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Primary Students' Online Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic: Perspective of Mothers

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Abstract: This study aims to explore parental involvement in primary students' online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study used a phenomenological qualitative research design. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect data, and nine mothers whose children were studying online participated in the study. Thematic analysis revealed that shifting from regular learning to online learning was not easy. Mothers mentioned that they did not find online learning effective for primary students. They were of the view that online learning was not catering to their children's intellectual and social development needs. The managing of children's schedules was demanding, and mothers had to change their routines. Creating a proper learning environment for children was another challenge. Participants shared some suggestions to improve online learning.

Key Words: Online Learning Primary School; Parental Involvement; Covid-19; Pandemic; Qualitative Research

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the world in every field of life. In Pakistan, this virus affected every work sector, and the education department closed all institutes and shifted to the online medium. Therefore, Covid-19 had an impact on students, instructors, and educational organizations worldwide ([Adnan & Anwar, 2020](#)).

Online learning was a new thing in Pakistan, and teachers had to put in extra effort to prepare for the lectures. Parents also took a new role in helping their children with their studies with Technology. Children needed encouragement to boost their motivation to study online. In an online learning environment, parental support has been found to significantly affect learners' success ([Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020](#)). When children engage in online education, parents must assume new responsibilities to

increase instructional accountability for their children's learning. The absence of online devices and managing learning are some of the challenges faced by parents ([Novianti & Garzia, 2020](#)). Ongoing communication between parents and teachers to understand the expectations, as well as holding both home and school accountable for learning, is critical for the success of online learning.

Online learning is not an easy task for all stakeholders, including teachers, students, or parents. But in a pandemic, we can say that parents have taken the role of facilitators as they are teaching their children and/or are accompanying their children in online classes to ensure learning. Research studies have discussed different aspects of students and teachers in online learning; this study, however, examines mothers' involvement in primary students' online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan. The purpose of this study is to explore:

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1. The perception of mothers online teaching and learning, such as the use of Technology by children, efficacy of assessment practices, and the actual learning of children in an online environment.
2. The challenges faced by mothers during online learning of their children in primary school.

Literature Review

The worldwide spread of Covid-19 resulted in the closure of educational institutions, and online learning started. Many institutes are interested in finding the most effective way to teach course content online, engage students, and conduct assessments. Institutions in Pakistan use Microsoft Teams, Google meets, and Moodle as learning management systems and their applications for video conferencing. Zoom, Skype, and Webinar are some other video conferencing applications used for online learning ([Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj, & Sethi, 2020](#)).

Research has shown that students' beliefs about computers play an important role in their future use of Technology in instructional settings. Similarly, students' attitudes regarding the internet and web-based instruction also affect their future use of online instructional materials ([Wei & Chou, 2020](#)). [Chickering and Ehrmann's \(1996\)](#) framework introduced seven principles of constructive online learning. The principles are faculty-student communication and collaboration, student-student communication and collaboration; active learning techniques; prompt feedback; appropriate time for tasks; high-performance expectations, and respect for diverse learning styles. Asking questions is also an essential part of the learning process. Posting questions online in the Learning Management System, class forum, or course chat groups is an example of online communication self-efficacy. Asking questions in face-to-face classes is difficult for some students due to social stigma, and students face difficulty in asking online as they do not have online communication self-efficacy. This directly impacts their ability to learn online ([Chung, Subramaniam, & Dass, 2020](#)).

Online mode provides access to learning but there are challenges to technological access in a developing country like Pakistan. Parents believe that the Covid situation was difficult, as it was not easy to manage homeschooling tasks ([Parczewska, 2020](#)). Learning to use Technology was one problem faced by parents (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020). Parents and children also face space issues as everyone has to work and study from home, so there is not enough private space for everyone, especially in a joint family system (Sachdeva Suri, 2021). A study done by [Bhamani et al. \(2020\)](#) found that workshops were arranged for parents to facilitate online learning so that gaps in students' learning can be filled. Challenges of online learning mentioned by teachers and students are teacher behaviour, teaching methods, and how teachers interact with students ([Mustafa, Khursheed, Rizvi, Zahid, & Akhtar, 2021](#)). The online system was found ineffective where parents could not help their children, and an innovative way of teaching was recommended (Khalid, 2020). Training and a good internet connection can facilitate parents to guide their children in online learning ([Kainat & Sultan, 2020](#)).

The majority of parents claim that the quality of online learning is inferior, especially where insufficient support is given by schools. Individual needs of families should be respected and met promptly to aid children's learning in remote schooling ([Koskela, Pihlainen, Piispa-Hakala, Vornanen, & Hämäläinen, 2020](#)). In most countries, teachers do not connect with parents of children to facilitate homeschooling (Thorell et al., 2021). Parents complained that their children spend more than 3 hours daily on-screen, and most of the students had less than 2 hours for outdoor activities, which affected their mental and physical health ([Zhao et al., 2020](#)).

Parents agree with school closure, and in some contexts, they were satisfied with the help given by schools, but still problems were mentioned. Organizing homeschooling and motivating children was a challenge for parents in Germany and Mexico. Loss of social contact posed a significant challenge

for primary school students in both countries ([Pozas, Letzel, & Schneider, 2021](#)).

Parents used different strategies to facilitate online learning, but all methods were not successful (Simpson, 2020). Parents feel that remote learning is not a substitute for regular learning, and it can be a disaster for those who cannot self-regulate learning ([Zhang, 2021](#)). A virtual learning environment is not appreciated, and it is not rated highly, while others say it can be an effective method if proper guidance and tools are provided ([Hegazi et al., 2021](#)). Proper guidance, appropriate tools, training of parents, technological support, opportunities for social interaction, and balance distribution of

time between physical, outdoor and online learning are the key elements highlighted in the research studies shared above to create an effective online learning environment.

Findings

This study used a hermeneutic phenomenology research design. Using semi-structured interviews, the researcher accessed the participants' world of the lived experience and their interpretations of these experiences. The criterion used to decide the inclusion of participants in this study is: A mother of a primary section student who is taking online classes during the pandemic.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participant	Gender	Academic Qualification	Occupation	Child Class	School
Participant 1	Female	Masters in linguistics	Teacher	One	LACAS
Participant 2	Female	MBBS	Teacher	One and Three	LGS
Participant 3	Female	MBBS	Housewife	Two	LGS
Participant 4	Female	MA English	Teacher	One	LGS
Participant 5	Female	PGD in Early Childhood	Teacher	Four	LGS
Participant 6	Female	MBA	Teacher	Two	Pepperdine
Participant 7	Female	Graduation	Housewife	Two	LGS
Participant 8	Female	MBA	Teacher	One	LACAS
Participant 9	Female	MSc Housing and Home Management	Home-based Bakery Business	Five	LACAS

The researcher contacted the participants through WhatsApp and discussed the steps in the research process. Interviews were semi-structured in format, and participants were individually interviewed online at the time fixed by the participant. In Covid, in-person interviews could not be conducted. Two interviews were conducted on the phone as participants were housewives and were not familiar with Zoom. The remaining seven interviews were conducted through Zoom.

Thematic analysis ([Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017](#)) was used to analyze the interview data using NVivo. Six themes emerged from the data: Challenges of online learning; Learning to use Technology in online learning; Compromised intellectual needs of children; Time management during

online learning; and Challenges of the online assessment. Each theme will be discussed below, considering participants' insights.

Challenges of Online Learning

Most mothers said online learning was the only solution for students to continue their studies during the pandemic. Few mothers said that online learning was complex and confusing for mothers as well as children. They found it very difficult to handle their jobs and children's online learning at the same time.

My reaction to online learning was that I found it a very appropriate action by the school because, in the pandemic, this was the best solution for students. So, it was very pleasing for me to know that at least there

would be some activities at the school and my kid would remain close to their studies. (Participant 1)

Another participant said: *Well, in the beginning, when COVID was on the rise, we came to know that we were now going to be switching to online teaching. I just considered it tough. I was apprehensive about how I would manage, you know, the kind of things as I had never faced such a scenario before.* (Participant 8)

Most mothers said the shift was tough for them, as they had to get involved in their child's studies. They also said that kids were not given individual attention in online classes, which made it challenging to understand the content. Children missed their friends and traditional way of learning. The change to online learning, however, got better with time.

It was difficult for my child and me because there is a vast difference between regular schooling and online learning. Children learn more in live, face-to-face classes. Whereas in online classes, there are network issues. Sometimes children do not understand what the teacher is saying, and sometimes the teacher cannot convey her points. In online classes, there is a distortion that disturbs the tempo of the class. However, after some time, we got used to online classes and tried to adjust to them. (Participant 7) *One participant highlighted the positive aspects of online learning and said:*

Yes, it was easy as it saved me from morning rush hours of making kids ready and escorting them to school. It was pretty simple, like join zoom link or google meet, and you are good to go. At least your child will learn something through it. (Participant 3)

Most mothers stated that online learning was not practical for primary students. They felt that online learning was effective for older and focused students who understand the importance of online learning in the pandemic. Keeping the students motivated and making them sit in front of the camera was a challenge for mothers. Students used Youtube to understand difficult concepts. However, students lost interest in reading and writing in online education as they were using laptops and gadgets to learn. One mother

mentioned instead of wasting their time on other activities now, at least children were learning something. They were getting assignments which made them study at home.

Something is better than nothing. So in this way, I can say that it is better than not having any education. (Participant 4)

One participant Stated that: *Yes, it is effective. At least it makes students sit and do work for a couple of hours. They do not miss any of their lessons if they skip a class. They get their recording to complete their work. Their classwork and homework are checked daily. In short, they have a responsibility to study at home also.* (Participant 3)

Most mothers said that only incentives and encouraging words motivate children to take online learning. Few mothers asked their child's teacher to call his/her name in class when asking questions. They also said they bribe their kids with their favourite food or TV show so that they can take classes. One mother said that she could not motivate children for online classes even with incentives. Children can do it only with their will. Mothers made their children aware that there was no other choice instead to online learning.

Maybe we can say if she does good, we will give her gifts or learn so many things online, or if you are not doing your work correctly, you will be left behind this or that. Yes, sometimes we can do interactive games to make your child interested in online learning. (Participant 2) *Another participant mentioned that incentives cannot motivate every child and used another strategy for motivation:*

I told my son that we could not escape the situation because the world is moving towards online classes. I could not persuade him to take online classes. He leaves because I know it is not something that you can inculcate in a child; it is inborn. If he does not want to take his study seriously, no one can do anything. (Participant 5)

Giving a quiet learning space was difficult for mothers to manage who lived in a joint family. However, families who were living on their own could easily provide personal and

private space for children during online learning. As one mother said:

Yes, it was pretty easy for me to give him a proper learning space as I do not live in a joint family, my kids have their separate rooms, and most importantly, classes of my all kids are mainly at the same time, so there is no such thing of disturbance. They need their gadgets and their books, and they are good to go and take the class. (Participant 3)

Learning to Use Technology in Online Learning

The majority of the mothers felt that the software was difficult to understand, but help from teachers and tutorial videos explained the software. Younger teachers were more helpful than older teachers as they were tech-savvy. With time students got used to the software, and then it was easy for them to help their mothers. Participants also said that as they were teachers by profession, they did not find it challenging to get used to the software. Few mothers said that their children did not understand the software, making it difficult to take an online class. So, they sat with their kids when they took classes because kids could not use the software.

Luckily, it was very easy for my child and me because the school helped us a lot. They have given us detailed information about the software on how to maintain the GCR; they have provided very elaborated videos which we followed. It was effortless to do, and WhatsApp information was also shared. So, it is easy for me to follow that. (Participant 1)

Another Participant said: *Yes, if we talked about the software, I was pretty familiar with the Technology, so it was not difficult for me to handle zoom, google classroom or any other software used for online teaching. Nevertheless, it was a difficult task for children like my children were not aware of using raise a hand or other tools in zoom and google classroom. So, for them, the class was not very interactive. It was like one-way communication, and the use of software was also not very for them. However, not difficult for me as I was already in touch with such software. (Participant 6)*

Most mothers stated that the resources used in online learning were effective and

innovative. Videos and activities made learning easy and exciting for children. With the passage of time, teachers improved resources. Few mothers felt that online learning resources could not be compared with physical learning. They mentioned that children sometimes get bored with the same type of learning through videos and activities, and they miss their fellow students and school. One mother said that resources were useless if the child was not interested in an online class.

Of course, the resources are not comparable to those used in physical classes, but teachers still try to give their best by sharing different videos and doing various activities to keep students' interests alive. Even if my child misses his work, they share the screenshots or YouTube links. Moreover, I do not think they can do anything else. Still, something is better than nothing, so I am satisfied with the resources. (Participant 3)

Another Participant Said: *I think the teachers' resources are of no use if the students do not take online classes. Suppose you cannot motivate the child to look at the phone or to hear from you. So, I think all the sources they use are useless because they mostly use presentations or show pictures. I think they should better come in front of the students to take classes as this creates a comfortable situation for students. (Participant 5)*

The majority of the mothers said that communication between teachers and children was not satisfying. There is a gap in communication because of technology issues and a lack of software understanding. The teacher did not allow their kids to speak because of distortion in the class. Communication is more one-way in online learning, only the teacher is talking, and kids must listen to it. Few mothers mentioned that communication improves in online learning because of Technology, and children can text their teacher whenever they want. They also shared children answer what their teacher asks them to do in an online class.

You cannot compare online communication with classroom communication because kids can mute or unmute the mike independently. The answer

is if they want to, but in regular classes, they have to communicate. (Participant 9)

Another participant said: Of course, in my case, communication between my child and teacher has improved a bit; even my communication with his teacher has improved a lot. Because in regular schooling, we have to wait for mother-teacher meetings, and we have to take time before meeting the teachers, but now it has become easy to communicate. There are WhatsApp groups in which we ask anything and the teachers reply immediately, and even we can text them separately, which my kid does a lot nowadays. So yes, it is a positive point for me. (Participant 3)

Compromised Intellectual Needs of Children

Online learning affects the intellectual needs of children because of one-way learning. Children do not get an opportunity to learn from peers. Mothers also felt that children were not as competitive in online learning as they were in physical classes. Few mothers mentioned that children were learning new things through online learning, as lectures of teachers are based on the intellectual level of children. Teachers incorporate new learning techniques for better learning of students, as stated by one teacher:

Yeah, I mean, we cannot say that online learning has done its 100% into the intellectual needs of the children as children need that proper competitive environment that is present in the classroom; our children need a good learning environment. However, in online learning, both things were missing. There was not a proper competitive environment and no adequate learning environment. So intellectual needs have been compromised in my point of view. (Participant 6)

Most mothers said that the social collaboration of children suffered during the pandemic because they were not allowed to go anywhere. Mothers felt that children were more reserved and shy because of staying at home all the time. They also explained that their kids missed their friends and teachers. Some mothers said that social collaboration was affected, but mothers were not

concerned about this as they wanted their kids' safety. They did not want their kids to be social if it meant putting their health at risk. One of the participants expressed this view in the following way:

Oh yes, they cannot socially interact with each other, so it would be hard for them to leave their mothers after the pandemic, even when the pandemic is over. It would be hard for them to leave their home without their mothers. They are becoming too much dependent on us. (Participant 2)

Another participant said: *I know all this has affected my kid's social relations; now, they are not used to going out and meeting people, but still, I am not complaining about anything as this is the only way to save us from the virus. (Participant 9)*

Most mothers said that their children were emotionally disturbed during the pandemic and had become sensitive and afraid. Kids were listening about covid all the time, which impacted them and their daily lives. The majority of the mothers said that online learning had restricted children in communication. They only communicated when the teacher asked them to. For example, they reported that their kids were bound to express themselves in a physical class, but the teacher did not allow them to unmute their mike on their own in an online class. They also explained that their kids did not communicate in their class because of restrictions. Few mothers said that they could not force children to respond in class as they would do that when they wanted to.

My child is a bit moody. If he wants to communicate, he gives all the responses to his teacher, but if he is not in a mood, he will not speak anything in his class no matter what you do. (Participant 2)

However, the majority of mothers said that teachers considered their concerns and always helped them. They said that teachers were now more conscious as they knew mothers also listened to what they said in class. Teachers also replied to the texts of mothers on time.

Time Management during Online Learning

Most mothers said that the maintenance schedule for children was demanding as mothers had to manage everything for the child. They said that they had to take classes with their kids to help them. Some mothers said that they did not change the routine of their children but rather changed their routine. For example, they explained that they do their work in the morning before their kids' classes, so they were free when kids needed them. They also said that sometimes they left their work undone and focused on kids' homework.

One mother said: Yeah, initially, it was tough for me to manage as I had to revise my schedule and adjust my routine according to my kid's classes. I do my kitchen work early in the morning to give my full time and attention to him during his classes. Then the leftover piece was done after his classes. However, yes, my priority is his classes. (Participant 3)

Few mothers said that children were entirely responsible, and they did their work themselves without any help. So, they did not have to ask their kids repeatedly to do their work, as one participant said:

As my son is a bit responsible, he also gets used to this online routine that he sits for his work and does it with all this attention. (Participant 7)

Most of the mothers said that online learning was a burden as mothers focused on their children's homework and classwork along with their jobs. Online learning was also a financial burden as they had to arrange internet and other facilities.

Yes, it is a burden on mothers, a burden in the sense that when we used to send a child to school, the child comes up with the homework, and mothers have to make them complete the homework, but in these online classes, a mother has to look up for the classwork as well and has to be alert because he can get any mail, or any announcement, any notice anytime. Alternatively, you can say it is a burden, but it is a duty; it is a very tough duty for the mothers. (Participant 1)

To manage time, mothers kept the laptop and gadgets charged and made sure there

were internet bundles to ensure smooth learning. Most mothers suggested that teachers should provide recorded lectures and change the class timing as children get bored in long classes. Few mothers said that online learning could be improved by adding some activities in online classes to develop interest.

For teachers, I would say that they should provide a recorded lecture on time so that if my child misses her class, she can cover the work. Moreover, mention the links to the videos which you use in the lecture. (Participant 2)

Challenges of Online Assessment

The majority of mothers were satisfied with their children's progress in online learning as kids were learning something. Few of the mothers said that progress was unsatisfactory as kids did not understand anything and were not interested in online classes. For example, they explained that their kids often ditch them like they did not have any class or the teacher was absent. However, after some time, they knew that their kids were not taking their classes, and sometimes they also missed their tests or quizzes. One of the participants said:

I can say that I am not very satisfied with my child's progress during online learning because things are somehow messed up. At times, we missed the classwork, and it was difficult for us to understand the proper homework. Moreover, my children were not very participative in the class, and they were not properly communicating with the teacher. So, I am not very satisfied with the progress during this time. (Participant 6)

Most mothers mentioned that in online evaluation, children copy their tasks or seek help from others. With such practices, it is not possible for the teacher to evaluate children. For example, they reported that evaluation in online learning was just a formality. Mothers said that everyone knew they helped their kids in assessment. It was also shared that there was some software that their kids used to solve quizzes; evaluation cannot be fair. Only one mother was satisfied with the evaluation process and said it was reasonable.

Yes, I am satisfied with the evaluation process. Because the teacher evaluated adequately. Like last time when my son had an assessment, she asked him to tell the things verbally and then asked him to write what she was asking him, so, in this way, the evaluation is a bit proper, and I am satisfied, no offence with that. (Participant 5)

Most mothers said that the grading system was accurate in online learning, and mothers could understand it. For example, they reported that teachers were using a google form to update grades. They also mentioned that their kid's progress was satisfactory in comparison to what they were learning. Few mothers said that the grading system was improper; the grades cannot be appropriate when the assessment is incorrect. One mother said she did not have experience with online grading.

Yes, it is pretty easy to understand, they upload the marks or remarks whatever they want to give, and we can see that, and most of the time, their comments are correct about my child. I was delighted with my child's evaluation, as I know where my child stands. (Participant 8)

Most mothers said that teachers considered their concerns and always helped them. They said that teachers were now more curious as they knew mothers listened to what they said in class. They also mentioned that teachers directly replied to their texts on time because they knew their job would be at stake if they did not help them. One mother said that teachers did not care about mothers while making the class schedule.

No, the teachers do not bother our concerns because they make their schedule, they do not know whether we have the gadgets for our kids or not, and they do not know that we have more than one kid who has to take the class. So, they have to take the course at that time, and we cannot give them any excuse. (Participant 5)

Discussion

Parents in Pakistan found it difficult to manage online learning for their children due to their jobs and responsibilities at home. Now with the new shift, mothers had to get involved in classwork and homework for

children, so managing time was difficult for mothers, as indicated by research studies ([Novianti & Garzia, 2020](#)). Mothers found it difficult to use Technology initially, and research shows that parents had a similar problem when a shift was made to online learning (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020). Support from schools and teachers helped to overcome this problem in Pakistan also ([Garbe et al., 2020](#)).

Research studies mention teacher behaviour, teaching methods, and how teachers interact with students as the challenges of online learning ([Mustafa, Khursheed, Rizvi, Zahid, & Akhtar, 2021](#)). These problems are also highlighted by mothers in Pakistan, and they used different strategies like giving incentives to students to take classes and requesting the teacher to ask questions to their child in online learning. Giving individual space was an issue for mothers living in joint families in Pakistan, and space issue in online learning is also mentioned in research studies on online learning as everyone was working from home (Sachdeva Suri, 2021). The critical role of parents is also emphasized by research studies, and the online system was found ineffective when parents could not help their children, so an innovative way of teaching was recommended (Khalid, 2020). Mothers in Pakistan suggested training, a good internet connection, and access to devices facilitate online learning, and research also affirms this ([Kainat & Sultan, 2020](#)). If the seven principles of the constructive online learning framework suggested by [Chickering and Ehrmann \(1996\)](#) are incorporated into online learning, then the quality of learning can be improved. The mothers in Pakistan also mentioned these seven principles at different points in their suggestions to improve online learning.

Faculty-student communication and collaboration; student-student communication and collaboration; active learning techniques; and high-performance expectations ([Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996](#)) are mentioned by mothers for improving online learning in Pakistan. Communication in online learning is not smooth due to distortions, so even when communication happens, it cannot be effective. Mothers in Pakistan stated that teachers should use active

learning techniques like questioning and using methods other than videos to augment the learning of students. So mothers were not labelling online learning as ineffective but felt that online learning could be an effective method if proper guidance and tools were provided ([Hegazi et al., 2021](#)). Prompt feedback was not mentioned as a problem for mothers in Pakistan.

Lack of social interaction was a challenge for mothers in Pakistan as they worried about the communication skills and emotional development of their children. Research studies also affirm this as a challenge of the covid pandemic in online learning ([Pozas, Letzel, & Schneider, 2021](#)). Due to this limitation, parents do not feel that online learning can be used as a substitute for face-to-face learning ([Zhang, 2021](#)). Another concern and limitation mentioned by mothers in Pakistan are inappropriate and ineffective assessment system as unfair means are used by students. This is, however, unique to the context of Pakistan and is not stated as a barrier in other studies.

There are lots of similarities between the challenges that mothers of primary school children face in Pakistan and the problems faced by parents in different countries. Some problems, however, are unique to the context of Pakistan and are embedded in our cultural context. Recommendations to improve online learning would help augment student learning of primary school children in Pakistan and internationally.

Conclusion

This phenomenological analysis study

intended to see the perceptions of mothers of primary school children about online learning as well as the challenges faced by mothers in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results indicate that mothers understood that online learning was the only means to continue education during the pandemic. Schools and teachers facilitated the mothers and students to use technology to access learning. Mothers managed technological and internet issues by charging gadgets and getting internet bundles, but there was still distortion in online communication, which limited communication. Challenges that limited the learning of students and their intellectual learning were one-way communication of teachers in online classes, limited interaction and activities in online learning, lack of peer-to-peer learning, and use of videos as the primary means of learning due to which children lost interest in learning. The social and emotional learning of students was compromised in online learning, which worried mothers.

Mothers tried incentives to motivate children to attend online classes, but it had limited impact. Time management of mothers to manage homework as well as classwork was a constant struggle for mothers, and finding a personal space was also a barrier for some families. The success of online learning for primary school children is not possible without involving mothers in the learning process. Future research must indicate strategies to make online learning interactive and effective with the tools being used in a developing country like Pakistan.

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