

## COVID-19 Crisis: Early Childhood Care and Education in Pakistan

Zunaira Kanwal\*  
Muhammad Shahid Farooq\*\*

### Abstract

In the last couple of years, the whole world faced a catastrophic situation and especially the students suffered a lot. The interruption occurred in students' learning at all stages of education due to sudden closure of educational institutions. This meddling in formal schooling adversely affected the academic outcomes of preschool children. This phenomenological study was conducted to explore the effect of this pandemic on care and education of young learners in Pakistan. Seventeen teachers and parents of preschool children selected through criterion purposive sampling were interviewed on a semi structured interview protocol. The results revealed that school closure due to COVID-19 had numerous adverse effects on the overall learning of students especially learners with low readiness and it increased the dropout rate of students. It also affected children's physical, social, emotional and language developments. The literacy skills of children also suffered a lot. Preschool teachers reported that all these developments except physical development were much effected. Parents explored different home based leaning activities for children to engage them at home. Their involvement also contributed in learning of their children through various activities during the school closure. These home based activities were unstructured, unplanned, limited, and less beneficial in developing learning competencies in children. What so ever children learned during this period, their learning was divergent. Results of this study may be helpful for care givers and school practitioners to minimize these effects on early years care and education. This study may be a stepping stone for teaching young learners during the future school closures.

**Keywords:** School closure, learning competencies, early childhood education, early care.

---

\* Institute of Educational and Research, University of Punjab.  
Email: zunairakanwal57@yahoo.com

\*\* Professor, Institute of Educational and Research, University of Punjab.  
Email: shahid.ier@pu.edu.pk

### **Introduction**

Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has influenced people in various ways from the beginning of its eruption. The country wide shut down has highly impacted people's lives from all age groups and occupations. Throughout the world, the education system has also been affected by the outbreak and modified 1,576,021,818 students' lives in 188 countries (UNESCO, 2020).

Jackson *et.al* (2021) said that the pandemic COVID-19 has spread in almost two hundred countries since its outbreak and 153 million people got infected and 3.5 million deaths occurred around the globe. According to UNICEF's (2021) immediately prior approximation, the education of 1.6 billion children has been disrupted due to pandemic worldwide. The data collected by the Global Education Recovery Trackers manifest that by untimely March 2021, just fifty-one countries have implemented physical education. In over ninety countries, many methods (e.g., hybrid, online) was set up (UNICEF, 2021b).

Black, *et.al* (2020) disclosed that even before the terrible circumstances begin by the pandemic, almost 43% children below the age of 5 years not attaining their developmental capability were considered to be at risk around the world. According to The World Bank (2021) girls and different groups like refugees, racial minorities, children with special needs and displaced inhabitants may not rejoin the school. The learning loss issue among the children has been raised. World Bank Global Director for Education approximates that with schools closure the ratio of "learning poverty" (the proportion of 10-year-olds unable to read a short, age-appropriate text) within a year will increase by 10% during a pandemic (James, 2021; UNICEF, 2021a). However, with extensive poverty, learning losses of that kind are not distinctive to countries. Experts in Europe and U.S have announced that students will be affected by massive learning losses when they will get back to school (Engzell, Frey, & Verhagen, 2021) and these children with limited resources will encounter the most adverse effects before the crisis, 1/2 to 1/3 children will undergo "lost year" of school.

Institutions are centers of human interactivity and social activity. Social exposure that is necessary for development and learning was missed out by many children during school closure (UNESCO, 2021). The best public policy instrument to raise skills should be provided to various schools. Social awareness and social skills can be raised during school time, the basic purpose of being in school from an economic viewpoint is that it expands the ability of a child. Even a minimal hour in school is fruitful and a minimal hour of missed school will affect skills

development. Formal education gives necessary knowledge for the skills development of children. So, the learning outcomes of some children can be badly impacted by interference in formal education, especially for deprived learners with uneven access to learning resources (UNESCO, 2020a).

Several restrictions and sanctions were applied by the state and provincial governments on human interactivity. Therefore, children were disconnected from all kinds of school-based athletic activities like recess, walking to school, and physical education. State, Federal, and Provincial recreation places were closed. Although it was necessary to prevent outspread of COVID-19, these outdoor physical measures were crucial, too. This had restricted the ability of children in the involvement of physical activities which was vital to stop the disease and keep them healthy (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Early childhood practitioners and researchers, in general, admit that developmental zones are equitably critical to value emotional and social development. Children's emotional and social experiences in early life with their first care taker and instructors determine their later personal and academic results and serve as a foundation for other developmental areas (Denham, 2006; Denham & Brown, 2010; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Children's emotional and social capabilities are progressively acknowledged as censorious for success in all later stages of their adult life (National Education Goals Panel, 1995; Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006). Children's formal schooling experiences start from kindergarten to the preparative level. Children grasp phonological awareness, essential literacy skills, and morphology, which lay the stage for later learning literacy skills (Crim, Hawkins, Thornton, Rosof, Copley, Thomas, 2008). Kuhfeld *et. al* (2020) and Oreopoulos, Page and Steveans (2006) highlighted significant differences including sufficient time to allocate teaching, incomprehensible parental skills, resources (for example, everyone will not have the equipment to access online stuff), and the amount of information. If parents do not have the ample knowledge and understanding of something, it is difficult for them to assist their children in learning. As a result, this episode will lead to an increase in the growing inequality of people's income for the pretentious cohorts.

The principal objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education are the whole development of the learner to prepare them to see their higher potential, to prepare for school, and to provide child support services in their initial years of schooling. The main areas of focus are, art as the foundation of schooling; play as a foundation for learning; students'

recognition of particular features of thinking abilities; the supremacy of the experience rather than the proficiency; acquaintance with knowledge, and challenging experience in daily routines; the combination of informal and formal communication; the integration of literary and cultural concepts, written concepts should have basic literacy and numeracy methods; the usage of community materials, such as texture, art, color and knowledge; and to practice proper growth, flexibility, quantity, health, healthy habits and well-being (NCERT, 2006).

Developmental measures are referred to as a set of activities, skills, or specific tasks of the age that most children can do when they cross a certain age. Although each landmark has a certain age level that means human growth occurs as they grow older. As the baby grows and develops, he begins to learn complex features. When he grows older, he must work hard to develop his skills, critical essential skills and competencies including gross motor skills, fine motor skills, language skills, comprehension skills as well as social skills (UMHS, 2012).

Educational institutions were closed worldwide to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus among children and adults. As long as various programs were found suitable to address the need at the time, on the other hand, organizations have provided a difficult process for parents working from home by burdening them with the responsibility of their children's smooth learning during COVID-19 lockdowns.

During the pandemic, some measures were taken to overcome the educational crisis in Pakistan. Pre-primary schools have enrolled 8,636,383 students in Pakistan, whereas primary schools enrolled 22,931,305 and secondary schools enrolled 13,357,618 students respectively (UNESCO, 2020). In Pakistan, this unpredictable situation led to uncertain and impoverished access to an adequate schooling. However, some measures were introduced and awareness moves were launched for parents' readiness for learning of their children at home. This was the high time to explore the parents and preschool teachers' experiences and views about the post pandemic care and education of their children.

## **Objective**

The objective of this research was to explore the effect of school closure during COVID-19 on early childhood care and education (ECCE) of preschoolers in perspective of learning competencies.

## Research Questions

The research questions of this study were:

1. What was the effect of school closure on early childhood care and education (ECCE)?
2. To what extent COVID-19 affected the physical, social, emotional, literacy and language development of early years' children?

The basic purpose of this research was to determine the upshot of Covid-19 crisis faced by early childhood education due to school closure. This study was to find out the effect of COVID-19 interruption on learning competencies of Early Childhood Care and Education. This study also helped in understanding the situation of readiness of learners, increased dropout rate, and social, emotional, physical, language and literacy development of students.

This study may be useful in finding out gaps in the learning competencies of early year students and help to plan the best possible solutions regarding the designing and implementation of extended syllabi and strategies in Pakistani context. It may sensitize all concerned (*i.e.*) educational authorities, curriculum developers, and school management to recognize the need for time and make practical efforts for implementation. It may be valuable for curriculum developers to bring change in curriculum design by keeping in view gaps in learning competencies of early childhood education. It may guide heads to organize training for the teachers and parents to prepare them to assist their children at the preschool level during school closure and after the reopening of schools. It may help teachers to bring changes in their instructional strategies and use multiple strategies to cope with the learning gaps in early childhood education.

## Method and Procedure

This study was qualitative in nature and conducted by using the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm helps to understand how people construct and reconstruct the meaning of their thoughts based on their routine interactions with each other. It is used to build an understanding of the research process and to learn to prioritize people's subjective understandings and diverse meanings. The phenomenological approach was adopted to determine the effect of COVID-19 crisis on the early years' education. The goal of this

phenomenological study was to explain how social reality can be known through human consciousness, especially what kind of thoughts one has about their experiences (Hasse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This technique was used to conduct this exploration so that appropriate response may be sought to get insights into students' parents' and teachers' experiences during school closure due to COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Sampling and Participants**

The population of this study consisted of parents and teachers of children at early childhood care and education level. The target population consisted of eight female preschool teachers and nine mothers. Criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used to find participants. According to Patton (2015), the selection and recruitment of participants should be following the study's goals and objectives. Purposive sampling is common in qualitative research, and it is grounded on the idea that to get the best data, find the best cases for study. Purposive sampling was the most appropriate choice for the selection of the subjects to ensure the appropriateness and representativeness, a good informant and an adequate sample size was required (Morse, 1991). A good informant is a person who is interested in sharing information and his reflective thoughts with interviewers. The focus of a qualitative study is to get in-depth insights into the small samples that's why even a single unit (n=1) can be selected purposively for the study (Patton, 1990).

The sample included eight preschool teachers (Female=8) and nine parents (Female=9). All the teachers were with Masters Degrees and experienced. Three of the parents had Bachelor's degrees, while the other six had Masters Degrees. Two of the parents who took part in the study were job holders, while the other seven were house wives.

The selection of participants was based on inclusion criteria. This inclusion criterion for preschool teachers were:

1. All the participants participated voluntarily.
2. Providing distance education.
3. The teachers of early childhood education have a maximum of 5–10 years of work experience.
4. ECLC (Early Childhood Learning Certificate) and ECLD (Early Childhood Learning Diploma) trained teachers related to early childhood education.

The criteria for inclusion of parents were:

1. Being parents of a preschooler child.
2. Being associated with teachers of their child and helping their children in education.
3. Being voluntary participants.

The current study was delimited to the semi-government pre-schools of a particular district of Pakistan. Teachers' and parents' views were taken to assess the students' learning skills. Students' learning skills assessment could be done by using other means but due to the Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing problem, the researchers could not approach them.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were held for determining that what teachers and parents of preschool children think about the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on early childhood care and education. The simple probes were utilized during the interview to acquire rich data. The semi structured interview protocol used in this study comprised of two parts to explore the views of teachers and parents, a Covid-19 Preschool teacher Interview Questions (Cov-19TIQ) and a Covid-19 Parent Interview Questions (Cov-19PIQ). The Covid-19TIQ form consisted of twelve items while the Covid-19PIQ form consisted of six items. The variables discussed via research instruments were related to school closure and learning, low readiness for learners' learning, dropout rate, and learning competencies (physical, social, emotional, language, and literacy skills). All the items were easy-to-understood and open-ended in nature. The interviews were audio-video recorded and then transcribed for drawing meanings. The duration of each interview was 30 minutes to one hour. The interview questions explored the views of teachers related to the impact of Covid-19 on students learning competencies and activities related to the learning competencies performed by the students during closure. In some instances, teachers and parents were not able to answer some queries so, at that point, different probing questions were asked to elicit the proper answers.

To ensure the content appropriateness and trustworthiness of the interview protocol, four mock interviews were conducted, and revisions were made to the protocol after consultation with four experts in the field of early childhood care and education. In qualitative research the validity is referred to its reliability and trustworthiness, as well as any assurance of results (Leavy, 2011). Trustworthiness of the study can be ensured by

addressing descriptive validity, interpretative validity, theoretical validity, and evaluative validity by using Maxwell's validity criteria for qualitative research (Maxwell, 1992). To ensure the validity of this study content validity of the instruments was ensured by the four experts in that particular area. Total of six items from Covid-19TIQ while the two items in Covid-19PIQ form were revised and finalized in the light of two experts' feedback. Interviews of participants were conducted, and data were collected through face-to-face and video audio calls. Some interviews were recorded via social media apps due to social distancing and isolation. The researchers tried to keep in view factual accuracy, the accuracy of words and actions while doing interpretations, and data were reported in an unbiased way without making judgments and evaluations of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that to establish reliability, a demonstration of validity is ample enough.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretations**

To ensure clarity, the following steps of analysis and interpretations were included:

1. Data organization and preparation
2. Initial concentration/immersion
3. Coding
4. Categorizing and theming
5. Interpretations

The basic thing is preparing data for analysis. The researcher had scan and transcribe data that have been generated, according to its nature (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Some codes of data analysis were determined in advance by the researchers. However, the list was kept open for changes throughout the analysis of data. The interviews were transcribed, open codes, themes, and sub-themes from the acquired data were developed. These themes and subthemes were *school closure and its impact on learning, school closure and low readiness learners' learning, school closure and dropout rate, COVID-19 interruption and learning competencies, involvement of students in learning activities during the closure, and COVID-19 impact on Early Childhood Education in terms of duration*. A separate file for each interview was made. Saldana (2014) suggested making a separate file for each "chunk" of data, for the interview, and so forth. A document was prepared question-wise, and queries were run to check the frequency of the words for each question. Initial immersion of data was done. This immersion of data allowed to gain

a deep understanding and emotional insight into the social world of the study. The process involved repetitive cycles of searching for meaning, renaming codes, creating small codes, compiling codes, and making concepts in new categories to manage any new information that was not considered before data analysis. The coding of data and analysis process was supported by NVivo 10, appropriate software for qualitative data analysis. This strategy relies on generating codes by using the exact language of participants (Strauss, 1987). After coding data, patterns and relationships between the codes were identified. Data were categorized and themes were developed. The process of categorization consisted of grouping the same codes (Saldana, 2014). Miles, & Huberman, (1994) developed, managed, and edited codes and sections as a detailed combat battle. They have explored and interpreted various data styles by reviewing and modifying codes retrospectively, conducting queries (*e.g.*, text search queries, matrix writing queries), and performing data demonstrations.

## **Results**

Six major themes were transpired from the data set through collaborative analysis:

- a. School closure and its impact on learning
- b. School closure and low readiness learners learning
- c. School closure and dropout rate.
- d. COVID-19 interruption and learning competencies.
- e. Involvement of students in learning activities during closure.
- f. COVID-19 impact on Early Childhood Care and Education in terms of duration.

### ***a. School closure and its impact on learning***

Data revealed that school closure had a very bad impact on children learning. It minimizes children learning activities as their children were learning through various activities under teacher supervision at school.

**Teachers' and parents' views (Respondents)**

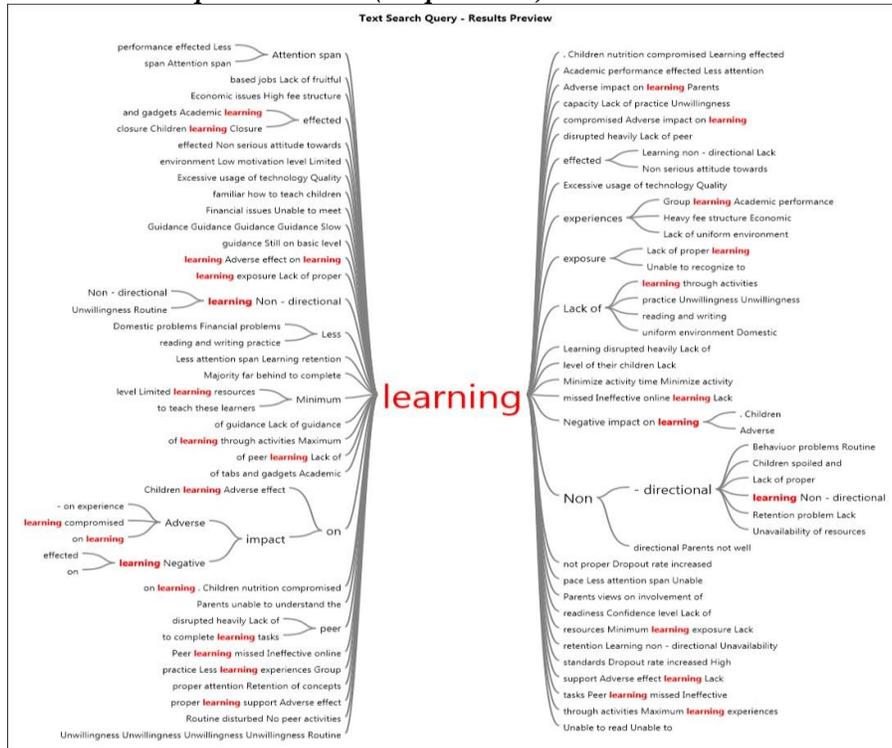


Figure 1: Impact of school closure on learning

Most of the parents disclosed that it has affected a lot of kids of this age who don't take online classes seriously, they are using tabs and mobiles and they like to spend more time playing on gadgets. Moreover, quality education has not been imparted to children through this online forum. Some of the parents tried to teach their children at home but most of the parents neglected their children which is not good for their further learning.

On the other hand, teachers also expressed that:  
 “Students' learning is extremely affected due to closure of school because maximum learning happens at school. Schools provide uniform and prepared environments which were not possible for parents to provide for their children at home.”

Parents were unable to provide all learning resources to their children. It was also tough for them to teach their children because most of the parents are not well educated and do not know how to guide their children in their studies. Some of the teachers referred that children learn at home but their learning is not proper and directional. Many teachers expressed that peer learning is the main part of a child's learning which cannot happen at home. Children are spoiled and reluctant to perform the given tasks due to excessive usage of tabs and gadgets.

***b. School closure and low readiness learners learning***

***Teachers' views (Respondents)***

It was indicated by teachers that learners with low readiness were more at risk than other children. They were unable to recognize, write and communicate properly. It was observed that these learners were usually neglected at home by their parents.

It was also mentioned by most of the teachers that parents of low readiness learners did not seem serious about the online classes. These children were unable to complete their given tasks. They were facing problems to do their work independently. Due to school closure, they had no chance to do social activities. They had no proper guidance to practice reading and writing. They were feeling burdened. These learners were at high risk.

One of the teachers expressed that:

*“Low readiness learners already lack learning readiness. They are not confident in expressing themselves. They are not getting a chance of individual attention and experiences of doing various activities”.*

***c. School closure and dropout rate***

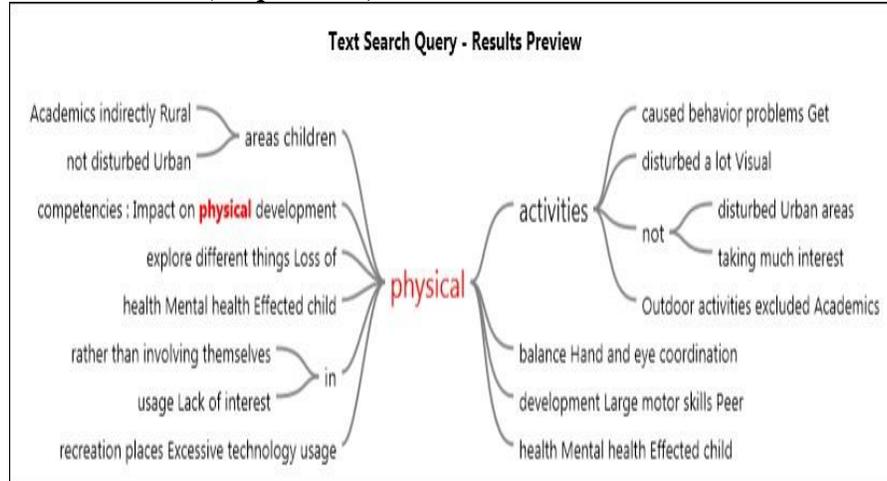
***Teachers' views (Respondents)***

In this scenario, most families were facing financial problems. Most of the teachers mentioned that the drop-out rate has increased, the reason is that schools were having high fee structures which were very difficult for parents to afford at this time. Parents think that online studies were not as helpful for their children so, why they should bear the pressure of the heavy fee structures. Some parents were having a fear that their children cannot meet the learning standards. Due to these reasons, many children have dropped out of school.

**d. COVID-19 interruption and learning competencies**

Researchers analyzed five dimensions of learning competencies including emotional, social, language, literacy, and physical development. It was noted that emotional, social and literacy, language development were identified as most affected due to loss of physical development, among learning competencies reported by teachers. Coding indicated that maximum respondents reported that physical development was the least directly affected area but it has serious effects on language, literacy, social and emotional development.

**Teachers' views (Respondents)**



*Figure 2: Impact on physical development*

It was discussed by the teachers that physical health helps to maintain mental health. Due to school closure students have been confined to one place as they have no facility to play outdoor games. They did not play outdoor games but played some indoor games randomly that's why their large and fine motor skills are affected. Due to staying at home for a long extended period, children used to get addicted to technology and wanted to spend most of their time on mobiles and laptops watching cartoons.

One of the teachers stated that:

*“Children are more interested to use mobiles rather than involving themselves in physical activities”.*

Many teachers indicated that at home children are not taking much interest in their studies that's why due to lack of practice children were facing hand and eye coordination problem. They are unable to focus on one task for a long span. They were showing unwillingness to do a given task. Children lived in one place that's why they remained unable to explore different things. Loss of physical activities caused various behavior problems in children, they got aggressive, irritating, and lazy. Discipline issues have been increased and a lack of self-control is observed in students.

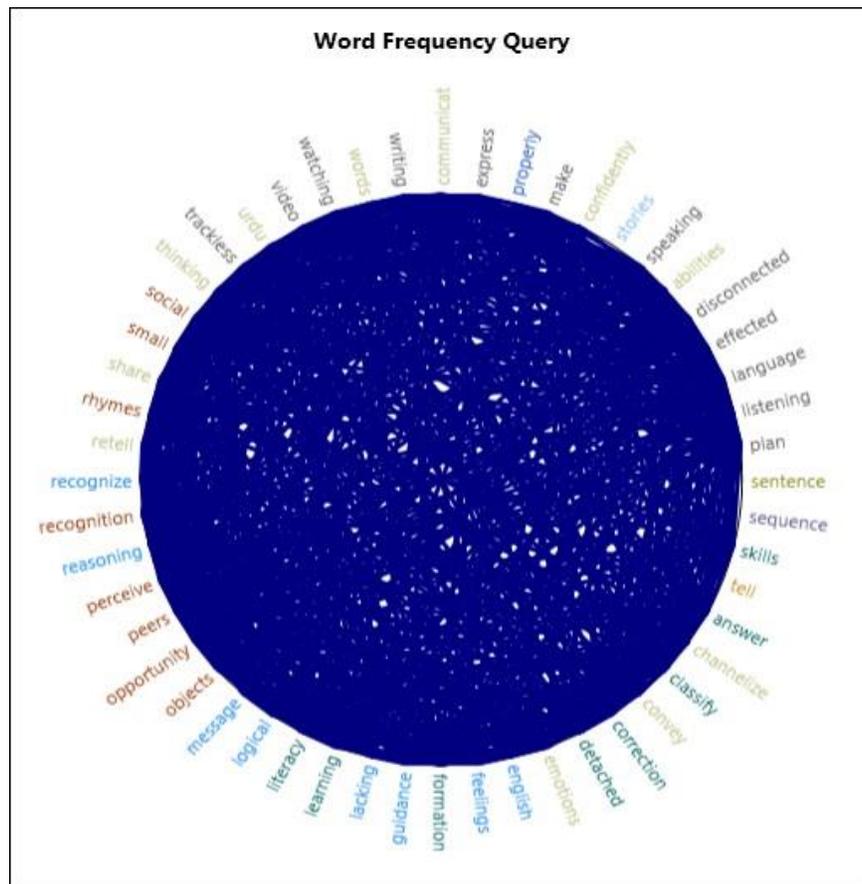


Figure 3: Impact on language development

Most of the teachers reported that children at home did not get the opportunity for listening and proper expression of language. They did not find much time to share their feelings that's why they were unable to channel their emotions and express themselves properly. Their speaking

skills were affected as they were not familiar with others and unable to perceive and answer the questions. At schools, children used to get proper time for listening through different activities like video watching, and storytelling, and the teacher gave them maximum listening time throughout the day. This part was skipped from the student's routine. Students were disconnected from all kinds of interactions with peers and teachers. They were unable to make small sentences, tell stories in sequence, and make their own stories and rhymes. They were unable to communicate confidently. Parents did not correct and guide their children during speaking. Children were lacking logical thinking abilities.

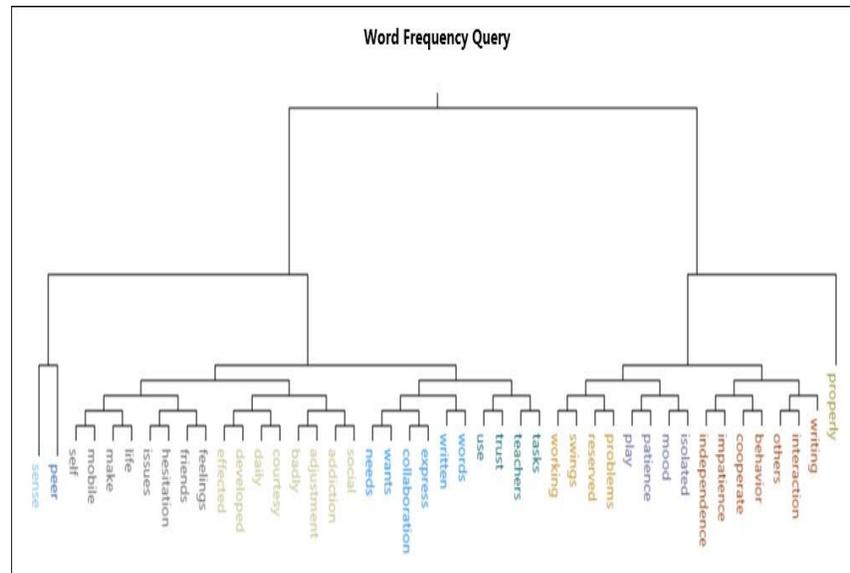


Figure 4: Impact on social development

It was discussed by teachers that students who went to their hometown and lived there, were more social than those students who lived in their apartments. Children felt isolated, trackless, and detached. They were unable to express their needs and wants. They did not want to make friends. The practice of social distancing affected their minds. They were showing impatient behavior and did not know how to collaborate with their friends, or how to communicate their needs and wants. They were not able to use courtesy words in their daily interaction with their peers. Students have developed trust issues and hesitation to express their feelings.



*Figure 5: Impact on literacy development*

It was mentioned by the teachers that students need special plans and activities to fulfill this learning gap. During online classes, students just learned basic concepts and they did not practice reading and writing. Students were feeling less confident and confused because their concepts were not clear and they were unable to write with proper formation. Some students did the random practice of reading and writing on a note book which is not sufficient for learning and their learning is not proper and directional. Students were facing problems in reading and learning properly. They were unable to recognize 3D shapes. They were unable to do mental math. Due to lack of practice, they were unable to handle the written work. Most of the teachers stated that if the duration of school closure will be increased then a permanent gap in students learning will occur.

Word Frequency Query

issues	emotional	control	aggressive	effected	disturbance	academic	child	common	communica
						depressive	directional	horrified	isolated
					expression				
			instability	mood		maturity	psychology	quite	sense
	discipline	self			imitated	needs	shy	unsystem	unwillingn
behavioral			learning	swings		negatively	unstable	use	wants
					problems				
					non	unstructure	violent		

Figure 6: Impact on emotional development

It was expressed by teachers that behavioral issues arose in children and they did not know how to express their feelings. They were not having self-control and discipline in their daily interaction with their peers. Students were showing mood swings and were found disturbed. They were feeling shy, horrified, depressive, and aggressive. These behavioral issues were indirectly affecting their academic achievements.

**e. Involvement of students in learning activities during the closure  
Parents' views (Respondents)**

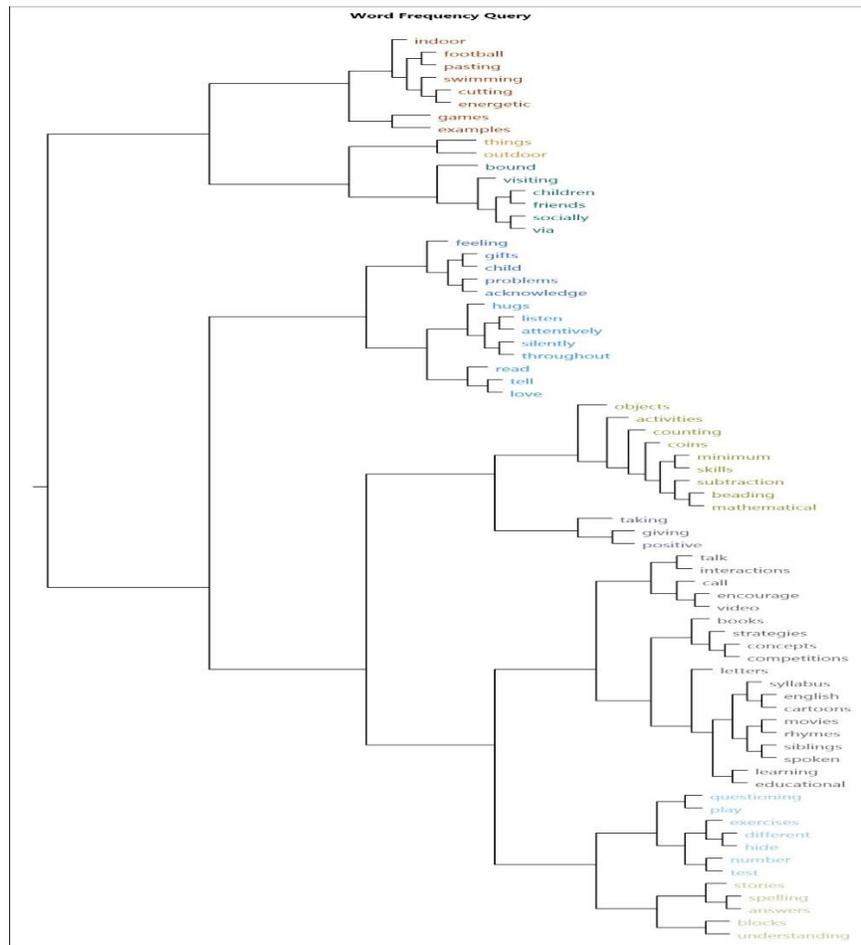


Figure 7: Involvement in learning competencies-related activities

**Involvement in physical development activities**

Parents were quite concerned about the physical activities of their children. To overcome this gap, they played many activities with their children like cutting, pasting, jumping on numbers, chase games, mental games, quizzes and hide and seek.

Most of the parents agreed on this point that they had played maximum indoor games with their children but have not played outdoor games which was the most essential part of their physical development.

### **Involvement in language development activities**

Parents tried hard to put effort into improving their children spoken skills. They showed them different educational videos, one-on-one talk, played word games, and sang rhymes on daily basis with their children. Parents also discussed making their children be able to learn from syllabus books. Parents have a discussion on various topics with their children and allowed them to choose their favorite topics and talk about them.

Parents said that during screen time with their children, they tried to let their children watch cartoons in English to enhance their listening and speaking skills. Parents agreed that they did not perform specific activities which could help to boost the language skills of their children.

### **Involvement in social and emotional development activities**

Most of the parents said that during this pandemic, the social development of the children was disturbed badly. For children at the age of early childhood, the missing interaction with peers had negatively effect on the socio-emotional skills' development. Parents highlighted that socially they were bound to stay at home but they tried to bring this gap by making online calls with their peers. They did different new things like making love cards. Parents talk with them throughout the day, they acknowledge their children's feelings and show affection by having them.

One of the parents responded that:

*“Every time, I guide my child with a positive note, by listening to her silently and attentively when she is trying to talk about anything”.*

### **Involvement in literacy skills development activities**

Parents were conscious of child literacy skills' development. They tried to do various activities to reinforce the mathematical concepts. They did different activities like beading by using real-life objects, counting on fingers, jumping on the number line, and counting coins. Inculcate different concepts like addition during playtime. Through these activities, parents helped their children to build up mathematical understanding. Most of the parents agreed that they did not put much attention to the mathematical skills of their children.

### ***f. COVID-19 impact on Early Childhood Education in terms of duration***

Covid-19 interruption may have a long-term effect on the literacy and emotional development of children. It also affected physical development, language, and social development but this gap can be filled in a short time by taking some serious steps from the side of the school and parents. Covid-19 may affect students' academic performance and emotional

competencies in the long term, but their grades can also be affected in the future. Its effect may be long-term, only the teacher's extra effort can bridge this gap that requires a lot of time and planning.

Most teachers discussed that if they compare the last and current sessions, there is a clear gap between students' skills development. Children missed all activities which help to build up confidence and to boost their learning. School closure for a long duration is alarming for students' holistic development. Their writing skills, fine, large motor skills development, EPLE (Early Practical Life Experience), and sensorial experiences were missed. Some teachers mentioned that the learning abilities of children at this age are sharp they can grasp the concept easily so, they will easily bridge this learning gap.

## **Discussion**

It is important to note that it was difficult to find out relevant literature related to the particular study, in the times of COVID-19. The subjects of this study were teachers and parents from metropolitan city of Pakistan, which were most vulnerable to the consequences of school closure and global lockdown. The findings are the true depiction of their real life experiences.

The findings showed that most teachers were concerned related to sudden school closure and its impact on children's literacy skills and emotional health. Students have performed certain activities during the closure of schools related to all learning competencies but all those activities were not enough to fulfill the learning needs of children. The most frequently reported pattern of activities reported by the parents during the COVID-19 period were unstructured activities. Many important activities were not practiced by the students, which could help mitigate learning loss during school closures.

During the pandemic due to the sudden shutdown of schools, students faced a loss of social interaction. This was the reason that children's emotional health was disturbed which indirectly affected children's academics badly. Due to living at home or in a confined place for a long time, most of the students got addicted to mobiles, tabs, and gadgets. They preferred to spend all their time playing games rather than focusing on reading writing and physical activities. They have completely lost interest in their studies. Children practice and learned the different concepts from their parents but their learning was non-directional. Low readiness learners were particularly affected by the lack of teacher support and they are at

extreme risk. It was founded that if this closure will prolong then it may have long-term serious effects on children's physical, social, emotional, language, and literacy skills.

Many media sources opinions and notifications also discussed learning losses and their impact on students (C.D.C.P, 2020; Jinshan, 2020; UNESCO, 2020c). In many countries, vulnerable pupils have been the main point of concern during home tutoring (Andrew, *et. al.*, 2020; Green, 2020; Outhwaite, 2020). There were different causes and factors for it. Students have been bound in homes due to the serious threat of the viral infections. Schools had to follow mandatory lockdowns to maintain social distancing for the betterment of the nation. School closure causes stress and anxiety among young school going children. After reopening of schools for a short period, students followed social distancing, and avoid group work and hand shaking, which was also a factor of anxiety and stress in students. The timing of the extended lockdown was very critical.

All participants mentioned that the learning competencies of preschoolers have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was challenging for the parents to engage with their children, most of them tried to stay technology-friendly and grappled with learning online. To bridge this gap, school Education should be experienced by the children for their skills development. During school closure students have missed all learning opportunities and faced different learning environments at home. Students did not learn much at home as they could learn at school. There were different reasons behind it, e.g. lacking peer learning, unavailability of a prepared environment, and involvement in unstructured activities. All learning competencies of a student are affected detrimentally.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The uncertain times for the development of young minds in particular and humanity in general, mitigate the physical, emotional, social, language, and literacy loss consequences. The academia, parents, government, and non-government organizations (NGOs) must provide a structured plan after negotiation and developing new partnerships.

According to UNESCO (2020d), health crisis, as well as educational crisis, resulted at a global level due to COVID-19. The covid-19 pandemic broadens the educational achievement gaps, it is not just a critical point for health but also for education (UNESCO 2020b). This research can be

helpful for teachers, parents, and policymakers in devising means to bridge this gap that has been created by the pandemic.

It is suggested that teachers of Grade I may add revision of the basic concepts, content, and course of the syllabus that were taught at all preparatory stages and may plan effective pedagogies to provide additional time, individual attention and group work to enhance young children's literacy, social, emotional, language and physical skills. An additional booklet based on multiple activities and worksheets must be provided by the school to the parents to reinforce the learning of concepts to make their learning directional side by side at home as well. School administration should arrange additional classes for low readiness students during zero period to provide maximum learning experiences to improve their learning acquisition. Frequent parents and teacher's meetings may be arranged for feedback and communication with parents to track children's progress. School administration may bring change in their fee structure for the particular dropped students to bring them back to school. A proper activities plan may be prepared for the games period by the school for students' maximum physical development. Teachers must take into consideration students' emotional well-being while planning activities for students. Maximum group work activities may be made part of lesson planning. They need to be more careful to fulfill the social and emotional needs of the students as these might have been changed qualitatively after going through the pandemic. Schools may arrange counseling sessions for emotionally disturbed students. Teaching-learning strategies may be activity based at the maximum level to enhance the students reading and writing skills. Policymakers may design plans for sustainable early care and education, and make sure that all stakeholders implement it properly during the times of crisis. Moreover, more information related to an outbreak should be added to educational programs to make the parents part of this process. This study may help the future researcher for further research on challenges teachers face during the pandemic and its effect on other grade levels.

## References

- Andrew, A., Cattan, S., Costa-Dias, M., Farquharson, C., Kraftman, L., Krutikova, S., Phimister, A., & Sevilla, A. (2020). *Learning during the lockdown: Real-time data on children's experiences during home learning*. The Institute for Fiscal Studies. [www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/Edited\\_Final\\_BN288%20Learning%20during%20the%20lockdown.pdf](http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/Edited_Final_BN288%20Learning%20during%20the%20lockdown.pdf)
- Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C., Andersen, C. T., Di-Girolamo, A. M., Lu, C., McCoy, D. C., Fink, G., Shawar, Y. R., Shiffman, J., Devercelli, A. E., Wodon, Q. T., Vargas-Barón, E., & Grantham-McGregor, S. (2020). Early childhood development coming of age: Science through the life course. *The Lancet*, *389*(3), 77–90.
- Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). *Stress and coping*. [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managingstressanxiety.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019ncov%2Fprepare%2Fmanaging-stress-anxiety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managingstressanxiety.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019ncov%2Fprepare%2Fmanaging-stress-anxiety.html).
- Crim, C., Hawkins, J., Thornton, J., Rosof, H.B., Copley, J., & Thomas, E. (2008). Early Childhood Educators' Knowledge of Early Literacy Development. *Issues in Teacher Education*, *17*(14), 72-73.
- Denham, S. A. (2006). Social-emotional competence as support for school readiness: What is it and how do we assess it? *Early Education & Development*, *17*(1), 57–89.
- Denham, S. A., & Brown, C. (2010). Plays nice with others: Social-emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education & Development*, *21*(1), 652–680.
- Engzell, P., Frey, A., & Verhagen, M. D. (2021). Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, *118*(17), 41–45.

- Hesse-Biber, S., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.). SAGE.
- Jackson, J. K., Weiss, M. A., Schwarzenberg, A. B., Nelson, R. M., Sutter, K. M., & Sutherland,
- James K. J. (2021). *Global economic effects of COVID-19*. Congressional Research Service. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R46270>. Pdf
- Jinshan, H. (2020). *Parents grapple with e-learning as Chinese schools stay shut*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2020/02/24/parents-grapple-with-e-learning-as-Chinese-schools-stay-shut>.
- Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020). *Projecting the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement*. [https://doi: 10.26300/CDRV-YW05](https://doi:10.26300/CDRV-YW05).
- Leavy, P. (2011b). *Oral history: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(3), 279–300.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.). SAGE.
- Morse, J. M. (1991). Strategies for sampling. In J. M. Morse (Eds.), *Qualitative Nursing Research: A Contemporary Dialogue* (pp. 127–145). SAGE. <https://doi:10.4135/9781483349015.n16>
- National Council of Educational Research and Training. (2006). *Position Paper National Focus learning: Toward common views and vocabulary*. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED391576>.

- National Education Goals Panel. (1995). Reconsidering children's early development and learning: Toward common views and vocabulary. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED391576>.
- National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: US.
- Oreopoulos, P., Page, M., & Stevens, A. (2006). Does human capital transfer from parent to child? The intergenerational effects of compulsory schooling. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 24(4), 729–760.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4<sup>th</sup>ed.). SAGE.
- Saldana, J. (2014). Coding and analysis strategies. In P. Leavy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 581–605). Oxford University Press.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for the social scientist*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, R. A., & Lagattuta, K. H. (2006). *Feeling and understanding: Early emotional development*. *Blackwell handbook of early childhood development*. Blackwell.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). *Physical activity guidelines for Americans*. The U.S.
- UNESCO. (2020). *COVID-19 Education Response*. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/education-response/consequences>.

- UNESCO. (2020a). *How is China ensuring learning when classes are disrupted by the coronavirus?* <https://en.unesco.org/news/how-china-ensuring-learning-when-classes-are-disrupted-coronavirus>.
- UNESCO. (2020b). *UNESCO Covid-19 Education response: Education sector issue notes*. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/issuenotes>.
- UNESCO. (2020c). *Adverse consequences of school closures*. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>.
- UNESCO. (2020d). *COVID-19 Educational disruption and response*. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>.
- UNESCO. (2021). *COVID-19 educational disruption and response*. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2020). *COVID-19: A Global Crisis for Teaching and Learning*. UNESCO.
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2021a). *How the COVID-19 pandemic has scarred the world's children*. <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/COVID-19-pandemic-scarred-world-children>
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2021b). *At least one-third COVID-19: At least a third of the world's schoolchildren unable to access remote learning during school closures, new report says*. <https://www.unicef.org/pressreleases/COVID-19-least-third-worlds-schoolchildren-unable-access-remote-learning-during#:~:text=NEW%20YORK%2C%2027%20August%202020,%20to%20school'%20plans>
- University of Medicine and Health Sciences. (2012). *Your Child Development and Behaviour Resources*. [www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/devmile.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/devmile.htm).

World Bank. (2021). *Urgent, effective action required to quell the impact of COVID-19 on education worldwide*. [https:// www. World bank. org/en/ news/ immersive- story/ 2021/ 01/ 22/ urgent- effective action- required-to-quell-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-education worldwide](https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2021/01/22/urgent-effective-action-required-to-quell-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-education-worldwide)

***Citation of this Article:***

Kanwal, Z. and Farooq, M. S. (2022). COVID-19 crisis: Early childhood care and education in Pakistan. *Journal of Early Childhood Care and Education*, 6(2), 1–26.