

Education Methods in COVID-19 Response: Assessing Gendered Impact

Pakistan is among 166 countries that implemented country-wide closure of educational institutes (UN 2020a). This closure resulted in disrupted educational activities for a billion students across the globe causing learning losses and aggravating educational disparities. UN (2020b) estimated around 23million dropouts mainly due to the economic losses during the pandemic.

In Pakistan, it affected around 46.8 million students (Yousafzai 2020). Of these, 22.9 million are primary level students and 13.4 million are enrolled in secondary schools (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2018). Its gendered implication indicates the disrupted education of around 15.97 million girls, that is, 44% of total primary and secondary level students (Ibid.).

Various technology-based distance learning initiatives such as TeleSchool (aired on national TV), radio programmes in some remote areas, and WhatsApp groups played a significant role in continuation of educational activities in Pakistan. However, the existing digital divide (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2019) is a potential risk of widening educational disparities in terms of area, gender and socioeconomic. For instance, gender disaggregated data of mobile ownership showed that only 39% women own a phone (FII 2017). Similarly, additional burden of household chores on females after the lockdown and school closure translates into the reduced chances of accessing available technology devices including TV, radio, phone, internet for education purpose (Tariq and Bibler 2020). This situation may widen the existing gender gaps in education, including learning outcomes as only 36% girls compared to 43% boys can perform basic arithmetic competencies (ASER 2019). Similarly, 49% girls compared to the 40% boys of 5-16 years are out of school in Pakistan (Tabassum et al. 2019).

Addressing above mentioned policy concerns, initiatives like the TeleSchool have potential to be promoted as blended learning for those students enrolled in schools to improve their learning levels. Additionally, they can also be extended as a possible solution to address the out-of-school children issue in Pakistan (Baloch et al. 2020; Naviwala 2020).

Keeping this in view, the panel aims to discuss the following:

- How has education for girls been interrupted because of the closure of public and low-cost private schools in Pakistan?
- Pakistan's adoption of education technology during the pandemic and its impact on girls' education
- How is education technology further increasing learning gaps between the haves and the have-nots?
- How does education technology need to be integrated with the public school system in Pakistan and how can provision of digital access to girls be tackled as a social norm issue?
- How can Pakistan make girls' schools more resilient to future emergencies?
- Required efforts to ensure inclusiveness of existing alternate learning initiatives and how to strategise their effective delivery in the long-term.

The session aims to have a gender-focused conversation by engaging people from multiple sectors, including officials from the education departments, practitioners of ed-tech, experts in digital learning and education providers.

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