Quality and inequality of the education system

Over the last years, armed conflicts, displacement and national disasters have disturbed the education of 75 million children and youth around the world. With the spread of COVID-19, that number is developing in an exceptional manner since education has been hit especially hard by the pandemic with 1.53 billion students out of school and an increasing drop-out rates around the globe.

We are living amid what is possibly one of the utmost threats in the course of global education. Several nations have already been facing a learning crisis where many students were in schools yet not learning the essential skills needed for their development. The World Bank's "Learning Poverty" indicator states that even before the outbreak of COVID-19, 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand at age 10.

This pandemic can possibly exacerbate these results even more. Among the issues that should be taken into account in this period of the crisis and which may immediately affect children and youth, are losses in learning and increments in dropout rates.

Moreover, most countries have very unequal education systems, and thus the negative impacts of the pandemic will be felt excessively and disproportionally. Disparity brought about by the pandemic will deepen the education gap; this has been affirmed by the World Bank data, which featured that the educational gap between the poor and the rich will broaden due to COVID-19.

The effect of the pandemic on education varies between the southern and northern hemisphere. Richer nations were more ready to move to online learning strategies while middle-income and poorer countries faced amplified inequality of opportunities. Those differences in opportunities expanded and caused the crisis to have even bigger negative effect on poor children's learning. Whenever left unaddressed, these educational needs can have long-term effects especially for the most vulnerable and unprotected.

Today, like never before, it is critical to re-examine, rethink and redesign the educational systems to guarantee that children are acquiring better quality education. The education methods, which worked toward the start of the 20th century need to be developed in order to fit the 21st century. It is an ideal time for a real revolution in the education system.

Finland, ranking among the top 10 countries in education globally, is going to set out one of the most extreme education reform programs ever undertaken by a nation state called "phenomenon" teaching through rejecting conventional "teaching by subject" in favor of "teaching by topic"; A methodology that advances multidisciplinary setting in education, building students' character, resilience and communication skills, opposed to simply driving children into assessment mechanisms. The reform will attempt to handle the everlasting inquiry: "What's the purpose of learning all this?" and/or "for what reason do I have to know this?"

Lebanon's education sector today is challenged like never before and moving in a descending trajectory. In addition to limited political commitment to education and deteriorating educational financing policy, other constraints confronting the Lebanese educational system include narrowing the achievement gap between private and public schools, consolidating state supervisory and regulatory role over private education, improving vocational and technical education and ensuring quality education.

Shortcomings in the Lebanese education system go beyond public versus private institutions. As indicated by worldwide examinations, such as PISA that measures student performance globally in mathematics, reading and science, the performance of Lebanese students has declined. When contrasting outcomes from 2011 and 2015, positioning of students' math proficiency and science has fallen; and 66 percent of students did not meet essential proficiency levels in science, math, and reading, a World Bank study noticed.

While many countries, including Lebanon, switched to distance teaching to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 disruption, challenges related to preparedness, weak infrastructure and capacity, as well as the digital gaps, have put additional strains on Lebanese students, parents, teachers, principals and the educational authorities. School closure in Lebanon has widened learning inequalities, affecting the most vulnerable children and youth disproportionately expressed various UN agencies on March 28.

Additional difficulties are identified with: inability of low-income social groups to have regular or tablet computers and fast internet, lack of appropriate training for teachers and students on distance learning mechanisms, difficulty in digitizing the curriculum content for remote education purposes, and the absence of effective evaluation mechanisms that can be applied using technology. The absence of equal opportunities is profoundly noticeable.

The primary issues confronting education leaders in the world today are: What are the socio-economic risks of the interrupted educational process? What opportunities can be seized despite the current crisis? What are the recommendations that can be drawn from international experiences attempting to overcome some of these barriers?

One of the opportunities offered by the crisis is a clearer understanding of the gaps and challenges. The mission of all education systems is to overcome the learning crisis, respond to the strains caused by the pandemic, reduce its negative impact on learning and schooling and build on this experience to get back on track with quicker improvement in learning.

As education systems cope with this crisis, they must also be thinking of how they can get better and stronger with an improved sense of responsibility of all stakeholders and an enhanced understanding of the need to bridge the gap in opportunities and guaranteeing that youth have the similar quality education opportunities.

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