

## THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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On December 31st, 2019, some cases of unknown pneumonia were reported by Chinese health authorities to world health organization (WHO) regional office China which were later on diagnosed as cases of a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The novel coronavirus was isolated from samples taken from lower respiratory tracts of affectees, gene sequencing and comparison to the existing coronaviruses revealed that the novel coronavirus named “(2019-nCoV)” is a beta coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> Coronaviruses have caused epidemics in 2012 in the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and in China in 2002-2003 (SARS-Cov). WHO in January 2020 declared Covid-19 as viral global emergency after spread of virus to many countries. This outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was officially announced as global pandemic on March 11, 2020, by WHO.<sup>2</sup> So far it is assumed that COVID-19 strain emerged from wild animals in Wuhan, a city in Hubei province of China. Animals namely Pangolins, snakes and Bats have been referred as potential carriers found on the sequence homology of CoV isolated from these animals. Studies suggest that youngsters under the age of 18 years show that about 8.5% of reported cases, with relatively small number deaths as compared to other age groups and generally mild disease. However, patients with severe illness have been reported. Adults having pre-existing comorbidity have been proposed as a risk factor for developing severe disease and intensive care hospitalization.<sup>3</sup>

The recent COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 persist a significant issue for

worldwide health, education, society, economics, transportation and society.<sup>4</sup> Due to lack of unclear and effective treatment of COVID-19 in early stages of pandemic, emphasis has been given on early recognition and diagnosis, treatment and isolation of infected people and quarantining their close contacts. Government agencies of all Countries enforced quarantine, social distancing and hand washing to control the spread of infection. Educational institutes comprising universities, colleges and schools were closed in majority of countries including Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan is a developing country and the economic condition is not good as compared to developed countries like America, China, United Kingdom and Russia to tackle with COVID- 19 Pandemic. During pandemic majority of institutes in developed countries have moved to online education to facilitate academics and save waste of time.<sup>6</sup> Developed countries have well established technology, nonstop internet facility and online learning programs but imposition of online of online learning in developing nation including Pakistan faces many barriers. Government of Pakistan announced 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown on March 2020, and closed all educational institutes nationwide. During this period ministry of education started teleschool ambition in partnership with leading EdTech supplier such as Knowledge Platform, Teleemabad Sabaq.pk to transmit free learning materials to class 1-12 students. Medical Colleges, degree awarding institutions and universities offering bachelor, master and doctorate programs shifted their learning process on online web based application learning management system (LMS) which offers an

teacher with a way to create and deliver learning content, monitor pupil involvement and assess scholar performance. Universities and medical colleges also adopted another software-based application zoom, a video conferencing application that assents teachers and students in the educational and other institutions to carry out online classes and meetings. All these applications required a good working internet connection but remote cities of Pakistan including tribal districts do not have internet coverage due to which students learning process suffered. Further, students of life sciences, biological sciences, health and medical sciences and research scholars involved in lab-based activities were deprived from practical sessions during closure periods.

It is noteworthy that this pandemic is not distinctive to Pakistan alone. Government sector should ensure strong broadcasting of internet facility in all localities of Pakistan. Policy makers of education sector should give obvious directions at the start of the learning sessions, interacting with the students rather of just talking.<sup>7</sup> Organizations should establish IT divisions and software to upgrade learning standard. Moreover, vaccinated process should be accelerated and awareness sessions should be conducted to tackle myths about Covid-19 vaccination among public. In Pakistan cases of Indian delta variant are raising and according to National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) positivity percentage are 6.30 as of July 22, 2021 leading to fourth wave of COVID-19 in Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> If the positivity ratio of COVID-19 increases the Government may announce closure of educational institutions in cities with high positivity but educationists, should make efforts to adapt the nemesis of COVID-19 into an opportunity.

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