



**Addressing the impact of
COVID-19 on global education**



UNICEF

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Forum: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on global education.

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Introduction

The impacts of COVID-19 are everlasting, global education being one of the most important and impacted branches. The need for addressing these issues is growing, the international education system is slowly transitioning back to the system it was before COVID-19. However, there were no questions raised about if this was most beneficial for the students.

The first reports of COVID-19 were found in Wuhan, China. This virus created global panic, causing people to purchase loads of toilet paper, to stay home. In March 2020, countries started to implement lockdowns, meaning that citizens should stay at home, except for COVID-testing and going to the grocery store for groceries. This caused schools to close and transfer to online schooling, and this from the start created some issues.

The first arising issues were the need for devices and the internet, most online schooling was provided through platforms such as Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. Some households did not have access to the internet or digital devices, causing a learning gap for these students. The lockdown created distance between people, students lost any chance for physical contact with peers. This created an everlasting social setback which can still be noticed till this day. Online school also made it easier for students to not participate in the lessons, which created a big learning gap that can still be noticed today. The mental health of students, teachers and parents was also noticeably declining during the lockdown (School During the Pandemic: Mental Health Impacts on Students - NAMI California, 2020).

Some countries during and after COVID-19 temporarily changed their curriculum with extra redos or the instant chance to graduate due to the inability to take final exams. These redos were included in the curriculum for two years, however they have been removed after those two years

including all changes made for COVID-19. The World Bank helped by supporting 62 countries with financial aid, and was working to build a better system.

The effects of COVID-19 in the international education system are still noticeable. These problems like mental health, the social setback, and the learning gap need fixing. This causes more students to drop out of school, which can also have everlasting effects on economies. This report will elaborate on the impact that COVID-19 had on global education, and the students who are still suffering from the effects of COVID-19.

Definition of Key Terms

COVID-19

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it creates mild to moderate respiratory illness and recovery is possible without any required special treatment.

Lockdown

A period of time or a state where access to an area is restricted in the interests of public safety or health.

Epidemic

An outbreak of infectious disease that occurs in a community at a particular time.

Learning poverty

The inability of individuals to achieve the necessary skills and knowledge to participate fully in society.

Pandemic

An outbreak of infectious disease that occurs on a global scale, the disease leads to significant illness, mortality, and social disruption.

General Overview

The Problems

The COVID-19 pandemic has created multiple challenges that still are yet to be solved. The challenges that are created impact students, educators, and education systems worldwide. A great number of students are still suffering from learning loss, this means that some students have to stay a year back or that they have fallen behind on school work. To catch up to a learning loss is difficult, and these students do not often address their struggles and without any extra effort, it is not possible to catch up. The setback of students from LEDCs is even worse, already existing educational inequalities were exacerbated. Students were facing great challenges with accessing learning resources such as devices, books, and internet access.

The effect that COVID-19 had on the mental health of students and educators was vast. The pandemic created stress due to the uncertainty of the future. The isolation created by the lockdown created a feeling of loneliness for a great number of students. It also created a social setback that is still very noticeable, lots of teenagers lack social skills that they could not develop due to the lockdown. These skills are essential for adulthood, so it is of utmost importance that teenagers are able to increase their social skills. It is harder to create and develop friendships without proper social skills, which means that the students also lack social contacts. Social contact is one of the most important influences on the mental health of students, meaning that with less social contact the mental health of a student could possibly decline. It was even harder for individuals suffering from a diagnosed disorder. In a study, parents reported concerns regarding the lack of opportunities to practice their social skills, the previously mastered social skills for adolescents aged 3-18 years regressed (Breux et al., 2023).

Lifestyle and Extracurricular Activities		
Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence that youth can remain socially connected through telehealth Creative outlets for virtual social connectedness emerged (e.g., virtual band and choir concerts) 	Neutral/Mixed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased screen time for leisure (e.g., video games, cell phone) Decreased driving time 	Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreased access to quality food Reduced physical activity and increased sedentary behavior Reduced participation in extracurricular activities, particularly athletic activities, and part-time work
Family Social Environment		
Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved family relationships and play between siblings Increased parental understanding of curriculum and learning needs 	Neutral/Mixed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time with family Parenting practices during pandemic related to family and non-family social interactions 	Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased family chaos and conflict Increased risk for child abuse and intrafamilial violence Adolescents needing to become caregivers for younger siblings
Peer Social Environment		
Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher quality social interactions, particularly face-to-face interactions with peers during pandemic Decreases in negative interactions with friends among younger and older adolescents (ages 8-12 and 13-15, respectively) 	Neutral/Mixed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer face-to-face interactions with peers More online interactions with peers Adolescents with marginalized identities reported more media use, but also higher perceived friend support from social media during the pandemic 	Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreases in positive interactions with friends among younger adolescents (aged 8-12) Some evidence of cyberbullying becoming more problematic during pandemic More time online/on social media linked to higher levels of depression and social anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullying/victimization decreased among neurodevelopmental youth Messaging and video chatting with peers can facilitate social connectedness and closeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although youth on average doing okay socially, certain subsets may be particularly impacted (e.g., youth with social anxiety) Adolescents who experienced negative peer relations pre-pandemic actually were more resilient during the pandemic 	
Social Skills		
Positive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-sample of youth have parent-reported reductions in stress resulting from fewer interactions 	Neutral/Mixed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parenting and parent technology use linked to social-emotional outcomes 	Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent-reported concerns regarding lack of opportunities to practice social skills Parent reported regression in previously mastered social skills for autistic youth Self-regulation and cooperation skills decreased in autistic youth during pandemic

Current Opinion in Psychology

Figure 1 - Summary of benefits and concerns noted in existing research (Elsevier, 2023)

Teachers were suffering from burnout during COVID-19, the burnout did not only affect the teachers themselves but also the quality of their teaching, this also affected the students. The burnouts were commonly caused by the quick adaptation needed to the new teaching methods, the task of managing the online classrooms, and addressing the variety of needs that students had at that time. This also created a training gap for teachers. Online classes made it harder for teachers to ensure that students were studying, this also made it harder for the traditional assessments. It created concern about the effectiveness of the assessments and the fairness of evaluating the performance of students in the pandemic.

Higher education institutions were also impacted by COVID-19. There were financial challenges, and there were great changes in the enrollment pattern due to the uncertainty of the

pandemic. Some students were not able to follow any classes during the pandemic and were not allowed to leave their rooms due to the pandemic, creating an enormous feeling of isolation.

All these struggles lead to the careful consideration of a long-term reform to enhance the resilience and adaptability of global education. The pandemic exposed the flaws of the global educational system, and the importance of strengthening it. Students are still suffering from a social setback and learning loss due to the pandemic, without any global assistance.

The Causes

The school closures began in March 2020, which meant that students had to follow online school. This disrupted in-person learning. The online lessons created a digital divide, for online lessons school books, devices and the internet were needed. Students who did not have access to one of these supplies could not properly attend digital lessons. This caused a great difference in learning loss between regions, the biggest regions that were most affected by the pandemic in terms of education and health are the Caribbean and Latin America (World Bank 2021). The digital lessons also created challenges due to student participation, it was harder for teachers to control the engagement of students. Students were able to do all kinds of different activities during the online lessons that were not related to studying for school, this created another big setback for students.

The pandemic had a big social and emotional impact, isolation from the lockdown and online lessons paired with stress caused by the pandemic. The online lessons caused isolation which had a bad impact on the mental health of students, they lost almost all connection to peers. Students were also suffering from more academic stress and pressure, this was caused by the changes which required more commitment of the students. Parents also suffered from stress during the lockdowns, caused by the need for extra parental support for their children during digital learning, and their additional struggles with working digitally. The stigma created around mental health is refusing students, teachers, and parents to seek help for the mental health issues they still suffer from caused by the pandemic.

Timeline of Key Events

Date

December 2019

Event

First COVID-19 reports emerge in Wuhan, China

January 2020	The WHO declares a Public Health Emergency
March 2020	Countries start to implement lockdowns
April 2020	UNESCO launches the Global Education Coalition
June 2020	The UN calls for a coordinated global response
August 2020	Many countries face challenges with the transition to remote learning
July 2021	Countries begin to open schools
2022 and beyond	Ongoing efforts to strengthen global education

Major Parties Involved

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization a committee of the United Nations which is responsible for public health. Some key functions of the WHO include health guidance and standards, disease and surveillance response, and research and innovation. The main focus of the WHO is public health, the impact of COVID-19 on global education does not directly impact them, but the impact is significant. They provided guidance for safe school protocol operations, and collaborated with UNESCO to address the health-related aspect of educational disruptions. It ensured health and safety recommendations for students and schools, and it is part of the Global Education Coalition.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been involved in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on global education. UNESCO is part of the Global Education Coalition, created as a partnership between different organizations to ensure inclusive learning opportunities for all during and after the COVID-19 crisis. They also provide guidance and policy advice to countries on how to manage disruptions, ensure learning, and support the well-being of students and educators during the pandemic. UNESCO also monitors the impact of COVID-19 on education globally, and promotes open educational resources.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has been involved with this issue by their efforts to ensure continuity of learning, and their recognition of the importance of technology. They also address the learning loss caused by the lockdown. UNICEF

emphasizes the importance of mental health and its influence on the students. There is a main focus on the rights of children and their well-being, the effects that COVID-19 had on global education still influence these things, which makes this issue an important topic for UNICEF to discuss.

The World Bank

The World Bank is involved with this issue because of their financial support for education, they supported countries facing challenges that were caused by the pandemic. The World Bank is also known for initiating emergency education programs to support countries that have suffered from the impact of the pandemic. The World Bank is also able to provide assistance for technological assistance, and they collect data about the impact COVID-19 had and still has on education. The World Bank strives for inclusive education, meaning that every child has the right to education (Inclusive education, z.d.).

Brazil

Brazil is already known for its learning disparity, these inequalities already existed before COVID-19. However, these problems worsened due to COVID-19. The schools in Brazil were at least closed for one and a half years and the minister of education of Brazil did not provide national coordination (*COVID's impact on education in developing countries, 2021*). 'The Pnad-Covid 2020 survey estimated that 5,075,294 children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years declared they were not attending school or that they were attending, but that no school activities had been promoted in the week prior to the interview.' (UNICEF, z.d.).

China

Education during COVID-19 continued in China, by following classes through the internet and distance learning. China is a technologically advanced country, this helped with creating a proper education system during COVID-19.

Possible Solutions

Digital Access and Infrastructure

Investments in technology infrastructure will ensure more equitable access to learning resources such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, but it can also provide devices and internet access for students living in less developed countries.

Teacher training and Professional Development

Training programs that teach educators how to enhance their digital teaching skills, and how to appropriately approach and help students that are struggling with their mental health or school subjects.

Hybrid Learning Models

The development of hybrid learning models is key, these can be implemented in the current education system to ease the shortage of teachers. However, it is also important to develop these learning models for future disruptions.

Open Educational Resources

The promotion of the creation of an open educational system is key to equitable global education. It will provide accessible and widespread access to high-quality education materials.

Mental Health Support

The emotional impact that the epidemic had on parents, students and educators should be addressed. Mental health and psychological support services should be integrated into education systems, creating an opportunity to seek help for any struggles that a student, parent, or educator may suffer from. The creation of extracurricular activities for students to improve their social contact could also be incorporated into the mental health support.

Flexible Assessment Methods

Find alternative assessment methods that can effectively assess various student performances in various learning environments.

Global Collaboration

Through the encouragement of international collaboration, by sharing various assessments and successes, countries are able to collectively address global education challenges. There may also be an opportunity for them to share resources if needed.

Recovery and Catch-Up Programs

Some students are suffering from a learning setback, implementing programs that help them catch up on missed classes or learning opportunities, and providing additional resources and support, can help students to overcome the setback that was created by the pandemic.

Further Readings

UNICEF: Out of school children in Brazil: a warning about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education.

This elaborates on the impact of COVID-19 on the education system of Brazil and how it was before and after the pandemic.

https://www.unicef.org/brazil/media/14881/file/out-of-school-children-in-brazil_a-warning-about-the-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-education.pdf

Worldbank: Managing impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world.

This elaborates on the impact of COVID-19 on education in various countries. So, delegates can probably find the impact that the pandemic had on their country here.

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing#:~:text=China%20is%20one%20country%20where,school%20systems%20are%20less%20prepared.>

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