

Study The Post–Covid–19 Academic Challenges of The School Heads in District Shaheed Benazirabad

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Abstract

The emergence of COVID-19 in Wuhan in December 2019 made every country to take notice of the situation and announce globally accepted effective measures to minimize the losses. This pandemic situation has shaken every pillar of the states in the world. Education is a continuous process, and the mixing up of the masses from different corners of society was supposed to be a major cause of its spread. The shutdown of educational institutions was the very first step taken by each country to curtail the spread of COVID-19. The same steps were rigorously taken in Pakistan as well. The reopening of the schools took almost seven months, but during this period, some online classes were taken at higher education level. At the school level, it was also a big challenge because of the insufficient resources and difficulties to use technology. The schools were reopened under the SOPs by the Government of Pakistan and the provincial governments and their departments and so the education department also notified the SOPs for the schools to re-continue the education without a visible loss. The reopening of the schools was not an easy task as the parents and the students were afraid of becoming affected by the virus. This study was intended to study the post-COVID-19 academic challenges of the school heads in District Shaheed Benazirabad. The objectives of the research study were to determine the challenges faced in the implementation of SOPs, analyze the support from the higher authorities, and understand the head teachers' administrative and management challenges after the reopening of the schools in district Shaheed Benazirabad. The quantitative research method was applied in this research study and a survey design was employed. The population of the research study was 245 head teachers of the Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Higher Secondary boys' and girls' schools of District Shaheed Benazirabad. The sample of the current study was 174 headteachers (43+42+44= 174) selected through a simple random sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale was used for data collection. The results showed that in some cases the necessary facilities were missing in the schools, it was also found that the higher authorities though responded positively but yet some of the headteachers showed concerns. It was also found that the teachers faced problems in managing the proper seating of the students in

overcrowded classes during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It is recommended that the teachers and the head teachers should be made prepared to tackle any such situation in the future, the necessary support should be made available in time in the schools, and the higher authorities should engage focal persons for a cluster of schools to keep in touch with the headteachers to cope up with such situations.

Keywords: Post Covid-19, Pandemic, Challenges, Sufficient facilities.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutes face academic challenges at multiple stages in Pakistan. The financial, human, and material resources are regularly discussed challenges in public and private persons. Along with the above challenges, the uneven dilemmas also shake the foundations of education. The Covid-19 pandemic situation also created a high-magnitude disturbance in the world and serious shocks felt in Pakistan as well. COVID-19 first emerged in Wohan City, China in the last week of December 2019. The abbreviation COVID stands for coronavirus disease, and the suffix 19 reflects the year of its emergence. All the activities of the states were stopped. It also disturbed the educational systems of the countries and their academic practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic was caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and has given global attention because of its quick spread. The medico-legal researchers were found helpless to eradicate (Cheng, 2020). Different measures were taken to curtail and control the pandemic. As it attacked people of all ages (Fegert, 2020). Yet, Pakistan, having fewer resources, had taken rapid and reasonable steps to cope with that situation. One of the bold and timely steps was the lockdown in which all educational institutes were shut down in which all educational institutes remained closed (Sahu, 2020). The schools in Pakistan were closed on 26th February 2020 (Nafees, 2020). Like other countries, the reopening of the schools took almost seven months and were reopened on 15th September 2020 after the lockdown with mandatory SOPs identified by the World Health Organization for schools all over the world (Maiorano, 2020). The Pakistani government had also issued policies and guidelines, but still, after the reopening of the schools, there were many challenges that school students, their parents, teachers, and especially the head teachers faced. The Government had set clear expectations that all pupils would go back to school and catch up on the academic losses. This study was carried out to study the post-COVID-19 academic challenges of the school heads in Shaheed Benazirabad District, to determine implementation challenges of the SOPs, to analyze the participatory support of higher authorities and understanding of the head teachers' administrative and management challenges after reopening of the schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad.

Research objectives

1. To determine the implementation challenges of the SOPs after the reopening of the schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad
 2. To analyze the participatory support of higher authorities after the reopening of the schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad
 3. To understand the head teachers' administrative and management challenges after the reopening of the schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad.
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Research Questions

1. What were the specific implementation challenges of the SOPs after the reopening of the schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad?
2. To what extent was participatory support given to the head teachers by the higher authorities after the reopening of the schools in District Shaheed Benazirabad?
3. What type of administrative and management challenges were faced by the head of the schools after the reopening of the schools in the Shaheed Benazirabad District?

Literature Review

There is a difference between administration and management, the administration is about setting goals, and objectives and making decisions to achieve those goals and targets (Enis, & Naim, 2018).

The administration is best equipped to determine the types of policies and rules necessary to achieve the desired goals. School administrators are responsible for making decisions related to departmental staff, school activities, and teaching and learning practices within the institution (Lunenburg & Allan, 2021). Management has two dimensions: the processes involved in establishing management and the functions of management. School head teachers are responsible for the effective functioning of school management (Tanjung, 2020). Management involves overseeing the available resources. Headteachers must manage human resources, material resources, and financial resources (Victor, 2017). Additionally, some researchers suggest that managing time should be considered a fourth function of management (Gerdin & Jan, 2004).

The pandemic situation is defined as a disease which outbreaks eventually in a particular geographical area or more geographical areas and creates dangerous consequences in the shape of illness and death casualties in higher numbers (Hebebcı, Bertiz, & Alan, 2020; Gope, 2021). That outbreak may last for days or years is defined as a pandemic situation (Braack, et al., 2018). Its in-hand example is COVID-19.

Pradhan, Sandip, Jugal, and Chidambaram (2020) investigated the impact of COVID-19 on children following the reopening of schools. Their study revealed that, while children are generally less affected by the virus than adults, increased interactions in school settings raise their risk of infection. Therefore, children must wear masks and maintain social distancing to minimize this risk (Courtemanche, 2020).

The researchers emphasized that children with underlying health conditions, such as respiratory diseases, asthma, or bronchitis, require closer observation at school. Overall, schools play a vital role in supporting children's academic and physical health, making it important to implement safety measures as they reopen (Domenico et al., 2020).

Tria J.Z. (2020) examined the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector in the Philippines, highlighting the numerous challenges it has presented. In the article, he discusses the need for new educational policies to ensure quality during lockdowns and to address the issues that arose due to the pandemic, while also considering future opportunities for improvement (Sharp C.J., 2020).

(Khalid & Ali, 2020) investigated the effects of school closures and the transmission of COVID-19 following the reopening of schools. They compared the increasing ratio of hospitalized cases to confirmed cases. Their findings suggest that reopening schools is feasible in areas

with generally low community transmission, as seen in Denmark and Norway. In contrast, the growth rate of cases in Germany is significantly higher (Ebru Yılmaz İnce, Ahmet Kabul, & İbrahim Diler, 2020). The authors emphasize the need for improved measures regarding school reopenings, which should ensure adequate space in classrooms and robust infrastructure to identify infections (Khalid & Ali, 2020; Meira Levinson, D.Phil., Muge Cevik, M.D., & Marc Lipsitch, D.Phil., 2020).

EVİŞEN, AKYILMAZ, & TORUN, (2020) reviewed the educational policy actions taken by the Ministry of National Education during the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted that, during this challenging time, countries around the world were striving to meet the educational needs of students through various online technologies for distance education. In their assessment of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, they emphasized the necessity of addressing the educational challenges posed by COVID-19. They recommended that to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on the educational system, the Ministry need to establish a comprehensive distance education environment that adequately supports students academically and meets all their educational needs (Fegert, 2020).

Daniel (2020) described Covid-19 as a significant challenge for educational institutions. He noted that, in a short period, it was difficult to meet the educational needs of students and provide a satisfactory response to parents. In his study, he recommended that institutions leverage technology and various resources for remote learning. He also suggested that teachers should assign work aimed at helping students recover from the learning disruptions caused by the pandemic (Gallego, 2020).

Onyema (2020) examined the impact of COVID-19 on education by collecting data through structured questionnaires from 200 respondents, including parents, teachers, students, and policymakers from various countries. The study utilized regression analysis to interpret the data. The findings indicated that COVID-19 has had a significant negative effect on education and the learning process. Many students and educators expressed a belief in the importance of using technology to maintain engagement with learning during the pandemic. This study supports the idea that educational institutions should adopt technology to enhance digital skills.

Yates, Starkey, Egerton, and Flueggen (2020) examined the online learning experiences of high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. They collected data from 1,975 students in their final two years of high school. The researchers employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for their study. Their focus was on three characteristics—personalization, authenticity, and collaboration—that influence learners' experiences. Additionally, the study identified other important factors such as motivational and pedagogical approaches that can enhance academic progress and positively impact learning outcomes.

The study titled "Examining Distance Education in Higher Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Isparta Applied Sciences University" was conducted using a survey method. The survey featured a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire with 21 items and gathered data from 1,011 students at Isparta University. The data were analyzed using SPSS software (Bączek, 2021). The findings concluded that the participants' views were influenced by their access to computers and the Internet.

Gallego (2020) investigated the influence of COVID-19 on the performance of 458 students

through a field experiment at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. The main objective of the study was to explore how COVID-19 affected students' performance by dividing them into control and experimental groups to examine differences in assessments. Engzell (2021) noted that the impact of COVID-19 was observed to be positive on students' performance, as their learning habits changed and improved during the pandemic, leading to greater focus and efficiency in their studies.

Hebebcı, Bertiz, & Alan (2020) studied teachers' and students' perceptions of distance education during COVID-19 by gathering data from 16 teachers and 20 students using content analysis. Opinions were both positive and negative, with recommendations from Hentea (2003) and Islami, Enis, & Naim (2018).

Rouadi and Anouti (2021) discussed an experiment on the online learning process in intermediate and secondary schools in Lebanon during the COVID-19 situation. In their study, they focused on the successes and failures of online education by collecting data through a random sampling technique via an online survey. They employed statistical analysis and concluded that most respondents viewed online learning as a failure due to a lack of various resources. The authors recommended that teachers should adapt computer technology to improve the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ahmad (2020) and Sohail (2021) examined the challenges and priorities of COVID-19 vaccination in Pakistan. Their study highlighted that underdeveloped countries, particularly low-income ones, struggle to provide vaccinations due to limited financial resources (Jones, 2020; Sohail, 2021). They emphasized that the government is already facing difficulties in supplying vaccines for polio and other diseases, which adds to the challenge of distributing the COVID-19 vaccine (Sides, 2020).

Methodology

This research study was quantitative by method, and a survey design was adopted. The population of the current research study was the Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Higher secondary school teachers of District Shaheed Benazirabad. A sample of 174 head teachers was selected through a simple random sampling technique. The data was collected through a self-designed questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was found to be 79% reliable. The reliability was established through Cronbach's Alpha. The collected data was analyzed through SPSS software V.22. The results were drawn in frequency, percent, mean score, and standard deviation. The results were analyzed research question-wise, and the squire test was applied to test the significance of the results.

Data analysis

Analysis of research question 1. SOPs implementation challenges

Research Question 1 (1-14)

No.	Attribute	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	SDA	190	12.33		
2	DA	507	32.92		
3	UD	71	4.61		
4	A	652	42.33	3.00	0.4270
5	SA	120	7.80		

Missing	0	0
Total	1540	100

The above table reveals that 45.25 percent of the respondents disagreed, 4.61 percent of the respondents remained undecided, and 50.13 percent of the respondents agreed that they faced challenges while implementing the SOPs, such as making face masks available and delivering to the students and the teachers, the wearing of masks by the students and the teachers in suffocated environment, maintaining social distance in overcrowded classes, regular cleanliness of the school, spraying the school for disinfecting the building, sharing of drinking glasses and water bottles and stationary with each other at the time of the reopening of the schools, with a mean score of 3.00 and a standard deviation of 0.427

Chi Squire Test Results

Observed value(fo)	190	507	71	652	120	1540
Expected value(fe)	308	308	308	308	308	1540
(fe-fo)	-118	199	-237	344	-188	0
(fe-fo) ²	13924	39601	56169	118336	35344	263374
S(fo-fe) ² / fe	45.20779	128.5747	182.3669	384.2078	114.7532	855.1104

$$x^2 = \Sigma (fo-fe)^2 / fe$$

$$\Sigma=855.1104$$

$$x^2= 263374/1540 = 171.022$$

$$N-1$$

$$5-1=4$$

In education Alpha = 0.05

Table value of X²

$$4=9.488$$

Chi-square results show that challenges faced by head teachers regarding the implementation of COVID-19 SOPs after the reopening of school are significantly positive because the calculated value 171.022 is greater than the value 9.488. Margin of error = 0.05 and df = 4

Research question 2. Participatory support to the head teachers by the higher authorities.

Table 4.52 Research Question 2 (15-24)

No.	Attribute	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	SDA	70	6.36		
2	DA	218	19.82		
3	UD	66	6		
4	A	520	47.27	3.42	0.5020

5	SA	118	10.72
Missing		108	9.82
Total		1100	100

The above table shows that 26.18 percent of the respondents disagreed, 6 percent of the respondents remained undecided, 57.99 percent of the respondents agreed and 9.82 percent of the respondents did not respond to the questions that they faced challenges in having the support of higher authorities in reopening of the school with mean score of 3.42 and a standard deviation of .502 in the specific areas such as, conducting awareness sessions, training sessions, support and supervision, to handle the uneven situations, making clean drinking water available, providing sanitizers, moral support, confidence building, and proper guidance to the head teachers of the schools after the reopening of the schools.

Chi square Test Results

Observed value(fo)	70	218	66	520	118	992
Expected value(fe)	198.4	198.4	198.4	198.4	198.4	992
(fe-fo)	-128.4	19.6	-132.4	321.6	-80.4	0
(fe-fo) ²	16486.56	384.16	17529.76	103426.6	6464.16	144291.2
S(fo-fe) ² / fe	83.09758	1.93629	88.35565	521.3032	32.58145	727.2742

$$x^2 = \Sigma (fo-fe)^2 / fe$$

$$\Sigma=144291.2$$

$$x^2= 144291.2/992 = 145.454$$

$$N-1$$

$$5-1=4$$

In education Alpha = 0.05

Table value of X²

$$4=9.488$$

Chi-square results show that participation of high authorities after the reopening of schools is significantly positive because the calculated value 145.454 is greater than the value 9.488.

Margin of error = 0.05 and df = 4

Research question 3. Administrative and management challenges

Research Question 3 (25-36)

No.	Attribute	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	SDA	133	10.08		
2	DA	385	29.17		
3	UD	70	5.30		
4	A	584	44.24	3.17	0.4180
5	SA	148	11.21		
Total		1320	100		

The above table shows that 39.15 percent of the respondents disagreed, 5.3 percent of the respondents remained undecided, and 55.45 percent of the respondents agreed with administrative and management challenges faced by the head teachers with a mean score of 3.17 and a standard deviation of 0.418 in maintaining the attendance of the students, splitting students in groups keeping in view the school time table, to continue the academic practices, managing teachers to meet the needs of the splitting classes, making emergency funds available if any time needed, keeping an eye over any changing situation to keep informed the teachers, students and their parents, making heads and the parents satisfied with the social distance amongst the students and the teachers and other staff

Chi square Test

Observed value(fo)	133	385	70	584	148	1320
Expected value(fe)	264	264	264	264	264	1320
(fo-fe)	-131	121	-194	320	-116	0
(fo-fe) ²	17161	14641	37636	102400	13456	185294
S(fo-fe) ² / fe	65.00379	55.45833	142.5606	387.8788	50.9697	701.8712

$$x^2 = \sum (fo-fe)^2 / fe$$

$$\Sigma=185294$$

$$x^2 = 185294/1320 = 140.374$$

$$N-1$$

$$5-1=4$$

In education Alpha = 0.05

Table value of X²

$$4=9.488$$

Chi square results show that challenges to be faced by head teachers in administration and management after reopening of schools is significantly positive because calculated value 140.374 is greater than the value 9.488. Margin of error = 0.05 and df = 4

Table 4.55 Consolidated Result

No.	Attribute	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	SDA	393	9.92		
2	DA	1110	28.03	3.16	.449
3	UD	207	5.23		
4	A	1756	44.34		
5	SA	386	9.74		
	Missing	108	2.72		
Total		3960	100		

The consolidated results show that 37.95 percent of the respondents disagreed, 7.95 percent of the respondents remained disagreed or did not respond and 54.11 percent of the respondents remained agreed that they faced post covid-19 challenges in implementation of SOPs, getting support from higher authorities, and administrative and management challenges while reopening of the school in district Shaheed Benazirabad with mean score of 3.16 and a standard deviation of .449

1. Chi square Test

Observed value(fo)	393	1110	315	1756	386	3960
Expected value(fe)	792	792	792	792	792	3960
(fe-fo)	-399	318	-477	964	-406	0
(fe-fo) ²	159201	101124	227529	929296	164836	1581986
S(fo-fe) ² / fe	201.0114	127.6818	287.2841	1173.3535	208.1262	1997.457

$$x^2 = \Sigma (fo-fe)^2 / fe$$

$$\Sigma=1581986$$

$$x^2= 1581986/3960 = 399.4914$$

$$N-1$$

$$5-1=4$$

In education Alpha = 0.05

Table value of X²

$$4=9.488$$

The Chi square results show that the implementation of SOPs, Support from the higher ups and the school administrative and management challenges were faced by the school head teachers were significantly positive because the calculated value is 399.4914 which is greater than the table value of 9. 488 at the margin of error of .05 and degree of freedom of 4.

Findings

The findings of the research indicated that head teachers require assistance and support to address the multiple challenges they face following the reopening of schools. Additionally, the study highlighted the necessity for higher authorities to plan for the future in order to facilitate head teachers in similar situations after schools reopen.

The results of the research were discussed with administrators, managers, and stakeholders to seek guidance on effectively addressing the issues raised post-reopening. This study recommends that higher authorities play a crucial role in identifying head teachers who are encountering these challenges, ensuring that they adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to COVID-19. Therefore, it is essential to arrange meetings where all relevant details can be shared to ensure the safe reopening of schools and to prevent any unforeseen problems.

Conclusion

The research concludes that the challenges faced by heads of schools after reopening of schools in the COVID-19 situation such as the results for five areas of research were implementation of SOPs, financial issues, and Administration/management. Role of stakeholders and academic challenges were concluded that in all these areas heads are facing challenges such as the majority of heads showed their consent towards Agree as they are facing challenges regarding implementation of SOPs in schools after reopening of schools. The second area was of role of stakeholders where heads' responses have remained agreed that they are facing a communication gap between higher authorities so they need their vital role towards schools to fill the gap, especially in the facilitation of training and financial & moral support after reopening of schools in COVID 19 situation. The third area was Administration and management where the majority of heads showed their consent towards Agree as they are facing challenges in Administration and Management after the reopening of schools. The outcome of the consolidation of the quantitative data of the problem statement study the challenges faced by heads after the reopening of schools in the COVID-19 situation in District Shaheed Benazirabad, showed agreement with the research questions asked from the targeted respondents of the study.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that in such situations, all facilities necessary for implementing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be provided in schools by stakeholders and the School Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh, under the policy.
3. Administrative stakeholders from the concerned department are required to ensure regular visits to schools to assess conditions following their reopening.
4. Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be made mandatory and arranged by the management and stakeholders for schools.
5. The concerned department must organize sessions for students to train them on how to navigate the ongoing COVID-19 situation and maintain routine activities with optimal safety measures.
6. The administration of the concerned department should engage in discussions with health authorities regarding the safety of school buildings before reopening.
7. The management of the concerned department may provide resources for school heads to conduct training sessions for teachers, enabling them to effectively monitor students when they return to school.
8. Awareness sessions for parents, teachers, and students should be conducted by various stakeholders.
9. Adequate allocation of funds should be included in education policies, with additional funding provided to schools to manage challenges arising from the COVID-19 situation.

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