

## Education Poverty: the aftershock of the pandemic

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A growing number of children are getting ready to go back to their classrooms. About 78 percent of the 134 countries that have closed schools have agreed on schools reopening dates.

However, questions abound. What does the return to school during the pandemic look like? How will schools reopen? What are the safety measures? How will student learning be affected? To what extent will the poorest and most vulnerable communities be affected? These and other questions remain difficult to answer. Reopening schools must weigh the benefits and risks through educational, public health and socio-economic lenses.

COVID-19 has forced tremendous changes in the manner in which lessons are provided. Yet, worldwide education requires a much more drastic rethinking. The crisis has elicited the world's greatest impulse for educational technology implementation literally overnight in history. Schools and universities are struggling to reform their teaching and learning in order to encourage students of all ages to study from home. While this poses immense operational and logistic problems, it opens up a world of possibilities for reimagining what the 21st-century education looks like.

Education can no longer be about obvious knowledge and information. According to the OECD 2030 Future of Education, "We need to replace old education standards with an educational framework that combines knowledge with the 21st-century skills of creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration."

This will not be done by merely shifting classes from chalkboard to Zoom calls, but by fundamentally changing the technique through which skills are taught and learned, from one-way information distribution to customized, self-directed learning.

Kids ought to be taught how to educate themselves. Students need not only learn awareness and knowledge but also skills, attitudes and values to grow and shape their future. This was never more apparent than in the current COVID-19 crisis.

Prioritizing marginalized groups is a crucial factor in decision-making as the crisis aggravates prevailing educational gaps by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults living in poor urban or rural areas, refugees, individuals with disabilities, and displaced people to resume their learning.

Nothing is going to be normal when school reopens. Even buses, playgrounds, cafeterias, and classrooms will look different as long as the coronavirus remains a threat. It is the largest adaptive process in the history of education.

The Policy Brief "Education during COVID-19 and beyond" published in August 2020 by the United Nations assesses the learning losses that are projected to continue beyond this period. It represents profound concern about the failure of a decade of educational growth. The reports recommend: Firstly, the implementation of immediate and swift concerted action to ensure the safety of all; secondly, the security of allocated expenditure for education and enhancing national and global investment in education; third, creating sustainable education structures with an emphasis on equality and inclusion; fourth, rethinking education and fostering improvement in teaching and learning. In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of taking disadvantaged groups, employability skills, teacher readiness, communication barriers and monitoring the learning seriously.

Education is one of the most important drivers in human capital investment. A recent report, which was published by the Brookings Institute, illustrates the effects of today's school closure on students' potential prospects including economic opportunities, for example additional earnings. As the report points out, some models indicate that the lack of learning during the unprecedented structural turmoil of the World War II affected the lives of students 40 years later. Moreover, not only the impact of missed learning is not restricted to the individual, but it also affects communities as a whole. It is presumed that any additional year of schooling is equal to 10 percent in additional future earnings.

In the context of a multidisciplinary view of poverty, education is defined as a significant factor between wealth and deprivation. The phenomenon of "Educational Poverty" is described as restricting children's right to education and depriving them of the opportunity to learn and improve the skills they will need to prosper in a promptly shifting world.

Education Poverty affects both children's educational attainments and accomplishments; it hinders their success and the development of their talents. Education Poverty does not only restrict children's dreams and adversely influence their prospects but also it affects their emotional development and their ability to establish relationships with others and explore themselves and the world around them.

Educational poverty has advanced by creating a comparative assessment instrument called the Educational Poverty Index that promotes an evidence-based policy. The Education Poverty measurement tool was updated and redefined in 2016 to include improvements and changes to the educational provision subindex including indicators as early childhood education, part-time classes, inadequate schools infrastructure and internet access. In addition, improvements to the learning and development subindex were introduced including indicators of low achievement in math and reading, early school leaving and engagement in cultural events.

In Lebanon, major persisting inequalities across the country are increasing educational poverty and social exclusion. This imposes reflection and actions tailored to address a challenge that has been amplified because of the pandemic threatening to be transferred from generation to generation in a brutal cycle.

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