

---

**CHALLENGES OF LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

---

Sofia Iqbal  
Professor of Ophthalmology  
Khyber Girls Medical College, Peshawar  
Saphra Sohail  
Final Prof, MBBS  
Agha Khan Medical College, Karachi

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)<sup>1</sup>, 850 million children and young adults are out of education or training because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many countries, this has resulted in a shift from traditional in-person learning to online learning. However, online learning is not new in developed countries. Many universities had ventured since long into online education with some courses offered as a supplement to in-person teaching. Pakistan is one of the countries lacking both accessibility and infrastructure for this major transition<sup>2</sup>. Hence there is a need to examine the current challenges and the impact on our students.

There will be certainly an increase in educational inequalities and the setback will last for a long-time affecting employment and income especially for those coming from underdeveloped areas. As regards medical students, this pandemic presents the greatest practical and logistical challenge<sup>3</sup>. It has disrupted medical education, requiring intense and prompt attention from medical educators. These challenges have affected patient care due to focusing attention on COVID-19 patients, which has severely limited the availability of bedside teaching opportunities for medical students<sup>4</sup>. Resultantly they are unable to complete clerkships and lack direct patient care experience. To make online education more inclusive, institutions need to ensure that learners benefit from technologies and have access to the Internet. Smartphone use has increased manifold in our country, and it can be easily used for online learning, which is a good replacement for laptops. Surveys focusing on accessibility to the Internet, laptops/tablets/smartphones can provide a platform, involving stakeholders who can help students who have limited or no access<sup>5</sup>. The college IT department should be involved which should help students with issues that come up during e-learning. Although e-learning is not an alternative to hospital rotations, yet it can help continue medical education through access to clinical videos and other online resources focusing on clinical scenarios and examination techniques. We need to ensure teachers' training for the unique demands that online teaching poses. Many strategies have been developed for improving the quality of online teaching and engaging students. These include interacting with students, encouraging student's participation by giving more open-ended questions, sharing videos focusing on examination techniques and different clinical scenarios, providing clear directions at the start of the session, and providing students with emotional support in this time of crisis. We should not forget that students' attitudes are influenced by the support they receive from families and teachers. As teachers, we play an important role in the development of positive attitudes and providing students with emotional support<sup>6</sup>. There is a need for specific guidelines for online medical education framed by Pakistan Medical Council for implementing e-learning. With this sudden shift, away from the classroom in many parts of the world, some are wondering whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic. For teachers, it is an opportunity to implement this teaching and learning methodology in our medical schools and training institutions whereas for students it is an opportunity to make use of e-learning for deriving maximum benefit thus preparing us for an unforeseeable situation in the future.

**REFERENCES:**

1. Lopes H, McKay V. Adult learning and education as a tool to contain pandemics: the COVID-19 experience. *Int Rev Educ.* 2020;66(4):575-602.

2. Mukhtar K, Javed K, Arooj M, Sethi A. Advantages, limitations and recommendations for online learning during COVID-19 pandemic era. Pak J Med Sci. 2020;36(COVID19-S4):S27.
3. Torda AJ, Velan G, Perkovic V. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical education. Med J Aust. 2020;14(1).
4. Sahi PK, Mishra D, Singh T. Medical education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Indian Pediatr. 2020;57(7):652-7.
5. Irawan AW, Dwisona D, Lestari M. Psychological impacts of students on online learning during the pandemic COVID-19. KONSELI: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling (E-Journal). 2020;7(1):53-60.
6. Khalil R, Mansour AE, Fadda WA, Almisnid K, Aldamegh M, Al-Nafeesah A, et al. The sudden transition to synchronized online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia: a qualitative study exploring medical students' perspectives. BMC Med Educ. 2020;20(1):285.



**LICENSE:** JGMDS publishes its articles under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-Alike license (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0).  
**COPYRIGHTS:** Authors retain the rights without any restrictions to freely download, print, share and disseminate the article for any lawful purpose. It includes scholarly networks such as Research Gate, Google Scholar, LinkedIn, Academia.edu, Twitter, and other academic or professional networking sites.