

Online Education in Uzbekistan and In the World during the Pandemic of Covid 19

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Abstract: *As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, so do the risks we face. The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped at national borders. It has affected people regardless of nationality, level of education, income or gender. But the same has not been true for its consequences, which hit the most vulnerable hardest. Education is no exception. Students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and eager and able to learn, could find their way past closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down. This crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems – from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs.*

Keywords: online learning, distance education, traditional education, digital skills, remote learning

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis is a new challenge for education systems around the world. As of April 22, over 180 countries have been forced to close their schools in one form or another during the pandemic. More than 1.7 billion students were affected. Prolonged closure of these educational institutions can lead not only to problems of academic performance in the short term, but also have a negative impact on the quality of human capital and reduce the economic opportunities of students in the long term. Like many countries, Uzbekistan also had to close schools across the country to prevent the spread of the virus. This decision was made on March 15, the same day when the first case of coronavirus infection was recorded in the country. Two days later, the Ministry of Public Education (MOE) announced an unprecedented government decision to launch a distance learning program for the country's 6.1 million schoolchildren during quarantine.

The main problem during the school closure period is the difficulty in ensuring equal access to education, especially in the context of limited resources. It is incorrect to assume that all students have access to distance learning resources and the same opportunities to do so during the period when schools are under quarantine. In fact, such a crisis has a negative impact mainly on socially vulnerable students, many of whom live in remote areas and do not have access to electronic devices (computers, tablets, phones) and the Internet.

METHODS

In Uzbekistan, the population is still experiencing difficulties with access to the global network. About a third of the population is still not provided with Internet access. At the same time, almost 50% of the country's citizens live in rural areas (World Bank, 2018). As of March 2020, the country ranks 133rd in the world for mobile internet speed and 95th for fixed broadband speeds.

For these reasons, the MNE recognizes that online learning will not be able to provide equal access to educational resources for all students in the country. However, with 100% coverage of the territory of Uzbekistan with digital television, the use of television broadcasting is the only possible option for providing mass distance learning. Although there are still some unresolved issues, the response of the Ministry of Education to the crisis and the establishment of distance learning were prompt. So, in just a few days, 350 video lessons were prepared, and from March 30, they began broadcasting on several state TV channels. Lessons are available in Uzbek and Russian with sign language translation. In parallel, these videos are posted on the social networks of the Ministry of Education and Science, including on the video platforms YouTube and Mover.uz, as well as on the website kundalik.com, a platform for managing the educational process. In addition to this, the MNO website has published a list of its own online resources, including Talim.uz, Edu Market, Eduportal, and Kitob.uz. Thanks to the decision of Internet providers and GSM mobile network operators not to charge traffic when visiting these electronic resources, access to them for schoolchildren and their parents has become free.

The pandemic has put universities in difficult conditions, forcing them to adapt to the current events in the shortest possible time, spend significant funds for accelerated digitalization, and make decisions often without considering possible consequences. The

pandemic had a negative impact on international cooperation in the field of education and science: international travel was canceled, exchange programs and academic mobility of students and academic staff were suspended, and many research cooperation programs were paused.

Why can't online learning replace teachers and face-to-face learning? Because the process of learning and transferring knowledge is a personal experience. It is most effective when transmitted from person to person in personal communication. Many people remember the best teachers who influenced the formation of our personality. Perhaps it was because of our love for certain teachers that we developed an interest in subjects. Computers can never completely replace a real teacher.

Uzbekistan has decided to conduct classes at all levels remotely from the new academic year. Perhaps due to the large number of infections in the country and the extension of quarantine. However, according to many experts and parents, the main reason is the unpreparedness of our system for mixed or full-time teaching methods during a pandemic. To organize such types of training, it is necessary to prepare the entire system. Physically, schools will have to change the classroom to maintain social distancing and monitor health compliance. In a methodological sense, teachers and school administrators need to be prepared for the new learning format and possess digital skills. The grading system must be updated in accordance with the new realities. All this requires well-coordinated work at all levels (central state apparatus, regions, districts, schools) and additional financial investments in the educational system.

The question arises - are our system and all of us ready for the upcoming distance learning? Spring has shown that many processes have not been adjusted. There were technical problems with the Internet, teachers and children in rural areas lacked equipment, and the quality of teaching declined. Whichever format of education is proposed in the coming year, if we do not take urgent measures to improve the entire system, the coronavirus will throw our education back for many years.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main differences between online and traditional studying.

Advantages:

- Flexible study schedule. Perhaps this is one of the main advantages of an online school. This is especially convenient for young athletes, musicians and actors who do not fit the standard lesson schedule.
- A comfortable environment for students with disabilities. The correspondence format gives a wider choice of schools, because not all educational institutions provide opportunities for inclusive education.
- Development of independence. Pupils devote more time to self-study based on materials developed by professional teachers.
- More opportunities for gifted children. If in a "regular" school they are forced to study at a general pace for all, then with online learning they can work in an individual rhythm, ahead of their classmates.

Disadvantages:

- Unavailability of the Internet;
- Inaccessibility of mobile communications;
- A decrease in control by the educational institution;
- Poor quality of the proposed educational content;
- Restrictions of the distance method;
- Stress situation caused by the pandemic.

Strategies for reopening schools

Reopening of schools in the context of the pandemic it is far more complex to reopen schools than to close them. Policy makers need to make difficult and uncertain trade-off between keeping education services locked down to reduce the risk of the virus transmission, on the one hand, and managing the adverse effects of school closures on children's safety, well-being and learning, on the other. School closures not only lead to a loss of education opportunities, and thus long-term social and economic prospects of students (see the preceding sections), but the longer disadvantaged children are out of school, the less likely they are to return. Further, prolonged closures disrupt essential school-based services, such as immunisation, school meals, and mental health and psychosocial support, and can cause stress and anxiety due to the loss of peer interaction and disrupted routines. These negative impacts are likely to be significantly higher for disadvantaged children, children living with disabilities, and children in institutions. Not least, school closures have also serious long-term consequences for economies and societies.

For the respondents who had definite knowledge of the plans to reopen schools in Uzbekistan we analyzed that in those countries, the groups more likely to be involved in the process of reopening the schools include the ministries of education and health, local authorities, principals and principals' associations and parents. In most cases (73%) the process of school reopening will be decided at the national level; only in 27% of the cases will the process of school reopening be decided locally. In most cases (70%), the reopening plans cover all educational institutions, but in 27% of the cases the plans will refer only to some levels of education. Only in 6% of cases will the plans focus on specific geographic regions. There is variation with respect to the strategy to reopen schools: in some cases schools will reopen on the same date (45%), in others they will open on different dates, depending on the level of education (37%) or grade (40%). In 14% of the cases, schools will reopen on different dates based on their location.

The Ministry of Public Education (MNO) has summed up the results of a survey among parents about whether it is necessary to open schools in the new academic year, the Podrobno.uz correspondent reports. The survey involved 5.5 million parents of students in grades 1-11. This is 89% of all parents whose children attend school. "76% of them noted that schools should work in a traditional way, and 24% were in favor of distance learning," said the Ministry of Education and Science.

CONCLUSION

As we enter the COVID-19 recovery phase, it will be critical to reflect on the role of educational systems – and particularly vocational education – in fostering resilient societies. The global health crisis and the lockdown that followed have brought to the fore professions that have often been taken for granted, renewing our awareness of their value to society. This has helped restore a sense of esteem for those workers who have worked relentlessly during this time to keep economies afloat. Real change often takes place in deep crises, and this moment holds the possibility that we won't return to the status quo when things return to "normal". While this crisis has deeply disruptive implications, including for education, it does not have predetermined outcomes. It will be the nature of our collective and systemic responses to these disruptions that will determine how we are affected by them.

In this sense, the pandemic is also a call to renew the commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to succeed at school and develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will allow them to contribute to society is at the heart of the global agenda and education's promise to our future society. The current crisis has tested our ability to deal with large-scale disruptions. It is now up to us to build as its legacy a more resilient society.

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