

SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION FOR ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE: WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP FOR EDUCATION?

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Abstract: *The importance of education is undeniable. No matter what we want to do or what sector we want to rebuild, we need specialists. And specialists need solid knowledge that can stand the test of time. Another demand of the 21st century is the speed with which knowledge is acquired, so from the beginning of 2020, we live in a "new world" in which online courses have become a reliable help. Young people in poor countries have faced greater difficulties participating in online education, mainly due to a lack of technology and the necessary equipment. Universities and governments around the world have taken steps to make the specialization curriculum more attractive and to improve the teaching-learning process. Online learning demands the use of new and effective teaching tools, so blending online with traditional learning may be the desirable outcome. However, online learning requires clear regulation, and teachers believe that it is appropriate for a limited number of courses, primarily in the Humanities disciplines.*

Keywords: *online education, learning, digital transformation, Great Learning.*

JEL Classification: *I21, I24, I25.*

1. Introduction

Even before the covid-19 pandemic, the world faced a learning crisis, with 258 million youth not frequenting school. 53% of young people up to the age of 10 in poor countries were unable to read and understand a 20-line text close to their age. Sadly for many of the world's children and youth, schooling is not the same as learning. The pandemic affected 1.6 million student learning carriers, but online education tried to mitigate the effects of school closures. Remote learning received great appreciation between 2019 and 2022 and continues to gain territory. In September 2021, 27% of education systems remained fully or partially closed. We must not forget that 124 million people were pushed into poverty as an effect of the pandemic. In this challenging time the World Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO tried to build more equitable, efficient and resilient learning systems.

2. Research methodology

The research in this article is quantitative type. This involves the study of national and international specialized literature, as well as the analysis conducted by international organizations about education. The approach was meant to highlight the changes in learning and show the places that experienced major learning loss. The years 2020 and 2021 were crucial because the learning loss experienced in this time will be felt later. Reports and forecasts from organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO are pessimistic about the consequences. This article also aims to show the solutions proposed by the countries so that the education system becomes more efficient and can respond to the challenges of the future.

3. Literature review

Pravat presents how the Indian Govt. and different stakeholders of education have explored the possibility of Open and Distance learning (ODL) in the Covid-19 pandemic (Jena, 2020). Daniel concluded that providing practical distance learning is possible but requires special arrangements, and the use of asynchronous learning gives teachers and students more freedom (Daniel, 2020). Tadesse and Muluye consider that students from poor families with lower educational levels and children with poor learning motivation

suffer most during the coronavirus pandemic (Tadesse and Muluye, 2020). In Aristovnik opinion the lack of computer skills and the perception of a relatively higher workload prevented students from perceiving a higher performance while adapting to the 'new normal', namely, education from a distance (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

4. The global situation

Educational reports in Mexico show that students between the ages of 10 and 15 have suffered significant learning losses in reading and math between February 2020 and April 2021. Although in most Mexican states since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, lessons for preschool, elementary and secondary levels have been given on television (Dominguez, 2021). Replacing qualified teachers is never easy, but in a pandemic, many parents have been forced to take on the role of teachers to help their children. And the hard part is when parents don't have adequate education. In Russia, school closures had heterogeneous impacts on learning, thus, the reports do not show a more affected age group. The situation in South Africa is not a positive one, as young people in 2020 lost 60% of their school days. Schools in South Africa represent also safety and support for children, and time away from that represented deepening and widening inequality (Soudien, 2021). In Kenya during the pandemic, the online Math-Whizz tutoring platform became popular, which was a reliable help for those who wanted to develop their knowledge followed by their deepening through practical exercises (www.whizz.com). During this period, the inequality in access to education among young people living in rural and urban areas has become even more pronounced in Ethiopia. Private universities in Ghana faced serious cash flow challenges due to reduced admission numbers and the little assistance received from the government (Tamrat, 2021). In some countries, teachers did not receive targeted training and support for online instruction. And this was later seen in the performance of the pupils and students. In Brazil, young people learned 28% less during the pandemic than in 2018. Even in Norway, where the education system has been supported by countless nonprofit organizations was a 20% learning loss. Among the challenges of the Norwegian education system since the beginning of the pandemic, we can mention the problem of curriculum overload, the application of knowledge in real-world situations, and insufficiently prepared students for the future (Hilt and Riese, 2021). In the United States, the highest learning losses were recorded in states such as California, Colorado, Tennessee, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, and Maryland. Youth from South Asia, Latin America and The Caribbean felt the closure of schools the most, and the lack of equipment to be able to participate in online courses.

186 countries around the world implemented remote learning programs, but high-income countries managed to do it better than low-income countries. Online platforms were the most preferred solution, but we must not forget that almost 1.3 billion youth did not have access to the internet. West and Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, and South Asia are the territories under which most young people do not have access to the internet. In poor countries, mathematics training programs have been launched on popular television and radio channels, trying to mitigate the consequences of school closures. The situation in Saharan Africa is also aggravated by the fact that only 47% of the population has access to electricity. Students with disabilities had difficulty participating in remote learning because of the lack of sign language interpretation, closed captioning, or braille. Different apps like Zoom, Google meet, Facebook, Youtube, and Skype was used in European countries to help students in their learning process. The unclear situation heavily influenced the emotional well-being and mental health of students, many of them experienced unbearable psychological pressure.

Graduation ratio from tertiary education between 2015 - 2020

In Afghanistan, this percentage has increased in 2018 from 9.62% to 10.85% in 2020. Albania achieved a gradual increase from 2015 to 2018, but from 2019 (45.23%) there is a gradual decrease. In Argentina, the changes implemented in 2013 started to show efficiency, so from 2018 to 2019, there is an increase of 11.43% in the graduation ratio. Percentages in Australia show an upward trend from 59.29% in 2015 to 66.41% in 2019, which demonstrates the effectiveness of policies that support students. The Austrian education system is also showing stability through the steady increase in the percentage of university graduates. The increase in Belgium is significant, from 27.98% in 2016 to 50.15% in 2019, and this is not surprising as the Belgian education system is receiving increased attention and financial support. Over five years, there has been a 6.65% increase in China and a 21.25% increase in the Macao Special Administrative Region. Despite the difficult situation faced by Colombia, the percentages have a growth trend between 2015 (20.61%) - and 2020 (26.55%). In contrast, numbers in Croatia show a declining trend from 2015 (45.95%) to 2020 (42.62%). Finland's growth in five years is 7.23%, in Germany 5.03%, Hungary 0.96%, India 2.29%, in Italy 5.61%. The situation in the countries that have made great efforts in the last eight years as we can see in figure 1 is regarded with student choice expressed as a percentage.

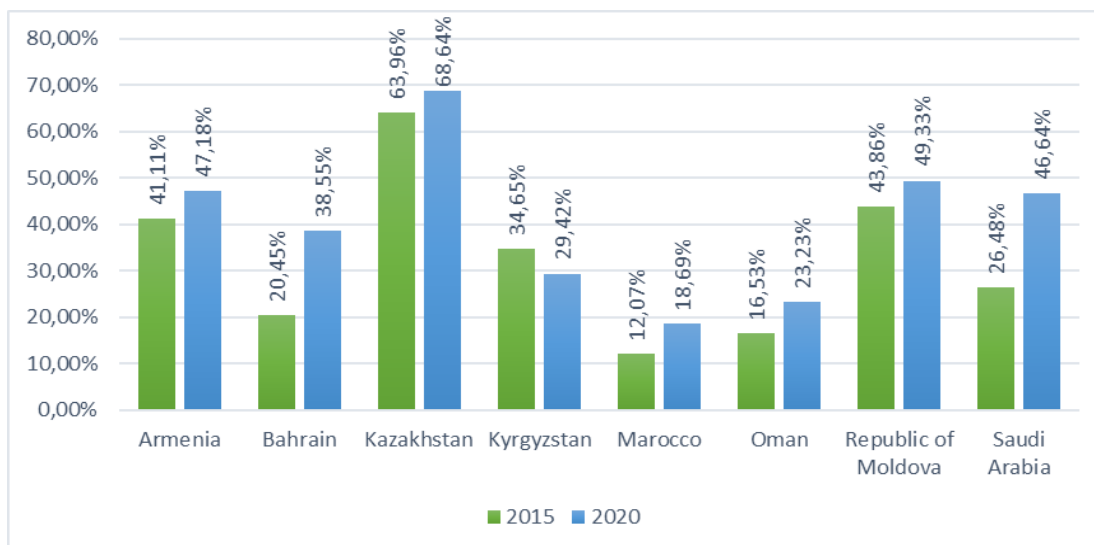


Figure no.1 The situation in the countries that have made great efforts

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from UNESCO

5. Designing programs for the transformed students

Greater belief in global connections is just the first step in the spreading of virtual global education. The Great Learning online platform is an example of how online education can transform people's lives and careers overnight. This online platform with 3.5 Million learners in 170 countries offers relevant programs in technology, data and business. He has collaborated with top universities, including Northwestern University, The University of Texas at Austin, and the McCombs School of Business to provide quality programs for students (www.mygreatlearning.com). With 2 million learning hours, the platform has ensured the professional retraining of 66% of its students in the last two years. The courses have become more dynamic in the last two, and for many in India, these courses have been the stepping stone to a successful career. Career mentoring was introduced, with an expert mentors guide, LIVE online sessions with experienced industry

professionals, and continued learning and networking opportunities to help learners to find a new "professional path". The majority of courses have adopted a new structure that allows participants to take part in projects organized by top companies, apply skills, build solutions, and gain experience that adds value to their resumes. They also serve to build an Industry Ready Portfolio, are compact, and well thought out to be practical allowing students to acquire the useful and practical knowledge they need. The courses are divided into two main categories, as we can see in figure number 2.

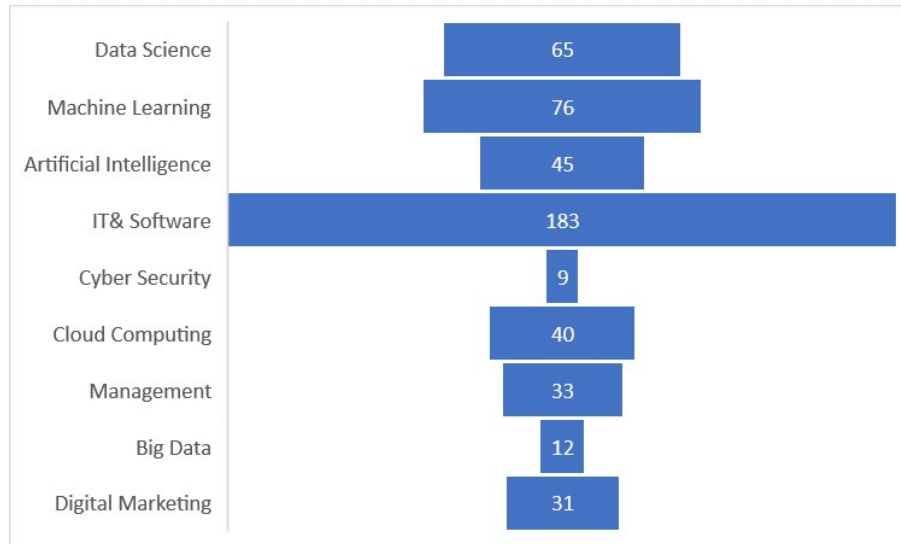


Figure no.2 Number of courses available by category in 2022

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from Great Learning

From now on artificial intelligence will play a very strong role in education, material testing and teaching. In line with Nelson Mandela’s belief that “education was the most powerful weapon, you can use to change the world” we must do everything in our power to convince young people that a successful life is based on a solid education.

6. Conclusions

Unfortunately, the covid-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities in education. Even this confusing situation has brought some benefits: the re-invention of teaching, learning, and focus on value, not just quality. In-person education is very different from online education because teachers provide the emotional support that students need. For the past two years, countries have struggled to rethink their education system. The Great Learning educational platform was the ideal solution for those in India to develop knowledge cheaply. New educational policies are trying to harmonize ‘new curriculum’ suggestions with existing models, creating a sense of unity. During the pandemic crisis, it was seen that the education system is not programmed to produce skills and competencies that make it easier for humans to participate in the global economy.

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