



Forum: Human Rights

Issue: Preserving the right to quality education in the context of mass digitalization of educational institutions in the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

Nowadays the question of preserving the right to quality education in the context of pandemic digitalization is a serious issue for all the UN members, especially when keeping in mind SDGs, specifically the fourth one (quality education). Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. Over the past decade major progress was made towards increasing access to education and school enrollment rates at all levels. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 91 per cent of students worldwide. By April 2020, close to 1.6 billion children and youth were out of school. Moreover, nearly 369 million children that rely on school meals needed to look for other sources of daily nutrition. Never before have so many children been out of school at the same time, disrupting learning and upending lives, especially of the most vulnerable and marginalized. The global pandemic has far-reaching consequences that may jeopardize hard won gains made in improving global education.

Definition of key words

Digitalization – transformation of sound, picture and other information in analog systems into digital formats; the use of digital technologies to upgrade processes; integration of digital technologies into everyday life by the digitization of everything that can be digitized.

Pandemic – an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affects a significant proportion of the population.

Quality education – kind of education provided by an educational system that emphasizes the importance of focusing on five important elements including: quality learners, quality learning environment, quality content, quality processes, and quality outcomes.

Mobilize – to put into movement or circulation.

Background information

Students, their parents, and educators around the world have been feeling the extraordinary ripple effect of Covid-19 as schools and universities have been shutting down and quarantine methods have been ordered to cope with the global pandemic. While governments and health officials have been doing their best slowing down the outbreak, education systems are trying to provide quality education for all during these difficult times

As school after school and university after university has been shutting down in the face of the Covid-19 crisis (in more than 150 countries), digital learning has risen from a nice-to-have extracurricular facility to become the lifeline for education. But the opportunities that digital technologies offer go well beyond a stop-gap solution during the crisis. Digital technology allows people to find entirely new answers to what people learn, how people learn, where people learn and when they learn. Technology can enable teachers and students to access specialized materials well beyond textbooks, in multiple formats and in ways that can bridge time and space. Alongside great teachers, intelligent digital learning systems cannot just teach students science, but they can simultaneously observe how they study, how they learn science, the kind of tasks and thinking that interest them, and the kind of problems that they find boring or difficult.

However, digital learning lacks some of the crucial advantages and characteristics of offline education format. Attending school and university classes not only helps students acquire knowledge but plays an important role in the process of socialization. Numerous social connections emerge during school and university years, and some of them may last for the whole life. Digital education breaks this process as student do not spend so much time together and most of the time do not interact informally outside their classes. Moreover, it may be harder for students to concentrate on their studies when they are sitting at home in front of their computers, smartphones, tablets etc., as their surrounding always remains the same, and for successful learning process it is important to change the surroundings. Finally, digital education requires students to use electronic

devices, and this poses a problem for families with low income, which do not have and opportunity to provide their children with qualitative electronic gadget.

The changes in our societies have vastly outpaced the structural capacity of our current education systems to respond. Within the framework of the suspension of face-to-face classes, the need to maintain educational continuity has presented challenges to which countries have responded with different remote options and solutions, including adjusting the school calendar and how the curriculum is implemented, all adapted, prioritized and adjusted in various ways. In order to make adjustments, it is necessary to take into account the characteristics of national or subnational curricula, the country's resources and capacities to develop distance learning processes, the levels of segregation and educational inequality in the country, and how much of the school year had elapsed.

Major countries and organizations involved

Nowadays, during pandemic, almost every country and every member of the UN is involved in this issue, as it is really important to understand that education is vital for everyone, especially in our modern world.

The list of organizations:

- UNESCO
- UNICEF
- WHO
- ANEP

Relevant treaties and UN resolutions

- 47/23 New and emerging digital technologies and human rights
- 47/6 The right to education
- 47/3 Civil society space: COVID-19: the road to recovery and the essential role of civil society

Previous attempts to solve the issue

UNICEF, together with the EU, has previously advocated that safe and quality child-friendly education during a pandemic, with a focus on the needs of the most vulnerable,

should be a priority of the government and the whole society. UNICEF has also advocated for decisions on school reopening and modalities of work of each school to be made in cooperation with health professionals, the school management and staff, parents, students, and the local community.

A survey conducted in September by Ipsos, with the support of UNICEF and the British Embassy in Podgorica, on a nationally representative sample of parents of school-age children showed that most parents think that, in the long run, distance learning can lead to a decline in children's motivation to learn. They also point out that children miss socializing with their peers and that many parents cannot provide adequate support for their children in learning.

Possible solutions

In order to help schools and universities provide better learning, we must think about how exactly we will do it. There are lots of measures and it is essential to develop them in right way. We must:

- Focus on improving the content of curricula (in relation to health and well-being, in particular) and on specialized support for teachers, ensuring appropriate contractual and working conditions, teacher training for distance learning and the return to school, and socio-emotional support in order to work with students and their families,
- Develop preparedness of the education system to respond to crises, i.e. resilience at all levels,
- Plan and realize to be focused not only on education, but also on health, nutrition and social protection,
- Provide new technologies to schools,
- Cooperate and collaborate between different sectors and actors to achieve an integrated system, focused on students and education staff.

Useful links

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45905/1/S2000509_en.pdf

https://cdn.hundred.org/uploads/report/file/15/hundred_spotlight_covid-19_digital.pdf

<https://www.unicef.org/media/100211/file/DIGITAL%20UNICEF.pdf>

<https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/stories/we-will-support-overcoming-challenges-education-during-covid-19-pandemic>

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/publication/wcms_783730.pdf (Very useful!!)