

Forum: United Nations Human Rights Council

Issue #26-02: Measures to address the education gap caused by COVID-19

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Guiding Questions as you Read

- How has covid-19 affected your education?
- How can countries facilitate access to technology?
- Which populations are most at risk of losing their education?
- Why is the education gap an important issue to address?
- In what ways could your delegation mitigate the education gap?

Introduction

Key Terms

Covid-19
Inequalities
Education
Drop out
Social classes
Remote learning

With the rise of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, educational organizations have found themselves dependent on technological advancements to continue teaching the use without threatening their health. The result has been a gap between those who have been able to continue with their education, whilst those in less financially stable households, or without access to the technology needed to tap into the world of online schooling, have been left without the basic human right for the pursuit of knowledge. In other words, the transition from physical to virtual education has subsequently implemented a gap where those with the economic status to support the technology that students need to properly learn. Without education, there is no sufficient guidance to the next generation to carry on humanity's legacy, continuing businesses, managing infrastructure, and maintaining the composition of society as a whole. Not to mention the fact that schooling is a basic human right, and drawbacks in this field get the general population no close to the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030, as the provision of education for all is part of these collective objectives. But just as the world has vastly reacted to the surge of the coronavirus pandemic, it has also taken notice of this pressing issue and implemented

strategies to mitigate its effects on students around the globe.

Comprehension Question(s): Why has COVID-19 caused a gap in who receives education?

Definition of Key Terms

Covid-19: COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease.

Education: The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university.

Drop out: Stop participating or being involved in something, in this case school or education.

Social classes: A division of a society based on social and economic status.

Remote learning: Is a situation in which the student and the educator, or information source, are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment.

Inequalities: Difference in size, degree, circumstances, etc.; lack of equality.

Current Situation

Key Terms

- Covid-19
- Inequalities
- Education
- Drop out
- Social classes
- Remote learning

Due to the global pandemic governments across the globe enforced “stay-at-home” regulations, it disrupted the structure of how we interact inside our society. From one day to the next, we saw the closure of schools, educational institutions and universities.

Thousands of students transitioned from a physical classroom to a virtual one in a matter of days, with educators transforming lesson plans into Zoom-friendly content (or other platforms). Due to education becoming remote the education gap has only increased. Students across the globe are not able to access their classes due to not having the economic ability to acquire speedy internet or even computers. Many

students have even dropped out of school due to the lack of motivation to wake up and stare into a computer screen for hours. Another pressing issue regarding education is the learning gaps in students. Many kids who are going to online classes aren't getting half of the content they need, creating gaps in their knowledge, which will later on affect them. One last thing to consider is how each student's economic status and social class affects their ability to get an education, which is something that should not happen given that the right to education is a human right.

Virtual Classes

Online courses call for a greater amount of motivation and self-discipline than a classroom-based course. A classroom has one or more instructors and peers, who can hold a student accountable for their course-work. In contrast, online courses involve setting our own goals, tracking progress and meeting deadlines. As for the educators, it requires them to put in additional efforts to incorporate online learning programs into the curriculum in the most suitable manner. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, schools have been forced to move classes online. This has caused an even bigger gap in education due to the fact that many students have had issues getting speedy internet or even computers to get access to their classes. Taking into consideration the economic status of all the students, some teachers have been more flexible with deadlines and class materials, but still online education is hard on many students given that not everyone has the motivation and self-discipline required to succeed in a virtual manner.

Minorities

There are numerous minority families that are unable to access the internet and digital devices and therefore are being left behind. The Pulse Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that only 60.9 percent of Black families and 63.6 percent of Hispanic families have the internet available at all times for educational purposes, whereas 78.9 percent of white households have constant access. The underlying reason is the financial strain on minority families, who often have lower earnings. In 2019, Hispanic and Black homes comprised 49.2 percent of total low-income households, making them the least advantaged racial groups in terms of socioeconomic status. The

pandemic of COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation, resulting in job losses and business closures. Due to variables that degrade education quality, such as inconsistent internet connections, a lack of study areas, and insufficient quiet time, low-income Hispanic and Black children may have inferior learning outcomes. Learning loss is increased when education is of poor quality.

Mental Health

The pandemic was an event that affected everyone, everywhere. It was a moment of grief and misery for many people. Everything that has occurred in the last year will have an impact on today's youth for the rest of their lives. Educators had already voiced a growing feeling of urgency about concerns related to social-emotional learning (SEL).. Social emotional learning is defined as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL has been the top concern among educators for the past two years, according to HMH's Educator Confidence Report, which was issued in cooperation with YouGov. Recent events have further added to this issue, raising concerns about children's and adolescents' mental health.

Comprehension Question(s): What are the main topics and issues regarding the education gap caused by the Covid-19 pandemic?

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Portugal

Portugal has taken great strides in order to prevent the education gap caused as a result of Covid-19 from enlarging. The educational program “#EstudoEmCasa” was launched by the Portuguese Ministry of Education. They reserved a public television channel in order for students without access to computers or tablets to watch it through this broadcast. Schools, students, and families were also provided with “guiding principles” within an educational roadmap. This served to provide information

to families on how the program would function and how to access the channel in question. Furthermore, the planning and monitoring of the transition was monitored using a television grid which was provided to the general population on a weekly basis. Nevertheless, this is a temporary solution, as private and public organizations have worked to provide electronic devices like laptops and routers to families in financially unstable environments. The Post Office Services and the National Scouts Group of Portugal also served to provide hard copies of student's lessons for those who either did not have internet connection or lived far away from their respective schools. Teachers and delivery services would organize the homework and assignment transportation according to due dates and availability.

India

Long-standing issues of inequality in India have deepened the disparities in education for different households. In total, over 320 million students across the nation have had their pursuit of knowledge disrupted as a result of the rapid transition to virtual schooling. Although India has the world's second-largest school system, the swift closure of this network of services has resulted in the closing of over 1.5 million schools. Not to mention the fact that, before the pandemic, 32 million children did not have access to an education. This is endorsed by the fact that, according to a survey by the Ministry of Rural Development, only 47% of India's population gets more than 12 hours of electricity, and 36% of the nation's schools operated without electricity whatsoever before the transition to virtual learning. Therefore, students in underprivileged circumstances have been left without resources from which to receive their education. Reports from those who are learning have also suggested that those who are learning virtually have also been struggling, as one-on-one accommodations are not facilitated by online platforms. Teachers are also having trouble adapting to new technology and interfaces that they did not use before the coronavirus outbreak. Information collected in order to properly deal with this pressing issue have suggested that those that have dropped out of school have done so because of economic factors. This is because 90% of the population is involved in disorganized work, meaning that they are not provided with enough financial compensation for their work. In rural households, according to the Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India

Report, only 15% of families have the internet and only 13% of children could use it (only 8.5% in females). Girls were particularly vulnerable because many have domestic responsibilities that have increased as a result of their inability to access online education. Child labor and child marriage rates have increased as a result of the lack of resources available for distressed families.

Chile

Throughout the pandemic, Chile has made several evaluations in order to properly address the psychological state of their youth as a result of the pandemic. For example, the government created a non-profit organization named América Solidaria in order to conduct studies across all of Latin America in collaboration with other partner organizations. In total, 80 percent respondents of these surveys reported a deterioration in their mental health as a result of the coronavirus quarantine and virtual learning. In response, the Chilean government distributed over 125,000 computers with embedded internet connection in several cities with those most vulnerable to the coronavirus education gap. The Ministry of Education also provided printed material to more than 380,000 students in disadvantaged towns and rural schools that did not have an internet connection to begin with. This was done through the utilization of the Air Force, which could access the most remote areas with their advanced technology. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education hosted a seminar in May 2020 to provide guidance to teachers addressing how to support the socioemotional development of their students during remote learning whilst also providing self-care services to the educators themselves.

Turkey

Turkey has had one of the worst track records out of the nations struck with the coronavirus education gap. As a result, over 30 percent of the nations' student body is at risk of failing and having to repeat a grade. This is a direct result of the government's ill-equipped infrastructure, which results in an education system that relies on virtual learning. In low-income areas that do not have access to electricity, let alone an internet connection, many have stopped receiving an education all together. Those who are going back to school do so on a rotation basis, but many are still forced to continue with remote learning because in an effort to mitigate the rampant spread of

COVID-19. During the first week of online courses that started in September 2020, the EBA educational program which much of the nation's schools depend on crashed and was unusable for an entire week. It was said that it was a result of the large amounts of traffic that flooded the website, although many argue it should have been expected. Nevertheless, the government blamed it on a cyberattack. Moreover, the fees granted to those using their internet connection, televisions, and computers are high compared to most other nations, leaving many families without an education due to the financial burden it has had on them. The result, as reported by Turkey's Republican People's Party, reported that four million students could not access their virtual schooling due to the government's lack of resources. Within this group, the reasons for the inaccessibility of their learning has been difficulty accessing the internet for 3.5 million, whilst the other 750,000 do not have televisions let alone other electronic devices in their homes.

Italy

Italy has provided useful training services for teachers that facilitate their job online. Online platforms have also been created in order to promote collaboration between students and to make giving feedback easier. The National Education Trade Union wrote a Manifesto in order to promote inclusivity education during the Covid-19 pandemic as well. It had six main ideas, outlining how education should be pursued in a safe but efficient manner. It first denotes how teachers must continue to provide a learning environment for their students, and that online school, although a tool in these desperate times, should not replace its physical counterpart. It also states that technology should be used to facilitate learning and not an overall solution, and that the educational gap must be mitigated because it is a human right. Finally, the Manifesto explains that the autonomy of schools and collegial bodies, as well as other elements that were respected before virtual education should continue to be followed, and that, in order to measure the efficacy of the nation's implementations, data evaluations must be conducted in order to measure the student's and teacher's performances. Lastly in Rome, the identification of those in low socio-economic statuses has been done through the provision of basic services, and has also served to offer students from underprivileged backgrounds with electronic devices and better infrastructure through the implementations of free internet connections.

UN Involvement

The United Nations and education partners have come up with a new campaign called "Save our Future". This campaign aims to target four key areas. The first area is the reopening of schools. They issued guidance to help governments in this complex endeavor. It will be essential to balance health risks against risks to children's education and protection, and to factor in the impact on women's labor force participation. The second area will be prioritizing education in financing decisions. Before the crisis hit, low and middle-income countries already faced an education funding gap of \$1.5 trillion dollars a year. This gap has now grown. Education budgets need to be protected and increased. And it is critical that education is at the heart of international solidarity efforts, from debt management and stimulus packages to global humanitarian appeals and official development assistance. The third area is targeting those who are hard to reach. Education initiatives must seek to reach those at greatest risk of being left behind -- people in emergencies and crises; minority groups of all kinds; displaced people and those with disabilities. They should be sensitive to the specific challenges faced by girls, boys, women and men, and should urgently seek to bridge the digital divide. The fourth and last area is called "the future of education is here". We have a generational opportunity to reimagine education. They want to take a leap towards forward-looking systems that deliver quality education for all as a springboard for the Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve this, they need investment in digital literacy and infrastructure, an evolution towards learning how to learn, a rejuvenation of life-long learning and strengthened links between formal and non-formal education. And need to draw on flexible delivery methods, digital technologies and modernized curricula while ensuring sustained support for teachers and communities.

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event | Effects |
|----------|---|---|
| 01/09/20 | The World Health Organization announces the discovery of a pneumonia-like disease (later identified as COVID-19) in Wuhan, China. | Widespread panic spreads to neighboring nations and around the world, and discrimination begins against those of Chinese descentance. |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| 01/21/20 | The coronavirus's characteristic human transition is identified by Chinese scientist Zhong Nanshan. The WHO thinks of declaring a national health emergency, but does not do so when it receives this information | Institutionalization and community care |
| 01/31/20 | The World Health Organization finally calls a Global Health Emergency for the sixth time in history. As well as in Wuhan, the novel coronavirus can be found in the United States, Germany, Japan, Vietnam, and Taiwan. | 9800 people were infected and 200 dead in Wuhan. International borders were closed and precautions by governments and people started to take place. |
| 02/02/20 | Global air travel is officially restricted. | Many are left stuck outside their homes, and are forced to move in with their loved ones. |
| 03/11/20 | The WHO declares the coronavirus a pandemic and the public finds itself deeply concerned. | Countries across the Atlantic Ocean begin to prepare for a possible spread of the virus into their nations. |
| 03/13/20 | The majority of schools close worldwide and transition to online learning. | Schools begin to transition their curriculum into an online format, leaving many without accessibility to these resources behind. |
| 04/2020 | Nationwide closures are reported by all countries in the United Nations, with 99% of people affected | A total of 1.725 billion students are affected by the pandemic in their educational institutions. |
| 2020-2021 | Schools with the appropriate resources | Schools focus their budgets on the |

begin to appropriate their campuses to accommodate students when governments eventually allow for it. **changes to their campuses.**

03/21 Pioneering schools begin to open in hybrid formats, though half of the student population remains online. **The transition to a new normality begins, though many are left behind due to the lack of resources.**

Past International Action

The urgency of the coronavirus pandemic has incited several international initiatives to prevent the world's most vulnerable student body from losing their access to education. The Global Solutions Initiative Foundation, for example, focused much of its funding on introducing a proposal to address the "largest education disruption in history" according to their website. The plan includes launching the INEE Coronavirus Resources Portal, a website with resources like technical support, information about the state of the pandemic, and webinars for teachers on technological programs they could use to improve their lesson structure. Another part of said plan was the implementation of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education. This branch would serve as a set of standards for governments to assess schools on their response, recovery, and preparedness, which would help the staff be ready if another event like this were to happen again. Finally, the Interim Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control would be implemented in schools so students and staff could learn about the prevention of diseases spreading.

Furthermore, the Global Partnership of education, which is an independent international collaboration between nations, provided financial grants that were allocated to help students maintain their education. As a matter of fact, a total of 467 million dollars were gathered between 66 countries along with another 25 million from UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank between April and October 2020. This financial assistance went towards providing hygiene and psychosocial support to vulnerable communities, establishing temporary non-technological distanced programs to those without access to an internet connection, and working behind the scenes to improve

the permanent infrastructure of schools to make them more reliable in the case of new waves of the coronavirus and so that the reopening of schools may be accelerated.

There has also been an initiative by the International Association of Universities in the case of those pursuing higher learning, as many colleges and universities alike have their student body living on campus with roommates. In order to assess the impact and the measures to be taken, the association conducted the “Global Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education”. With this data, school boards are now evaluating the best course of action to improve the higher educative experience during this time.

Lastly, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development created a toolkit for board members and educators alike as an informative response to recover from the coronavirus crisis on education. Published on July 10, 2020, provides instructional advice on how best build a curriculum online whilst still providing alternatives that do not concern the use of technology. Furthermore, the text provides constraints and factors to be considered in the creation of these programs, as well as socioemotional ways to support students in need. Finally, great emphasis is placed on the mitigation of inequalities through the provision of educational guidelines and resources that teachers can use to help their most vulnerable students.

In short, much has already been done to diminish the education gap caused as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these initiatives have not necessarily had the desired impact on the recovery of schools, as much of the worlds' population remains without access to an education, or in an online format that is harmful to the students' and teachers' mental health and wellbeing.

Possible Solutions

The covid-19 pandemic has increased the gap in education in several aspects. Many students need socio-emotional support as well as instructional support. One possible solution to decrease the gap of education is to do more one-on-one teaching with kids who have had more difficult times due to the lack of internet connection or other personal issues. As many schools around the world have started to slowly open up using a hybrid schedule, that can also be a way of slowly getting things back to normal and

helping students with socio-emotional and educational needs. Keeping in mind the safety protocols many activities can be done outside with the proper distance and masks. This can also help kids connect with others while also keeping them safe.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The urgent issue of the educative crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic greatly relates to the Sustainable Development Goal of Quality Education. The pandemic has only increased the number of children outside of schools, further emphasizing the need of an infrastructural upgrade to the reliability of schools. According to the United Nations, 200 million children will not have access to an education as of 2030, which is why this goal seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Even during the 21st century, a time of pioneering technological innovation, online learning is inaccessible to around 500 million students and, with the closing of schools as a result of the pandemic, and 65% of primary schools that can accommodate students do not even have handwashing facilities necessary to maintain a hygienic environment. In short, the reversing of the years of progress done on the improvement of education as a result of the pandemic simply highlights the work to be done for the sake of the generations to come.

Appendix

- I. General information about specific delegations for the creation of country profiles:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

- II. Context on the education gap caused by the COVID-19 pandemic:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>.

www.edweek.org/leadership/a-year-of-covid-19-what-it-looked-like-for-schools/2

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III. Important information about previous steps taken to solve the education gap:

www.oecd.org/publications/education-responses-to-covid-19-an-implementation-strategy-toolkit-81209b82-en.htm

IV. Steps that the United Nations has taken to mitigate the education gap:

en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse

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