

The Impact of Covid-19: on Administration of Universities in Twin-Cities of Pakistan in Terms of E-Learning

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Abstract

The study is about the impact of Covid-19 on administration of universities in twin-cities of Pakistan in terms of e-learning. It is a novel topic that required qualitative research through in-depth interviews from the experts of the matter at hand. The highlights and the themes portray the gamut of the problem and the heterogeneity of the issues surrounding the exercise of e-learning in the twin cities of Pakistan. The results of this study provide theoretical foundation for future mature studies and portray the empirical implications for university management in terms of the major challenges and their nature and corresponding solutions.

Keywords: Covid-19, Universities, Pakistan, E-Learning, Administration

Introduction

In spring 2020, lockdown was imposed by the government forcing almost all education institutions to shift to remote education programs to keep the country's children learning as more than one billion were at risk of falling behind. Universities started to explore alternative ways of providing education using teleconferencing technologies with the help of internet. In Pakistan, the national command and operation Centre (NCOC) was formed in April 2020 as principal body governing the policies and implementation of the national covid-19 SOPs in an effort to deal with the pandemic. Its main function was to collate, analyze and process information received from all provinces and form policies in accordance with the SOPs.

This E-learning system was established by the help of teleconferencing software programs out of which the most prominent one, designed especially for educational purposes was the Microsoft teams. Students would connect via the internet to use MS Teams to continue their education over the period of lockdown, lasting for more than a year. During this time, the university management had to face a series of challenges ranging from *monitoring, facilitating and coaching, feedback, exam conduction and evaluation and technological complications*. All these challenges are discussed in depth and solutions are discussed that would help overcome these complications, may these challenges prevail in the near-future.

Gap Analysis

In a covid-free world, if e-learning system was introduced worldwide, state of the art technology would allow for tackling administrative challenges faced by education sector which comprise of problems that are less of a challenge for the developed countries because of their resources and development. In the educational sector such countries can introduce and managing the online education system with its challenges, with or without the added threat of covid-19. Yet many of the world's children particularly in the poor households did not have access to internet, computers, amplifying the effects of existing learning inequalities. The crises crystallize the dilemma policymakers were facing between closing schools with the intent of reducing contact and saving lives. Or to keep them open to work and to maintain economy. The interruptions were not a short-term issue but also had long-term repercussions for the cohorts (Greenhow, et al., 2021). During the first-wave of covid-19 in Pakistan, lockdown was imposed, with no other alternative available, the educational institutes resorted to online education for all students. This online system was established by the help of teleconferencing software programs out of which the most prominent one, designed especially for educational purposes was the Microsoft teams. Students would connect via the internet to use MS Teams in order to continue their education over the period of lockdown, lasting for more than a year. During this time, the management of universities across the country had to face a series of challenges ranging from *facilitating and coaching, feedback, exam conduction and evaluation and technological complications*. The aftermath of the lack of appropriate measures taken by the management resulted in an overall somewhat flawed system of results evaluation and degradation of the standards of quality education which defeat the goals and objectives of the university. The major gaps observed have been the internet

availability, authority for teachers regarding grading and teaching methodology, biasness towards students, and unfamiliarity for freshly enrolled students

Problem Statement

A discourse on university administration with respect to covid-19 and E-learning to evaluate the performance in terms of *facilitating and coaching, feedback, exam conduction and evaluation, and technological complications.*

The criteria for evaluation involve the relation of covid-19 with the said challenges. The methodology employed is observational and qualitative approach is used, along with probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The primary methods of data collection are semi-structured interviews, observations. The aim of this research is to understand the impact of covid-19 on quality of education to give solutions to raise and maintain the standard of quality education.

Research Question

How has covid-19 affected the administration and e-learning of higher-education institutions in Twin cities of Pakistan during lockdown?

Literature Review

At the end of February, the World Bank established a collaboration between organizations in different areas of policy (health, social, education and environment) to support countries all over the world. Initially only China and small number of other affected countries were taking measures of social distancing through closure of schools. Over the time with the vast spread of virus, 120 countries had closed schools to avoid and stop the spread of the outbreak, impacting a billion students across the world. Pakistan had to move towards the alternative modes of learning during the entry of Covid in the country (Ejaz et al., 2021). The World Bank supported Pakistan through monetary assistance of \$400 million for food security as Covid and locusts together created an accelerated alarming situation (World Bank, 2020). Moreover, the ASPIRE) program was steered towards the disruption of universities through initiating opportunities of remote learning and virtual learning. By providing protocols on how to open universities safely with the positive use of technology with proper learning and training for teachers and administrators. Increased connectivity would help bridge the gap to provide education services for Pakistan's youth especially for the remote and disadvantaged area of the country. While looking down the history of

pandemics it is realized that the preparedness of these outbreaks is crucial. Assuming the COVID 19 spread happening in waves, the process of this trend would be cyclical. Pakistan should start preparing with the response plan to help cope with the crisis that will hit and take measures to reduce the negative impact. Educational administrators and policy makers should use this crisis as an opportunity to introduce new learning modes that can reach everyone to prepare for emergencies and to make the system more resilient. Over the last year, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on our daily lives. Strict limitations have been imposed across the world to control the spread of this disease. This reality has impacted many aspects of human existence, including educational roles and practices, which are being called upon to be restructured (Ellahi, Malik, Sulehri, Kiani, & Awais, 2021). The educational leadership has had to be reshaped internationally in the recent year because of the coronavirus disease pandemic of 2019. The purpose of this research is to look into the challenges that have occurred as a result of the preceding situation, as well as to try to find out how educational administrators may implement basic educational management concepts in a crisis. Over the last year, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant impact on our daily lives. Strict limitations have been imposed across the world to control the spread of this disease. This reality has impacted many aspects of human existence, including educational roles and practices, which are being called upon to be restructured.

Furthermore, there appears to be a social divide within the university. On the one hand, pupils struggled to concentrate during the online class, while on the other hand, the teacher association and the Rector do not communicate effectively. There is little interaction between teachers and Rector since the teachers simply follow the rector's directives without discussion. The principle has devolved into a bureaucrat, followed in instructions, circulars, and health procedures. He or she acts as a university administrator and a representative of the Ministry of Education, not as a leader with a shared vision with the teacher association. Despite the important findings of this study, there are several limitations. To improve the triangulation of study results, future research should use a mixed research technique design that includes both qualitative and quantitative data. Moreover, the sample size could be increased by enlisting the participation of students and teachers from all semesters. The study's findings will be more objective and representative, allowing them to be generalized further. More research on the role of the university administrator in resolving the educational crisis is needed. The federal

government retains crucial tasks, such as ensuring cohesiveness and delivering compulsory education, which is mostly a provincial obligation. Most importantly in KPK and Baluchistan which are the backward provinces of Pakistan. The Federal government of Pakistan should ensure the ways in which the provinces are interlinked to provide homogenous security and education throughout the country. It should be a combined effort to execute the plan of action. The development of online learning has been one of the key effects of university closures during the Covid-19 pandemic. The benefits and problems of the quick transition from face-to-face to remote education because of the internet have been studied in this field. One of the issues raised by teachers was the lack of a school-wide strategy for transitioning from face-to-face to online education, or the fact that the practices were outdated. Although teachers generally rate the experience as positive in terms of student participation, they do have some reservations. Several obstacles have been identified. Teachers, for example, believe that a considerable number of students, require technical assistance with online learning technology, and struggle to comprehend written material or having parents who are unable to assist them. Teachers took into account this as well. Online learning is a unique methodology, and not all teachers are proficient at it, or were prepared for the abrupt transition from face-to-face to online learning.

As a result, in the absence of a dedicated online platform specifically designed for the purpose, most teachers are simply conducting lectures on video platforms such as Zoom, which may not be true online learning. Finally, teachers believe that online instruction has increased the number of pupils who suffer from social isolation, as well as a loss in motivation and discipline. Academics are concerned that the shift to online teaching and learning would lower their educational institutions' attractiveness and impact their ability to recruit students in the coming academic years. Students from minority groups, girls, and low-income students were more affected by the pandemic's health and economic impacts, and their academic activities were delayed more. Similarly, those in precarious positions were more sensitive to the crisis's effects. Finally, the most recent study in this category examines not only academics' experiences during the early weeks of the pandemic in the United States, but also how post-secondary educational institution administrators dealt with the challenges posed by the unforeseeable circumstances (Johnson, 2020). In the case of administrators, the survey's findings suggest that most of them believe they require additional assistance in areas such as how to manage remote students, access to online materials, and knowledge on best practices for supporting faculty members who work from

home (Johnson, 2020). The universities had to go through painful transition during the shutdown and shifted towards online and blended learning. Extensive training programs were exercised through the guidance of HEC and relevant ministries (Dhawan, 2020). There are mix opinion about the disruptive period of shifting from blended learning to online platforms as some believed that the infrastructure as a whole and cultural foundations do not support it. Apart from it, the international e-giants provided online courses for free to masses (Microsoft, 2021).

Impact Of Covid-19

The pandemic situations have been dealt through the support of international community and national establishment. The following SWOT represents the case of pandemic (Atlam et al., 2022).

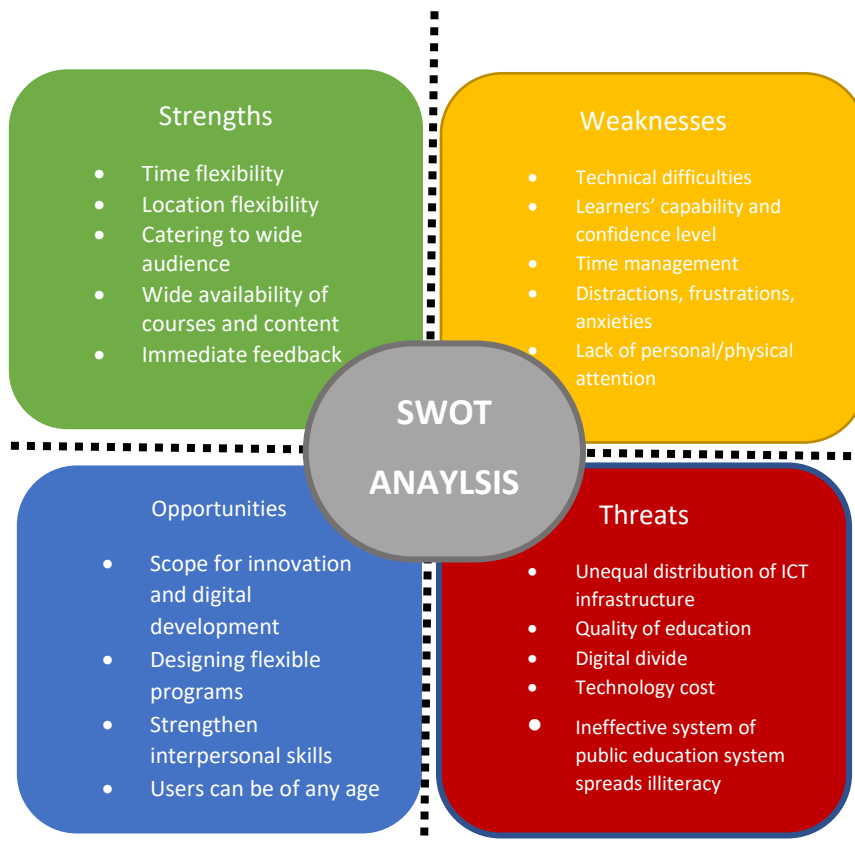


Figure 1: SWOT ANALYSIS (Atlam et al.,m 2022)

Methodology

To this research Qualitative data is required which in this case is a mix of primary and secondary data that is descriptive of uncontrolled variables, and random sampling is employed to gather data through semi structured interviews, observations. The relevant

and useful data is curated and organized to conduct a thematic analysis. This ultimately aids in better understanding of the variables in question.

Data Collection

Random sampling, sample size 100–200-time duration 14-20 days (2-3 weeks) write dates and months accessibility of sample? University students and teachers. The tool used was semi structured interviews.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used on qualitative data that was in the form of semi structured interviews. For this purpose, TAGUETTE codebook is used.

TAGUETTE Codebook

Dimensional Highlights

Themes

Staff: 12

HIGHLIGHTS

New staff had to be hired to fill in for sick employees, the existing staff had to work excessively. Faculty had difficulty in controlling and monitoring students during exam conduction.

Challenges : 20

HIGHLIGHTS

The biggest change was the uncertainty, accompanied by the shift to online learning. Shortage of skills, shortage of staff, technological unfamiliarity. Difficulty in controlling students in online system. And monitoring.

Administration: 30

HIGHLIGHTS

Decision making and strategies.

Changes:12

HIGHLIGHTS

New resources acquired, extra measures were taken, sops were observed, strategies were implemented, teaching methodologies were modified.

Resources: 8 HIGHLIGHTS Internet accessibility was less, there were connectivity and availability issues.

Teaching Methodology: 8 HIGHLIGHTS Strategies were modified. More weightages given to class participation and engagement of students; leniency was shown to students who suffered from covid. there were coaching provided to teachers

Quality Education: 6 HIGHLIGHTS It was greatly compromised for some students while others were unaffected. Unfair means and plagiarism increased in online system.

Results/ Findings

There was a significant compromise in quality education when shifting from on-campus to online classes as backed up by data. There was increased workload on the teachers, and they had to modify their methodologies in order to cater to students needs of learning. Also, administration was challenged in providing internet resources sufficiently. Monitoring and controlling was also problematic and using conventional methods of monitoring did not prove beneficial. Coaching for teachers was available but it was time taking. Administration did not take the correct measures to modify the grading system which resulted in unfair grade distribution. Sops were not strictly observed risking exposure to the population. students also failed to develop interpersonal skills during the e-learning era. Nonetheless, there was innovation in advancement in technology and teleconferencing software's, also administration is now capable of executing future strategies by reviewing their shortcomings and learning to adapt.

Discussion

Our results show that covid has adversely affected the online learning system in terms of administration and has presented a lot of new challenges for the administration of universities. This study would contribute to the body of knowledge by adding more information related to the variables under study. Through semi structured interviews,

random sampling and descriptive analysis it became apparent that access and connectivity were the main challenges nationally. These difficulties are beyond the educational system's ability to fix on its own. However, the educational system must prioritize using available data for future planning, preparing teachers to prepare for a changing educational landscape, and building an enabling environment at all levels of the system, particularly at the school and community levels. There is also a political acknowledgement of the need to address country-wide inequalities, which COVID-19 has brought to the fore. To carry out this objective, a statewide mapping operation to track the spread of school connectivity will be required. A change in policy priorities is required. Some sections of the country lack internet connectivity, and there are also security concerns to be addressed. Our research is based on descriptive analysis and hence cannot be verified. The research that will be conducted in this field will not give reliable results as this is the limitation of our research. Also, our research could not establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the variables under study. Another aspect to consider is that the response of interviewees may not be truthful and could be biased. The sample size may not be adequate to produce generalizable results or present an accurate description of the population of interest.

Conclusion

The teachers are accustomed to the traditional face-to-face method, they are hesitant to accept the change in teaching. However, the pandemic crisis has left no other option for the teaching profession than to embrace the change of online distance teaching and learning. It will be beneficial to the education sector in the long run because it may bring about some amazing innovations. At the same time, many students have limited or no access to the online learning system because they live in areas with poor connectivity. It is possible to further widen the gap between society's various strata. Because of the pandemic's sudden emergence, the world was not prepared to deal with it. In Pakistan, it took one to two months to assess the severity of the situation. Although educational institutions were the first to close, transitioning to online became a difficult problem due to a lack of planning. This taught Pakistan's education sector a valuable lesson: there must always be a plan B in place to deal with any unforeseen disasters. Pakistan's education sector was being forced to adapt to online distance learning via Zoom, Google Class, or Microsoft Teams. (Mishra, 2020; Nasir & Hameed, 2021).

Proposal/Recommendation

Improved, tried and tested **coaching techniques** that are efficacious in achieving the objectives of coaching. This includes coaching of faculty regarding use of technology and software, the methods of delivery of instructions and the feedback to check the outcome of the measures, as this crucial step directly impacts the quality of education imparted to the student body. Availability of **pertinent resources**, such as strong and stable internet connection for the faculty, technological aid for unfortunate students to ensure equal education, software that are easy to use or come with user-friendly instructions and study material that is challenging and up-to-date and not based on cramming system.

Monitoring was another challenge for the management, the faculty lacked programs for real time check and balance. During exam conduction, all of the students could not be adequately monitored and there was room for using unfair means. Students who used unfair means. For these improved techniques should be devised and more research should be conducted. Educational administrators can use this crisis as an opportunity so they can introduce new learning modes that can reach everyone, to prepare for emergency and make the system more resilient. They should be **prepared** for similar circumstances in the future. Observations show that there was a delay in course schedule of universities that prolonged the average semester duration which is a reason for **loss of time**. Small scale universities lacked a **crises team** to respond in real-time to handle to situation that prevailed during lockdown. The existence of a core crises team severely aids in mitigating the risks to quality education and devising strategies that are implemented effectively.

Evaluation and marking system during the online system promoted an unfair competition, the methods of exam conduction and evaluation were not sufficient in accurate evaluation and testing of the knowledge imparted to the student body.

Students worldwide suffered from an **educational shock** and in countries with lesser resources the shock is greater comparatively, which further lowers the standards of quality education. The developed Countries have the alternative to use their resources to mitigate the educational shock which ultimately influences the learning experience for students. Ever since the pandemic, lockdown was imposed and lifted at different intervals depending on the statistics of covid spread, however when businesses resumed and universities reopened for physical classes with strict SOP policies, the implementation of the policies was ineffective despite training the faculty to enforce SOPS, this gave rise to new cases and put the lives of many at risk. Observations also show the absence of **substitute**

teachers in replacement of covid afflicted teachers' majority of whom continued their jobs whilst quarantine and sickness. Universities also failed at times to fill in for their employees on medical leaves.

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Appendix

Exhibit A. FURC INTERVIEW



FOUNDATION UNIVERSITY RAWALPINDI

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Q. In term of facilities, what could be improved and provided to faculty?

- Strong INTERNET Connection
- Better Teleconferencing Applications,

Often teachers used their own internet resources to make sure classes continued uninterrupted.

Q. In case of a hybrid system, and on-campus class conduction, were sops followed and enforced?

Yes, the cabins were distanced appropriately, and teachers only attended university on alternate days which significantly reduced their chances of exposure due to a smaller number of people at the campus. But still work from home should be allowed, as it was inconvenient. But for better monitoring.

Q. Were their challenges in controlling the students during online classes?

Based on the response, teachers can be categorized into two segments, those who were lenient in their teaching methodology and techniques while the others were quite strict in their strategies and grading. Some techniques that were used to gain better control by teachers were: Strict and devoted teachers increased marks weightage for class participation and attendance. Teachers also modified their content and increased presentations. Non serious and inconsistent students were strictly monitored by faculty. Moreover, the lenient ones only ensured conduction of classes and fulfilled the criteria set by university administration. And did not make any extra efforts to motivate their students. Also, such students were easily identified and were marked accordingly.

Q. Did administration provide internet facility to students in far-fetched areas or those who do not have access to internet?

Yes, they introduced internet packages designed for such students and took the initiative to set up labs for attending online classes.

Q. Has the overall quality of education decreased?

The overall quality of education was adversely affected but it all comes down to the Course content and ability to control the student body and environment and how teachers are able to control the students to conform and execute the strategies. At the end of the day, teachers have the ultimate authority and it depends on their efforts and devotion.

Q. Was quality compromised in the conduction of exams? What measures were taken to evaluate student performance?

Yes, it was greatly compromised but it was unjust towards the high scorers. Not only the students but the teachers are also fully aware of the unfair means students use to pass their quizzes, assignments, and final exams, in such circumstances it becomes difficult to stop such behaviors.

Despite the its department closely monitoring Ip addresses and imposing harsh penalties, students still used unfair means to score higher grades. Webcams were turned on and students were asked to show their surroundings.

Q. Were the faculty prepared well for the lockdown in advance?

No, all measures were taken quickly and were rushed to say the least, this posed a lot of challenges for management in acquiring the facility. They should be prepared for it as a part of the contingency planning.

Q. Were there any coaching for teachers to understand the technology associated with online learning?

Yes, there was in-department training from the head office, and it was an online meeting and all features were described and discussed and orientation was conducted.

Conclusion

Lesser weightage of final exam and more weightage of presentations to make sure students are absorbing the body of knowledge so for that the grading criteria should be reversed. Teachers also believe that more authority in grade distribution would prove beneficial.

**EXHIBIT B.
INTERVIEW**

RAWALPINDI MEDICAL COLLEGE

Q. how did covid19 affected the universities management.

Covid19 has affected the education sector the most. We faced several problems in introducing the online system to students and teachers. Training of staff for conducting online classes and exams was a struggle for the administration due to the up gradation of websites, and portals. Consumption of resources to manage classes according to the Sops. During this time several teachers and staff were unavailable which caused a lot of burden on the university administration.

Q. what strategies were undertaken?

Yes, we opted for several strategies like technical advancement. More thought processing was needed. We tried our best to ensure that the SOPs were being followed when on campus. We made sure the availability of sanitizers, disinfection of buildings, offices, classrooms. Cafeterias and libraries were closed so we could control the gathering of students there. Our administration took charge of the unvaccinated students and staff and ensured complete vaccination of all members.

Was there a need to train the current teachers or hire new staff?

Yes, teachers had to be trained for online teaching, conducting online examinations and maintaining attendance records

Q. What was the change faced by the university management?

As I have mentioned before, the biggest change we felt and faced was shifting to online learning. It's a difficult period as there was unavailability of staff and teachers, and then hiring new ones is problematic. Training of staff for conducting online classes and exams.

Exhibit C.
INTERVIEW

SKANS**Q. How did Covid19 affected this university's management?**

It affected our management in this way that we faced a shortage of skills as we had to shift entirely to an online setup so some of our staff was not familiar with the software and programs. Our admin staff had to work excessively for hours and days to act upon the change, but despite these hurdles we enhanced our administration and management and brought about new and up to date technological advancements.

Q. Was there a need to train current teachers or hire new staff?

Yes, we arranged workshops for our faculty to train them for the online teaching and making them aware of the problems that may occur during their classes online. New server operators were hired to handle the extensive tech load and to manage the network and internet connections without causing hindrances in the online lectures going on.

