2021 UNESCO-KEDI Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Seminar

"Supporting teachers' digital and remote teaching capacity in times of COVID-19 and beyond"

Concept Note

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted education at all levels and caused unprecedented challenges for students and teachers around the world. Forced closure of schools in more than 191 countries has affected over 1.5 billion learners, representing 94 per cent of students globally, and disrupting the work of around 63 million primary and secondary school teachers[1].

This crisis has ravaged various parts of education. For example, it has exacerbated pre-existing educational inequalities, causing substantial effects beyond education. However, paradoxically, it has also stimulated innovation within the education sector. Due to the closure of schools, teachers and schools are required to rapidly respond to the unexpected transition from face-to-face to remote teaching with varying levels of available technology, support, and technological competencies. Thus, the role of teachers has become even more essential to prevent and mitigate learning loss and governments should focus on training and support for educators[2].

Despite these efforts, in many countries, schools and teachers are not prepared to design, deliver and assess distance learning. Teachers lack the necessary digital skills and readiness for employing distance learning pedagogies. Based on the UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey, 66 per cent of the surveyed countries reported on receiving instructions on how to deliver classes through remote learning. Special training for teachers were offered in two-thirds of high income countries, half of middle income countries and only 20 per cent for low income countries. Furthermore, only 1 in 3 countries reported on having access to internet connectivity and ICT tools to work during school closures[3].

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[1] United Nations (April, 2020). Startling disparities in digital learning emerge as COVID-19 spreads: UN education agency. Retrieved from
https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062232
[2] United Nations (August, 2020). The UN's Policy brief on COVID-19 and Education.
[3] UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank (October, 2020). Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures.
tcg.uis.unesco.org/survey-education-covid-school-closures/

In terms of connectivity, 63 per cent of the world's school-age children, which counts around 2.2 billion students, do not have access to internet at home. The situation is even worse for South Asia where only 13 per cent of children have internet access.[4] Lack of connectivity limits access to educational resources. However, this has not stopped countries finding ways to leverage existing capabilities and employ different educational platforms and media channels besides the online approach, such as the use of television, radio and paper-based models. The pandemic has demonstrated, more than ever, the importance and urgency of improving connectivity and distance learning capabilities. In the case of Asia, the use of radio, online platforms and mobile phones were reported as the main sources used by teachers during school closure.[5]

In addition, COVID-19 has had varying impacts on teachers' well-being, from physical safety to mental health, and employment conditions. Teachers have needed to adapt to significantly changed teaching environments, modalities, and expectations as they support continuity of learning. Furthermore, in the subsequent reopening of schools, both teachers and students will be exposed to risks as they return to in-class education. It is considered essential to prepare and maximize teachers' wellbeing and safety in the context of ongoing school closures and in the safe reopening of schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the need to implement policies to better prepare teachers to equip them with the necessary tools and access to technologies, and to ensure continuity in education delivery and tackling the digital divide.[6] For this to happen, cooperation with key stakeholders such as the private sector and civil society organizations are important. Governments should develop policies and practices such as capacity-building and training programmes to equip teachers with digital skills and distance learning pedagogies to mitigate the challenges of the pandemic.

In recognition of the different contexts and challenges in each country in the Asia-Pacific region, the 2021 UNESCO-KEDI Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar on **"Supporting teachers' digital and remote teaching capacity in times of COVID-19 and beyond"** will be an important opportunity to rethink diverse approaches to strengthen teachers' pedagogical skills, develop comprehensive core review policies to support teachers' needs, and reimagine the teaching profession and education systems seriously in the time of crisis.

Objectives

- To share promising practices and reflections from the COVID-19 pandemic in supporting teacher's digital skills and distance teaching strategies in the Asia-Pacific region;
- To share perspectives, progress, and challenges as well as the improvement plans of teachers in the time of crisis of countries in the Asia-Pacific region;
- To discuss ways of responding to the transition to remote teaching in times of COVID-19; and
- To discuss policy recommendations to support teachers' skills and well-being before and after school reopening

Format

The seminar is composed by a series of presentations, panel discussion and a session where teachers from Asia-Pacific are invited to share their practices in teaching during COVID-19. Participants are highly encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences.

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[4] UNICEF, ITU. 2020. How many children and young people have internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved from https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/
[5] UNESCO. (2020). Infogram based on the UIS Survey on UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank Survey on National Education Response to COVID-19 School Closure. Retrieved from https://infogram.com/final-unesco-education-COVID-19-data-1hke60d1x7m525r?live
[6] United Nations (2021). Leveraging digital technologies for social inclusion. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-92-leveraging-digital-technologies-for-social-inclusion/

Audience

The audience for this seminar will be regional and national level education stakeholders (including policymakers and implementers) interested in teacher's digital capacity and remote learning during COVID-19, and the general public.

Working Language

English will be the main language of the seminar. Simultaneous interpretation can be provided as necessary.

Dates and Time

The seminar will be held on 21-22, October 2021 (two days) from 14:00 to 16:00 (Bangkok Time).

Modality

The seminar will be conducted via Zoom.To register and join the Seminar please click here: **ZOOM Link**
Webinar ID: 824 2662 3366 / Passcode: 903706

Session Guide

Session 1 Panel Discussion
Title: Comprehensive Policies to Support Teachers' Skills & Pedagogy during COVID-19

This session aims to present and highlight the efforts made by governments and education authorities from different countries around the Asia-Pacific region in enhancing teachers' capacity and pedagogy during times of emergency. It is expected that panelists will highlight key aspects of their education policies and plans related to providing support for teachers to mitigate the impact of school closures, as well as looking at how we can learn from other countries' cases to better support teachers and respond to national needs and priorities.

Session 2
Title: Innovative and Impactful Approaches in Teacher Training and Capacity Development

School closures and social distancing have forced us to re-think the traditional education system in innovative ways for education delivery through increased use of ICT in education and ensuring that education is centered on the learner's needs. Countries across the Asia-Pacific region have adopted innovative practices based on their available resources, technology and infrastructure. Moreover, many governments have pursued ways to strengthen partnerships with international organizations, private sector and civil society to better respond to teaching demands and ensure learning continuity. This session will share different innovative cases regarding teacher training and capacity development to deliver quality distance learning, while presenting promising cases concerned with partnership and collaboration with different stakeholders.

Session 3
Title: Elements for Ensuring Teachers' Well-Being, Motivation and Healthy Working Conditions

The prolonged crisis has brought significant challenges and distress for teachers, coming from an increased workload, abrupt transition to online learning, job insecurity and health risks. Empowering teachers and ensuring their well-being through physical and psychosocial support has become fundamental to equip them with the necessary tools and skills to enhance their social and emotional competences and provide a healthy and safe learning environment, while maintaining the high quality of teaching. This session explores the importance of building resilience in the education system and support of teachers' well-being by sharing different cases across Asia Pacific region.

Session 4
Title: Promising Practices by Teachers in Distance Learning during COVID-19

Teachers' initiatives for reaching higher standards of quality of teaching have been highlighted during COVID-19. Collaboration and partnership between teachers bring together ways to improve teaching practices and overcome the challenges of education by supporting each other. This session aims to provide a space for teachers around the Asia-Pacific region to share their experiences and know-how in teaching to support the diverse needs of students during distance learning and ensure continuity in education in response to COVID-19.

Organizers

The Seminar is jointly organized by:
UNESCO Bangkok, Section for Inclusive Quality Education (iqe.bgk@unesco.org)
Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), Office of International Cooperation
(international@kedi.re.kr)

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