

## A case study of Pakistan's exports in post COVID-19 scenario

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the crucial role exports play in Pakistan's economic growth, particularly amidst the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Exports are essential for earning foreign exchange, maintaining current account balance, and driving economic development. However, Pakistan has consistently declined its export-to-GDP ratio since 2014, leading to economic instability. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these issues, causing supply chain disruptions and a drop in global demand. This study assesses Pakistan's export performance before and after the pandemic, evaluates the pandemic's impact on trade, and offers recommendations for fostering export-led growth in the post-pandemic period. It also highlights the significant 10% economic loss in FY2021, with major trading partners like the USA, China, and Germany facing severe impacts. Despite challenges, Pakistan's textile and leather sectors grew in areas such as surgical instruments. A survey of 149 respondents showed statistically significant relationships between key variables and government policies like tax waivers and reduced utility costs, which helped revive industries, particularly textiles, creating jobs and boosting exports. The study recommends diversifying low-cost products and enhancing export strategies to recover lost trade. However, limitations such as a small sample size and limited resources suggest that future research is needed to expand on these findings.

**Keywords:** Exports, Covid-19, Pandemic, Pakistan, Developing Economy, Government.

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## **A case study of Pakistan's exports in post COVID-19 scenario**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Exports play a very important role in the growth and development of a country by balancing the demand side (Baloch & Rashid, 2022). The balance between imports and exports in the international market predicts the competitiveness of a country. An increased export ratio secures the country against the current account balance and debt crisis. Furthermore, it generates foreign exchange, balances the economy, and provides investment for future projects that create jobs in the country (Rashid, 2016; Rashid & Amirah, 2017). Therefore, export maximization has always been the top priority of successive governments in Pakistan. Different studies have shown that exports are an important drive for sustainable development and growth in any country (Hashmi & Mohd, 2020; Rashid et al., 2019).

Pakistan's exports have steadily declined since 2014, resulting in a current account crisis for the country. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, the recent decline in exports is attributed to global developments. If we study the export performance of Pakistan in the international market, we would come to know that Pakistan's export performance is very slow compared to other countries in the region. It led to less supply against greater demands imports and therefore disturbed the balance of trade, ultimately resulting in the flow of national currency out of the country, thus consistently burdening the national exchequer with foreign debts for running government business and providing subsidies to local industries (Rashid & Rasheed, 2022). Pakistan witnessed a downward trend in its exports-to-GDP ratio as compared to the other regional countries. Pakistan recorded only 10.5% exports to the GDP ratio in 2014–15, which was lower than other developing countries.

As already discussed, the sustainable growth of GDP totally relies on the strong economy of a country because it provides the basis for a stable macroeconomic environment, possibly only through maximum exports vis-à-vis imports (Amjad et al, 2021; Khan et al., 2022). For the same reason, successive governments adopted strategies for economic liberalization and privatization along with various incentive packages. Furthermore, the shortage of energy in the country had been recovered from 2001 to 2005. However, our exports remained low as compared to the other developing countries in the region or similar economic conditions. It highlights deep institutional and structural weaknesses, resulting in Pakistan's lackluster export performance, and amplifies the need for addressing the productive capacity to boost exports (Mian & Sufi, 2014). The naïve COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the already fragile supply conditions. This pandemic disturbed the international market and created several problems for developing countries, such as Pakistan. The current balance in the country presents a dull picture of the economy, as the demand side has overloaded the supply side and the equilibrium is far from what the government desires (Rashid et al., 2024a).

Cumulatively, these conditions in Pakistan demand serious reforms, which are to be implemented in true letter and spirit. The main objective of this study is to do a detailed analysis of Pakistan's exports in the post-COVID-19 scenario and to present a balanced view for an export-based market strategy so as to enhance the economic conditions in the country (Agha et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021). In international business, the supply side plays a very important role in balancing trade; therefore, every country tries to maximize its exports. Due to the extraordinary importance of exports, this paper conducts a study to measure Pakistani exports in the post-COVID-19 scenario and presents recommendations for enhancing the level of exports to support domestic manufacturers (Das et al., 2021; Haque et al., 2021). It will also analyze the relationship between COVID-19 and Pakistani exports after the pandemic. It will measure the devastating effects of COVID-19 on Pakistani exports and seek ways forward for improving them.

The economy of Pakistan has been under pressure because of rising imports and low exports. This economic situation got even worse in the COVID-19 pandemic due to a worldwide trade crisis,

which resulted in further lowering of exports to other countries. In this backdrop, there is a need to study the impacts of COVID-19 on Pakistan's exports and economy and to suggest measures to improve the economic situation.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The main aim of this research is to find out the effects of the COVID-19 Corona pandemic on the supply chain, especially Pakistani exports. Through the researcher's analysis, we would try to gauge how much it disturbed the country's economy after limiting exports. Furthermore, the researcher would also bring forth some policy recommendations for handling the situation.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This research paper seeks the impacts of COVID-19 on Pakistan's exports and answers to the following questions:

- a) What were Pakistan's export ratios post-COVID-19 and pre-COVID-19?
- b) What was the impact on Pakistan's trade and exports noticed after COVID-19?
- c) What government policies were required for increasing exports and how much these have been successful?

## **2. Literary Review**

### **2.1 Emergence of the Covid-19 Corona Virus**

The emergence of the coronavirus (COVID-19) wreaked havoc at the international level and affected all and sundry. It devastated the international economy in a number of ways, differentiating itself in particular through its impact on the real world. It grapples with both developing and developed countries, as all of the countries are facing severe market-specific damage due to a short supply of exports (Dhar et al., 2021). The COVID-19 outbreak is leaving no one behind. All types of industries, businesses, and services are on the verge of disaster as these institutions are facing supply chain disruption and a decrease in demand, ultimately creating a financial crisis. This situation happened all of a sudden, and no one was prepared to handle it. Governments around the globe have been imposing lockdowns to handle COVID-19; however, it further exacerbated the problems of industrial sectors as both imports and exports were halted, which drastically left the production process in the doldrums. Industrial organizations and business sectors are continuously protesting against the lockdowns, and the majority of them claim that they can't survive furthermore (Shafi et al., 2020).

This pandemic is the worst in the region, as many external environmental crises have occurred in the past that damaged local industries, such as the 2005 Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Pakistan, and the Ebola outbreak (Shafi et al., 2020; Kim & Lee, 2020). The pandemic disturbed the life cycle of the global community as well as living standards. Demands for some goods are increasing, thus creating business for some industrial sectors. On the other side, countries with low economic profiles are continuously facing severe economic conditions. The impacts are significant as they affected almost every segment of life and thus posed a severe threat to the continuity of business. We can say the main reason for all these crises is the disturbance of the global supply chain, especially for medium-scale manufacturing enterprises (Rashid et al., 2024b).

Studies show that economic activities are adversely affected by natural calamities like earthquakes, floods, and other epidemic diseases. In addition, small and medium industries are volatile and therefore vulnerable to natural crises due to their smaller resources and revenue generations. Therefore, it is assumed that natural calamities affect the industrial sector directly or indirectly. The direct impacts include loss of human life and infrastructure, whereas the indirect effects are disturbance of supply chain and loss of inventories due to long storage, causing damages to road infrastructure and power supplies, damage to public infrastructure, communications, road, and railway networks that

increase production costs, and posing a heavy cost for supply of manufacturing goods to the market. Data for the year 2019 from the World Trade Organization predicts that there has been a continuous increase in natural calamities between 1998 and 2017. The estimated economic losses for this period amount to a total of \$2.9 trillion for the disaster-affected countries. The United States was the most affected (\$9945 billion) in terms of disaster statistics; the other most affected countries were China, Japan, India, Pakistan, and European countries.

## **2.2 Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Global Economy**

The pandemic is not restricted to a single region or country, but its calamities are widely spread. The fatalities may be seen around the world in the form of lockdowns, restrictions on the movement of goods and humans, travel bans, and suspensions of road, rail, and air traffic, which slow down the whole global economy (Rasheed et al., 2023; 2024a). The Code 19 crisis spread globally from February 21 to March 24, 2020, and the numbers are still increasing to date. The fear was that the COVID-19 pandemic would be a major hurdle to the growth of the global GDP. A major decline in the global GDP is recorded between 2.3% and 4.8% (Felipe & Fullwiler, 2020).

Moreover, the experts opined that the current wave of pandemic may result in low direct investments at the global level. To provide a backup to the world economy, the world may need up to 2.5 trillion US dollars to meet the damages caused by this pandemic. This shows that this crisis has been worse than the 2008 crisis. As per the data of the International Labour Organization (2020), more than 25 million people worldwide lost their jobs, and there was a decrease of 3.4 trillion in labor income. Similarly, the lockdowns, either partial or full, are influencing 81% of labor (almost 3 billion of the workforce of the whole world). Therefore, it may be referred to as the worst world crisis since World War II. It is estimated that the US would lose three million jobs in the mid-summer of 2020, and similar trends would be experienced by Europe and the Middle East (Siddiqui et al., 2020). As per the ILO study, COVID-19 has a high effect on the housing, food, and automobile sectors, whereas its low impact on services and utilities sectors such as defense, health, education, and public administration is comparatively lower (Rasheed et al., 2024b; Hashmi et al., 2021b; Rashid et al., 2020).

The most profound effect of this pandemic Corona has to be noticed in developing countries, as it is very difficult for them to manage foreign exchange and implement restrictions for handling it. In this regard, countries with fragile health infrastructure, high dependency on trade and tourism, debt crises, and irregular flows of capital. Moreover, it may result in approximately an increase of almost 11 million people in poverty. It is hard to predict the exact impact; however, it is presumed that developing economies would suffer the most. As per the UNDP estimates, developing countries may suffer income losses of over 220 billion US dollars. Moreover, the World Bank has predicted that the South Asian countries may suffer the worst economic crisis in the last 40 years.

## **2.3 The Overall Covid-19 Corona Situation in Pakistan**

A number of natural disasters have been faced by Pakistan, which have severely affected the overall economy of the country. In 2010, the megaflood caused huge losses to the country about 4 billion US dollars. Similarly, the earthquakes in 2005 and 2008 and other natural disasters have been affecting the country year after year. It causes heavy damage to businesses, especially small enterprises, as they don't get to the post-disaster stages because of a lack of resources (Kalichman et al., 2020). Lack of government support is also a reason for the financial decline and even bankruptcy of small enterprises, as they do not have the ability. The most affected enterprises working in Pakistan have to face political and economic instability and poverty rates. Though the initial outbreak of COVID-19 was reported on December 19 as pneumonia, it was later termed COVID-19. Pakistan recorded its first COVID-19 in February 2020; however, the cases were raised after the arrival of pilgrims from Iran. Besides this, the sudden announcement of lockdown also compelled migrants to arrive in their hometowns, therefore creating disorder and exasperating the situation, thus resulting in a chaotic situation.

Moreover, the recorded cases also hiked up in March 2020, as the recorded cases rose to 1078 from 75 and increased day by day in other parts of the country. A total of about 265,000 cases were confirmed in the coming few months, which resulted in about 5,600 deaths. The data below in Figure 1 shows the province-wise confirmed cases in Pakistan.

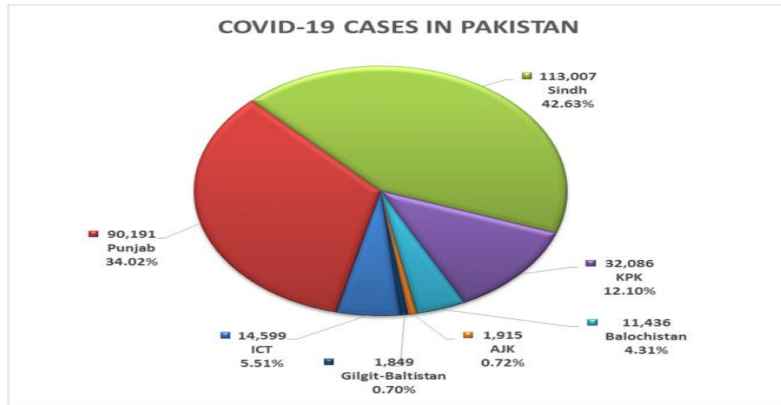


Figure 1: Province-Wise Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 in Pakistan

Source: Literature

Though Pakistan's export to GDP ratio is lower than 10%, the number of workers in industry is far greater than that is estimated. It is therefore expected that their contribution to the overall economy is greater than stated. Jobs in the economy are multiplied by certain sectors related to exports. The decline in export activity will further aggravate the employment crisis in Pakistan. All destinations have been ranked among the top 10 destinations of Pakistan's exports are USA, UK and China at the top. About 50% of Pakistan's exports are destined for those countries that have been most affected by this pandemic. Like China, the USA, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, and Germany. About 40% of Pakistan's exports were to European countries, and 9% were directed to China. It concludes that the effects of Pandemic Corona have great implications for Pakistan's exports, as its major customers are struggling to deal with this pandemic.

Below Figure 2 represent the conceptual framework.

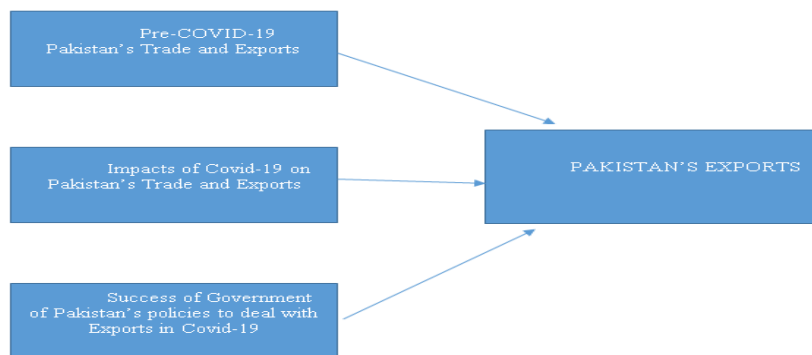


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's own creation

### 3. Methodology and Data Analysis

This research paper adopted a quantitative approach (Hashmi et al., 2020a; Rashid & Rasheed, 2024) to study the effects of COVID-19 on the supply chain of the Pakistani economy. As the qualitative

method pose trustworthiness issue (Haq et al., 2023). The researcher studied different available literature, policy documents, and related research. Data is collected from secondary sources such as trade and industrial development corporations, the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, etc (Hashmi et al., 2020b; 2021; Khan et al., 2023a; 2023b; Rashid et al., 2021; 2022b). To make this study more reliable, I collected data from different enterprises of all sizes, from micro to medium, working in Pakistan. For two consecutive years of the pre- and post-COVID-19 period, the data was collected so as to measure the overall effect on the economy (Rasheed & Rashid, 2023). The trends in exports for these years have been measured, and the results have been elaborated accordingly. A single-equation model is used for empirical investigation of the pre-and post-COVID-19 scenarios so as to seek better policy initiatives for handling them with the minimum loss to government revenue. Its basis is GDP per capita (constant 2010 US\$) (Tt), where GDP (Yt) is a dependent variable and dependent variables are exports.

$$Y = a + lg \exp$$

GDP is a dependent variable; therefore, we take all other variables constant.

The analysis of secondary data collected from different sources shows that for year 2019, the estimated GDP of Pakistan was estimated at 38.6 trillion PKR, and the growth rate was calculated at about 3.3%. However, the Planning Commission of Pakistan calculated an economic loss of about 10%, that is, 1.1 trillion PKR in FY2021. The analysis shows that there is a continuous decrease in GDP, as predicted by the below figure 3.

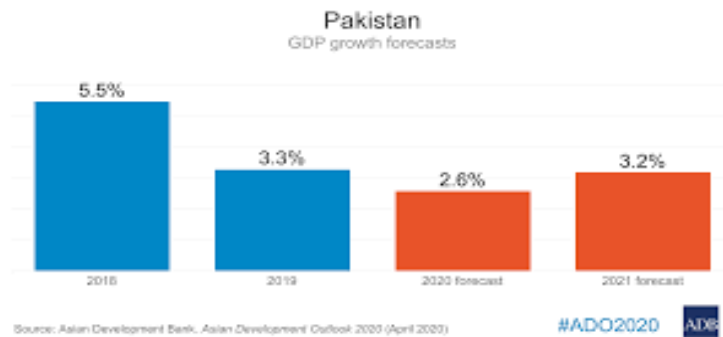


Figure 3: GDP Growth Factors

Source: Literature

The available data shows that Pakistan exports are mainly destined for five trading partners, which include China, the USA, the UK, Japan, and Germany. Among these countries, four were severely hit, which had a drastic effect on exports, especially from Pakistan. According to the World Bank, the decline in exports is expected to be 50% if the pandemic continues for the next few years. The below Figure 4 witnesses to this scenario:

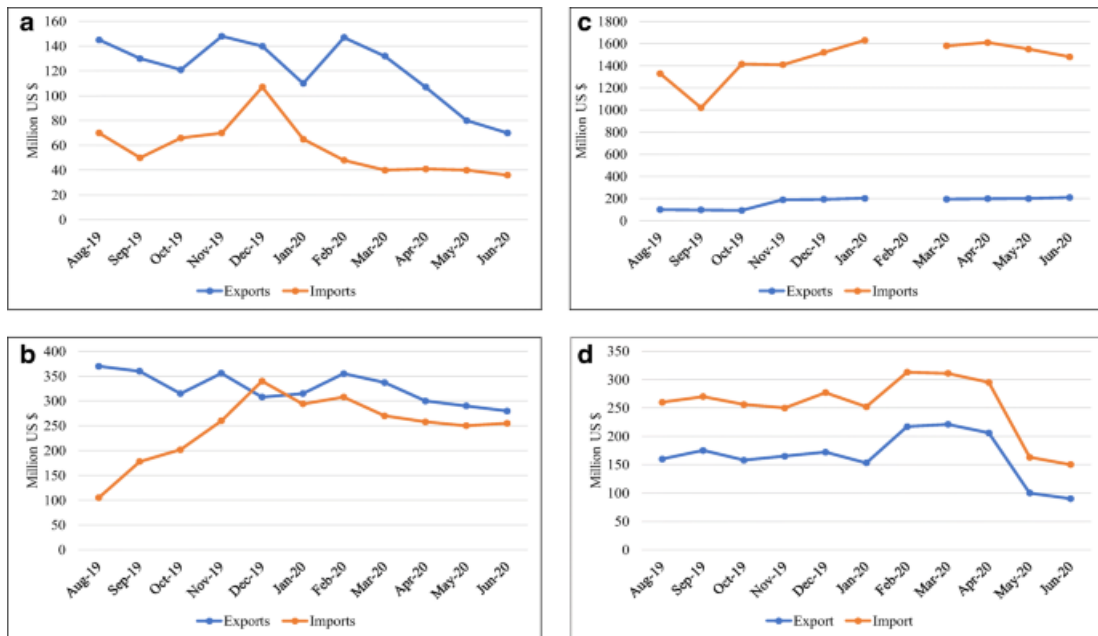


Figure 4: Export and import trends

(Source: Literature)

Pakistan’s major exports include the Textile items like towels, bedsheets and leather products. Apparel counts for about a quarter of the total exports; other textile exports are about 17%; grain products are 10%; and leather products are about 3%. All other exports include surgical instruments and ethanol.

**4. Results Analysis**

The information collected in this study was processed and inspected while using Microsoft Office Excel and IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences Statistics (SPSS). The data analysis method used descriptive and inferential statistics.

**4.1 Demographic Factors of Respondents**

For analysis of the demographic variables, which include gender (male or female), age, employment status (full-time, part-time, unemployed), and educational status (graduate, postgraduate). As you can see in Table 1 in this study, the total number of respondents was 149, of which 115 (77.5%) were male and 34 (22.5%) were female. 69 (46.5%) of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 25; 33 (22.5%) were between the ages of 26 and 30; 19 (12.5%) respondents were between the ages of 31 and 35; 11 (7.3%) respondents were between the ages of 36 and 40; and 7 (4%) respondents were above 40 years of age. 42 (39%) of the total respondents were graduates, and 107 (61%) of the total respondents were postgraduates; this showed a healthy image of literacy among the respondents. 134 (87%) respondents were full-time employed; 15 (13%) respondents were part-time employees. The reliability analysis was conducted to find out the internal consistency of each factor, which shows the reliability of all factors (Rashid et al., 2024c; 2024d). The Cronbach’s alpha value is .757, which is greater than 0.7, and all items individual reliability is also greater than 0.7 all independent variable are reliable for each item (Rashid et al., 2024e; 2024f).

**4.2 Model Summary, ANOVA and Coefficients**

| <b>Model Summary</b> |                   |          |                   |                            |  |  |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Model                | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |  |  |
| 1                    | .537 <sup>a</sup> | .289     | .274              | .61699                     |  |  |

a. Predictors: (Constant), ICPT, ICWT, PCET

| <b>ANOVA<sup>a</sup></b> |            |                |     |             |        |                   |
|--------------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Model                    |            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
| 1                        | Regression | 22.421         | 3   | 7.474       | 19.632 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
|                          | Residual   | 55.198         | 145 | .381        |        |                   |
|                          | Total      | 77.618         | 148 |             |        |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: PET  
b. Predictors: (Constant), ICPT, ICWT, PCET

Table 1: Model Summary and ANOVA

Table 1 shows the R value, which is 0.537 in the above table, showing that there is strong strength between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Rashid & Rasheed, 2023; Rashid et al., 2023; 2022a). R shows the accuracy or regression, and its value shows that independent variables explain 28.9% of the variable in the dependable variable. The adjusted R square shows the unbiased accuracy of the regression (Rashid et al., 2024g; 2024h). We have 27.4% unbiased accuracy in the regression.

| <b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b> |            |                             |            |                           |       |      |
|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| Model                           |            | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|                                 |            | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| 1                               | (Constant) | 1.391                       | .310       |                           | 4.485 | .000 |
|                                 | PCET       | .055                        | .075       | .057                      | .737  | .462 |
|                                 | ICWT       | .263                        | .068       | .293                      | 3.865 | .000 |
|                                 | ICPT       | .324                        | .080       | .326                      | 4.068 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: PET

Table 2: Coefficients

From the sig values in the above Table 1 and 2, it has been interpreted that all the variables have significance. All Sig values are less than 0.05, which means that all variables are statistically significant.

## 5. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

### 5.1 Conclusion

This research was conducted to assess how COVID-19 has affected the overall world trade and, in particular, the exports of Pakistan to the rest of the world. This study was prepared based on facts and figures, taking into account the data from various authentic sources. In this study, initially we got the different export states in the pre-Covid-19 timeframe, then the overall effects that Covid-19 had on world trade and exports. Then COVID-19 impacts in Pakistan in general and on exports in particular were analyzed. The Government of Pakistan took certain important steps and issued various guidelines to the industry, which helped the industrialists re-start their operations and meet export demands. In the last part of the study, comprehensive research was carried out to study the impacts of different aspects on Pakistan's exports. A questionnaire was issued to 150 individuals from different fields, age groups, and experience groups to get their feedback. Based on the data, all the independent and dependent variables were studied with their impacts on each other, and the reliability of the data was verified. Results have found that COVID-19 had a huge impact on the whole world in all aspects of life, including trade and business. Further, the exports of Pakistan were greatly affected by COVID-19 due to the



lockdown situation and other key factors. However, after the initial wave, the government of Pakistan made a policy and took many positive steps, which resulted in the revival of the industry and an increase in exports to the rest of the world.

Pakistan suffered a decline in its exports from 2013 to 2016, which fell from 25 billion US dollars in 2013 to 20.5 billion US dollars in 2016. It grew to 23.8 billion US dollars in 2019 at a rate of 5.1%. The most significant increase was in the garments and grain sectors, at 8.2% and 11.3%, respectively. However, since the start of the Corona pandemic in March 2020, a sharp decline in exports has been reported. Exports fell to 9960 million US dollars in April 2020, 54% below the previous year. Mostly textiles and ready-made garments had negative impacts. However, the surgical instruments and leather products, like gloves, showed a positive growth rate on a month-on-month basis. Pakistan reported a significant decline in its exports between 2013 and 2016. Exports fell from 25.1 billion in 2013 to 20.5 billion in 2016. Exports have been growing for a year since then, reaching 23.8 billion in 2019, an increase of 5.1 percent. However, the most significant increase was in garment and grain exports at 8.2 percent and 11.3 percent, respectively. Figures published by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) in 2021 reveal a sharp contraction in exports since March 2020.

Exports fell to 9,960 million in April 2020, down 54 percent from April 2019. Exports of net wear, bed wear, and ready-made garments also had a negative impact in March 2020. But exports of surgical instruments and instruments and some leather products (such as gloves) showed a positive growth rate in March 2020, month-on-month as well as year-on-year. The countries affected by this pandemic import about 50% of the global trade in apparel and other textile items from the rest of the world. They have a 43% share of imports of leather products and a 15% share of grain. However, China imports just 5% of global trade in apparel and other textile products. Its import share in grain is just 6%, and that of other products is 11.5%, as it mainly relies on its industries. It is also clear that Pakistan does not export a major portion to these affected nations.

## **5.2 Government of Pakistan's Policies**

Government of Pakistan has made concentrated efforts to achieve the possible market share and increase its exports to fill the gap the created demands across the world market. In particular, in textile exports, the government has waived certain taxes and the cost of gas and electricity, which has helped the textile industry increase their production levels and exports as well. It also resulted in the creation of new jobs and sped up the textile business and industry. Further, it has focused on other industries that have export potential to increase their export share, like automobiles and parts, electronics, communications items, cement, and other engineering products.

## **5.3 Policy Recommendations**

Pakistan is expected to focus on low-cost products that do not have much market value, as policymakers have not been able to create high-end products. Therefore, the destination markets are not likely to give much priority to restoring demand for Pakistani exports over other high-value and essential commodities that make up a large percentage of total imports. In addition to essential items for health care and vital household use, it is likely that a variety of textiles and textured products may be delayed due to increased demand from buyers. However, the destination markets do not produce low-cost products in their countries and mainly rely on imports; therefore, it may create a good opportunity for exporters in Pakistan to increase their exports. Therefore, some exporters may find it easier to restore their export sales through product diversification or better export strategies to improve potential trade relations.

## **5.4 Limitations and Recommendations**

During the study, all efforts were made to make it as reliable as possible, but due to my far off location and inaccessibility to sources, it was difficult to complete within the timeframe and make it more accurate. The sample size, with all my efforts, was 149, which should have been more, probably

200 or more. Further, I was unable to consult my teacher or other colleagues from time to time for necessary guidance and correction of the study. However, if possible, efforts were made to make it an acceptable study. In my opinion, for any study of this type, the time period and scope may be further enhanced by adding other factors having a direct impact on Pakistan's economy and exports. Moreover, the number of respondents may be increased to 200 or more.

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