

EDITORIAL

ONLINE LEARNING ERA

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The world has changed after the havoc caused by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). It has deeply impacted the economy, schools, colleges students and universities worldwide with disrupted medical education and healthcare systems. Pakistan's education system is in the struggling phase where the majority of students live in rural areas. The literacy rate is not going up from 60 percent as mentioned in a district-level survey 2019-20 (Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLSM)).¹ The drastic consequences of the horrible COVID-19 menace on one side, damaged the economy and health of the Pakistani population, and on the other hand, decreased the intellectual and mental capacities of students gaining education. The e-learning was promoted under the "HEC COVID-19 Guidance" as all educational institutions were forcefully closed amid coronavirus catastrophe. The budding online trends of delivering education to the students got into the limelight. Later on, to bridge the learning losses of the student's government forced Higher Education Information (HEI) system toward online learning systems.² Therefore, universities were directed to carry out online learning classes. Later on, when the feedback was taken, some technological issues, pedagogical, infrastructural, content-based, as well as health-related issues, were observed during the first year of online learning.³ As no one was mentally prepared to welcome the COVID leading to educational devastation.

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Considering the undergraduate medical teaching in the first year of pandemic 2020 all institutions struggled hard to complete the course and deliver the content to the students. Teachers did more hard work than the students. It was a whole new thing for the teachers and the students, nobody was fully familiar with it. As for virtual learning or online learning previously 2-to 3 institutes were working on this pattern namely Allama Iqbal Open University (since 1974) and the Virtual University of Pakistan (2002).⁴ These higher education institutions were working earnestly to provide education to the working class or the people living in remote areas. The undergraduate institutes never experienced this newer teaching-learning and learning method (online teaching) until COVID arrived. It was easier to transfer the theoretical knowledge to students however the practical teaching deficiency lacked the students behind.

The students became very relaxed during this tricky era. Taking lectures online by sitting in their comfort zone initially got popular among elderly students. The younger kids and their parents had to struggle a lot in terms of economic burden, but in the end, the beneficiaries of this trend were the students who got promoted without assessments (or lenient checking). Later on, depression and sadness prevailed among the students due to longer stay at home under the dreadful situation outside. Maintaining SOPs created COVID terror.⁵ In a country where the literacy rate is already below the desired level, we are in a process of producing the students having less grasp on the actual knowledge and lack clinical training too. Different researches were done in 2021 in the educational sector and it highlighted that

virtual education has still not been grappled happily by students.⁶ They are confused regarding the completion of the syllabus. They are still more in the favor of face-to-face classroom teaching.⁷

It should be kept in mind that COVID-19 and off and on lockdown, unpredictable waves of the pandemic are driving the educational system for conversion to online academics and developing countries like Pakistan are trying hard to develop reliable, cost-effective, and secure online academic systems to provide uninterrupted conceptual learning.⁸⁻⁹ However it could also be stated that the online COVID era made many teachers capable and well oriented with the technology and latest communication tools, but still online learning in Pakistan is at a nascent stage. In 2022 all the institutes are trying hard to overcome the deficient knowledge of students with more and more face-to-face teaching with interactive lectures, assessments, assignments, and providing students boredom-free education and enhancing their communication skills which were ruined during Online teaching.

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