



Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN (E) 2708-4175 ISSN (P) 2074-2061

Volume 44: Issue 4 December 2024

Journal homepage: <https://pjss.bzu.edu.pk>

The COVID-19's Legacy in Pakistan's Higher Secondary Education: A Cross-sectional Study

^a Areesha Rashid, ^b Muhammad Rashid, ^c Umar Gul, ^d Nosheen Qamer

^a M. Phil Scholar, Faculty of Biological Sciences, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: areesha.rashid@bs.qau.edu.pk

^b Senior Subject Specialist/Lecturer, Education Department, Government of the Punjab, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Email: mrpkoo7@gmail.com

^c ES Teacher, Education Department, Government of the Punjab, Faisalabad, Pakistan

E-mail: umargull83@gmail.com

^d Educator, Department of Education, Government of the Punjab, Faisalabad, Pakistan

E-mail: nosheenqamar@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

History:

Accepted: 01 October, 2024

Available Online: 18 November, 2024

Keywords:

COVID-19, Decline, Downfall,
Education, Intellectuals

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objective of this study is to examine the post-COVID impacts on Pakistan's education system and offer recommendations to overcome these issues.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A cross-sectional study design was followed to conduct a questionnaire based survey. A well-structured questionnaire was provided to education's intellectuals, including teachers and principals. A total of 1164 responses were recorded, quantitatively examined, and statistically analyzed. The significance of the results was compared by p-value ($p = 0.05$) with a 95% confidence interval.

Findings: Intellectuals' responses comprised on 653(56.1%) male and 511(43.9%) female; Lecturer 720(61.9%), Subject Specialist 234(20.1%) and Principal 210(18.0%) from government 784(67.4%) and private 380(32.6%) educational institutions. The study revealed that the highest percentage of respondents (44.16%) strongly agreed on key issue that the current education system does not produce skilled students at the basic level. Second most closely followed by 43.38% who identified the promotion policy up to grade eight as a problem. Additionally, 43.04% highlighted the lack of uniformity in the basic school system as a major concern. Regarding the evaluation and examination system, particularly the semester system, 39.26% of respondents strongly agreed that it contains significant flaws. This issue also had the highest level of disagreement, with 7.65% of respondents indicating satisfaction with the system.

Implications/Originality/Value: The study highlights that integrating social media and technology into the education system can mitigate the decline in education during future disruptions like COVID-19. Consistent policies and infrastructure development are crucial for sustaining adaptable and resilient education systems. The outcomes of this study offer strategies that can enhance the stability of the education systems.

© 2024 The authors. Published by PJSS, BZU. This is an open-access research paper under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0



Recommended Citation:

Areesha, R., Rashid, M., Umar, G. & Nosheen, Q. (2024). The COVID-19's Legacy in Pakistan's Higher Secondary Education: A Cross-sectional Study. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 44(4), 549-560. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.14178555

*Corresponding Author's email address: areesha.rashid@bs.qau.edu.pk

1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) has significantly affected all aspects of life across the globe. One of the most severe impacts has been on the economic conditions of developing countries, where economies are already struggling. Following the economic slump (Nicola et al., 2020), education was the next major victim (Viner et al., 2020) experiencing severe disruptions. Schools and universities were forced to close their doors, leading to a massive shift to online learning. Unfortunately, in many developing countries, including Pakistan, the transition to online education exposed deep inequalities in access to technology and infrastructure, widening the education gap. Education, which is the backbone of any nation was severely impacted, hindering its critical role in shaping the future of individuals and society (Begum, Poly, & Jung, 2012).

Education provides the essential framework for social development fostering social cohesion, reducing poverty, and improving health outcomes. Education raises critical thinking, helping individuals navigate complex challenges and contribute to solving global problems. Moreover, it sets the foundation for a skilled and innovative workforce, which is essential for economic recovery and growth, particularly in the post-pandemic era (Ojiambo, 2009). The strength and accessibility of education determine a nation's ability to flourish in a dynamic global environment. Furthermore, the college or higher secondary school level of education plays a pivotal role in shaping the academic and intellectual development of students, serving as a bridge between their foundational years and higher education or the workforce (Mahawattha & Rassool, 2023). However, despite its significance, this crucial phase of education has encountered various challenges and shortcomings that have slowed down its effectiveness. Additionally, in the wake of this global pandemic, the importance of education has become more pronounced than ever (Solomon-Calvin, 2021).

In Covid-19, structured operating principles (SOP's) imposed by the countries to mitigate this pandemic like; social distancing, closure of schools/colleges, smart syllabus and postponing of examinations, have significant implications on the education system especially in developing countries like Pakistan where around 2% of the GDP (gross domestic product) is spent on education (Farooq & Kai, 2017) which is low in Asian countries (Ghazi, Ali, Khan, Hussain, & Fatima, 2010). In such situations, Pakistan has faced unique challenges that have aggravated existing educational disparities. The demise of education at the transition level from college to university raises concerns about the preparedness of students for advanced study responsibilities.

The pandemic has intensified ongoing educational difficulties, impacting more than 91% of students around the world. Educational institutions had to quickly adjust to online learning settings, highlighting deficiencies in infrastructure and accessibility. This situation emphasized the importance of finding effective digital solutions to maintain continuity in education (Das, 2021).

The fundamental role of mediated communication in distance education highlights the importance of grasping how new technologies have influenced the ways distance education is delivered (Garrison, 1985). The swift incorporation of technology into education, especially via E-learning, has changed the way teaching is approached (Kriplani, 2023). More than ever, the COVID-19 epidemic has brought attention to the need of education. Investing in robust educational institutions is essential for fostering resilience and flexibility in future generations as nations strive to recover and adapt to shifting conditions. Reforms in education should be centered on improving the quality and accessibility of learning so that all students may thrive in an increasingly complex environment (Sergey & Elena, 2021).

Hence, this research offers insights into the key concerns of individuals directly involved in education, including subject specialists, senior subject specialists, professors, assistant professors, lecturers, and principals of schools, higher secondary schools, and colleges. Consequently, policymakers and stakeholders can gain insights into potential solutions. Documentary research to investigate factors influencing the downfall and problems in

education of Pakistan has been carried out, but the need is to visualize realistic approach after Covid-19 to address this apprehension (Rashid & Mukhtar, 2012).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to assess post-Covid-19's effect on education and consequently the downfall of education at intermediate level. Hence, it aims to:

- To assess core issues in education related to the post-covid-19 pandemic.
- Identify potential issues regarding the downfall of education.
- Make necessary recommendations to overcome these issues based on the rational findings.

1.2. Research Questions

This is an investigative study that focuses on the key factors responsible for the downfall of education in Pakistan after the pandemic Covid-19. This study aims to respond the following questions:

- What are the key issues generated during and after the pandemic in the education sector?
- What are the potential causes of the decline the education in Pakistan?

2. Research Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was followed to conduct a questionnaire-based survey, allowing for a comprehensive snapshot of post-COVID impacts on the education system in Pakistan. A well-structured questionnaire was administered to educational intellectuals, including Subject Specialists, Lecturers, and Principals from Faisalabad Division.

A questionnaire was created to gather information about the respondents' sociodemographic background, including gender, kind of work (private or government), job description, and type of institution they were connected with. The questionnaire was converted into Google Doc form and disseminated from May 11, 2023 to January 10, 2024. In order to gather data on the impact of Covid-19 on the structure of education and, general information on the decline of education, the quantitative portion of the study used a structured questionnaire approach. Sample size was calculated by using formula:

$$\text{Sample size } n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p(1-p)}{E^2}$$

Our minimum required sample size was calculated to be 1067.

2.1. Data Collection and Analysis

Snowball sampling, which comprises major online platforms including WhatsApp, Facebook, e-mails, and Twitter, was used to collect data for this study. Google forms were posted on these sites to contact participants, who were asked to advance it throughout their networks. In order to assure a maximum response, personal communication via phone calls and emails was also employed. To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was carefully designed with clear instructions, while Google Forms were accessed by only educational groups, enhancing data validity and reliability.

Authors' constructed 4-point Likert scale (assuming 1 = Disagree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Moderately Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree) is used to obtain clear stance and avoid neutrality on key issues of downfalls in education. It provides straightforward way for respondents to participate, improving the quality of data and avoiding indecision.

The data was quantitatively examined and statistically analyzed by using SPSS V-23 with 95% confidence interval and significance value of p as threshold at $p < 0.05$. Mean, standard deviation and p-value were calculated.

3. Results and Discussion

The minimum calculated sample size was 1067; obtaining 1164 responses enhances data precision and reliability, leading to more robust findings. The response comprises on 653(56.1%) males and 511(43.9%) females intellectuals (SS/SSS = Subject Specialist/ Senior Subject Specialist, Lec./Professor/AP = Lecturer/Professor/Assistant Professor, and Principal/ Sr. HM (Senior Headmaster) is shown in **Table 1** along with their demographic profile. The respondents were from colleges, higher secondary schools (HSS), and secondary schools (principals only).

Table 1:

Demographic profile of respondents (N = 1164)

	Items	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	653(56.1)
	Female	511(43.9)
Nature of job	Government	784(67.4)
	Private	380(32.6)
	SS/SSS	234(20.1)
Intellectuals	Lec./Professor/AP	720(61.9)
	Principal/ Sr. HM	210(18.0)
	S. School	41(3.5)
Nature of Institution	HSS	294(25.3)
	College	729(71.2)

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of responses along with the statistical analysis. The mean values, ranging from 2.930 to 3.094, indicate that respondents generally leaned toward moderate agreement with the statements. The standard deviation (SD), ranging from 0.8951 to 0.9823, suggests a consistent response pattern, with most respondents either agreeing or moderately agreeing with the issues presented. The significance of the results is compared by p-value. For $p > 0.05$ there is no significance difference of view among the independent variables.

The research findings reveal that 37.2% of the respondents strongly believe that low quality of teaching up to primary and middle level” is the primary cause of decline in education. Additionally, 31.79% agreed while 24.91% moderately agreed with this statement, and only 6.1% disagreed. 40.2% of the respondents expressed serious concern about students’ poor reading and writing skills, with a similar proportion (just over 28%) agreeing and showing significant concern about these deficiencies. Only 3.01% did not agree with this viewpoint.

The findings indicate that insufficient teaching staff, particularly in remote areas, is a major factor in the decline of education, with 96.30% of respondents supporting this view (41.92% strongly agreeing, 29.21% moderately agreeing, and 25.17% agreeing). Additionally, 43.04% strongly agreed that the lack of uniformity (diversity in private schools) also contributes to the decline, while only 5.41% disagreed with this cause. Concerns about the current education system's inability to produce skilled students at the basic level were expressed by 44.16% of respondents (strongly agreeing) and 26.03% (moderately agreeing). Moreover, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were identified as a significant contributor to the decline, with 41.49% strongly agreeing, 27.75% moderately agreeing, and 25.26% agreeing. Furthermore, 94.50% of respondents (40.46% strongly agreeing, 27.23% moderately agreeing, and 26.81% agreeing) believe that students' excessive use of social media has diverted their attention from education, further contributing to its downfall.

Political instability and influence, particularly regarding admissions and appointments, play a critical role in the decline of education, as supported by 93.64% of respondents (37.46% strongly agree, 27.58% moderately agree, and 28.61% agree).

A significant portion of respondents (37.89%) also expressed deep concern that changing policies without improving infrastructure contributes to the educational decline, with just over 5% of intellectuals disagreeing and the rest showing moderate agreement. The closure of institutions during domestic or national protests, events, or crises was identified as another contributing factor, with 38.23% strongly agreeing and just over 28% of respondents both agreed and moderately agreed with this statement. Overcrowded classes, particularly in public institutions, were also mentioned as a cause of decline, with 36.94% strongly agreeing and 29.30% moderately agreeing.

A significant percentage (43.38%) strongly endorsed that present promotion policy up to Grade 8, without fail concept is the major cause of decline in education. Only just over 6% opposed this view and showed their disagreement. Overall 92.35% of respondents (39.26% strongly agree, 26.46% moderately agree, and 26.63% agree) believe that flaws in evaluation and examination system contribute to the downfall in education. Additionally, 42.87% strongly expressed concern that assigning non-teaching duties to teachers is a major factor in the decline. According to 41.75% of respondents (strongly agree), the excessive number of vacations, holidays, and leaves throughout the academic year is a key contributor to the downfall of education, with only 6.5% disagreeing. Furthermore, traditional teaching methods that fail to incorporate modern technology were identified by 34.88% (strongly agree), 29.98% (moderately agree), and 28.44% (agree) as a major cause of educational decline, while only 6.70% disagreed with this opinion.

Table 2:

Frequency distributions of objectives structured downfall in education (after the pandemic) perception of the intellectuals from public and private institution (N = 1164)

Items	Frequency Responses from Intellectuals				Statistical Analysis		
	Disagree f (%)	Agree f (%)	Moderately Agree f (%)	Strongly Agree f (%)	Mean	SD	p-value
Low quality of teaching up to primary and middle level.	71 (6.10)	370(31.79)	290(24.91)	433(37.20)	2.932	0.9644	0.102
Poor reading and writing skills of students.	35(3.01)	328(28.18)	333(28.61)	468(40.20)	3.060	0.8951	0.449
Insufficient teaching staff in the institutions especially in the remote area.	43(3.70)	293(25.17)	340(29.21)	488(41.92)	3.094	0.9004	0.346
Our basic school system is not uniform (diversity in schools).	63(5.41)	277(23.80)	323(27.75)	501(43.04)	3.084	0.9373	0.205
Present education system does not produce skilled students at basic level.	70(6.01)	277(23.80)	303(26.03)	514(44.16)	3.083	0.9560	0.177
Students with low socioeconomic backgrounds contribute more downfalls.	64(5.50)	294(25.26)	323(27.75)	483(41.49)	3.052	0.9410	0.165
Students' interest in social media deviates from their interest which causes downfall in education.	64(5.50)	312(26.81)	317(27.23)	471(40.46)	3.027	0.9448	0.837
Political instability and influence (regarding admission/appointment) play a major role for it.	74(6.36)	333(28.61)	321(27.58)	436(37.46)	2.961	0.9562	0.001
Changing policies without change of infrastructure contributes downfall of education.	59(5.07)	336(28.86)	328(28.18)	441(37.89)	2.989	0.9332	0.001
Closing of institutions on any domestic or national protest/events/crisis is also decreasing education level.	62(5.33)	330(28.35)	327(28.09)	445(38.23)	2.992	0.9378	0.038

Overcrowded classes especially in public institution are the major causes of education decline.	65(5.58)	328(28.18)	341(29.30)	430(36.94)	2.976	0.9353	0.003
Present promotion policy up to grade eight (no fail concept from class I-VIII).	70(6.01)	277(23.80)	312(26.80)	505(43.38)	3.076	0.9526	0.174
Flaws in evaluation/ examination system (especially semester system in private institutions).	89(7.65)	310(26.63)	308(26.46)	457(39.26)	2.973	0.9823	0.013
Other duties assigned to the teachers rather than teaching.	64(5.50)	291(25.00)	310(26.63)	499(42.87)	3.069	0.9459	0.001
Huge number of vacations, holidays, and leaves throughout the year.	76(6.50)	287(24.66)	315(27.06)	486(41.75)	3.040	0.9615	0.114
Traditional methods of teaching do not cope with modern technology.	78(6.70)	331(28.44)	349(29.98)	406(34.88)	2.930	0.9472	0.305

The measures taken during this pandemic for educational institutions and objectives of this study as perceived by the intellectuals from public and private institutions are shown in Table 3.

Results show that there is not a statistically significant difference of perception between public and private intellectuals ($p = 0.118$) that promotion in next class without evaluation during Covid-19 lockdown is the primary reason of education decline. However, 55.89% (30.10% public, 25.79% private) of the respondents showed their serious concern (strongly agreed) about it. Both categories of intellectuals have same view and moderately agreed (just above 28%) to this concern. Only 13.19% (6.25% public, 6.84% private) of the respondents disagreed to this view point. Responses for uncertainty about resuming ($p = 0.004$) and reopening with limited classes ($p = 0.001$) reflects that there is a significance difference of opinion among both type of intellectuals (as $p < 0.05$). 56.61% (32.40% public, 24.21% private) strongly agreed to the concern that uncertainty about resuming of institutions is the cause of decline whereas, 58.27% (34.06% public, 24.21% private) strongly agreed with the concern that reopening with limited classes was not taken seriously by the teachers and students. 64.15% (30.99% public, 33.16% private) respondents show their serious concern that lack of face to face classes during pandemic is the cause of downfall in education. The p-value ($p = 0.003$) reflects that there is a statistically significance difference of opinion about this view point. Only 12.23% disagree to this point while remaining showed notable concern about it.

Both type of intellectuals strongly agreed (over 36%) and there is no significant difference of opinion ($p = 0.901$) among them that dropout during Covid-19 is also a cause of decline of education. Adoption of smart syllabus format after lockdown has diminished the students approach and cause a decline of education. P-value for this ($p = 0.671$) query shows that all the intellectuals have no difference of opinion and have strong concern about it 66.40% (34.82% public, 31.58% private). Only 12.83% (4.72% public, 7.11% private) of the respondents Disagreed that non-serious attitudes of students towards learning during and after this pandemic is the cause of decline of education. P-value for this enquiry ($p = 0.163$) indicates that there is no significance difference of perception of intellectuals about it. Lack of access to technology during COVID has badly affected the education. Majority of the respondents 78.44% (41.33% public, 37.11% private) show their strong concern about this issue. 44.39% of public whereas, 37.89% of private institutions' respondents strongly endorsed that unemployment during this pandemic has created disappointment in the students which is a major cause of decline of education. The p-value ($p = 0.318$) indicates that there is no statistically significant difference of perception among both type of intellectuals about this issue. Financial decline of parents due to this pandemic which has limited their children's educational necessities is another cause of downfall of education.

Table 3:

Objectives structured downfall in education (Covid-19 related) perception difference among public and private institution (N = 1164).

Items	Responses	Type of Institution		p-value
		Public/ Govt.	Private	
		n = 784(67.35%) f (%)	n = 380(32.65%) f (%)	
During Covid-19 lockdown, promotion in the next class without evaluation is the primary reason.	Strongly Agree	236(30.10)	98(25.79)	0.118
	Moderately Agree	220(28.06)	107(28.16)	
	Agree	279(35.59)	149(39.21)	
	Disagree	49(6.25)	26(6.84)	
Uncertainty about resuming and reopening of institution is the cause of decline.	Strongly Agree	254(32.40)	92(24.21)	0.004
	Moderately Agree	219(27.93)	118(31.05)	
	Agree	266(33.93)	135(35.53)	
	Disagree	45(5.74)	35(9.21)	
Reopening of institution with limited classes (half the strength of students) was not taken seriously by teachers and students.	Strongly Agree	267(34.06)	92(24.21)	0.001
	Moderately Agree	221(28.19)	102(26.84)	
	Agree	240(30.61)	149(39.21)	
	Disagree	56(7.14)	37(9.74)	
Lack of face to face classes during the pandemic is the cause of downfall.	Strongly Agree	243(30.99)	126(33.16)	0.003
	Moderately Agree	198(25.26)	105(27.63)	
	Agree	243(30.99)	126(33.16)	
	Disagree	34(4.34)	30(7.89)	
Dropout during the pandemic is also a significant cause of downfall.	Strongly Agree	286(36.48)	138(36.32)	0.901
	Moderately Agree	216(27.55)	101(26.58)	
	Agree	208(26.53)	113(29.74)	
	Disagree	74(9.44)	28(7.37)	
After the lockdown interval, the “smart syllabus” format adopted has diminished the students’ approach.	Strongly Agree	273(34.82)	120(31.58)	0.671
	Moderately Agree	223(28.44)	124(32.63)	
	Agree	240(30.61)	112(29.47)	
	Disagree	48(6.12)	24(6.32)	
Non-serious attitudes of students towards learning during and after this pandemic.	Strongly Agree	282(35.97)	126(33.16)	0.163
	Moderately Agree	226(28.83)	109(28.68)	
	Agree	239(30.48)	118(31.05)	
	Disagree	37(4.72)	27(7.11)	
Lack of access to technology during COVID has badly affected education.	Strongly Agree	324(41.33)	141(37.11)	0.048
	Moderately Agree	222(28.32)	105(27.63)	
	Agree	212(27.04)	113(29.74)	
	Disagree	26(3.32)	21(5.53)	
Unemployment during this pandemic has created disappointment in students	Strongly Agree	348(44.39)	144(37.89)	0.318
	Moderately Agree	204(26.02)	120(31.58)	
	Agree	181(23.09)	97(25.53)	
	Disagree	51(6.51)	19(5.00)	
Financial decline of parents/guardians due to the pandemic has limited their children’s educational necessities.	Strongly Agree	259(33.04)	107(28.16)	0.145
	Moderately Agree	241(30.74)	119(31.32)	
	Agree	242(30.87)	137(36.05)	
	Disagree	42(5.36)	17(4.47)	

Majority of the Intellectuals strongly agreed (33.04% public, 28.16% private), moderately agreed (30.74% public, 31.32% private) to this issue and showed no significance difference of opinion (p = 0.145).

3.1. Discussion

Promotion to the next class without evaluation during the COVID-19 lockdown emerged as a primary cause of the decline in education. Research shows that the nonexistence of evaluation can lead to long-term deficits in students’ academic advancement (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). Uncertainty about resuming and reopening institutions with

limited classes led to a decline in the seriousness of both teachers and students. A study conducted by (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022) showed that the uncertainty about school reopening created an environment of disengagement among students and teachers, which highlights how the lack of structured schedules and limited in-person instruction diminished effective learning.

A lack of face-to-face interaction and an increase in dropouts during the pandemic were seen as significant causes of declining educational outcomes. The lack of interaction with teachers and dropout rates increased due to economic pressures (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020) leading to a decline in academic performance (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The findings show that lack of access to technology and the non-serious attitude of students towards learning in Covid-19 has significant impact on downfalls in education. Research indicates that insufficient access to technology intensified educational disparities during COVID-19 (Francis & Weller, 2022).

Unemployment during the pandemic and financial decline (Areesha, Areeba, & Rashid, 2022) of parents due to this pandemic has limited their children's educational necessities, is another significant effect on decline. A study conducted by (Lopez-Leon et al., 2021) explains that economic impact of the pandemic is well-documented, with many families experiencing job losses that directly affected educational resources.

After COVID-19, the deterioration in education persists, and its influence is evident in the findings of this study. Low quality of teaching at primary and middle level, which yields poor reading and writing skills in students, is the prime cause of the decline of education in Pakistan. The consequences of poor reading and writing have lowered students' achievements (Graham & Hebert, 2010) and, as a result education level.

Diversity in school system in private setups, insufficient teaching staff, especially in remote areas, and students with low socioeconomic background contributes more downfalls in education. Low-cost private schools, have created a dual system where rich families can afford better education, while lower-income families are often left with lower-quality options, which results in unequal learning outcomes across different socioeconomic groups (Srivastava, 2013).

After Covid-19 teacher shortage worldwide has created unique challenges that have received more attention (Dadvand & Lampert, 2024). In the country like Pakistan, where social media is considered the most entertainment channel for teenagers, the students' interest in social media has deviated from their interest in education. The positive role of social media in education is reported along with evidence of its drawbacks (Tess, 2013). Moreover, overcrowded classes especially in public institutions, contribute a reasonable decline in education. A study reveals that overcrowded classes influence the teacher-student interaction, consequently leading to decline their performance (Sudrajat, 2021).

Political instability, political influence in education, unnecessary closing of institutions on any domestic/national protest/event and huge number of vacations/holidays/leaves play a vital role in the decline of education. The study conducted by (Devi, 2017) highlights several major impacts of political instability on education, concluding that education is the most adversely affected sector.

The lack of infrastructure in the education system severely impacts the students' quality of education (Hussain & Afzal, 2023) which may be attributed to policy changes or lack of financial issues. The findings of this study indicate that traditional teaching methods, automatic promotion of students up to Grade 8 without the possibility of failure, contribute significantly to the decline in education. Additionally, flaws in the evaluation/examination system, particularly within the semester system, further accelerate this decline. The study reveals that automatic promotion has no positive impact on student well-being (Chohan & Qadir, 2011), emphasizing the need for external evaluation for better check and balance compared to the semester system (Perveen & Saeed, 2014).

Additional responsibilities/assignments given to teachers outside of their teaching responsibilities have a substantial effect on their performance, which contributes notably to the overall decline in education quality. This increased workload reduces the time and mental resources available for essential teaching-related activities like lesson planning, classroom preparation, and personalized student support. The study shows that assigning teachers additional responsibilities beyond teaching negatively impacts their effectiveness, resulting in their failure to effectively prepare lesson plans (Nuwaha, Atukunda, & Kyayemagye, 2023).

4. Conclusion

The results conclude that promotion in the next class without evaluation, lack of access to technology, uncertainty about the resuming of institutions with limited students, non-serious attitudes of students and teachers, and financial decline of parents due to unemployment during and afterwards the pandemic cause subsequent decline in education. On the other hand, the decline of education in Pakistan can potentially be ascribed to poor teaching quality and promotion policy at the elementary level, diversity in the school system, overcrowding in class rooms and insufficient teaching staff in public schools, intervention of social media at the schools' level, numerous closures of institutions, political instability and influence, outdated teaching methods, and inconsistency in policies without infrastructure's improvements. The authors' suggest the following recommendations to cope with future challenges.

5. Recommendations

- 1- While there is no doubt that the in-person classroom system is highly effective, it should be complemented by an online distance learning program, replacing at least 50% of traditional instruction. This hybrid approach would enhance flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to benefit from both face-to-face interaction and the convenience of online learning. This way, in case of any lockdown or crisis, issues like uncertainty about school reopening, and student dropouts due to their access to reach the institution will be automatically resolved.
- 2- The government should implement financial assistance programs for students, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, similar to the "Ehsaas Program," to provide support during or after future crises, such as pandemics. These programs would offer monetary aid to students facing financial difficulties due to disruptions in family income, helping them continue their education without interruption.
- 3- At the school's level, the government should start teacher accountability based on performance, with a reward scheme for those excelling in improving students' reading and writing skills. Additionally, automatic promotion up to Grade 8 without proper evaluation should be discontinued.
- 4- The diversity in private sector schools up to the secondary level should be reduced by introducing uniformity, similar to public schools. At the foundational level, education should focus on activity-based learning instead of cramming or rote learning (Ratta), promoting the development of a skilled workforce for the future.
- 5- Political influence in school education must be entirely prohibited to ensure fair and unbiased decision-making within the education system. This can only be achieved through political stability and a strict observance to merit-based practices in hiring, promotions, and resource allocation. A merit-driven approach would promote transparency, accountability, and equal opportunities, ultimately improving the overall performance and credibility of the education system.
- 6- Teachers should be promptly dispensed to schools where there is a shortage; ensuring recommended class sizes are maintained. Additionally, teachers should focus solely on their teaching duties and not be given external tasks that divert from their primary role in education.
- 7- To minimize the impact of long vacations or closures due to domestic or national protests, schools should adopt shorter, more frequent study sessions throughout the year. This approach will ensure that students continue learning consistently, reducing the loss of academic progress during extended breaks. By

spreading out the academic workload over shorter periods, any disruptions to the school calendar can be better managed, keeping students engaged and maintaining the flow of education.

- 8- Teachers should be trained in modern pedagogies that emphasize student-centered learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This approach better prepares students for the demands of a rapidly changing world.
- 9- The government should initiate to integrate social media platforms and technologize education in school's system which will ensure that in the event of future disruptions such as epidemic, pandemic or political instability educational continuity can be maintained without compromising learning. By utilizing digital tools and online resources, schools can be easily transmitted to remote or hybrid learning models, minimizing the impact of institutional closures on students' education.

References

- Andrade, H. L., & Brookhart, S. M. (2020). Classroom assessment as the co-regulation of learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 27(4), 350-372. doi: 10.1080/0969594X.2019.1571992
- Areesha, R., Areeba, R., & Rashid, M. (2022). Post-Traumatic Effects of COVID-19 and its Trans Generational Epigenetics. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 7(7), 1577-1583. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7016275>
- Begum, D., Poly, I., & Jung, D. (2012). Education and Development: The Backbone of a Nation. *Apollon EJ*, 3, 11-20.
- Chohan, B. I., & Qadir, S. A. (2011). Automatic Promotion Policy at Primary Level and MDG-2. *Journal of Research & Reflections in Education (JRRE)*, 5(1), 1-20.
- Dadvand, B., & Lampert, J. (2024). Addressing teacher shortages in hard-to-staff schools (Vol. 52, pp. 271-275): Taylor & Francis. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2024.2348261>
- Das, R. (2021). Challenges Of Virtual Mode Of Education Faced By The Higher Secondary Students During Covid 19 Lockdown. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(1), 5942-5946. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17762/PAE.V58I1.2007>
- Devi, L. L. (2017). Political instability and its influence on higher education: A study of students' perceptions in Manipur University. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, 3(5), 300-307.
- Donnelly, R., & Patrinos, H. A. (2022). Learning loss during Covid-19: An early systematic review. *Prospects (Paris)*, 51(4), 601-609. doi: 10.1007/s1125-021-09582-6
- Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime. *McKinsey & Company*, 1, 1-9.
- Farooq, M. S., & Kai, Y. T. (2017). A Review of Pakistan School System. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(4), 97-101.
- Francis, D. V., & Weller, C. E. (2022). Economic inequality, the digital divide, and remote learning during COVID-19. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 49(1), 41-60. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/02F00346446211017797>
- Garrison, D. R. (1985). Three generations of technological innovations in distance education. *Distance education*, 6(2), 235-241. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158791850060208>
- Ghazi, S. R., Ali, R., Khan, M. S., Hussain, S., & Fatima, Z. T. (2010). Causes of the decline of education in Pakistan and its remedies. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 7(8), 9-18. doi: <https://doi.org/10.19030/tlc.v7i8.139>
- Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2010). Writing to read: evidence for how writing can improve reading: a report from Carnegie Corporation of New York (pp. 1 - 63). New York, USA: Alliance for Excellent Education.
- Hussain, A., & Afzal, S. (2023). Lack of infrastructure and educational facilities in public schools and its effects on quality education of students. *Journal of Excellence in Social Sciences*, 2(1), 37-50.
- Kriplani, M. (2023). Teacher's Attitudes Towards E-Learning in Higher Secondary. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology*, 3(2), 346-350. doi: 10.48175/IJARSCT-13861

- Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020). Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement. *Educational Researcher*, 49(8), 549-565. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20965918>
- Lopez-Leon, S., Wegman-Ostrosky, T., Perelman, C., Sepulveda, R., Rebolledo, P. A., Cuapio, A., & Villapol, S. (2021). More than 50 long-term effects of COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Scientific reports*, 11(1), 1-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.01.27.21250617>
- Mahawattha, N., & Rassool, R. (2023). "A smooth transition or a giant leap?" The challenges posed by the transition from secondary education to higher education in relation to EMI in Sri Lanka. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 13(2), 293-315. doi: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.t.38276>
- Nicola, M., Alsafi, Z., Sohrabi, C., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C., . . . Agha, R. (2020). The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review. *International Journal of Surgery*, 78, 185-193. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijssu.2020.04.018>
- Nuwaha, W., Atukunda, G., & Kyayemagye, F. (2023). The Relationship between Workload and Teachers Effectiveness in Secondary Schools: A Case of Uganda. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 6(1), 1-10. doi: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.6.1.1035>
- Ojiambo, P. O. (2009). Quality of education and its role in national development: A case study of Kenya's educational reforms. *Kenya Studies Review*, 1(1), 133-149.
- Perveen, U., & Saeed, M. (2014). A comparative study of examination practices in annual and semester system in public sector universities of the Punjab Pakistan. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 3(1), 243-254. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v3-i1/814>
- Rashid, K., & Mukhtar, S. (2012). Education in Pakistan: Problems and their solutions. *International journal of academic research in business and social sciences*, 2(11), 332.
- Sergey, K., & Elena, L. (2021). Supporting Elementary and Secondary Education During the Pandemic: A Case Study from the National Research University Higher School of Economics *Knowledge Studies in Higher Education* (pp. 243-260).
- Solomon-Calvin, S. (2021). Covid-19 pandemic: An era of opportunities and challenges in higher education. *Journal of Education Technology in Health Sciences*, 7(3), 78-79. doi: <https://doi.org/10.18231/j.jeths.2020.019>
- Srivastava, P. (2013). Low-fee private schooling: Issues and evidence. *Low-fee private schooling: Aggravating equity or mitigating disadvantage*, 1, 7-36.
- Sudrajat, I. (2021). Overcrowded Classrooms In The Analysis Of Teacher-Students Interaction. *JELA (Journal of English Language Teaching, Literature and Applied Linguistics)*, 3(2), 74-88. doi: <https://doi.org/10.37742/jela.v3i2.60>
- Tess, P. A. (2013). The role of social media in higher education classes (real and virtual) – A literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(5), A60-A68. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.032>
- Viner, R. M., Russell, S. J., Croker, H., Packer, J., Ward, J., Stansfield, C., . . . Booy, R. (2020). School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: a rapid systematic review. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(5), 397-404. doi: 10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30095-X

Acknowledgement: Authors acknowledge all intellectuals for their precious time to provide valuable responses.

Disclosure statement: None

Disclaimer: The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this research are merely those of the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of any affiliated institutions. This research is intended for informational purposes only and should not be interpreted as professional advice. Any reliance on the information provided is at the reader's own discretion.

Muhammad Rashid Senior Subject Specialist/Lecturer holds an MPhil from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and a Master's in Education from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Currently serving as a Senior Subject Specialist in the Education Department of the Government of Punjab, he is actively involved in research focused on education related concerns. He also focuses on addressing learning gaps between teachers and students, as well as the disparities between government and private sector educational institutions. ORCID: 0009-0002-1257-7686

Umar Gul is ES Educator, holds a Master's in Education from Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, and an MPhil from National Textile University, Faisalabad. He is currently teaching in the Education Department of the Government of Punjab, Pakistan, based in Faisalabad.

Nosheen Qamer is a teacher, holds a Master's degree in Education and an MPhil from GC University, Faisalabad. She is currently serving in the Education Department and imparts at Government Islamia Higher Secondary School Gatti, Faisalabad. Her research interests lie in the intersection of education and biological sciences, and her work in this area is highly beneficial for advancing knowledge within the education sector.
