

Committee: GC2

Issue: The issue of lack of education during the pandemic

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Introduction:

With the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have shut down all over the world, leading students to pursue their education online. Despite the fact that schools have reopened almost a year and a half after their closures, it seems that students have been having a hard time readjusting to regular school days both socially and academically. Studies have proven that academic performance and level of learning have declined enormously during the mandatory school closures to prevent the spread of the virus.<sup>1 2</sup> The closures have also had a detrimental impact on students' social, mental, and physical well-being.

Background Information:

The origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, dates back to November of 2019 in Wuhan, China. Since its first observation, the illness went on to spread fairly quickly around the world, and with consideration of its deadliness, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it to be a pandemic in March of 2020. Global lockdowns followed soon after, and as a result, schools were shut down to prevent further spreading of the virus, and education was carried out virtually.

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic has had undeniable and tangible effects on society and our daily lives. One of the things most impacted by the pandemic has been education. Schools all over the globe were shut down as soon as COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, and learning had to be carried out virtually due to the lockdowns. Although schools have reopened one and a half years after shutting down, a myriad of changes, mainly setbacks have been observed in this small amount of time. The coronavirus outbreak has certainly taken a toll on education systems worldwide, as well as students and teachers.

Despite online learning being performed in certain schools in a number of places before the start of the pandemic; globally, many countries were not able to adapt as quickly as

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe. (2021b). *Do not leave a generation of students behind*. Education. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/do-not-leave-a-generation-of-students-behind>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group. (2021b, December 6). *Learning Losses from COVID-19 Could Cost this Generation of Students Close to \$17 Trillion in Lifetime Earnings*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/06/learning-losses-from-covid-19-could-cost-this-generation-of-students-close-to-17-trillion-in-lifetime-earnings>

necessary due to their lack of technological resources. As well as low-income countries; students who are under the poverty line, in abusive households, and from oppressed minority groups; such as racial and ethnic minorities, disabled students, and girls have also struggled with switching to online education, and lockdowns in general. A prime example is the increased rates of domestic abuse as well as teenage pregnancies. Najiba Khan, who is a sexual and reproductive health expert mainly operating in Afghanistan, says: “Normally there should have been women there, but it was mostly little girls, some as young as nine (...) Many of them were fleeing arranged marriages, and all had suffered some form of physical abuse.”<sup>3</sup> For many children, school acts as a shelter: providing them with food, love, protection and utmost care that they cannot obtain anywhere else. The closures have cut off students’ access to these resources; therefore, they have not only posed an enormous threat to education levels, but also to the health and safety of millions.

School is more than just a space for academics, it is also a place where almost every child learns about social skills: like how to build friendships, share, and communicate in a healthy manner. The absence of a physical environment for young children to meet and socialize together has a high chance of leading to a generation of people with inadequate social skills. Besides social factors, young children, especially preschoolers, have been affected by the pandemic the most out of all school-aged children in terms of academics.<sup>4</sup>

Another group severely impacted by the state of education during the pandemic have been students in higher education. The European Students’ Union (ESU) has found that almost one in four students “reported to be experiencing either serious or very serious financial difficulties” during the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> On another note, education requiring practical knowledge, such as medicine and nursing, have been acutely difficult to carry out online as students do not have a physical environment to practice their skills in. Such deficits in learning the standard curriculum could affect society as well as people’s lives detrimentally.

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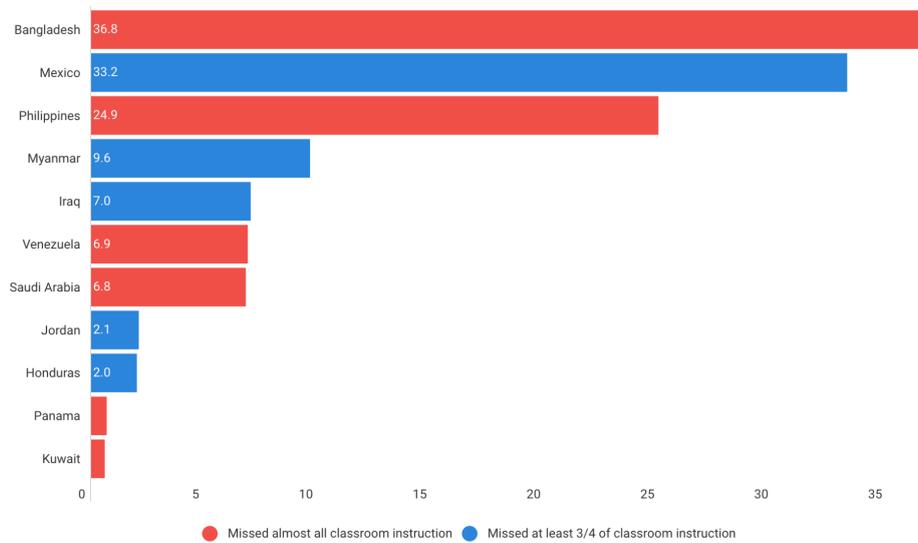
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7924898/>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/06/learning-losses-from-covid-19-could-cost-this-generation-of-students-close-to-17-trillion-in-lifetime-earnings>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/do-not-leave-a-generation-of-students-behind>

Number of students (in millions) who have missed at least three quarters classroom instruction time from March 2020 to September 2021, by country



### Definitions:

**Pandemic:** Widespread illness around the world.

**Coronavirus:** A group of viruses common in humans and animals. Some coronaviruses produce the common cold; SARS and MERS are also both coronaviruses. COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus.

**Community spread:** When a contagious illness spreads throughout a community of people who haven't traveled to a place where the virus began, or who haven't knowingly been in contact with anyone who has had the virus.

**Social distancing:** The act of increasing physical space between people to decrease the spread of an illness. (In the case of COVID-19, social distancing of at least six feet is recommended.)

**Self-isolation:** Separating oneself from others because you are sick.

**Self-quarantine:** Separating oneself from others because you have been exposed to a sick person.

### Timeline of Events

1. As by March 2020 WHO declared Covid-19 as a global pandemic, the policies of 180 countries were to close all schools from every level.

2. By April 2020, online education systems have been activated. But only countries with the most access to the internet, like Japan, were able to manage the problem of education during a global pandemic.
3. By September 2020, some European countries such as France, Germany and Sweden reopened schools with face to face education and managed with the structure with cohorts, while other countries have reopened at home education like Turkey.
4. In less than a month, the countries who have reopened face to face education, faced an unexpected wave of Covid-19 cases and most schools already had more than 20 covid cases which lead to many quarantines.
5. Some countries finished the semester through online education and some countries have reopened and closed schools (Philippines) which research has shown more than 800 million students have been affected by.
6. By September 2021 with the finding of the Covid-19 vaccine, students have been vaccinated which lead to the reopening of face to face, non-distant education.
7. Now, with the usage of masks mandatory and daily measurement of fever, the daily sanitization of classrooms and under enough supervision; students in most European countries continue face to face education but countries in America consistently reopen and close schools.

#### Involved countries and organizations:

- Enhancing preparedness while keeping schools open: This involves enforcing and supporting preventive actions in schools (Afghanistan); establishing protocols for schools' handling of illnesses and potential cases (Egypt, Russia, Belarus); using the education system's infrastructure and human resources to address the spread of infections in communities (Liberia and Sierra Leone); and limiting physical contact by reducing social and extracurricular activities (Singapore, Russia)
- Selective closing of schools: Choosing to isolate treatment areas, some governments have opted for localized school closures as an interim measure (for example India). In half the cases thus far, we have seen these localized approaches subsequently expand geographically (Brazil, India, Canada, Australia).
- National closing of schools (the most used option globally): As the virus has spread, many countries are announcing national school closures. Many are concerned that children and youth, while seemingly less susceptible to the virus and have a much lower case-fatality ratio, may serve as carriers for the disease, putting at risk older family members in communities across the globe where multi-generational households are the norm.
- Using remote learning and education resources to mitigate loss of learning: Many countries have turned to distance learning as a means of mitigating for lost time in school (fully online in China, Italy, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia; mobile phones or television in Vietnam, Mongolia). In addition to infrastructure and connectivity, teachers' and administrators' familiarity with the tools and processes are also key factors in providing distance learning (Singapore). Other countries send kids home with lessons as homework (Lebanon). In Bulgaria, more than 800,000 accounts have been created for all teachers and parents, publishers have been mobilized to open the digital textbooks and learning materials for grades 1 to 10, and

two national TV channels will broadcast educational tv. As more countries close schools, more creativity will be needed. For instance, adapting existing platforms for use in smartphones, and/or agreeing with telecom companies to eliminate the cost of accessing material from a Ministry of education site could be part of the mitigation efforts.

a Href=/Team/Kaliopé-Azzi-Huck Hreflang=En>Kaliopé Azzi-HuckTigran misManaging the impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world: How countries are preparing, coping, and planning for recovery. World Bank Blogs.

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing>

### Solution

Fortunately, it seems as though schools will not be closing again; however, the damage that has been done in the 18 months that they were closed is detrimental. Hundreds of millions of students around the globe have been left out of virtual education programs, mostly due to inadequate technological resources. Apart from being widely inaccessible, online education has also proven to be ineffective academically. Many students report feeling stressed and unmotivated due to the heightened amounts of schoolwork during the pandemic, while their grades and learning levels have declined.

Furthermore, the need for a global reform in education systems has arguably made the academic losses caused by the pandemic worse. Most education systems actually limit healthy learning by not properly centering students' needs, only focusing on bettering students' academic intelligence, and not leaving room for making mistakes. With online education already being a more passive and one-sided interaction between students and teachers, communicating needs has become even harder, ultimately leading to great degrees of stress and motivation loss.

The single most effective way to compensate for these great academic losses would be to change the current educational systems into ones that focus more on the students' needs and wants to create the best learning environment for them, therefore leading to more efficient studies.

*Education: From disruption to recovery.* (2022, January 24). UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

### Useful Links

- <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing>
- <https://time.com/5885554/europe-schools-reopening-germany-scotland-norway/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/09/13/global-school-reopening-18-months/>
- [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe/recovery-coronavirus-success-stories/digital/e-learning-through-lockdown\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe/recovery-coronavirus-success-stories/digital/e-learning-through-lockdown_en)

- <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/all-schools-europe-central-asia-should-remain-open-and-made-safer-covid-19-say-who>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/13/half-of-french-primary-schools-expected-to-close-teachers-strike-protest-covid-education>

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