COVID-19- A Blessing in Disguise for the Education Sector of Pakistan

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Abstract
This research is aimed at identifying the positive impacts of Covid-19 pandemic in relation to the education sector of Pakistan. Generally, individuals have a lot to talk about the devastating effects of the pandemic but this work of research identifies the positive aspects of the Corona virus on the education sector of the country. The data has been gathered from various educational institutions of the province of the Punjab. Population of the study includes both the students as well as the tutors and it has been located as to how the students and their tutors have both become tech-savvy by engaging themselves in online teaching-learning process through different web-based utilities such as Zoom, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, Moodle etc.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Tech-Savvy, Education Sector.

Introduction
Pakistani Government had to order closure of educational institutes until further orders on account of the fact that the number of COVID-19 infection cases augmented across the country. This closure of colleges, schools and varsities had triggered chief distraction in the educational system. As per UNESCO, around 1.725 billion students are presently affected globally.

Learning at school is a significant instrument that bequeaths to complete growth of the students. It is responsible for the growth of an individual’s communal skills, personality growth, and increase in motor-skills by participation in activities of co-curricular sort. Time spent at school is an enjoyable one for the students/kids as they enjoy the opportunity to spend time with their peers and are enthused and inspired by their tutors at the same time. When children attend their school, they abide by a learning timetable built on set deadlines and hence work in an ordered way. It is obvious that with a projected figure of 22 million school going children, Pakistan has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in the world. This ever-growing number of uneducated youth spells danger for the future of our nation especially when considering that more than half are girls who are neither learning nor playing useful roles in society.
While this situation looks rather grim at first, there appears to be light visible at the end of the dark tunnel thanks to "Covid-19".

The best part about Covid-19 is that it has helped knowledge easily reach all areas including remote villages and tribal areas where education initiatives by the government have failed so miserably before. This is the reason why the researcher names it as a blessing in disguise.

Covid-19 has paved the way for interactive digital textbooks and workbooks which are linked with local educational boards. This virus allows students globally to receive top class education in order to compete in a highly competitive global market. The students also get access to free online libraries and webinars which include full audio-visual learning guides accompanied by hundreds of hours of teaching videos featuring master teachers. Digital textbooks can be accessed on any smartphone, laptop or tablet device for no cost at all whereas printed textbook costs $30-$50 per book so it works out as a very economical solution for parents who would otherwise have to sell a kidney in order to afford their children's education.

"Covid-19 has been a real blessing for our education sector," said a local minister. "Many of our government initiatives such as launching free laptops and tablets had failed miserably which prevented us from reaching more than 3 million school children but Covid-19 has made it possible where we plan on providing each child with digital textbooks and workbooks through apps and the internet."

Students can also create their own QR codes and share them with friends and family so that they do not miss important learning materials that might benefit them in the future. Teachers also get their special platform through which they can share various teaching methods and techniques with students which makes the whole learning experience even more fun.

"Teachers need to feel appreciated otherwise they would lose interest in their profession which is why we created an online platform for them where they can communicate with each other," said a doctor, the Assistant Programme Manager of Covid-19 linked edu-technologies. "Their participation has led to an explosion of new ideas throughout the education sector because there are so many smart teachers who have joined us."

Technologies evolved out of Covid-19 also offer numerous other benefits such as child safety which includes age restrictions on any live video streaming site that might be linked within the textbooks or workbooks. Children are taught how to avoid sexual predators or being drugged by strangers. The textbooks also teach children self-defence skills in order to protect themselves against any potential attacks.

"Parents have been very pleased with all the benefits that Covid-19 has brought to their family," said Dr Juma Tewfiq, a child safety expert who is working for awareness of Covid-19. "Children are no longer vulnerable because they can now communicate with their parents via our messaging system that avoids spread of the virus."

Modern technology includes special modules which have been created by various international NGOs who have joined forces with the project linked to overcoming the crisis in order to aid Pakistan's education sector. This ensures that students receive constant updates on vital subjects such as health and hygiene so that they can remain healthy throughout their school life and beyond into adulthood. The curriculum also includes modules on animal rights and environmental protection so that children grow up to become well-rounded responsible citizens.
"Education is critically important for our young generation," said Mr Shaukat Ali Yousafzai, the Ex-Education Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. An Okara-based tutor said, "We thought that such a huge challenge of illiteracy could not be overcome but then Covid-19 came into the picture and made all our wildest dreams come true."

Covid-19 though a pandemic but has still been an absolute blessing for Pakistan's education sector which was once at the mercy of untrained teachers who were unable to provide proper learning materials to children. At this time, it seemed like our country was destined to remain behind the rest because we did not have any sort of plan or even any idea about how technology could be useful in our schools. Covid-19 has completely changed all that by helping our government initiatives such as launching free laptops and tablets had failed miserably which prevented us from reaching more than 3 million children. That is why Covid-19 can rightly be called a blessing because it has enabled us to provide the basic education that every child needs without any disruption whatsoever. Even the children could learn a lot despite the deadly virus.

**Literature Review**

The initial two cases of COVID-19 pandemic were confirmed in Pakistan by the Federal Health Ministry in Karachi and Islamabad on the 26th of February in the year 2020 (Saqlain et al., 2020). COVID-19 has appeared as an emergency of public health and one of the most immense catastrophes the humanity has ever witnessed. Corona pandemic crisis has put the Government and policy-makers in a fix in terms of devising a policy to close the educational sector to safeguard healthiness and protection in relation to the spreading of COVID-19 virus and consequently in order to save the lives of pupils ensuring the fact that the academic operations function normally to avoid the loss of education to the pupil.

However, health and protecting lives is undoubtedly the uppermost priority for every individual as well as the nations. More than 190 countries across the world had to suspend academics physically at educational institutions until the improvement of the situation. This tendency will have an impact on 90 percent of the total enrolled learners globally.

The researcher is a strong advocate of Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically, he is continuously striving for impart of Quality Education, Decent Work & Economic Growth in addition to the Responsible Production & Consumption. In this regard, the researcher himself conducts classes and manages evaluation of pupils under blended mode of learning. In this way, students are able to save a lot of fuel cost. This minimizes their risk of travelling 5-6 days a week and also minimizes those risks that are associated with health and crowding. Instead, the students visit the campus once or twice a week. Further, the researcher remains in regular contact with those students, who are from far-flung areas, where web connectivity is somewhat weak. For such students, the researcher manages correspondence through courier service. As part of creative writing, the researcher regularly encourages his students to write on issues like Impact of Climate Change, Global Warming, Peace, Justice, Equity, Gender Equality, Innovation, etc.

Tutors, who are the guardians of our coming generation, continue to render their services with great fervour, even during this pandemic crisis (Noor et al., 2020).

Despite persistent challenges, teaching-learning is yet taken as one of the most approved occupations, with around 1.4 million tutors in Pakistan serving in the government and private educational institutions, out of which nearly 51% is those of government-financed education Pasha et al. 2018).
School closures on account of the Corona pandemic has compelled tutors around the globe to ascent to change their physical classes into online mode of education (Peace et al., 2020).

Distance learning is a decent chance for tutors, pupils, and the families. Researchers argue that activities such as introduced online or web-based learning platforms, use Zoom, Classin, Wechat, TronClass, and Blackboard group platforms, and thus managed online training, and gathered information regarding all courses (Zhu and Liu, 2020). Online teaching learning is in itself not a new mode of transfer of knowledge for advanced/developed nations and also some under-developed countries. Still, shifting from face-to-face or physical class to online mode of learning is complicated for tutors, pupils, families, and the governments due to absence of adequate skill, money, skill, Information Communications Technology, enough infrastructure, web connectivity and educational capitals.

The paradigm-shift from face-to-face or physical classes to online mode of classroom has had a grave influence on evaluation and assessments of the learners. Applying evaluation and assessments online is a complicated task. Given that, the teachers have required to alter their assessment types to align with the online mode. Moreover, it is tough to assess the pupil how they are attending courses online and hence tough again to confirm that pupils are not involved in any malpractice like cheating while taking their online assessments (Basiliaia, and Kvavadze, 2020).

**Transformation of the Education Sector**

Covid-19 has truly made a huge difference because it has transformed our education sector. It has enabled us to provide children with any sort of online text books, workbooks, etc. that they may need for their classes which was an impossible task before its arrival on the scene. Even if some schools are able to scrape by with some papers and notebooks, most do not have anything at all. Not only does it offer textbooks but also gives Pakistan's students access to other essential materials such as movies on health, hygiene, social issues and environmental protection so that they stay up to date on current affairs while having fun at the same time!

However, Absence of adequate contact with tutors is yet another huge fear linked with online learning. Moreover, issues relevant to any specific content of the online course are usually conversed with the concerned course-tutor through e-mail that needs response-time (Zhong., 2020).

Due to this pandemic, institutions are using the latest technology in lessons which includes virtual reality equipment for studying science or history, 3D printers for engineering students and other high tech devices that can be used for teaching purposes.

**COVID-19 AND FOREIGN INVESTMENTS**

Covid-19 has also attracted foreign investments in Pakistan's education sector which means that we now have the opportunity to train and hire more technologically-able teachers for providing quality education to students. There is no doubt that Covid-19 will go a long way towards helping our country increase its literacy rate because it provides children with the most interactive and up to date learning materials possible. By providing children with the tools that they need to succeed, Covid-19 is creating a generation of well-rounded individuals who will be able to help Pakistan grow and prosper. Hence, it can be termed as a blessing in disguise.
COVID-19 and Foreign Investments

Covid-19 provides people with advanced farming techniques via their electronic devices so that they can increase crop yields and decrease costs. Such web-based projects also promote recycling by encouraging people to separate their trash into organic materials (which go to make compost for agriculture), recyclables (which can be sold) and general waste (which goes to waste disposal sites). "Covid-19 has helped us recycle 80% of our trash," said Mr Rehan Uddin, who lives in Karachi. "Before it arrived on the scene we were burying all our organic and recyclable waste which led to soil and air pollution but thanks to Covid-19 we no longer have that problem."

The Effects on COVID-19 on Environment

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Results and Discussion

This research identifies the positive aspects of Covid19 in relation to the education sector of Pakistan. Generally, individuals align their discourse on the pandemic with its devastating effect but this research work uses the Quantitative Research paradigm by implying the close-ended questionnaire to detect the positive aspects of the pandemic on the education sector of Pakistan. The data has been collected from various educational institutions of the province of the Punjab. Population of the study includes both male and female respondents in equal proportion. Furthermore, it includes both the students as well as the tutors and it has been ascertained as to how the students and their tutors have both become tech-savvy by having online classes through different web-based platforms like Zoom, Whatsapp, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, etc.

Data had been gathered from Punjab-based public sector educational institutions. Close-ended questionnaire had been implied as tool for data collection. Close-ended questionnaire contained a total of 10 questions. The respondents were to respond of their perspective or opinion in line with the Likert scale showing distinct 5-points including:

- **SA**- Strongly Agree
- **A**- Agree
- **UD**- Undecided
- **DA**- Disagree
- **SD**- Strongly Disagree

The Questions and their responses are as under:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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</table>

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The Corona virus has prepared us in advance for the possible future threats

Table 1: Responses to Q1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
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<th>DA</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Out of the entire population, a total number of 56% respondents strongly agree with the fact that the pandemic has in advance prepared them for the possible threats or crisis of the future. 33.5% of the respondents simply agree with the first question. Another 2% were undecided. Only 4.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. There were another 4% of the participants who strongly disagreed with the notion.

I now consider myself more tech-savvy than ever before

Table 2: Responses to Q2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the entire population, a total number of 62% respondents strongly agree with the fact that they now consider themselves more tech-savvy than ever before. 34.5% of the respondents simply agreed with the second question. Only 0.5% were undecided on it. Merely 3% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, none strongly disagreed with the notion.

Teaching-learning through Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, WhatsApp has been the best alternative to physical classrooms during prevalence of the pandemic.

Table 3: Responses to Q3

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<tr>
<th>Q3</th>
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<th>DA</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the entire population, a total number of 31% respondents strongly agree with the fact that Teaching-learning through Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, WhatsApp has been the best alternative to physical classrooms during prevalence of the pandemic. 39% of the respondents simply agreed with the third statement. 5.5% of the respondents were undecided on it. 22% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, only 2.5% was of those who strongly disagreed with the notion.

I as a teacher/ student strongly advocate the fact that the pandemic period has minimized my vehicle’s fuel cost when compared with Pre-Corona period

Table 4: Responses to Q4

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>SA</th>
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<th>UD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As far as this question is concerned pertaining to the fuel-cost cut, a huge number of 70.5% respondents strongly agree with the fact that the pandemic period has minimized their vehicle’s or travelling /fuel cost when compared with Pre-Corona period. 22% of the respondents simply agreed with the fourth question. None was undecided on it. 5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, another 2.5% of the population strongly disagreed with the notion.

This pandemic saves our mother earth and specifically our homeland Pakistan by reducing pollution

Table 5: Responses to Q5

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<tr>
<th>Q5</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</table>

As far as this question is concerned pertaining to the safeguard of the environment, a total number of 43% respondents strongly agree with the fact that Covid19 pandemic saves our mother earth and specifically our homeland Pakistan by reducing pollution. 28.5% of the respondents simply agreed with the fifth question. 3 percent of the respondents were undecided on it. 15.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, another 10% of the population strongly disagreed with the notion by thinking otherwise.

Teaching-learning through online mode is a better alternative to physical classes in times of crisis.

Table 6: Responses to Q6

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
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Out of the entire population, a massive number of 61% of the respondents strongly agree with the fact that teaching/learning through online mode is a better alternative to physical classes in times of crisis. 26 % of the respondents simply agreed with the sixth question. None of the participants was undecided on it. 7.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. There were another 5.5% of the participants who strongly disagreed with the notion.

Teaching-learning under online mode seems to be a bit challenging in remote areas of Pakistan

Table 7 Responses to Q7

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<tr>
<th>Q7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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Out of the entire population, a huge number of 73.5% of the respondents strongly agreed with the fact that Teaching-learning under online mode seems to be a bit challenging in remote areas of Pakistan and this remains a fact as far as web connectivity, is concerned in the far-flung areas of the
country. 21.5% of the respondents simply agreed with the seventh question. Only a little proportion of 0.5% was undecided on it. 4.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. There was however no participant to strongly disagree with the notion.

**COVID-19 and virtual education have minimized the risk of road accidents**

Table 8: Responses to Q8

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<tr>
<th>Q8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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As far as this question is concerned relevant to the reduced number of road accidents, a total number of 31% respondents strongly agree with the fact that Covid19 and virtual education have minimized the risk of road accidents. 39.5% of the respondents simply agreed with the eighth question. 8 percent of the respondents were undecided on it. 11% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, another 10.5% of the population strongly disagreed with the notion by thinking otherwise.

**COVID-19 has Given Us a Healthy Lifestyle**

Table 9: Responses to Q9

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<th>Q9</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

As far as this question is concerned pertaining to a healthy lifestyle, a total number of 47.5% respondents strongly agree with the fact that Covid19 has taught us on how to lead a healthy life by taking into consideration the principles of health and hygiene. 36% of the respondents simply agreed with the ninth question. None was undecided on it. 11.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, another 5% of the population strongly disagreed with the notion by thinking otherwise.

**COVID-19 Pandemic Has Made Us Think in a Broadminded Manner**

Table 10: Responses to Q10

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<th>Q10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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As far as this question is concerned pertaining to a broadminded thinking, a total number of 24% respondents strongly agree with the fact that Covid19 has made us think in a broadminded manner. 33.5% out of the total respondents simply agreed with the tenth question linked with broad thinking. 21.5% of the respondents were undecided on it. 15% of the respondents disagreed with the statement of the question. However, another 6% of the population strongly disagreed with the notion by thinking otherwise.
Conclusion

After extensive research, it can be deduced and concluded that Covid19 is not only a devastating pandemic but it does have a positive side too. It serves us as a blessing in disguise for the humanity. We are now well conversant with the notion of ‘Safety for all’. We can name this virus as a teacher, which has taught us necessary lessons, which were undoubtedly the need of the hour. It has given a new dimension to the concept of ‘Work from Home’. It reduces the risk of accidents. It also minimizes our cost of fuel and hence reduces potential threats to the environment such as pollution and depletion of Ozone layer. It has opened for us new vistas of knowledge. We are now more broadminded than ever before. This pandemic has openly introduced for us the online mode of education, which is the best alternative to physical classes not only in times of crisis but also in times of peace, the example of which could be the blended mode of learning. This teacher (Corona pandemic) has prepared us for the possible threats of the future in advance. We are now more and more concerned with washing our hands, sanitizing them and observing social distancing. Wearing of mask is yet another magic that saves us of being infected from viruses such as Flu, Malaria, Dengue, Corona, etc. The Covid19 pandemic has taught technology to both the teachers and their students and they now seem to be at par with growing needs of the modern world.

Aknowledgement

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References


