

Challenges Faced by Teachers During and after Covid-19 at Primary Level in Muzaffarabad

Aroosha Shafi Chughtai

arushashafi000@gmail.com

Department of Education, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan

Dr. Adeel Ahmed Khan

Department of Education, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan

Dr. Batool Atta

Department of Education, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Aroosha Shafi Chughtai arushashafi000@gmail.com

Received: 07-01-2025

Revised: 26-01-2025

Accepted: 16-02-2025

Published: 01-03-2025

ABSTRACT

The present study explores the challenges faced by primary teachers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study explores instructional and assessment strategies adopted by teachers during COVID-19 and the post-pandemic revival of the education system. This study is based on a qualitative research design, focusing on primary public and private schools in Muzaffarabad city. The researcher interviewed 15 selected primary teachers and employed thematic analysis to identify significant themes in the data. During the lockdown in Muzaffarabad city, where people were facing issues with internet accessibility and frequency, it was discovered that teachers used various platforms to communicate with students. However, WhatsApp proved to be the most effective platform. Teachers sent recorded lectures through WhatsApp, allowing students to revisit the lectures as often as needed. As schools reopened after COVID-19, teachers noticed that their students had become disconnected from books, did not read at home, and had forgotten most of what they had previously learned. Teachers used various remedial strategies such as alternative teaching methods, activity-based education, and one-on-one support to help struggling students get back on track. The study explores the innovative approaches used to support students in their academic endeavors and focuses on the positive impact of teacher guidance. Teachers have used innovative approaches like formative assessment, project-based learning and leveraged online resources and digital tools to make learning more interactive and engaging. This research has implications for educators seeking flexible teaching methods, policymakers responsible for shaping educational policies and communities encountering similar issues related to restricted internet access. Blended learning models that integrate both online and offline methods should be adopted to ensure continuity of education during any future disruptions.

Keywords: COVID-19, Teachers, Teaching Strategies, Challenges, Post-COVID

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak shattered the Earth, and the very first cases of corona-infected patients were seen in Wuhan, Hubei province, China. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) defined the COVID pandemic as the illness caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-Cov-2) on February 11, 2020. WHO explained that the COVID-19 pandemic is a deadly virus due to its easy transmission from one person to another and increased death toll?

As COVID-19 infected cases increased, all the countries started to implement quarantine and a stay-at-home policy to lessen the effects of COVID-19. Tadesse & Muluye (2020) revealed that the severance of the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures significantly impacted healthcare organizations, political, economic and educational sectors, especially in developing countries. The impact it had on schools and colleges, both before and after the pandemic, is significant.

Schools, colleges and universities had to close their academic activities in response to COVID-19. In Pakistan, the first case of a corona-infected patient was reported on February 26, 2020, and about 292,000 cases of COVID-infected patients were reported in mid-August (Rasheed, Rizwan, Javed & Zaidi,

2021). To deal with this situation, the Government of Pakistan imposed a lockdown across the country before it worsened and ordered to shut off the educational institutes amid this situation.

The Government of Pakistan ordered to close all the educational institutes for three weeks starting from March 13, 2020. However, the National Coordination Committee (NCC) ordered the closure of institutions till July 2020 (Nasir & Hameed, 2021). Pakistan's education system was closed for nearly a year during COVID-19.

The closure of schools made it difficult for teachers to instruct students of their schools because most primary-level students did not know how to use internet and device issues were reported.

(Tarkar, 2020). During the lockdown, teachers struggled to continue to teach in schools, especially in primary classes. They needed to find alternative ways to continue to instruct their students to minimize the loss of education.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) pushed all educational institutions to start online classes nationwide and stop face-to-face classes (HEC. Retrieved March 28, 2020). Then, schools, colleges and universities started online instruction for a long time (Quraishi, Asif, Sheeraz & Amer, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought various challenges for educational institutes while shifting the entire system of educational practice from traditional to online.

Online classes were started to deliver education to students amid repeated lockdowns (Noor, Ali & Husnine, 2020). However, internet availability was a prime question as many students came from villages to get an education and 88% needed proper internet facilities (Ullah, Ashraf & Ahmed, 2021).

E-learning was initiated with challenges in developing countries like in Pakistan. According to Rehman & Khan (2021), e-learning has its shortcomings. It has created a literacy gap in low socio-economic families as they cannot afford education via the internet. Due to socio- economic setbacks, many students needed help to afford smart devices to take classes online.

The Government of Pakistan and the state of Azad, Jammu and Kashmir cancelled the end-of- year examinations because the COVID-19 pandemic was still on the rise. Students were taught through online platforms but technology was still under-developed in assessing students. Therefore, the Ministry of Education decided to cancel the examinations (Mumtaz, Saqulain & Mumtaz, 2021). Students were promoted based on previous results in response to the damage created by COVID-19 in educational institutes (Abid, Zahid, Shahid & Bukhari, 2021).

All junior classes were promoted to the next grade without examinations per Government order. The Ministry of Education decided to assign concessional 33% marks to students who had failed the subjects in previous classes (Abid et al., 2021). People were surprised by the results during the pandemic year as everyone got more marks than expected.

The irony is that some students obtained more numbers than the total numbers due to errors in the grading or data entry processes. According to Hasan (2021), already facing many problems in education institutes, COVID-19 added more misery to learning and teaching, particularly in assessing school students.

Excluding assessments became a challenge for teachers because this decision resulted in a dramatic increase in the student passing ratio compared to pre-pandemic years (Sahu, 2020). Maintaining student engagement and motivation for learning without the structure of exams was a hurdle.

Returning to everyday life was difficult for students and school staff as it brought down the practical years of primary schooling (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Hence, teachers and other staff of schools needed to look for ways to resume the teaching and learning process after the COVID-19 pandemic. All students nearly forgot the previous lessons; some even started working to fulfil their households' needs as their parents lost their jobs or lives due to the pandemic (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

Students' academic level was adequate when they left the school, and the lockdown triggered a drop in their results after returning to school post-COVID. According to Sintema (2020), the spell of COVID-19 negatively influenced the student's performance. Teachers encountered a downward trend in student results. Some students can study independently, but most heavily depend on teachers' explanations.

Students were unaware of the reopening date, so they lost interest in textbooks (Rehman & Khan, 2021). Usually, grammar, spelling, and knowledge evolve with time, but as students stayed home for nearly a year, nothing was up-to-date. Schools initiated regular classes again, but it took work this time. Teachers had to face multiple problems teaching syllabi to such students for successive grades (Sintema, 2020).

Schools had to change their methodology and teaching strategies to mend the harm created by the COVID-19 pandemic in educational institutes. The flexibility of time, place, and methodology was required to get students back on track (Daniel, 2020). Therefore, schools needed to organize themselves with special arrangements to compensate for the loss of COVID-19 in the education sector.

In Azad Kashmir, various schools implemented creative ways of educating students during and after COVID-19. Principals and teachers used multiple strategies of teaching in their schools. Other schools can use such methods to continue education in times of hurdles. This study explored the challenges primary teachers faced in public and private schools in Muzaffarabad city. This study offers insights into the firsthand experiences of elementary teachers as they faced challenges during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, shedding light on their strategies for navigating this critical situation.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities created due to the COVID-19 pandemic would be helpful. According to Batool, Malik, Safdar & Ali (2022), conducting a study that finds the challenges faced by educational institutes during a pandemic is beneficial. Such studies can inform about the expectations from scholarly research in a post-pandemic era to confront the challenges in future.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

- To explore the challenges faced by teachers while instructing and assessing students during the COVID-19 pandemic in primary public and private schools of Muzaffarabad city.
- To explore the challenges faced by teachers and students after a year of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Muzaffarabad city.

Research Questions

The following were the research questions keeping in view the research objectives:

- What instructional strategies were adopted by teachers to communicate with students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What assessment procedures did teachers use to assess students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What problems did teachers face when they returned to schools after COVID-19?
- What problems did students face when they returned to school after COVID-19?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Piaget's Constructivism

Indicators during COVID-19

1. **Shift to Online Learning (Quraishiet.al.,2021)**
2. **Technological Barriers (Ullah, Ashraf & Ahmed, 2020)**
3. **Use of Digital Plat forms (Tarkar,2020)**
4. **Challenges in Assessment (Abid, et.al.,2021)**

Indicators after COVID-19

1. **Remedial Teaching Strategies (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021)**
2. **Hybrid-Teaching Methods (Daniel, 2020)**
3. **Re-engagement of Students (Rehman & Khan, 2021)**
4. **Innovative Assessment Techniques (Batool, et.al., 2022)**

Previous Research

Studies conducted to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education revealed that the closure of schools, universities and other educational institutes disrupted the traditional teaching style where students and teachers are both physically present. The abrupt closure of schools left the whole system of education in despair (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The closure of schools raised concerns about how well students were learning in their homes. One of the key challenges poor homes faced was the unavailability of internet service. Engzell, Frey and Verhagen (2020) highlighted the digital divide among households with lower-income families who often lacked reliable internet connectivity. As schools transitioned to online learning platforms, students from poor backgrounds faced difficulties accessing the necessary resources and materials to engage in remote education (Rehman & Khan, 2021). Previous research indicated the potential educational losses associated with the closure of educational institutions. For example, Engzell et al. (2020) found that school closures resulted in significant student learning setbacks. The closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges for teachers as they were thrust into an unfamiliar situation of online teaching and communication with their students (Sintema, 2020). The sudden and unprecedented nature of the pandemic left little time for teachers to adequately adjust to the new situation, requiring them to swiftly seek out new strategies and approaches to ensure the continuity of education (Tarkar, 2020). The swift progress of technology and an internet connection is essential to online learning. Online classes helped teachers to connect with the students during the closure of schools. The shift towards online education allowed students to pursue their academic goals without the need for physical presence in traditional educational institutions (Sintema, 2020). Maqsood's (2021) research study revealed that private institutions took the initiative to transition to online learning, while the public sector faced challenges in providing adequate support and resources for online education. Educators found online learning systems to be both adequate and inadequate. Online classes were considered adequate because they fulfilled education requirements during the lockdown. They were considered inadequate due to poor connection and the high cost of internet services. Students could only afford an education through WhatsApp as it felt inexpensive (Bahasoan, Ayuandiani, Mukhram & Rahmat, 2020). Akram, Aslam, Saleen & Parveen (2021) conducted a study on teachers' challenges to examine their challenges during online classes, such as lack of resources, lack of training, communication barrier and assessment, and conducting online classes similar to regular ones by using tradition lecture methods. Online classes were also the best solution to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on education. Online education allows students to learn from different platforms and teaches personalized learning for various needs (Rehman & Khan,

2021). According to Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj & Sethi (2020), e-learning is a form of student-centered learning and teachers can handle the students smoothly through online classes during schools' closure. Ma, Chutiyami, Zhang & Nicoll (2021) suggested that teachers should use online teaching methods routinely to become skillful in online teaching. Schools started to reopen to continue the educational activities for students after a decline in coronavirus cases around the globe (Tarkar, 2020). Many challenges with the reopening of schools arose. The academic loss was evident when students re-joined the schools after the pandemic. Students were only exposed to minimal education in their homes (Rehman & Khan, 2021). Zhao & Watterston (2021) emphasized the importance of motivating students to become self-learners to mitigate the impact of their background and other educational issues. Teachers used constructive measures to reduce the achievement gap and this planning begins with elementary schools, which have more difficulty adjusting to online classes. According to Nasir & Hameed (2021), the pandemic has taught us that the education system needs revitalization. The education system needs innovations and should accept the changes created due to the pandemic. Nasir & Hameed (2021) suggested that the curriculum should be student-centered to help students build the skills needed to survive the pandemic. A study by Kim and Asbury (2020) suggested that teachers should strongly desire a sense of normalcy and seek clear routines and structure in their daily teaching lives.

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design was used to carry out this research. Primary teacher's first-hand experiences were explored to determine the challenges they faced during and after the COVID- 19 pandemic. Interviewed questions were designed in accordance with Piaget's constructivism to know the personal experiences of selected 15 primary teachers.

Participants

The population of this study comprises all primary school teachers in both public and private sector schools of District Muzaffarabad city. The budget book (Finance Department AJK, 22-23) provided the data of public schools and teachers. The researcher obtained the budget book from the office of the Director of Public Instructions (male and female). Also, the Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education (E&SE) department of the state Government of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, provided a hard copy of data regarding private schools.

Table 1. The population of the study

S. No	Type of schools	No. of schools	No. of teachers
1	Public schools	26	289
2	Private schools	127	1788

Source: Office of the Divisional Director, Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (2022)

From the population above, a sample of 15 primary teachers from public and private schools were selected to present the population based on a purposive sampling technique.

Instrument

The researcher gathered the data from the participants utilizing One-on-One interviews. Purposive sampling technique has been used to collect data from the participants. Semi- structured interviews were used because they provided flexibility and range, allowing the interviewee to yield diverse data. Qualitative data was collected by interviews with selected 15 private and public primary teachers of Muzaffarabad city. Each participant received a set of well-organized questions.

For tool validation in this qualitative research, the researcher conducted pilot testing in 2-3 schools initially. This phase allowed the researcher to refine and modify the interview questions based on insights gathered

from the pilot study. Additionally, the interview questions were informed by a thorough review of relevant literature on the research topic, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in capturing data from primary teachers (Appendix C).

The interview questions were validated by experts in the field i.e. supervisor to ensure they were appropriate and comprehensive. The initial part of the interview focused on how teachers responded to the pandemic's challenges. For example;

How did your school respond to the COVID-19 pandemic? What pedagogic strategies did you use during the closure of schools?

What pedagogic issues have arisen?

Then, the researcher asked the participants to speak about students' difficulties during and after COVID-19. For example;

Did your school virtualize the education system? If YES, were all of the students able to attend the classes?

What was the impact of COVID-19 on students' reading and writing skills when they return to school?

In the final questions, the researcher asked the participants how they dealt with the problematic situation after a year of closure. For example;

What strategies did you use to help students to get back on track?

Did you incorporate remedial education approaches into your pedagogy?

Also, the researcher used probes and additional questions to receive detailed information from the participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher presented a permission letter (Appendix A) from the supervisor and gave each teacher a consent form (Appendix B) that clearly stated the purpose of the study. The consent letter explicitly stated that the researcher would keep the data confidential and that participants could leave the interview anytime if they want. The researcher designed a semi-structured interview guide for conducting the interview. The researcher conducted the interviews in a comfortable setting and the timing ranged from 30 to 40 minutes, with most interviews lasting between 10 to 15 minutes. Throughout the interviews, the researcher took notes and recorded the discussions. The researcher obtained consent from the principal and teachers to record the interview in audio format.

In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher looked closely at handwritten notes and audio recordings from the interviews to find out how participants' answers were similar or different. Thematic analysis revealed some important themes. The researcher developed the themes from the data. It was the pattern formation and recognition phase because qualitative data were frequently rich and alluring during this stage (Terry et al., 2017). Research questions assisted the researcher in determining what significant (Appendix F) was. The themes derived from the data were utilized to present a coherent and convincing narrative regarding the data. After listening to audio notes of interviews and reading the handwritten notes, the data was transcribed. The process of transcribing involved converting audio cassettes into text files. To ensure the responses were accurate, the researcher transcribed every audio tape after every individual interview and compared it to the live transcript (Appendix D). Codes were created by listening to the interviews. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to organize the themes into columns and then placed codes and quotations next to those themes in the following columns (Appendix G). Finally, the data was transferred to Microsoft Word for further analysis.

RESULTS

The study's findings shed light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the primary schools of Muzaffarabad city. Table 2 contains a complete list of research participants, including their scheduled interview dates and whether or not the interviews were recorded. Each participant was assigned a unique alphabet code, with the first letter 'A' and the remaining letters indicating the order in which participants were added. The school's location, whether it is private or public, has also been included.

Date	Participants	Recorded/Notes	Location
------	--------------	----------------	----------

March 24, 2023	AA	both	Private
March 24, 2023	AB	both	Private
March 27, 2023	AC	both	Private
March 27, 2023	AD	both	Private
March 27, 2023	AE	both	Private
May 18, 2023	AF	both	Private
May 18, 2023	AG	both	Private
May 18, 2023	AH	both	Private
May 22, 2023	AI	both	Private
May 22, 2023	AJ	Notes only	Private
May 22, 2023	AK	both	Private
June 7, 2023	AL	both	Public
June 7, 2023	AM	both	Private
June 7, 2023	AN	Notes only	Private
June 10, 2023	AO	both	Public

Adapting to school closure during COVID-19

Teachers had to quickly adapt to the new reality and find alternatives way to continue educating their students. The collected data revealed that most participants adapted to school closure through online platforms to continue teaching their students. AI described the shift to online learning this way:

“Since many institutions were closed in Pakistan, we were already mentally prepared for the possibility of schools closing here in Azad Kashmir. So, we began to prepare. We reached out to parents and requested them to provide their children with a mobile device for at least one hour of online learning.” (AI)

Internet connectivity and accessibility

Fluctuations in internet speed posed challenges for students living in far-flung areas. Students living in cities also faced internet related problems. Even, some students did not have cell phones to attend classes online.

“Unfortunately, only half of the students obtained devices and those in remote areas had extra difficulties. Firstly, they belonged to economically disadvantaged backgrounds and could not afford cell phones. The second major issue was the inconsistency in internet connectivity.” (AL)

Innovative teaching methods

This theme of innovative teaching methods divided the eagerness of teachers to utilize innovative methods. Half of the participants were enthusiastic to learn the effective use of online platforms to teach their students. The other half of the participants resisted online instruction due to their familiarity and attachment to traditional teaching methodologies and instructions.

“I bought a whiteboard along with all the required materials and I began recording videos to cover the entire book. My efforts were recognized and appreciated by the principal. (AL)

“We created a multi-book to ensure that students would not perceive any gaps in their education across subjects.” (AK)

“Students learn in regular classes and they did not learn in online classes.” (AM)

Private vs. public schools

Private schools proactively initiated online education and took extensive measures to ensure the success of online classes.

“We recorded the lectures using a whiteboard. Then, we sent those recorded videos to the principal for approval before sending to WhatsApp groups.” (AC)

In contrast, public schools strictly adhered to Government notifications and remained closed without implementing any form of online education.

“No, we did not start online classes, we just conveyed students to read their textbooks at home.” (AO)

Assessment and evaluation

During COVID-19, teachers employed various methods to assess students in online classes. Teachers adapted assessment methods to the online environment, leveraging technology and creative approaches to evaluate students’ progress and understanding.

“If we had sent videos between 9 to 11 O’clock, then we removed restrictions (from WhatsApp group), and students responded to us between 2 to 4 P.m.” (AB)

Parental Engagement in Assessment

Some of the parents proved to be supportive and helped teachers during the assessment process. Parents took help from guidelines sent by teachers to them while some parents contributed in damaging academic integrity during the online assessment.

“Parents sat alongside their children as they worked through the questions. Parents were committed to ensuring their children did not resort to cheating in exams, as they were paying fees for their education” (AF)

“Sometimes parents were not cooperative. They did not let their children work and sometimes parents did their homework.” (AK)

The challenges for teachers after COVID-19

This theme highlights primary teachers' post-COVID-19 challenges, including addressing learning gaps, behavior issues, and adapting to government directives. Teachers faced the need to repeat online class content due to students’ lack of home reading and introduced a smart syllabus to address academic disruptions. Also, teachers have faced several challenges due to the Government’s restrictions upon reopening schools after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We revisited and re-taught the material from scratch, beginning anew, although not covering the entire curriculum.” (AC)

“The smart syllabus made the full book shorter by including only the most important and information-packed topics.” (AF)

“We faced Government restrictions during the summer program. Constables warned us to close the school or risk losing our registration with the Mirpur board. (AL)

Students returning to in-person learning after remote education

According to most participants, students returning to schools after a period of remote education in Muzaffarabad were described as arriving with a blank mind.

“In primary classes, writing skills were inadequate and their reading abilities were also lacking.” (AH)

When asked if the students who passed their 7th-grade exams and progressed to 8th grade after online learning were on par with the 7th and 8th-grade students before the COVID-19 pandemic, a participant responded, stating that there was a noticeable difference.

“Certainly, there was a noticeable disparity. Enrolling a student in preschool without them acquiring foundational knowledge can lead to difficulties in later classes. AL also pointed out that when a student enters the 8th grade with little to no knowledge from the 7th grade and nearly forgotten content from the 6th grade, it’s evident that the students’ academic level has declined.” (AL)

Teachers employed various activities and teaching methods to lead students because they were out of track upon their return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Resource packs were provided by the head offices, containing activities for each subject. Every teacher was obligated to incorporate these activities into their classes and failing to do so incurred a penalty.” (AN)

“We improved the timetable and converted our teaching methods to activity-based and arranged sound system to teach sounds.” (AD)

The collected data unveiled the significant role of technology and the internet in helping teachers get students back on track after the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have used LED’s. Students learn a lot by watching. Students learn more in story form.” (AL)

DISCUSSION

This qualitative research reveals the challenges primary teachers faced during school closures in Muzaffarabad city. With schools closed, online platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom were used for teaching, but device issues and poor internet connectivity posed significant challenges. Teachers primarily used WhatsApp due to its affordability, even when internet connections were unreliable. Assessment was done through WhatsApp audio notes, but online classes negatively impacted students, leading to decreased interest in learning and poor performance.

Upon students' return to schools after lockdown, teachers adopted activity-based teaching methods to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. They shifted towards student-centered instruction, encouraging independent learning and problem-solving. The discussion focuses on teaching strategies during the COVID outbreak, challenges during online classes, and strategies for resuming educational activities after the lockdown.

FINDING RELATED TO PREVIOUS LITERATURE

The discussion of the findings presents the study’s results by focusing on teaching strategies to continue education during COVID outbreak, instructional challenges during online classes and strategies in revival of educational activities after the lockdown. The findings confirm previous research indicating that the abrupt closure of schools during the pandemic had a disruptive effect on the traditional education system (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Students and teachers faced significant challenges in transitioning to online learning, with issues related to internet connectivity and access (Engzell et al., 2020; Rehman & Khan, 2021). These challenges were consistent with the digital divide among students and the potential for educational losses during the closures (Engzell et al., 2020). The study’s findings support the idea that teachers had to rapidly adapt to the new reality of online teaching (Sintema, 2020; Tarkar, 2020). The sudden nature of the pandemic left little time for teachers to adjust, and they had to seek out new strategies and approaches to ensure the continuity of education. This is consistent with the literature that highlights the challenges teachers faced during the transition to online instruction (Sintema, 2020; Tarkar, 2020). The findings emphasize the crucial role of technology and the internet in enabling remote education (Bahasoan et al., 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020). Teachers used online platforms, recorded videos, and employed innovative methods to maintain educational continuity. This aligns with the theory that technology played a significant role in sustaining education during the pandemic (Bahasoan et al., 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020). The findings mirror the disparities between private and public schools in their response to the pandemic. Private schools proactively initiated online education, while public schools often adhered to government directives for closure (Aslam & Parveen, 2021). This discrepancy in response was evident in the study’s results. The findings reflect the adaptability of teachers in employing various assessment methods in the online environment and the involvement of parents in the assessment process (Aslam & Parveen, 2021). The study highlights how teachers adjusted their assessment strategies during the pandemic to ensure the integrity of the evaluation process. The study findings confirm that the return to in-person learning after remote education was associated with learning gaps, behavioral issues, and the need for adaptations in the curriculum (Tarkar, 2020). This aligns with the literature that highlights the challenges faced by students and teachers upon returning to school after the pandemic. The findings support the literature’s call for the revitalization of the education system and curriculum, emphasizing student-centered approaches and the need for innovations in education (Zhao & Watterston, 2021; Nasir & Hameed, 2021). The introduction of a “smart syllabus” to address academic disruptions aligns with the idea of restructuring the curriculum (Nasir & Hameed, 2021). The findings underscore the continued role of technology and the internet in helping teachers address the learning gaps caused by the pandemic (Ma, Chutiyami, Zhang & Nicoll, 2021). Technology, such as LED displays, was utilized to facilitate student catch-up, aligning with the literature’s emphasis on technology’s ongoing importance in education (Ma, Chutiyami, Zhang & Nicoll, 2021). Findings related to the conceptual framework

Piaget's constructivism theory is relevant to the challenges teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes active learning and knowledge construction through personal experiences. Teachers had to quickly adapt, using innovative methods, reflecting Piaget's idea that learning is an active, environment-interaction process. Internet challenges mirrored Piaget's focus on external factors in learning. Effective communication and parental involvement also align with Piaget's theory. Challenges post-pandemic, like addressing learning gaps, emphasized the need for individualized instruction in line with Piaget's emphasis on considering students' cognitive development stages. Overall, Piaget's constructivism highlights active learning, interaction with the environment, and personalized instruction relevant to teachers' pandemic challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by primary teachers in instructing and assessing students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by investigating their firsthand experiences. The study revealed that the transition to online education during the pandemic required innovative teaching methods to continue instructing students during COVID-19. During online classes, teachers faced challenges such as limited online teaching experience and internet connectivity issues, which harmed student learning. In response, teachers adopted activity-based teaching strategies and focused on fundamental concepts in assessments, intending to improve academic outcomes when students returned to school. Future research should investigate the long-term emotional impact of online classes on students, assess the effectiveness of hybrid learning models, and explore the role of teacher collaboration during crises.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Investigate the impact of online teaching on students' emotions, motivation, engagement, and mental health, and develop strategies to address any adverse effects.

Study hybrid learning models to understand their effectiveness in balancing virtual and physical classrooms for both students and teachers.

Explore the role of teacher collaboration and support networks during crises, assessing how professional communities and mentorship programs can enhance teaching practices.

Investigate innovative teaching methods like project-based learning and flipped classrooms post-pandemic, evaluating their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.

Study alternative assessment methods such as formative assessments and competency-based assessments, exploring their integration into regular classroom practices.

Develop programs to enhance digital literacy skills for teachers and students, focusing on effective use of educational technology and online platforms.

Explore strategies to strengthen community involvement in education, fostering partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to support student learning and well-being during disruptions.

REFERENCES

- Abid, T., Zahid, G., Shahid, N., & Bukhari, M. (2021). Online teaching experience during the COVID-19 in Pakistan: Pedagogy–technology balance and student engagement. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14(3), 367-391.
- Atmojo, A. E. P., & Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL classes must go online! Teaching activities and challenges during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 13(1), 49-76.
- Akram, H., Aslam, S., Saleem, A., & Parveen, K. (2021). The challenges of online teaching in COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of public universities in Karachi, Pakistan. *Journal of Information Technology Education. Research*, 20, 263.
- Batool, S. H., Malik, A., Safdar, M., & Ali, A. F. (2022). Pandemic Information Access Challenges and Expectations about the Post-Covid Era: A Survey of Pakistan Students' Opinion Regarding Academic Libraries' Services and Staff. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 48(6), 102604.
- Bahasoan, A. N., Ayuandiani, W., Mukhrum, M., & Rahmat, A. (2020). Effectiveness of online learning in pandemic COVID-19. *International journal of science, technology & management*, 1(2), 100-106.

- Daniel, S. J. (2020). Education and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prospects*, 49(1), 91-96.
- Finance Department AJK. (2022, December 28). Budget - Finance Department AJK. Finance Department AJK -. <https://www.financeajk.gok.pk/budget/>
- Hasan, N. N. (2021). The Consequences of Exams Cancellation. HEC Policy Guidance Series on COVID-19. (28 C.E., March). HEC. Retrieved March 28, 2020, from <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/HECAnnouncements/Documents/nCoVirus/Government-Directive.pdf>
- Kim, L. E., & Asbury, K. (2020). 'Like a rug had been pulled from under you': The impact of COVID-19 on teachers in England during the first six weeks of the UK lockdown. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(4), 1062-1083.
- Mukhtar, K., Javed, K., Arooj, M., & Sethi, A. (2020). Advantages, Limitations and Recommendations for online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era. *Pakistan journal of medical sciences*, 36(COVID19-S4), S27.
- Mumtaz, N., Saqulain, G., & Mumtaz, N. (2021). Online academics in Pakistan: COVID-19 and beyond. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 37(1), 283.
- Ma, K., Chutiyami, M., Zhang, Y., & Nicoll, S. (2021). Online teaching self-efficacy during COVID-19: Changes, its associated factors and moderators. *Education and information technologies*, 26(6), 6675-669
- t of COVID-19 pandemic: mental health challenges and reflections. *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 100011.
- Nasir, S., & Hameed, M. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on the Learning Processes of Typically Developing and Special Needs Students in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(3), 67-75.
- Noor, S., Ali, M. N., & Husnine, S. M. (2020). Performance of online classes in Lahore, Pakistan during Covid-19. *Performance Improvement*, 59(9), 33-42.
- Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133-141.
- Quraishi, N. H., Asif, M., Sheeraz, M., & Amer, K. (2020). Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and its impact on education at tertiary level: Challenges and solutions for Pakistani universities. *Journal of Education & Social Sciences*, 8(2), 40-54.
- Rasheed, R., Rizwan, A., Javed, H., Sharif, F., & Zaidi, A. (2021). Socio-economic and environmental impacts of COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan—an integrated analysis. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 28(16), 19926-1994
- Rehman, A. U., & Khan, B. (2021). Challenges to online education in Pakistan during COVID- 19 & the way forward. *Social Science Learning Education Journal*, 6(07), 503-512.
- Sintema, E. J. (2020). Effect of COVID-19 on the performance of grade 12 students: Implications for STEM education. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 16(7), em1851.
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4).
- Tadesse, S., & Muluye, W. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education system in developing countries: a review. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(10), 159-170.
- Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, 2, 17-37.
- Tarkar, P. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education system. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(9), 3812-3814.
- Ullah, A., Ashraf, M., Ashraf, S., & Ahmed, S. (2021). Challenges of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic encountered by students in Pakistan. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology*, 3(1), 36-44.
- (WHO) WHO (2020 (accessed April 13, 2020)) Coronavirus. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

Zhao, Y., & Watterston, J. (2021). The changes we need: Education post COVID-19. *Journal of Educational Change*, 22(1), 3-12.