



Forum: Human Rights

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

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the near-total closures of schools, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, universities and colleges. Many students could not attend online classes because of lack of the necessary equipment. The connection between teachers and students became worse, the level of motivation decreased.

Definition of key terms

Pandemic – an epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across a large region, for instance multiple continents or worldwide, affecting a substantial number of individuals.

Digitalization – the generic term for the Digital Transformation of society and the economy. It describes the transition from an industrial age characterized by analogue technologies to an age of knowledge and creativity characterized by digital technologies and digital business innovation.

Social distancing – a set of non-pharmaceutical interventions or measures intended to prevent the spread of a contagious disease by maintaining a physical distance between people and reducing the number of times people come into close contact with each other.

Background information

Efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 through non-pharmaceutical interventions and preventive measures such as social-distancing and self-isolation have prompted the widespread closure of primary, secondary, and tertiary schooling in over 100 countries.

Most governments decided to temporarily close educational institutions in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19. As of 12 January 2021, approximately 825 million learners

were affected due to school closures in response to the pandemic. According to UNICEF monitoring, 23 countries are currently implementing nationwide closures and 40 are implementing local closures, impacting about 47 percent of the world's student population. 112 countries' schools are currently open.

In general, having fewer education options has globally impacted people with less money, while people with more money have found education. New online programs have shifted the labor of education from schools to families and individuals, and consequently, people everywhere who relied on schools rather than computers and home life have had more difficulty accessing their education. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) as well as school closures impact not only students, teachers, and families, but have far-reaching economic and societal consequences. School closures in response to the pandemic have shed light on various social and economic issues, including student debt, digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness, as well as access to childcare, health care, housing, internet, and disability services. The impact was more severe for disadvantaged children and their families, causing interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems, and consequent economic cost to families who could not work.

Lack of access to technology or fast, reliable internet access can prevent students in rural areas and from disadvantaged families. Lack of access to technology or good internet connectivity is an obstacle to continued learning, especially for students from disadvantaged families. Teachers have reported that students are more likely to complete assignments if they have access to internet at home. In response to school closures caused by COVID-19, UNESCO recommends the use of distance learning programs and open educational applications and platforms that schools and teachers can use to reach learners remotely and limit the disruption of education. However, in regions where online learning is not feasible, due to a lack of access to distance learning tools such as smartphones and internet connectivity, some parents have resorted to child labor or early marriage as a means to cope with the financial stress placed on them by the pandemic.

To aid in slowing the transmission of COVID-19, hundreds of libraries have temporarily closed. In the United States, numerous major cities announced public library closures, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and New York City, affecting 221 libraries. For students without internet at home, this increases the difficulty of keeping up with distance learning.

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At the beginning of 2022, as the situation with coronavirus pandemic is becoming less severe, educational institutions have started to re-open again and traditional offline education is returning. However, the society now faces the results of the previous distant period, including the lack of motivation, disrupted educational process, and an overall decrease of educational level.

Organizations involved

World Health Organization (WHO)

Founded in 1948, WHO is the United Nations agency that connects nations, partners and people to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable – so everyone, everywhere can attain the highest level of health. WHO leads global efforts to expand universal health coverage. The organization directs and coordinates the world's response to health emergencies as well as promotes healthier lives – from pregnancy care through old age.

United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 11 December 1946, to provide emergency food and healthcare to children and mothers in countries that had been devastated by World War II. In 1950, UNICEF's mandate was extended to address the long-term needs of children and women in developing countries everywhere. In 1953 it became a permanent part of the United Nations System, and the words "international" and "emergency" were dropped from the organization's name, though it retained the original acronym, "UNICEF".

UN documents related to this issue

World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs

The World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs are products of a wide and systematic process of consultation conducted from October 1989 through January 1990 under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Commission established to organize the World Conference. Earlier drafts of the documents were discussed at nine regional and three international consultations.

These documents thus represent a worldwide consensus on an expanded vision of basic education and a renewed commitment to ensure that the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults are met effectively in all countries.

Possible solutions

- Improving educational technologies
- Providing students and teachers with necessary equipment
- Increasing the control of the quality of online education
- Helping teachers to get good skills in computer using

Useful links

Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond:

https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

WHO: <https://www.who.int/>

Current issues of digital legal education in the context of Covid-19 pandemic (article):

https://www.shs-conferences.org/articles/shsconf/pdf/2021/20/shsconf_lisid2021_01034.pdf

The rise of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic:

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/>

How has Covid-19 changed education:

<https://www.euruni.edu/blog/covid-19-changed-education/>

Future digitalization of education after Covid-19:

<https://www.hhs.se/en/research/sweden-through-the-crisis/future-digitalization-of-education-after-covid-19/>

Post-pandemic challenges for higher education (article):

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42438-021-00249-1>