COVID-19 and Online Teaching Strategies: The Impact of Online Teaching-Learning on Students of Poor Socio-economic Backgrounds in Malakand Division Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract: The COVID-19 first appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019, and within no time it spread across nations. At regional levels, Pakistan has been the second most affected country in South Asia, after India. The pandemic of COVID-19 created numerous problems including distortion in the already fragile education system of Pakistan. In Pakistan, traditional methods (class based) teaching and learning has been prevalent, while the sudden outbreak of COVID pandemic has altered the educational atmosphere and a transition has been made from conventional teaching to technology aided online learning. This paper intends to know about the issued faced by students of poor socioeconomic backgrounds in online teaching-learning process. The study included undergraduate and graduate students for collecting primary information. The data was collected from a sample of 32 students representing five different departments of the faculty of Social Sciences University of Malakand at Chakdara District Dir Lower, while using convenient sampling techniques. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interview guide in face to face setting with the respondents. For maintaining heterogeneity and richness in data both male and female students were selected for the study. The study found that students, particularly those belonging from poor family backgrounds faced issues i.e. no internet connection, signals problems, electricity fluctuation, time management, lack of interest, difficulty in understanding, and lack of technical knowledge about the use of online teaching-learning networks. The study also highlights that students of rich family backgrounds were able to manage these facilities and they continued their online education activities. The study recommends that proper infrastructure, prior training/orientation of students, availability of internet, provision of necessary facilities (devices etc), are required for online teaching to make it more result oriented.

Keywords: COVID-19, Poor family Background, Online teaching-learning, Pakistan, conventional teaching-learning

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Introduction

The novel Corona Virus first appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019, and within no times it spread across nations. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic (WHO, 2020). At regional levels, Pakistan has been the second most affected country in South Asia, after India (WHO, 2020b). The pandemic (COVID-19) has thrown the world into a major socio-economic challenge, with potentially strong adverse impacts on the lives of millions of people around the globe. In developing countries like Pakistan with existing low indicators of socio-economic development, a pandemic (coronavirus) has further compounded the situation (Heymann & Shindo, 2020). The precautionary measures in form physical distancing and self-quarantine or isolation has produced a vital reason for complete or partial lockdown, and majority of countries including Pakistan imposed lockdown for containing the rapid spread of the disease. Although, the lockdown was recognized as a appropriate strategy, however; this was resulted upheavals in entire society in general and impacted educational system in particular.

Throughout human history learning has been a basic and vital need of human beings. It has been one of the important elements of growth for individual as well as whole society. In past, learning took place in traditional manner wherein face to face interaction was necessary for teaching-learning process. With the advent of industrial revolution, technological advancement and globalization a shift has been occurred in this process and facilitated online learning process (Parsad & Lewis, 2008), however; it was not widely practiced across nations. The pandemic of COVID19 has altered the teaching–learning strategies and as a result of the closure of educational institution, online teachings were launched in both global North and South. Online learning has become the most popular trend in educational setting within no time and hundreds of universities adopted online learning to ensure continuity in students education and enable them the take their classes from home using computer technology (Bao, 2020). As the education system in Pakistan was mostly based on conventional teaching-learning method and a sudden transaction from traditional approach to online strategies created problems both for teachers and students(Farooq, Rathore, & Mansoor, 2020). This shift has created a puzzling situation and the lack of required facilities/infrastructure further aggravated the situation (Rieley, 2020). It has left both teachers and students with no other choice except arranging and using computer technology. As the access to and use of these electronic gadgets and internet devices require certain technical skills on the part of students and teachers and in absence of these skills undermine the purpose of online education (Deming, Goldin, Katz, & Yuchtman, 2015). Also, one's cultural capital in Bourdieu terms influences their access to and use of these devices, which are not equally available to all in our society. In this context, the students belonging to rich families quickly adopted this transaction, while students of poor family backgrounds fund it hard to manage these facilities required for online education.

COVID-19 and the system of Online Teaching-Learning in Pakistan

As the COVID-19 has captivated the entire globe and has made it compulsory for educational institutions to make a shift in their education delivery strategies. Pakistan also corresponds to this situation and initiated technology driven online education. This has changes the overall educational and teaching-learning approach and created problems in relation to time management, managing the facilities and acquiring the necessary technical skills (Carey, 2020). It also raises questions related to quality of education and involvement of students amid uncertain situation. In developing countries like

Pakistan where huge gap exists in access to and utilization of technology between the rich and poor students, the online education would not produce the desired results (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Besides, majority of students are not able to afford internet services while those afford it faced constant fluctuation of electricity and signals breakdown. In particular, the students of remote areas faced significant issues during online classes and their lack of financial resources further increased their marginalization (Zhang, Wang, Yang, & Wang, 2020).

The Learning Management System (LMS) has been developed and implemented to continue educational activities during COVID pandemic. No doubt the use of LMS facilitate a large number of students in accessing their course contents, submission of their assignments, and remain informed about their educational activities irrespective of location and time which could have a positive impact on students performance and achievements. It is to mention here that the use of LMS served in improving the communication between teacher and students and solved their problems (Fidani & Idrizi, 2012). However; this system has not been a panacea for all students and majority of students faced problems in using this system; and thus widened the gap in educational attainment between rich and poor students as it is argued in this research. In some instances it created adverse conditions both for students and teachers for teachers and students as it requires uninterrupted electricity and internet connectivity (Majadlawi, Almarabeh, & Mohammad, 2014). In wake of the COVID pandemic majority of universities and other higher education institutions lunched Learning Management System (LMS) for facilitating students' studies, however; this system did not produced the desired results due to inadequate available infrastructure/facilities.

The Zoom meeting is widely used software for online video conferencing/teaching-learning practices. This system allows people/individuals from different (distant) localities to share or record their video, research work, lecture and so on with distant audience. This software offers wide range of services in online teaching-learning. Due to the outbreak of COVID pandemic, the Zoom Meeting software was significantly used in educationalinstitutions (Muls, Thomas, De Backer, Zhu, & Lombaerts, 2020). To minimize the educational loss of students due to school closure, the Government of Pakistan has also launched an educational application "Taleem Ghar" for facilitating the students of public (government) schools. Through this application different recorded lectures relate to diverse fields were delivered for different classes. In settled areas this application has somehow facilitated the students, while in rural areas students remain ignorant of such initiatives.

Research Questions

- What are the different economic issues that influence students' online learning during COVID-19?
- How social and cultural factors influence students' online learning?
- How Internet and time management problems affected online teaching-learning process during COVID-19?
- What is the level of satisfaction of students from online teaching-learning during COVID-19?

Research Objectives

- To find out the relationship between students' economic background and their online learning
- To identify the issues faced by students in online teaching-teaching process during COVID
- To know the impact of online teaching-learning on students studies/achievements

Theoretical Framework used in the study

There has been significant imbalance in access to and utilization of ICT services among students of different socio-economic backgrounds. The economically privileged students have better access to ICT, while the poor students are deprived of such facilities because of their economic status. For this study a theoretical framework is offered, in which many theories has been amalgamated together to create study argument and analyze the issue under broader umbrella. It is argued that how the economic background influenced their online learning and how inequalities across society are reproduced through education itself by producing and distributing different cultural capital.The argument for this study has been derived from Karl Marx concept of economic determinism (1848), Bourdieu concept of cultural capital as well as habitus (1984), Antonio Gramsci concept of cultural hegemony (Prison Nootebook, 1937), Passeron concept of reproduction in education and cultural capital (1977), Michael Foucalt theory: The Archaeology of Knowledge, 1966) and Genealogy of Power (1969). Further, the study is also informed by Fredric Jameson "The cultural logic of late capitalism" (1991), Manuel Castells theory of "The information age: Economy, Society and Culture (1996) & Manuel Castells, of informatized capitalism, and of the network society (Castells, 2001), Ulrich Beck "Globalism and Globality (2000), Antonio Giddens theory of the modernity (1990) and Zygmunt Bauman theory of the Human consequences of Modernity (1998). In this study we argue that access to online learning in current scenario is source of knowledge generation and it is used as a means of capital accumulation in practical life. The stratification in access to information technology and its use thus generate and reinforce the concepts such as digital capitalism and high-tech capitalism. Thus information and technology are predominant way of objectification of the institution of education.The information technology its relevant gadgets or devices thus work as symbolic machines for polarization in society and redouble the existing disparities in education. Further, access to ICT (online learning) creates online network structures among the economically rich students and plays a dominant role in different learning achievements between the rich and poor students. In education acquisition one's social class background occupies an important role. The COVID pandemic has transformed the education system and has intensified the global digital divide.

Study Methods and procedures

The study will employ qualitative research design. Primary data was obtained from undergraduate students of University of Malakand. The respondents were selected from 05 different departments of the faculty of social sciences including Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Journalism and Mass Communication & Social Work. These departments were selected because access to these departments was convenient for the researcher and respondents were easily available. Further, we collected primary data from a sample of thirty 32 students through interview using semi-structured interview guide, while the selection of sample will be made through convenient sampling techniques.Each interview took 25-30 minutes, while the data collection process was completed within a month i.e. November 20, to December 20, 2021. In order to obtain rich data and maintain heterogeneity both male and female students were selected. Collection of data from both genders was possible because researcher is working as faculty member in the faculty of social sciences. The data was analyzed qualitatively while adopting the process of transcription, familiarization, developing codes, and identifying meaningful contents or themes. Although, the study was not sensitive in nature, however; prior consent was obtained from respondents and their interviews were deleted from the computer/audio after transcription.

Results and Discussion

The study was focusing on highlighting the problems faced by students in online learning during COVID-19 lockdown. The primary question of the study was to know how socio-economic backgrounds of students impacted their online studies. The study also draws that both rich and poor students have different access to ICT and this difference have negatively influenced their educational achievements during the closure of universities, and reinforced the already existing gap in education of the rich and poor students. This comparison/ relationship between economic background and education produce the argument for this study and highlights that the online teaching-learning process due to COVID lockdown widened educational gap between rich and poor students, which will take for years to recover.

Online Teaching-Learning and the Problems of Affordability

During COVID pandemic numerous strategies have been adopted for facilitating students' educational activities in Pakistan. This new strategies of online though recognized as a complete recipe for reducing academic loss of the students, however; in majority cases students faced difficulty in obtaining benefits from online learning. It is to mention here that there exist wide gap between rich and poor students in terms of access to and use of technology based online learning. The students belonging from rich family backgrounds were able to avail these opportunities as a result of their existing cultural capital, while the poor students were deprived of such opportunities (Coleman, 1966). In this context, students' socio-economic background affects their learning because parents of rich students as a result of their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) facilitate and supervise their children and coordinate their issues with as the schools about the quality and status of their children education. Field data also show similar results and most of the respondentstold that he was unable to get connected in the online class for the first month of COVID lockdown. While reflecting upon this a respondent stated that:

> *"We have no internet facility in our home. My father hardly affords our education expenses and i have no advance android cell phone to connect myself to online class. In absence of laptop and internet facility it was difficult for me to manage attending online class during lockdown. For few days i went to my neighbour (rich family) where they have the facility of internet and computer, however they did not provided me constant support and facilitation"*

It indicates that socio-economic status of students' hasinfluenced their studies during COVID lockdown. They faced financial issues to meet the requirements of this shift in education, and most of them remain unaware of the online education. Although, there are numerous tools available for online learning and teaching, but they are not equally accessible and have caused number of problems for students. The benefit of online teaching-learning did not reach all the students equally and teachers mostly contacted/communicated those students who were affluent and possessing the devices of online interaction with students. It was found that majority of teachers shared study materials and other instruction with students from rich families, and these materials were then shared with the rest of the students. This procedure created a gap between students and teachers and they did not avail the potential benefits of the online learning. In fact, online learning was not a compensation of class based learning for the poor students and resulted in huge learning loss for students of poor family backgrounds (Ullah & Ali, 2021). Similar views were also shared by a respondent and he blatantly uttered that:

> *"The online teaching is designed for the rich students. I do not have any access to this format of learning. In my village we face constant loadsheding of electricity, where internet facilities are not available to us. The students of settled areas where internet and other facilities are available could*

obtain benefit from online teaching. If this strategy (online teaching) continued it will result in irreparable educational loss for us (the poor students)".

It reflects that the digital divide between rich and poor students has been further intensified during online teaching. It impacted the leaning of poor students in negative ways because they found it difficult to afford the requirements of online learning in terms of internet, laptop, constant electricity and even a sound and peaceful study room in their congested household.

Online Teaching-Learning and Requirement of Technical Skills/Time Management

The online learning differs from traditional classroom learning where a teacher teaches the student face-to-face setting. In such setting all the students have equal access to learning. In online distant learning the teaching process based on technology based devices which requires skills in its operation. In developing countries like Pakistan and in study area in particular the students do not possess such technical skills to engage themselves efficiently in online learning(Tenforde, Kim, Lindsell, Rose, Shapiro, and Files, 2020). The online delivery modes of teaching also require students' interest, their attitude to work and ability to learn, while its success also depends on various aspects including standard of the course materials. To know the impact of online learning on poor students different interviews with research participants shows that they lacked skills to get access to online teaching. This was based on their existing cultural capital because majority of the poor students are also poor in what Bourdieu refers to the objectified (laptop, mobile, and other technological electronic gadgets) cultural capital that were essential for online learning. In this context a student (research participant) from Sociology department reported that:

"Online learning will not minimize our study loss. At first, mobile/laptop and internet device was not available with me for engaging in online class. After constant request to my father, I arranged laptop and internet device for participating in online class. It was a difficult experience for me as I was unable to prepare my ID in zoom meeting (which was used for our online class) and get connected. While getting into video, communicating with teachers, and sharing and receiving of study materials were difficult tasks for the first fifteen days".

Usually, the online teaching was based on teachers' routine and timetable. In rural huge families it was difficult to found a silent place at home and participate in online teaching. It remained a barrier for students to get their time out of traditional home routine and engage in online class (Lange & Costley, 2020). The difference is students and teacher time and routine thus undermines this collaborative process. It was also reported in few cases that students waited for hours to teacher for online class but teacher due to certain other tasks was not able to start class in time. The responses of participants reflect that time management created hurdles in positive engagement of students and teacher in this computer generated learning process. In similar context one of the respondents stated that:

"The closure of schools changed our daily routines. We usually got up late in morning and sleep late at night. It was freedom days for us because there was no compulsion on getting early and doing homework. Our class was decided at 10:00 pm at night, while most of our family members in village go to sleep at this time. This created issues for me in terms of communicating, listening and keeping lights on the home. Time management was an issue because when we are at home, so we could not ignore participation in family activities and helping our parents in domestic works.

This shows this the closure of universities/colleges resulted in disruption of students academic activities. Although some students reported that they have tried to cope with the situation, however; they found it difficult to continue their educational activities at homes in a way it happens in academic

institutions. The findings also show that to a great extent the students of rich family backgrounds managed this situation and found online learning helpful for them during COVID lockdown.

Conclusion

The study concludes that during online learning and teaching students in general and those belonging from poor families encountered several problems. The pandemic of COVID-19 increased the learning gap between rich and poor students, because of their unequal access to and use of technology. This willimpact the long-term learning, achievements and successes of students of poor family backgrounds. In addition, students of rich family backgrounds managed to continue their studies through online learning and faced lesser problems due to university closure, and they were convinced with the online learning and their studies were not disrupted during COVID lockdown. They were also convinced on their learning and skills of the use of technology, as it had made them independent learners. On contrary, students of the poor family backgrounds found it difficult to engage in online learning and spend most of their time in leisure activities or helping their parents in domestic activities. The online learning was not beneficial for them because they were unable to arrange the appropriate facilities required for online learning. In absence of laptop/computer, internet devices, signals problem, long–hour load shedding, and absence of educational environment in village resulted in huge loss of time/studies during the COVID lockdown.

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