The COVID-19 Crisis in Education: A Chance to Build Back Better
Key messages

01
THE WORST EDUCATION CRISIS OF THE CENTURY

The COVID-19 dramatically exacerbated the learning crisis. Countries chose to close schools to combat the pandemic, generating large and highly unequal learning losses.

02
FUTURE LEARNING IS AT RISK

Without swift action, the future of this generation is at risk. We need to set ambitious but achievable targets to accelerate learning now.

03
NEED POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

Stimulus packages did not prioritize education. Political and financial commitment is needed to recover and accelerate learning.
The COVID-19 dramatically exacerbated the learning crisis. Countries chose to close schools to combat the pandemic, generating large and highly unequal learning losses.
In low- and middle-income countries, 53% of children could not read and understand a simple text by age 10. (Learning Poverty)
Learning Poverty pre COVID-19

% of children who cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10

- Sub-Saharan Africa: 87%
- Middle East & North Africa: 59%
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 51%
- Europe & Central Asia: 9%
Learning Poverty pre COVID-19

% of children who cannot read and understand a simple text by age 10

% of children in Learning Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
<th>Middle East and North Africa</th>
<th>Latin America and the Caribbean</th>
<th>Europe and Central Asia</th>
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<td>Comoros</td>
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Data is missing for 38/50 Small States
In a context of a learning crisis...countries chose to close schools to combat the pandemic

Without any certainty about the benefits, but with highly unequal learning losses...

Source: World Bank analysis of UNESCO data
In small states, the length of school closures varied.

Similar to the rest of the world, LAC, MNA & SAR had the longest closures.

School closures in days, small states
Feb 2020 - Feb 2021

- Fully closed
- Partially closed

Global average (full and partial)

Source: World Bank analysis of UNESCO data
All countries implemented remote learning between 2020 and 2021

But not all successfully...

Remote learning response:

1. Only the better-off had the conditions for effective remote learning

2. Sometimes effective only to maintain a connection with school

3. Absent for early childhood

Massive, multimodal and varied response

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Paper, TV, radio and others</th>
<th>Computer, mobile and others</th>
<th>Nothing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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THE WORST EDUCATION CRISIS IN A CENTURY

100% increase in depression and anxiety symptoms for children globally* (Racine et al. 2021)

24 million additional students will drop out of the school system* (UNESCO 2020)

$17 trillion lost future earnings for this generation of students*

53% Learning Poverty, (up from 53% before COVID-19)*

Post COVID-19

370 million children in 150 countries missed out on a daily school meal* (Borowski et al. 2021)

70% increase in depression and anxiety symptoms for children globally* (Racine et al. 2021)

AN INEQUALITY CATASTROPHE

70%

$17 trillion lost future earnings for this generation of students*

53% Learning Poverty, (up from 53% before COVID-19)*

370 million children in 150 countries missed out on a daily school meal* (Borowski et al. 2021)

* estimations
Learning losses are now confirmed by recent data

Few countries have measured learning during and after school closures

- Evidence for Brazil, India, South Africa, Ethiopia, Netherlands, UK, US, all show significant and unequal losses

- Data has been collected for a few small states: Guyana, Kiribati, Moldova and Maldives

Sources: ASER, various years (India), Azevedo et al. 2021 (for simulations); UIS MILO study 2022
UNEQUAL impacts: learning losses vary dramatically across ages & socioeconomic status

Mexico: Percentage point change in the proportion of children who cannot read and understand a simple text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools with low SES</th>
<th>Schools with high SES</th>
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<tr>
<td>10-year-olds</td>
<td>15-year-olds</td>
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<td>10-year-olds</td>
<td>15-year-olds</td>
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-25% -10% -15% -10%

- Evidence of larger losses among the poor and for younger children, even in countries better prepared for remote learning
- Early childhood education basically disappeared in LICs and MICs.
- Other critical negative impacts on wellbeing: school meals, mental health (anxiety and depression), child marriage and GBV

Source: Estimation of the fundamental learning loss and learning poverty related to COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico, Hevia et al. 2021
Notes: The Socio-Economic Status (SES) index was constructed using information on schooling of the head of household and household assets (number of rooms, internet connectivity, and the existence of a car). Using normal quartiles, 4 levels were generated: high, medium-high, medium-low, and low SES.
Lessons on remote learning

1. Learning is intensive in human interactions
2. Effective teachers are more critical than ever
3. The digital divide must be closed—technology has the potential to be a great equalizer but today is a great unequalizer
4. The future is about balancing technology with the human factor
Without swift action, future learning is at risk. We need to set ambitious but realistic targets and accelerate learning now.
Without swift action, future learning is at risk

Need to set ambitious but realistic targets and accelerate learning now

Decisive and ambitious actions now can lead to a stronger learning recovery
## Learning Recovery: main proposed lines of action

*Which translate into components of Investment Projects*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reach every child and retain them in school</td>
<td>Assess learning levels</td>
<td>Prioritize teaching the fundamentals</td>
<td>Increase catch-up learning</td>
<td>Develop psychosocial health &amp; wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reopen schools safely and keep them open</td>
<td>Assess learning losses at national/sub-national level</td>
<td>Adjust curriculum across and within subjects</td>
<td>Support teachers continuously: build practical pedagogical and digital skills</td>
<td>Build teachers’ capacity to support their students’ wellbeing and identify students in need of specialized services</td>
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<td>Promote re-enrollment through back-to-school campaigns</td>
<td>Provide teachers with tools for classroom level measurement</td>
<td>Prioritize numeracy, literacy, socioemotional skills</td>
<td>Use approaches that align instruction with learning needs: targeted instruction; structured pedagogy; tutoring; self-guided learning</td>
<td>Support teacher wellbeing and resilience</td>
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<td>Provide cash transfers to poor families</td>
<td>Use early warning systems to identify at-risk students</td>
<td>Focus instruction on closing the gaps between desired and actual student learning in specific subjects</td>
<td>Expand instructional time (day, week or year)</td>
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World Bank support to improve learning in small states

Guyana (US$ 6.7M, Approved June 2021)
- Focus on foundational skills, socio-emotional skills
- Computer-assisted learning to teach to the right level in math and literacy
- Tool to observe classrooms and use this information for teacher coaching and tracking student progress
- Strengthening caregiver engagement through “parenting circles”, home learning kits, outreach campaigns

Maldives (US$9M, Board review in Aug 2022)
- Focus on English, Math and Science
- Expansion of ICT equipment in schools, digitization to provide uninterrupted learning during future shocks
- Continuous professional development for teachers (content knowledge, pedagogical skills, motivation)

Lesotho (US$ 7.1M, Approved June 2021)
- Improving student retention in secondary school through cash transfers to students from poor families, introducing youth clubs
- Introducing online teacher training in mathematics and science with the intention to scale up to students and support more personalized e-learning opportunities.
- Expanding the early childhood education sector to better prepare children (particularly those who are vulnerable) for primary school
Intervention

- Playgroups for children 0-5
- Early grade reading program for grades 1-2
  - Mother tongue
  - Evidence-based teacher training and coaching

Results

**Tonga**

Percentage of children able to read with comprehension by end of grade 2 increased 11%

**Tuvalu**

After 2 school terms of intervention, students were:

- Able to identify and read correctly 8 out of 10 of the most frequently printed words in their language
- Increased their reading scores (from 12% to 67-70% scores)

**Kiribati**

After one year of intervention, students:

- Could identify 42 letter sounds per minute (vs 22 letter sounds per minute before PEARL)
Political and financial commitment will be needed. Stimulus packages did not prioritize education.
More spending is needed

In low and lower-middle income countries, expenditures were already very low.

More funding is needed - for immediate learning recovery, and to build more inclusive and resilient systems.

IDA 20 includes Learning Poverty and learning recovery policy commitments.

Only 3% of stimulus packages were allocated to education and training. And most additional resources were spent by high income countries.
There is space for better spending

Although there is a positive relationship between expenditures per child and learning outcomes, inefficiencies remain a huge challenge to be tackled by both ministries of Education and Finance.

Significant different outcomes can be achieved with the same level of expenditures.

Thank you

World Bank Education GP


https://twitter.com/WBG_Education