

INSIGHT

How Can Education and Training Systems Bounce Back from COVID-19?



A student in Cambodia joins an online class on a mobile phone. Photo credit: ADB.

Policy reforms critical to building resilience include revamping teacher training and improving quality, relevance, and inclusion in the education sector.

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Introduction

Globally, education and training systems are undergoing unprecedented disruptions due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), calling for timely efforts to ensure that learning can continue in one form or another. While most of the attention has understandably been focused on health, safety, livelihoods, and economic growth, it is crucial to recognize that the pandemic can undermine hard-earned progress in education at all levels unless timely action is taken.

Disruptions from COVID-19 are compounding problems related to poor learning outcomes in developing countries; without concrete action, the pandemic will exacerbate “learning poverty” in low- and middle-income countries and will have long-term negative consequences on economic growth and human capital.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recently published [a guidance note to help developing economies in Asia and the Pacific reimagine education sector operations](#) in dealing with the pandemic in consultation with development partners. Governments in the region have announced and rolled out a series of measures to cope with and respond to challenges posed by the closure of education institutions. Several international agencies have prepared guidelines to address different types of disruptions and responses needed. The note draws on and reinforces key principles outlined in these guidelines, and augments and complements them.

This article is adapted from the guidance note, which provides suggestions and pointers for deliberate actions that stakeholders can consider in responding to the pandemic, as part of a long-term road map to improve quality, relevance, and inclusion in the education sector.

Response, Recovery, and Rejuvenation

The scale of shock to education systems is unprecedented, and thus calls for commensurate actions. Most stakeholders agree that the crisis brought about by COVID-19 could well be the opportunity to put in place transformational approaches and policies that address deep-seated problems in education. While the practicalities of resource mobilization and professional capacities need to be examined, this is an opportune time to explore a full-scale review.

Dealing with COVID-19 should go beyond the immediate crisis to initiate far-reaching reforms to strengthen the resilience of education and training systems. Recommended actions are framed in the form of three Rs:

- **Response:** How can education and training systems sustain teaching and learning during closure of education institutions due to the COVID-19 outbreak (3–10 months)?
- **Recovery:** How can education and training institutions prepare for the recovery phase when they reopen, make up for lost time for students, and enable their transition to higher levels of education or their entry into the job market (6–24 months)?
- **Rejuvenation:** How can education and training institutions rejuvenate teaching and learning with new tools and techniques, particularly expanding online education to complement face-to-face learning in pedagogically effective ways, and deploying new technologies to improving the quality of learning (8–36 months)?

While countries are preoccupied with responding to the crisis in the short term, it is important to consider strategies and solutions that not only provide immediate relief, but also incorporate medium- to long-term support to enable the recovery of education systems. Such an approach will build resilience within and help rejuvenate the education system.

EdTech Can Be a Game Changer

In plotting a roadmap in response to the pandemic, education stakeholders need to consider the transformational potential for education technology (EdTech) solutions. Often using new and disruptive learning technologies, such as personalized and adaptive learning technologies, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, EdTech solutions have completely redefined pedagogical and learning models through the delivery of education beyond physical environments. EdTech, on the one hand, can bring vastly improved learning experiences for students and on the other, can help to efficiently run learning management systems, student assessments, teacher professional development as well as administrative tasks.

EdTech tools and approaches can be game changers in many ways. While this guidance note advocates a transformational approach to reforming education systems through EdTech, it also cautions about the importance of keeping in mind that the goal of education is primarily learning. In adopting and scaling up EdTech, it is crucial that policy makers put high-quality learning by students as the central objective. Recovery strategies thus need to ensure that learning is the key underlying motive for the application of EdTech.

Equity in access to digital technologies is an important consideration. UNICEF estimates that at least 463 million students in schools are not able to access online learning due to either lack of policies supporting digital and remote learning or lack of household equipment needed to receive digital or broadcast instruction.

Pointers for Developing a Digital Strategy

Six overarching priority actions are recommended in deploying digital strategies to address COVID-19 to ensure focus on learning:

1. Sustain uninterrupted learning through alternative and flexible approaches using multiple channels and platforms, including online, mobile phones, TV/radio, and printed materials to meet the needs of students in diverse household settings.
2. Revamp teacher training to integrate the use of digital tools in traditional teaching and learning practices.
3. Develop high-quality digital content in partnership with national and global institutions and drawing on regional and global standards.
4. Ensure equal learning opportunity for students who lack access to devices and connectivity through alternative mechanisms and partnerships to expand broadband connectivity.
5. Articulate clear policies toward assessments and examinations, certifications, and transition to higher levels of education.
6. Provide for innovative financing arrangements and partnerships, such as twinning arrangements between institutions for capacity building to scale up deployment of EdTech to improve learning.

Resources

Asian Development Bank. 2021. *COVID-19 and Education in Asia and the Pacific: Guidance Note*. Manila.



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