Are We Doing Enough for Students with Disabilities: A Case of Online Education During COVID-19 Pandemic?

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Abstract: Due to COVID-19 pandemic, nobody ever predicted the situation occurred. Mostgovernments around the world are closing the schools and universities to stop the spread of thepandemic. Such national closures have already impacted more than 72 percent of the studentpopulation around the world. Numerous countries have announced local closures, which affectmillions of extra learners. According to UNICEF, the COVID-19 pandemic has also hit theeducation sector hard, with 1.53 billion learners out of school. Instructors are making experiences using different E-learning platforms. Practical coursedelivery and assessments have been the major challenge. Therefore, this paper evaluates the criticalsteps taken by the governments of different countries, including Pakistan. A detailed review of onlineavailable sources and government official web page has been made to summarize the conclusion.The paper concludes that most governments have taken various steps to continue students learning, including the Pakistan government, but limited attempts are made for special children. It ishighly suggested to make significant actions to contain education with various learning difficulties.Training programs should also be introduced to educate the teachers dealing with specialeducation.

Keywords: Student with Disability, Online Education, COVID-19, Pandemic

I. Background:

Just as the effect of COVID-19 has no limits, so must its solutions have no limits, just as theyrequire association across the public and private sectors to safeguard that each student remainsengaged and keep learning [1]. While many governments make considerable effortsto confirm continued educational prospects, their capacity for learning excellence variesenormously, particularly for the most vulnerable peoples [2].Several governmentsacross the globe briefly closed educational institutions to avoid the spread of the COVID-19pandemic. Such regional suspensions are impacting more than 72 percent of the worldwidestudents. Some other countries have brought in localized closings that impact millions of otherlearners [1].

The COVID-19 pandemic struck education extremely hard, with 1.53 billion out-of-school students and various school closures worldwide, impacting 87.6 percent of the world's overall enrolled students [3]. Going to school is about more than just learning math and science; it's all about making friends and interacting with your classmates. It's all about developing life skills and learning how to be a good person. As a result, keeping in touch with the school in every way possible is essential. This is also a time for all students to focus on their socio-emotional skills and learn more about how to relate to society at such a challenging and trying time in their lives.Here. the role of parents is very essential in that mission,which has always been extremely significant. After COVID-19 pandemic, most of the teachingactivities are shifted online and nobody was well prepared for such condition. Beside networkissues, effective teaching is a big issue. Teachers are preparing themselves for this transition. Butas its the demand of the time we have to explore new teaching method and diversify our skills alsoespecially dealing with the disable students. Figure 1 shows a recent survey conducted by thecenter of global development and the world bank.
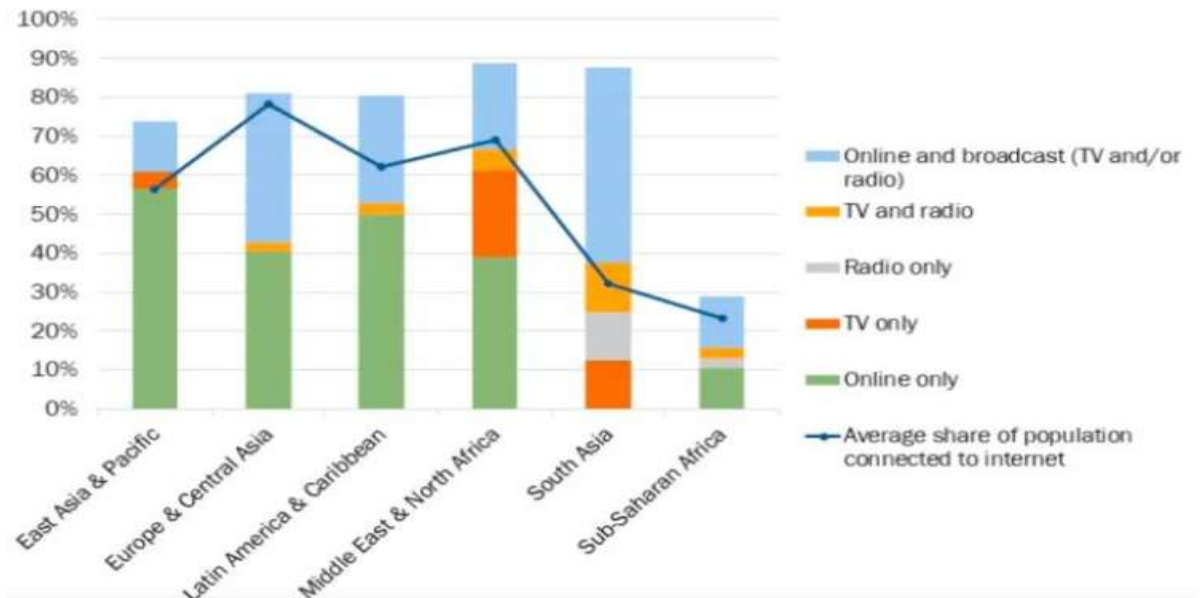
Figure 1: Countries Actions for Remote Learning during COVID-19 (Location-Based)[2]

The nation's responses to school openings differ from one region to the next[1]. Many other countries offering digital learning, such as East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and many others, depend heavily on online education. Nonetheless, a sizable portion of the population uses a combination of online television and radio education to reach out to rural locations and others that do not have access to the internet. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 28 percent of countries rely exclusively on television and radio, just under 40% provide only online education, and 22 percent use a combination of online and broadcast options. Nearly 40% of South Asian countries use broadcasting (radio, television, and radio), and nearly 50% use a combination of internet and broadcast learning resources. Just 11% of Sub-Saharan Africa countries depend exclusively on online services, and only 23% use a combination of online and broadcasting.Similarly, Figure 2 illustrates the adoption of distance learning by various subcontinents with varying income levels for continuing primary education (K-12) because of school closures.
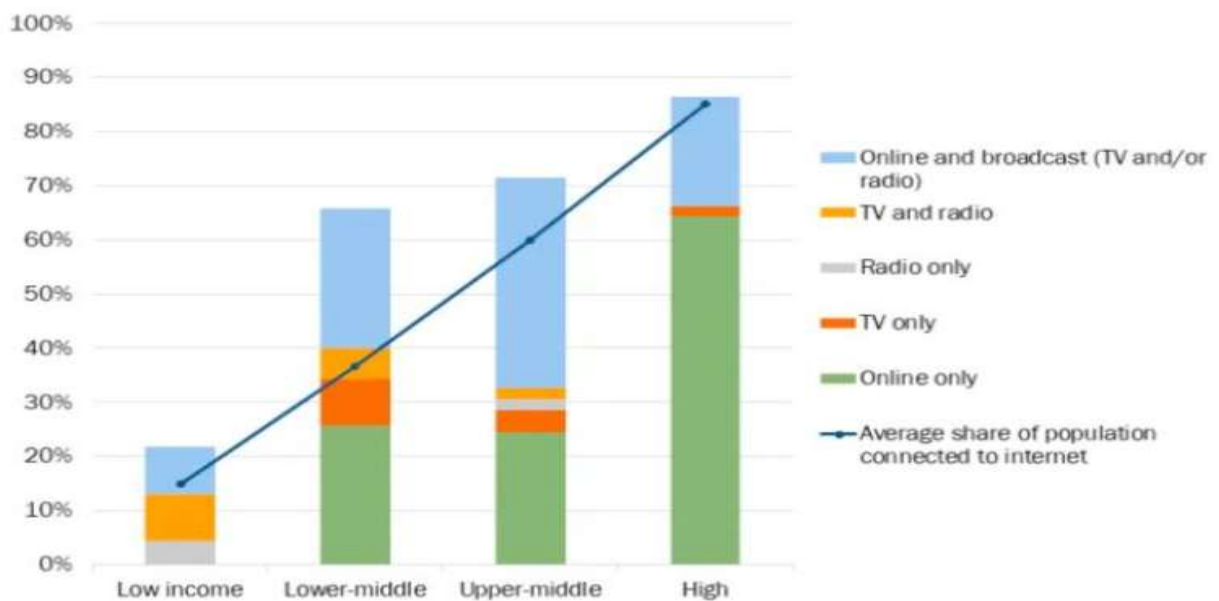

Figure 2: Countries Actions for Remote Learning during COVID-19 (Income Based)[2]

Depending on the level of income, the responses differ widely: less than 25 percent of low-

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incomecountries currently have any form of distance learning, most of which use TV and radio. By contrast,almost 90 percent of high-income countries have distant learning services, approximately all provided online. Twenty percent of high-income countries make use of a mixture ofonline and broadcast education. Over 70% of the upper-middle-income countries offer distant learning incentives, using a combination of online and broadcasting. A smaller share of low-middle-income countries 66 percent provides online and/or remote learning opportunities for theirstudents. But even as low and middle-income governments try to provide educational servicesonline, most students do not get hit. For example, in low-middle income countries, only 36 percent of citizens have internet connectivity, a number that can't be easily changed during thepandemic.

II.   KEY FINDINGS OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

Following the Pakistan government's directions regarding the pandemic declared of the WHO COVID-19, all universities and schools at all levels (public and private) in Pakistan are directed to sack academic operations temporarily and close by April 05, 2020. During theclosure time, the universities shall take the required steps for COVID-19 under the HigherEducation Commission (HEC) scheme. Both universities have already decided to updatetheir programs to provide successful online teaching as a replacement for traditionalclassrooms. The goal is to continue teaching [4]. Given thenationwide closure of schools due to COVID-19, the M/o FE&PT plans to launch a National TVChannel to disseminate grade 1-12 Student Learning Objective (SLO)-based educational content.In this regard, the Government of Pakistan also took significant steps, and they immediately launched

Table 1: Online Platform Supporting Education in Pakistan **(COVID-19 Education Updates,2020)**

S. No	Platform	Access Link
1	Sabaq Foundation	https://sabaq.pk/
2	Knowledge Platform	https://www.learnsmartpakistan.org/
3	SABAQ	http://sabaq.edu.pk/
4	Taleemabad	http://orendaproject.org/
5	Online Campus	https://www.campus.pk/
6	International Online Platform	https://www.khanacademy.org/

Even in the absence of a global threat, children with disabilities are among the world's most insecure, neglected, and stigmatized communities. COVID-19's modern history has affected life in any part of the globe, and it is likely to impact children with pre-existing conditions adversely. The more enormous pressure imposed on children with disabilities will necessitate more aggressive steps to ensure that their needs are fulfilled as the pandemic progresses. Programmatic actions would continue to resolve these complex issues alongside distinct, inclusive policy responses during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods[5]. It is well established that individuals with socioeconomic inequalities and marginalization are overwhelmingly impacted by disease [6]. The government has taken reasonable measures to link students to their educational rights. Still, there is room for change in terms of E-platforms and legislation relating to special children's schooling, since educating a child with learning disabilities varies greatly from teaching a normal child. The government must take major steps in this direction, and teacher preparation programs for working with such disabled students should be established. Parents should also attend, since educational programs for this specific group of children would be difficult without their assistance.

III.   CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that most governments have taken various steps to continue students learning, including the Pakistan government, but limited attempts are made for special children. It ishighly suggested to make significant actions to contain education with various learning difficulties. Itis suggested that online training programs be introduced to educate the teachers dealingwith special education. It is also suggested that long-term policy and plans should also be designedin the future to tackle any of the impending pandemics because "Education is for ALL".

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