Shifting to Online Mode: Analyzing Parents' Perceptions of Social Distancing and its Effects on Academic and Social Learning of Primary School Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of social distancing on academic and social learning of primary school students during pandemic in Pakistan. For this research study, a mixed-methods convergent parallel research design was employed. Through a questionnaire, quantitative responses were collected from 120 parents whereas for qualitative responses, face-to-face interviews were conducted with twenty parents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the quantitative data, whereas thematic analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data. According to the study results, parents perceived that social distancing affected the academic and social learning of their children during the pandemic in the shifted phase from offline to online mode, although there were variations with respect to the demographics selected for this study. Based on the parents' interviews, the majority agreed that social distancing had a negative effect on children's academic and social learning, in addition to tempering their communication skills and disrupting the psychological health, which consequently generated a learning gap. It is recommended that the concerned authorities may take such initiatives to address and mend the learning loss of children relevant to their academic and social skills in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: *Social distancing, parents, academic learning, social learning, pandemic*

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Introduction

Many countries around the world have implemented measures such as lockdown to reduce social contact in order to slow down the spread of the novel Corona disease (Brodeur et al., 2021). Educational institutes faced a severe disruption of the educational process from pre-primary to tertiary education due to a complete lockdown (United Nations 2020). Schleicher (2020) stated that the dark effects of the pandemic could be mitigated on the education of students, parents, and teachers by reshaping curricula and education through internet learning platforms and digital educational sites. In many countries, educational institutions have taken the initiative to offer online classes in order to reduce children's learning losses.

Pakistan, like the rest of the world, pioneered distance education with the Tally School. Private institutes in Pakistan also provided education through the internet in order to ensure the continuity of learning and communication between teachers and students. But these efforts are not fruitful for the overall development of our young children because child development is a process of many-sided development. For example, in school, a child is engaged in classroom activity and project-based learning, where he learns practically; he also learns from his classmates through interacting and playing with them. In online learning, schools cannot provide an environment where children can learn holistically. The researcher considered it significant to conduct this distinctive study, as the findings will give a holistic, broad, and wide picture of parents' perspectives on the effect of social distancing on their children's academic and social learning. Parents are keen observers of their children and have noted many things that are happening with their children. While most research focuses on the perspectives of teachers and students, parents, who are more concerned about the education of their children, are largely ignored. There is also a strong reason for taking the parents' perspective in the Pakistani context because most research has been done in the western context, so there is a lack of information about the parents' perspective on the effect of social distancing on primary school students' social and academic learning in Pakistan. To fill this gap, this study tries to explore Pakistani parents' perspectives regarding the effect of social distancing on primary school students' communication, academic and social learning amidst the pandemic.

Review of Literature

Since the spread of corona pandemic large quantity of researches had been done on various topic related to pandemic effects on various aspects. For the present research to grasp the research topic the researcher looked at several papers linked to his research as well as other reliable sources. This study's literature review was conducted in a standard manner, providing a review of COVID-19 effects the Education Sector, social learning, communication skill and academic learning. UN (Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2020) said 107 countries had closed their schools because of COVID-19 on March 18, 2020, affecting 862 million small kids and youngsters around the world roughly half of all students and 29 of those countries were severely affected, with national school closures occurring in few days.

Social competency and the quality of interpersonal interactions are influenced by several kinds of behaviors that may be learned and enhanced throughout life (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2017). Several learning mechanisms, such as differential reinforcement, rule-based learning, and following other behavior, which are primarily mediated by the social environment, are used to develop these skills (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2014; Gresham, 2018). For educational achievement, social adjustment, and social skills development, the child's interaction with his peers is essential.

This interaction also acts as a caring aspect (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013). According to Lee (2020), children who have previous mental illnesses or who have had particular educational need in the past may be more negatively impacted by school closures in terms of their mental health. Interventions during the epidemic are advised in that same article to lessen the harm done to children's education (Lee, 2020).

The process of transmission knowledge and common perceptive from one person to another can be called communication (Keyton, 2011). The term highlights the reality that information transmission does not result in communication unless there is a common understanding (Cheney, 2011). Whether discussing a topic, speaking on the phone, or sharing information via letters, people are said to be in contact. Whether it is written or spoken, communication is fundamentally the sharing of information (Velentzas and Borni, 2014). As a result, the process of transferring or sharing information between information senders and receivers occurs through communication (Masdul, 2018; Suprapto, 2017). In general, the purpose of communication skills is to create social connections between people in a variety of contexts, including transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and even multidisciplinary fields like politics, economics, psychology, health, education, and others. (Masdul, 2018; Liang, Tian, Zhang, & Tian, 2020). Four purposes of communication in learning are: Social communication is the first type, followed by meaningful communication, formal procedure communication, and instrumental communication (Masdul, 2018).

According to Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. (2020), switching to virtual learning had an impact on students' academic achievement and resulted in a significant amount of intellectual fatigue because of the increased effort. Because they didn't obtain the right instruction from their professors Ali, (2020), many students haven't benefited from online learning and stop showing up for lessons.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to examine the effect of social distancing on communication, social learning and academics of primary school students during the pandemic.

Research Questions of the Study

The research questions of the study are given below:

1) Does social distancing temper students' communication?
2) Does social distancing affect social learning of primary school students?
3) Does social distancing affect academic learning of primary school students?
4) Do parents feel that their children exhaust themselves mentally and have impaired social relationships during pandemic?

Research Hypotheses of the Study

Following research hypotheses were formulated to investigate the significant differences in perceptions of the effects of social distancing on academic and social learning on the basis of parents' gender and locality.

1) Gender and location of parents do not significantly affect their perceptions of the effects of social distancing on children's communication skill, academic and social learning.

2) Parents' age group and qualification do not significantly affect their perceptions of the effects of social distancing on children's communication skill, academic and social learning.

Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature and employed a mixed-methods approach. A mixed method convergent parallel design was used. A survey questionnaire and a semi structured interview protocol was used to determine the effect of social distancing on primary school students academic and social learning.

Population and Sample: The current study's population included all parents of primary school students in Punjab's public and private sectors. The sample was selected from parents of students studying in public and private schools of Sargodha district only. In the present study, a simple random sampling was used to collect the quantitative data from 120 parents. Moreover, face-to-faced interviews were conducted from 20 parents by asking 6 semi structured questions for the purpose of collecting qualitative data.

Research Instruments: In this study, two research tools were used. Q1 was questionnaire that was used for quantitative data and Q2 was semi structured interview protocol. Q1 was flourished by added statements related to social distancing effects on children. There were 6 statements related to communication skill, 12 statements related to social learning and 10 statements were related to academic learning along with various demographic variables such as age, gender, qualification and locality or area. The above statements were generated with extreme care and attention with reviewing appropriate literature. Statements were measured on 5 point Likert scale such as "1 = strongly disagree," 2 = disagree," 3 uncertain," 4 = agree," 5 = strongly agree,"

The raw draft was analyzed by a panel of 5 PhD experts for content and face validity. The questionnaire was amended according to recommendations and pilot tested with 35 participants (parents) that were not included in the final sample of the study. The Cronbach alpha value of reliability of statements related to communication skill (6 items, CS = 0.840), social learning (12 items, SL = 0.854) and academic learning (10 items, AL = 0.899) and over all reliability of 28 items was 0.9 which is highly acceptable value for inter consistency of instrument. For Q2 researchers first developed 12 questions and conducted interviews with 5 parents after pilot testing. After making some changes and preparing the final interview, six questions were finalized according keeping in view the experts' opinions.

Parents' quantitative responses were analyzed through SPSS. Both descriptive (percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation) and inferential (like t-test and one-way ANOVA) statistics were applied. For qualitative data thematic analysis was employed.

Table 01
Reliability analysis of the questionnaire used in the survey (n = 120)

Sr. No	Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
1	Communication skill	06	.840
2	Social learning	12	.854
3	Academic learning	10	.899
Overall reliability		28	0.9

Findings

Participants' demographic information

There were 120 parents (76 male parents and 44 female parents). There were 75 parents from urban areas and 45 parents from rural areas. Only 18 (15%) parents were between the ages of 18 and 30, 36 (28.3%) were between the ages of 31 and 40, 39 (32.5%) were between the ages of 41 and 50, and 24 (20%) were between the ages of 51 and 60, with only 5 (4%) parents being over 60. Regarding the variable "parents' education," 7 (5.8%) parents mentioned that their qualification is "middle pass," 11 (9.2%) parents wrote that their qualification is "matriculation pass," and 8 (6.7%) parents stated that their qualification is "F.A. pass." 25 (20.8%) said that their qualification is graduate, and 49 (40.8%) parents mentioned that their qualification is master's. Only 20 (16.7%) of the parents had a M.Phil. or higher education.

RQ1: Does social distancing temper children's communication?

Parents were asked to show their perspective on 6 statements related to social distancing that affect their children communication skill. Most of the parents were agree that due to social distancing children communication skill affected as result showed with a mean score (3.65) and standard deviation (0.828).

RQ 2: Does social distancing affect children's social learning?

Participant of study appeared on same page related to 12 statements on social distancing that affect children social learning. Most of the parents were agree that due to social distancing children social learning affected as result showed with a mean score (3.70) and standard deviation (0.666).

Table 02
Demographic information of parents

Sr. No.	Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	76	(63%)
		Female	44	(36%)
2	Area	Urban	75	(62%)
		Rural	45	(37%)
3	Age of respondents	20-30	18	(15%)
		31-40	34	(28%)
		41-50	39	(32%)
		51-60	24	(20%)
		Above 60	4	(4%)
4	Qualifications	Primary	00	(0%)
		Middle	07	(5.8 %)
		Matriculation	11	(9.2%)
		F.A	8	(6.7 %)
		B.A	25	(20%)
		M.A	49	(40.8%)
		MPhilandAbove	20	(16.7%)

Table 02, shown above, indicated the demographics of parents, for example; gender, area, age and qualification along with categories, frequencies and its percentages.

Table 03
The social distancing affects children communication skill

Sr.	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Social distancing has affected my child's thought expression ability.	3.48	1.231
2	Social distancing has affected my child's conversation skills.	3.83	.932
3	Social distancing affected my child's voice and tone.	3.59	1.134
4	Due to social distancing, my child avoids family discussions.	3.54	1.215
5	Social distancing has affected my child's listening and attention abilities.	3.75	.981
6	Due to social distancing, my child avoids responding to other questions.	3.75	1.147
Over all communication skill		3.65	.828

Table 03, given above, reflected the mean score of respondents on how social distancing affects children communication skill. For example, the conversation skills of children were affected severely as perceived by their parents. Further, the mean score received on overall communication skill is 3.65 showing the communication skill of children was also tempered in pandemic due to social distancing.

Table 04
The social distancing affects children social learning

Sr.	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Due to social distancing, my child avoids social functions.	3.68	1.153
2	My child's ability to form relationships has been hampered by social distancing.	3.81	1.140
3	Due to social distancing, my child avoids sharing his feelings.	3.80	1.082
4	Due to social distancing, my child avoids sharing his problems.	3.83	1.018
5	Due to social distancing, my child gets irritated in critical situations.	3.94	.938
6	Due to social distancing, my child avoids saying "Slam."	3.32	1.257
7	Due to social distancing, my child avoids taking an interest in physical games.	3.43	1.228
8	Due to social distancing, my child avoids interacting with guests.	3.68	1.045
9	Social distancing has affected my child's self-confidence level.	3.69	1.098
10	Social distancing has affected my child's ability to express himself.	3.65	1.026
11	Social distancing has affected my child's social adjustment ability.	3.82	.926
12	Due to social distancing, my child's behavior has become aggressive.	3.83	.950
Over all social learning		*3.70*	*0.666*

The table above indicated that the social learning of children was also affected by social distancing. For example, the greater mean score indicated that children were irritated in critical situation, and this happened due to social distancing. Moreover, over all social learning score is 3.70 indicating that parents were of the view that social learning of children was affected in pandemic.

RQ 3: Does social distancing affect children's academic learning?

Respondents of study showed almost same perspective related to 10 statements on social distancing effects on children academic learning. Most of the parents were agree that due to social distancing children academic learning affected as result show mean score (3.80) and standard deviation (0.797).

Table 05
The social distancing affects children academic learning

Sr.	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Due to social distancing, my child avoids study discussions at home.	3.71	1.032
2	Due to social distancing, my child avoids learning activities.	3.93	10.78
3	Social distancing has affected my child's writing ability.	3.88	1.154
4	Social distancing has affected my child's reading lessons and understanding abilities.	3.82	1.045
5	Social distancing has affected my child's lesson-learning ability.	3.74	1.126
6	Due to social distancing, my child avoids doing his or her homework regularly.	4.03	.898
7	Social distancing stopped my child from thinking creatively.	3.66	1.185
8	Due to social distancing, my child avoids obeying my discipline.	3.53	1.216
9	My child's academic performance has suffered as a result of social isolation.	3.94	1.048
10	Social distancing has affected my child's overall learning progress.	3.83	1.051
Over all academic learning		*3.80*	*.787*

Hypothesis 1: Gender and location of parents do not significantly affect their perceptions of the effects of social distancing on children's communication skill and academic and social learning.

Table 06
Independent sample t-test comparison based on gender and location of parents with regard to children communication, social learning and academic learning

Variables	Mean	SD	Gender			Location		
			t	*df*	*p*	t	*df*	*p*
Communication skill	3.65	0.828	-1.167	118	.246	-.477	118	.634
Social learning	3.70	0.666	-.105	118	.916	-2.279	118	.024
Academic learning	3.80	0.787	-1.659	118	.100	-1.331	118	.186

$p < .005$

The comparison of parent's perspective of the effects of social distancing on children's communication skill, social learning and academic learning. Table 6 outlined the detail of the results. These findings indicated that parents' gender had no statistically significant difference with their perspective about the effect of social distancing on children communication skill, social learning and academic learning. The location of parents appeared to predict that location had no significant difference in parents' perspective about effect of social distancing on children communication skill and academic learning but as the p value of social learning is.024 (less than.05), indicating that a difference was discovered in the perspectives of parents about the effect of social distancing on children social learning.

Hypothesis 2: Parents' age group and qualification do not significantly affect their perceptions of the effects of social distancing on children's communication skill and academic and social learning.

Table 07

One-way ANOVA comparison on the basis of parents' age regarding the effects of social distancing on their children's communication skills

	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	*p*
Age	1.967	4	.492	.709	.587
Error	79.716	115	.693		
Total	81.683	119			

$p < .005$

In table 7, the one-way ANOVA illustrates that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents with respect to their age as far as the effects of social distancing on their children's communication skills is concerned, as shown by the values (F =.709 and p =.587>0.05). There was no effect of a parent's age on their perspective on the effects of social distancing on children's communication skills.

Table 08

One-way ANOVA comparison on the basis of parents' age regarding the effects of social distancing on their children's social learning

	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	*p*
Age	.866	4	.217	.479	.751
Error	51.994	115	.452		
Total	52.860	119			

$p < .005$

In table 8, the one-way ANOVA illustrates that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents with respect to their age as far as the effects of social distancing on their children's social learning is concerned, as shown by the values f =.479 and p =.751>0.05. It means that all parents irrespective of their age had the same perception of the effects of social distancing on their children's social learning.

Table 09
One-way ANOVA comparison based on parents' age regarding the effects of social distancing on their children's academic learning

	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	*p*
Age	1.922	4	.481	.770	.547
Error	71.804	115	.624		
Total	73.726	119			

$p < .005$

In table 9, the one-way ANOVA illustrates that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of parents with respect to their age as far as the effects of social distancing on their children's academic learning is concerned, as shown by the values f =.770 and p =.547>0.05. It means that all parents irrespective of their age had the same perception of the effects of social distancing on their children's academic learning.

Table 10
One-way ANOVA comparison on the basis of parents' qualification regarding the effects of social distancing on their children's communication skills

	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	*p*
Qualification	6.365	5	1.273	1.927	.095
Error	75.318	114	.661		
Total	81.683	119			

$p < .005$

Table 10 showed no statistically significant difference between parents' qualifications and the effects of social distancing on their children's communication skills, as indicated by the values f = 1.927 and p =.095>0.05. It means that all parents irrespective of their qualification had the same perception of the effects of social distancing on their children's communication skills.

Table 11
One-way ANOVA comparison based on parents' qualification regarding the effects of social distancing on their children's academic learning

	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean Square	F	*p*
Qualifications	6.085	5	1.217	2.051	.077
Error	67.641	114	.593		
Total	73.726	119			

$p < .005$

Table 11 showed no statistically significant difference between parents' qualifications and the effects of social distancing on their children's academic learning. According to the values, f = 2.051 and p =.077>0.05. It means that all parents irrespective of their qualification had the same perception of the effects of social distancing on their children's academic learning.

Table 12
One-*way ANOVA comparison on the basis of parents' qualification regarding the effects of social* distancing on their children's social learning

	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Qualifications	4.871	5	.974	2.314	.048
Error	47.989	114	.421		
Total	52.860	119			

$p < .005$

Table 12 showed the value f = 2.314 and p =.048.05. There was statistically significant difference between parents' qualifications and the effects of social distancing on their children's social learning. It means that the parents with respect to their qualifications had different perception of the effects of social distancing on their children's social learning. The variations in their perception had been illustrated in LSD post hoc comparison in table 13 given below.

Table 13
LSD post hoc comparison of parent's qualification with regard to the effect of social distancing on social learning of children

Dependent Variable	I of participants	J of participants	Mean Diff. I-J	Std Error	Sig.
Social Learning	Matric	FA	.61458*	.30148	.044
		MA	.55442*	.21647	.012
	FA	MA	.30776	.15947	.056
	MPhil & Above	MA	.37526*	.17216	.031

The LSD post hoc comparison of parents' perceptions on the effect of social distancing on children's social learning with regard to qualification is shown in Table 13. According to the qualifications of the comparison participants, matriculation-qualified parents' perceptions differed significantly from FA-qualified parents' perceptions (I-J =.61458*, p = 0.44). Matriculation qualification parents' perspectives differed significantly from M.A. parents', (I-J) =.55442*, p = 0.12. The perspectives of middle qualification parents differed significantly from those of M.PHIL and above parents, (I-J) = -1.02262*, P = 0.05. As shown in the table 13, parents with higher education have a different perception of the effects of social distancing on children's social learning than parents with lesser qualification.

Qualitative data Analysis

The researchers interviewed twenty parents. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Urdu language and recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the "bottom-up," by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2007). Data collected through interviews were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. Researcher paid several readings to understand the data and constituted a framework to categorize it systematically. During analysis of the interviews categories and themes are emerged. The code assigned to text along with digit basically represents the major category of the text in which the parents talked about. Consistency in elaborative responses of parents on similar issue also indicates the reliability of analysis.

RQ 4: Do parents feel that their children exhaust themselves mentally and have impaired social relationships during pandemic?

Table 14
Analysis of responses of parents

Sr. #	Themes	Categories
1.	Communication	1. Effects on communication skill 2. Less talkative. 3. Self-expression problem. 4. Appropriate vocabulary. 5. Talking ability.
2.	Learning Loss	1. Learning ability. 2. Peer learning. 3. Effect of online classes on learning. 4. Ready-made notes. 5. Passive learner. 6. Interest in studies. 7. Institutional learning. 8. Poor writing.
3.	Social relations	1. Social interaction. 2. Interest in smart phones. 3. Daily Routine. 4. Live alone. 5. Physical games. 6. Free to play.
4.	Mental exhaustion	1. Feel hyper. 2. Annoyingness. 3. Think randomly. 4. Mentally tired.

Theme 1: Communication

Communication was the most important theme of this study, which elaborates on the effect of social distancing on children's communication skills, self-expression attitude, and talking ability. The majority of parents described how social distancing had affected children's communication skills.

"Social distancing affected my children's communication skills too much because their interaction with each other was very low, as you know that children learn with their classmates. Their communication skills will be disrupted if we do not provide them with a social environment and only provide them with gadgets for online classes."

From the perspective of participants, it can be concluded that children's communication skills were very badly affected during the pandemic period because they were secluded from their social environment. Social environments influence children's communication skills, and as schools become closer together, there is less opportunity for socialization and communication. According to their parents, their children faced severe communication problems, such as the inability to talk

or to talk less with others, the tendency to live alone and use a mobile phone instead of participating in discussions with friends and family.

Theme 2: Learning Loss

"Social distancing impaired my children's learning ability because when children will not interact with teachers and will not make eye contact, they cannot learn anything. In online classes, their attention is being diverted; even he uses Face book and YouTube during online classes, and parents also disturb him during online classes, which is why his learning process becomes slow" (P1). Respondent: no one added more than *"now my children show less interest in their studies. Because children take interest in studies due to fear of teacher punishment, now he has no fear of teacher punishment; he just filled out the class formalities" (P1).*

From the respondents' perspective, the researcher concluded that children's learning ability was affected and children became disinterested in their studies because school was closed and they could not get a proper education. According to parents, there were online classes and tally school, but they were unaffected; most of the children were distracted by mobile games and other entertainment apps, which ruined their learning and made them disinterested.

Theme 3: Social Relations

"Social distancing has spoiled their children's social relationships because when children do not meet with their friends, how will their social relationships maintain, and their social networking is affected due to social distancing."

From the above theme, the researcher concluded that most of the parents have the perspective that social distancing has affected their children's social circle; they were detached from their relatives and friends, and even some children could not maintain family relationships.

Theme 4: Mental exhaustion

> *"My children suffer from irritability due to social distancing because they have less opportunity to play and more restrictions are imposed on them, which is why they cannot express themselves. So it is natural that in such a situation children suffer from irritability"*

Children mental health really affected by social distancing due to covid-19 social distancing. Children become depress and anxiety clearly seemed in children.

In conclusion, almost all of the parents agreed that their children were psychologically affected and are dealing with various psychological issues such as hypertension and depression.

Discussion

The findings of the present study are of importance in the area of education in emergencies or pandemics. The results and conclusions derived from the study have many vital uses in the Pakistani context. As previous studies have found, there are many problems that students have been facing like a lack of direct interactions, a lack of social settings, distraction from social media, and technology-related problems (Shetty et al. 2020). The present research finding revealed that there was no significant difference in parents' perspectives as far as the effect of social distancing on their children's communication skills, social learning, and academic learning are concerned with respect to demographics, e.g., gender and age, except locality. All the parents were on the same page that social distancing has affected their children's communication skills, social skills, and academic learning. All schools were closed during the pandemic, and children lost their main source of learning. They have limited opportunities at home to do activities like school preplanned

activities. Similarly, there was no significant difference in perspectives of parents on the effect of social distancing on their children's communication skills and academic learning with respect to locality. But there was a significant difference in perspectives of parents on the effect of social distancing on their children's social learning with respect to locality. There was no significant difference in the perspectives of parents on the effect of social distancing on their children's communication skills, social learning, and academic learning with respect to online classes. Another ANOVA result showed that there was no significant difference between parents' perspective on the effect of social distancing on children's communication skills, and academic learning with respect to parents' qualification but there was a significant difference between parents perspective on effect of social distancing on children's social learning with respect to parents qualifications.

In several studies on the relationship between students and teachers, it was discovered that students perceived higher learning outcomes when there was more interaction than when there was less interaction (Baber, 2020; Eom and Ashill, 2016). Interaction has been identified in previous research as a crucial component of learning in both virtual and traditional situations (Kang and Im, 2013; Lasfeto, 2020). Social competency and the quality of interpersonal relationships are influenced by several kinds of behaviors that can be learned and enhanced throughout life (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2017). Several learning processes, such as differential reinforcement, rule-based learning, and modelling, which are primarily mediated by the social environment, are used to develop these skills (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013). According to Lee (2020), children with prior mental disorders or who have had special educational requirements in the past may be more negatively impacted by school closures in terms of their mental health. Interventions during the epidemic are advised to lessen the harm done to children's education (Lee, 2020). Closing schools, not having the essential instrument to engage in classes, not having the facility of internet resources from their place, and being unable to leave their homes for a long period of time have all had a psychological effect on learners (Apriyanti, 2020).

For educational learning, social adjustment, and social skills development, the child's communication with classmates is vital. This interaction also acts as a defending factor (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013). Yilmaz et al. (2020) found that students struggle with the virtual learning procedure and need outside help; otherwise, their desire wanes and it impacts their academic learning. According to Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. (2020), moving to virtual learning had an impact on students' academic achievement and resulted in a noteworthy amount of intellectual exhaustion because of the increased effort. Many students haven't benefited from online learning and have stopped showing up for lessons. In their research, Apriyanti (2020) elaborated that nursery school and primary school parents bear challenges during the Corona pandemic, including being unable to assist their children to learn and dealing with children's lack of focus, unwillingness to learn, longing to go to school, incapability to learn virtually, and imperfect comprehension of the subject topic.

We understood from our study that social distancing has affected children not only academically but also socially and psychologically, as they avoid participating in the communication process due to weak communication skills. They have lost well command on vocabulary and have poor writing skills, and now they face problems while remembering lessons, they have lost interest in the learning process, their relations with family and friends are also affected because they were psychologically disturbed due to social distancing's negative effects. During the pandemic, social distancing took place and children were confined at home. They were not only restricted from going school but also barred from society. In a catastrophe situation,

children were forced to take online classes where they could not physically interact with their teachers and classmates. According to parents' perspectives, children's communication skills were affected due to fewer opportunities for social gathering and a lack of physical infractions. In social distancing period, all were restricted to maintaining six feet of distance everywhere. Children mostly lived alone. They did not talk with their peers. Consequently, their conversation skills were badly affected and tempered.

Similarly, children's social skills were also affected. Social norms and values mostly learned by children through direct observation. Children love to play and like social gatherings, and this results in learning social norms and values. Social distancing restricted their ability to participate in social functions and also restricted their ability to meet and play with their friends. School is mostly considered a learning hub for social skills. According to parents' perspectives, due to the effects of social distancing, their children avoided social functions, and consequently, their social skills were affected.

Conclusion

Getting insight from parents' perspectives made us able to conclude that social distancing not only affected children's communication skills and social learning but also their academic learning as well. Most children lost interest in their studies. Children did not like to take part in learning activities. Parents worried about the poor writing and learning problems of their children. Hence, social distancing became a nightmare for primary school children's academic and social learning. Social distancing has tainted children's personalities and children suffer from psychological illnesses like depression and anxiety. They avoided social gatherings and preferred to live alone. We concluded that a gap had emerged in learning due to the pandemic.

It is recommended that the concerned authorities take such initiatives that repair and mend the learning loss of primary school students relevant to their communication skills, academics, and social learning in the post-pandemic era. Our study was confined to Sargodha district only; hence, future researchers are encouraged to conduct research on exploring ways to address the learning loss that prevails among children in public primary schools in other districts and provinces of Pakistan.

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