**Global academic delay and digital divide**

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Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI), Switzerland, published a study sampling 31,212 higher education students from 133 countries and 6 continents. The research finds “boredom, anxiety, and frustration” among students during lockdowns. The socio-demographic difference, gender, and nature of subjects are important variables in scoring the efficiency of online academics. Students classified as male, part-time, first-level, applied sciences, a lower living standard, from Africa or South Asia reported their academic life more distressful as compared to those from Europe with higher living standards and logistics.

According to the United Nations the COVID-19 pandemic “has caused the largest disruption of education in history”, having profound impacts on the academic evolution of students enrolled in Montessori and secondary schools, higher secondary colleges, technical institutions, universities, and research development centers. COVID-19 restrictions worldwide glaringly changed the economic, cultural, and emotional dimensions of human life. The educational disruption, ceasing on-campus curricular and co-curricular activities, however, would have long-term effects that can turn into a generational catastrophe, as feared by the United Nations.

Shawna Lee, associate professor of social work and director of the Parenting in Context Research Lab, University of Michigan, finds “high-stress levels, anxiety, and depression among parents” during lockdown affected the mental fitness of children enrolled in primary grades. About 35% of parents reported considerable changes in their child’s behavior during social isolation, “including being sad, depressed, and lonely”. “Social distancing and stay-at-home orders disconnected millions of children from in-person education and left little time for parents to prepare to support their children’s education at home,” she concludes. The relevance of mental fitness is acquiring knowledge is well-proven by many eminent educationalists all over the world.

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Jean Piaget’s classification of cognitive development into four stages has a major impact on education planning. The Formal Operational Stage starts from the age of 12 and up. At this stage, the adolescent begins to investigate, reason, and conclude a hypothesis. Teens begin to search logic and evidence required to shape their social and political opinions. Piaget considers intellectual evolution a qualitative process using different schemas. A schema presents both abstract and material actions involved in knowing and understanding knowledge. Piaget’s schema includes the body of knowledge and the process of acquiring that knowledge.

The lockdown shifted interactive process of acquiring knowledge in a classroom into virtually conferenced lecture. Many studies situating the impacts of online learning on overall academics reveal that translation of learning experience from onsite to online has affected cognitive transmission by changing the psychological orientation, environment, and response of participants. The environment, proximity, presentation, and physical appearance constitute a conducive process for knowledge acquisition, equally important as knowledge itself.

The experts of educational psychology agree that learning apps, electronic and social media have made knowledge more accessible but could not replace a classroom particularly for children. The classroom is the depository for acquiring a sustainable learning experience. The human mind is an intricate learner. Classroom modulates knowledge over the carriers of expression, formality, and sociability. The campus environment, peers, dress, designed to accomplish a learning task corroborate the knowledge-transfer process. The consolidation of academic outcomes using internet is a challenge that needs to be properly quantified and addressed for primary and secondary education.

The pandemic multiplied challenges for the developing countries. For instance, Pakistan’s public expenditure on education is estimated at 2.6%, of the total GDP, which is the lowest in the region. The Global Education Monitoring Report 2017-18 by UNESCO identified a lack of proper regulation, financial input, and teaching training sessions in Pakistan. Untrained teachers are hired by the private sector on low salaries to tackle the educational requirement of a massively exploding population, and to hit the maximum profits out of this “business”. Every single teacher is educating 80 students. These teachers cannot ensure a successful knowledge-transfer process in the classroom, how one can expect them to manage it online?

There is a greater “Digital Divide” appeared in global education. Students and teachers of the underdeveloped world “found themselves grappling with unfamiliar conferencing technology”, as reported by the UN. Internet is a life luxury in low-income countries. Class counts, timetables, assignments, quizzes, and exams are formally put in place online, nevertheless, the rigorous exercise or the process of obtaining knowledge is seriously lacking from kindergarten to universities. During the last year, UNESCO reported: “87 percent of the world’s students?—that is 1.5 billion learners?—have been affected by school closures in 180 countries”.

UNESCO reported last year some 830 Million students are deprived of internet services. In the sub-Saharan region, 82 percent of students are unable to make a conference online and 90 percent have no personal computers. A UNICEF official claimed: “We are now looking at an even more divisive and deepening education crisis”. Lockdowns in education institutes in present scenario when the pandemic has already consumed millions of human lives is understandable, nevertheless, the educational planners of the word need to grasp the scope and impact of the crises to compensate the academic delay when things will get normal. Tragically, despite facing such drastic dangers that can lead to a “generational catastrophe”, the national governments are not acting as an emergency to prognosticate solutions.

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