanced foundation, transmission capacity, and authorized programming applications. Subsequently, a strengthened HEC started teaching and preparing of workforce and staff in the domain of online modalities in the whole range of undergrad to doctoral level through an empowering climate. This idea is fortified by a past report led by Badasyan and Silva which announced a critical improvement in test scores in local language and math tests. Also in an Eastern Mediterranean examination including English preliminary understudies, the greater part uncovered that they can utilize the web as an instructive tool, whenever joined by resilience. The significant social and political issues expected to emerge are in the controls requiring clinical preparing which require hands just as intelligent climate and albeit not as powerful through an advanced interface fake bodies is a debatable issue as a training effectively set up. As reflected in an Indian

investigation including dental understudies to receive computerized transformation in education thus, the notorious extension can be crossed. The Radiology branch of the nearby tertiary consideration community has begun entrusting occupants with radiological pictures conveyed online for the quiz. Since clinical instruction has been seriously influenced improvement of training consortiums for inhabitants might be required. In nations with cutting-edge medical care frameworks, tele-health rehearses are stylish covering the clinical segment viewpoint. (Mumtaz, Saqlain, Mumtaz 2021)

But why social and political participation through online mode is important? Why can't the government just close the institutions and restart the process once the institutions are reopened? This is a very significant question that needs to be answered especially from the perspective of Pakistani problems. Pakistan comes under third world countries and its resources are less than its population. (Mehmood, A. May 19, 2020) So a country where people are struggling to satiate their hunger, are people ready to embrace this new norm? Are people educated enough to accept the change? Are they literate enough to face these challenges? Are they financially strong enough to make themselves following the latest time? These are the questions that need to be answered.

The perils of online learning

This idea of online learning has perils that can affect society in the most dangerous way. First of all, the people who don't have enough resources to meet their basic needs are forced to buy gadgets that are out of their reach. Secondly, discontinuing the normal process of learning means distracting children and as a result, they are attracted to other activities that can be unhealthy for them. Thirdly, if the parents are not literate enough or if they are not interested in online learning of their children or they don't have time to supervise them, it may lead to severe circumstances and no one can be held responsible for such a thing that has just become a new normal.

So far as the government is concerned, it has already so much to deal with other than the issue of online learning and its effects. But the ministry of education is really concerned about the continuation of the learning process and taking the examination to examine the children fairly and honestly. At first, when the pandemic arrived, the government decided to promote students to the next class without taking examination but that didn't show any positive result. It is being observed that the students who are not that much hardworking want to take maximum benefit out of this situation which they got earlier but the students who work hard for the whole year are disappointed to see that they are on equal footing with the other students. It is dangerous for the future of the country too. But for this year, the government decided to take the examination to make fair results and to ensure a better future for Pakistan. In Pakistan, the need for discipline and honesty is inevitable especially in the department of education as ethics and social values are the solution to the problems in Pakistan. The government ensures the

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availability of basic resources but obviously, the provision of the internet in the rural areas along with the gadgets is not possible for the government of Pakistan as well. In the era of the pandemic, the people who have to move back to rural areas due to financial crisis, their children are unable to get online classes and as a result, they are far behind and no one can be held responsible. The government is being protective but education is severely affected. Children might be safe from the virus but their ability to cope up with their peers has reduced to the minimum to almost finishing level. They are not motivated towards studies because there is no sense of competition now. They miss their routines and are indulged in activities like gaming, watching videos, and television continuously. It also creates health problems in children and adult students as well. Sitting at home and doing nothing may negatively affect the brain and students stop to think about their future. Other than that it also makes them depressed to stay at home and to reduce that depression they become more indulged in those unhealthy activities and as a result, both their physical and mental health is disturbed.

Social and political uplift through online learning

Other than the challenges, the online education system has opened whole new horizons in front of the students and the teachers in social and political arena. Through online learning, students get to know about their inner ability to understand concepts on their own. With the help of E-Libraries made by the government, students have access to the books they want to read and learn. By sitting at home and using gadgets for learning purposes has made students responsible for their acts and they develop the skill of analytical learning. (Haris, April 3, 2020). Online learning encourages them to work and fruitfully use their abilities. This time of pandemic has led them to work for themselves and their skills are enhanced. So far as young children are concerned, they learn the useful way of using gadgets and learn to run apps that can take them away forward towards the next level of success. Online learning has made students realize that this is the era of technology and without technology, nothing can be worked. They have understood the need of the time and the era coming ahead is a completely digital era so it is better to learn technology than to run away from it for resolving social and political issues.

Lessons learned amid COVID-19

In Pakistan, the pandemic is leaving its marks on every department i.e. social, political and education. The government's action of closing down the institutions affects the smooth political process and individuals are unable to concentrate. In this situation, there are some lessons that we have learned. First of all, there is not that much scope of online learning in Pakistan as the majority of the population consists of the struggling class. Secondly, individuals become lethargic and the

sense of competition is reduced. People are more interested in getting benefit without any struggle. So in this scenario, it is better to keep the physical activities going with the proper SOPs and make the people learn and create awareness of social and political integrity within the society of Pakistan.

Recommendations

First of all, it should be ensured by the management of the institutes to provide proper safety measures from the pandemic. Although the educational, social and political institutions are already following some of the measures if these are properly followed, there wouldn't be any need to close down the institutions. Moreover, the government should take into account the importance of education, political participation and awareness of social values as compared to the other departments like restaurants, recreational places like parks, and shopping malls. It is important to keep these departments open to stabilize the economy but still, they are not as much important as education and political institutions. By setting boundaries for these departments, the government should keep education and political institutions going without any hindrance as the future of citizens is at stake.

Among all the departments, the educational and political institutions are the only places where the pandemic protocols can be safely achieved as the discipline can be ensured at large. It can be further ensured by reducing the number of individuals and put the seats at a proper distance. To ensure the social distance between the people, the provision of the basic needs must be ensured by the management because it is one of the main reasons for interaction between the individuals. Furthermore, the management should provide face masks and sanitizers for free so that no hindrance can come in the way of smooth process of working. If the management of educational and political institutes ensures these safety measures, there won't be any need for the closures of these institutes anymore.

In addition to this, the assessment of students is crucial to avoid any dishonest results and promotions. Many countries around the world are still unable to make a strategy of taking examinations as they are scared of the massive spread of the pandemic. There are few ideas regarding the examination and one of them that is widely considered is an online examination. An online examination can be held but the responsibility becomes bigger with that as it is not easy to assess it honestly and additionally there is no proper provision of the internet in rural areas. According to an analyst, if we move on to taking the online examination, who will be responsible for fair results and for those students who live in rural areas where there is no internet facility? Who will provide the underprivileged students with the gadgets and who will make sure the fair conduction of exams? (Lieberman, Levin, Bazaldua, Harnisch, 2001). These are the questions that arise with the idea of taking the online examination. To avoid this situation, the management should conduct a physical examination by arranging the big rooms where the exams can

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be conducted. There should be one copy for the exam and the provision of more than one should be banned. The duration of the exam can be reduced and the exam paper should be objective rather than subjective. Hand sanitizers should be provided now and then and if some student is not wearing the mask, he should be provided instead of getting humiliated. To make it more secure, the distribution of the exam copies should be given to one person per room and no one should be allowed to touch them other than him. In this way, the process of education can move on without any hurdle and the future of the students can be secured. If the governments around the world understand the importance of education and consider keeping the institutions open, the future of the students will be secured and so will be the future of the world as a whole.

Conclusion

This COVID-19 pandemic has taught us how to deal with the situation in a positive way. It has shown that Pakistan needs to work on each and every department to pave its way through success. It has given us a lesson that Pakistan needs to work on its political, social and education department and new technologies need to be incorporated within the system. Pakistani people are yet to be educated to keep pace with the whole world and for that, they need to understand the importance of IT development and encourage their children to get IT education. To survive in the present era, it is impossible to stay out of the world of technology as every department is now IT integrated due to the ongoing pandemic situation. Nations have learned that most of the work can be done at home as well as political participation and educational process can also be continued at home because of the IT integration. Students, who are taking their online classes seriously and honestly, are all set to progress high in the upcoming era. It should be kept in mind that the only way to make progress in this world is to become progressed in the field of IT because nowadays even doctors and engineers are nothing if they don't know how to work online. They have to go through researches which are available on the internet and if they know how to do that, they make quick progress in comparison with those who refuse to learn these new things and keep their old thinking with them. So, this pandemic and the situation of online learning have a great deal of learning for those who are ready to learn in the field of politics and education as well.

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