

Covid-19 and child education

The income shock to households, whose children are in private schools, would increase their demand for public support

[Muhammad Jehangir Khan/Junaid Ahmed](#) | October 20, 2020



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Before the coronavirus outbreak, Pakistan's education system was already suffering from structural weaknesses and learning crises. However, the unprecedented school closures have resulted in further denting the country's efforts to build productive human capital. School closures have affected 55.3 million children in Pakistan aged between five and 16. Besides, 22.8 million children are already out of school. The pandemic is intensifying the risks and vulnerabilities of an already weak educational system.

Concerning the quality of learning, Pakistan is ranked 134 out of 157 countries on the Human Capital Index (HCI). Further, Pakistan's education quality is bad enough that the Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) and Learning Adjusted Year of Schooling (LAYS) differ by about four years. For instance, children in Pakistan can expect to complete 8.8 years of pre-primary, primary, and secondary school by age 18. However, when adjusted for quality of learning, it is only equivalent to 4.8 years: a learning gap of 4 years. Additionally, a learning gap between girls and boys is also present.

The low performance could be due to school and household level factors. Currently, better-off students are in comfortable homes with good internet connections, can hire a tutor, and are better placed for home schooling by

well-educated parents. The disparity in learning would widen as poor students do not have access to such amenities. In addition, these kids are also disproportionately vulnerable to dropout from school.

Our assessment, in this study, confirms that school closures can substantially increase dropouts and erode learning, which tends to adversely affect important outcomes in the long-term. Considering the effect of Covid-19 on LAYS, this decreases to 4.08 (a decrease of 14.64%) in case of school closure for five months. Further, the yearly earning loss to a student in school today is \$234, and the lifetime earning loss is about \$2,349. The aggregate economic cost to the current cohort of children amounts to about \$129 billion. Besides, nearly 15.5 million children are vulnerable to dropout due to workers' layoff.

The economic cost in terms of reduced lifetime earnings is substantial. Therefore, the solution is to devise an effective online learning strategy. For this, the success of online learning strategies depends on the availability and equality in access to computers and internet service. Therefore, in practice, what proportion of households in different regions have real-time access to such amenities needs to be evaluated.

Similarly, online learning strategy can be complemented with the adoption of an effective remote learning strategy. In this regard, proper Virtual Learning Environments can be helpful in giving access to students and educators to connect to a dedicated repository of educational resources. Education broadcasting also needs to be strengthened, so that regions and households without access to the internet are covered.

The income shock to households, whose children are in private schools, would increase their demand for public support as families cannot afford any fees and pressure on a cash-strapped public system will increase. Therefore, the government's priority should be to stimulate economic activities with effective social distancing SOPs in place.

Schools have (partially) re-opened since last month, but the situation is still evolving. The threat of a second outbreak of the virus still exists. Therefore, to create a resilient education system of futuristic orientation, the focus should be to strengthen our capacity in the long-term through consistent human capital policies with adequate budget allocation for child education.

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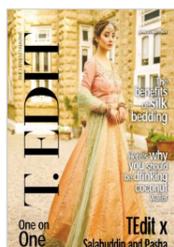
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