The costs of and response to COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the education sector in Latin America and the Caribbean

ACTING NOW TO PROTECT THE HUMAN CAPITAL OF OUR CHILDREN

May 2021
Outline

1. LAC prior to the pandemic: A learning crisis
2. The COVID-19 crisis in LAC and its impact on school closures
3. LAC’s efforts to mitigate learning losses through remote learning
4. Remote learning cannot replace face-to-face learning
5. The heavy learning losses in LAC countries
6. The pandemic is costing more than the learning loss
7. A call for action (and how it can be operationalized)
8. Key takeaway messages
LAC PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC: A LEARNING CRISIS
Learning poverty: 51% of children in LAC cannot read with proficiency by the late primary age.

15-year-old students in LAC are, on average, three years behind OECD students in reading, mathematics, and science.

Gaps in PISA scores:
Wide gaps in education outcomes reveal regressive patterns of access and quality.

Source: World Bank and PISA 2018 data
THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN LAC AND ITS IMPACT ON SCHOOL CLOSURES AND LAC’S EFFORTS TO MITIGATE LEARNING LOSSES THROUGH REMOTE LEARNING
The COVID-19 crisis in LAC and its impact on schools’ closures

- LAC is the region hit the hardest by the pandemic.
- COVID-19 caused school closures in all LAC countries (except Nicaragua), affecting an estimated 170 million students.
- LAC school closures are the longest in the world. Avg. of 159 in-person school days missed as of December 2020.
- Most countries in LAC remain completely or partially closed for in-person classes, with remote learning being the most widely used strategy.

**Global Education Recovery Tracker**

- **In-person education**: Schools are open, and students have returned for in-person instruction.
- **Hybrid/remote education**: Schools are open combining remote learning and in-person instruction and/or students are exclusively learning remotely.
- **Mixed/multiple**: Schools are operating with a combination of the following: in-person, hybrid, remote, and closed due to COVID-19.
- **Extended Break**: Schools are closed due to a regular school calendar closure (e.g., holiday).
- **No instruction/closed due to COVID-19**: Schools are closed due to COVID-19, and no education services currently available.
- **Unknown/Data Not Available**: Unable to obtain information through publicly available data.
LAC’s efforts to mitigate learning losses through remote learning

- Extensive efforts in LAC to set up multi-modal remote learning solutions to mitigate consequences of school closures.

**Support to teachers in LAC**

- Offered special training: 73% (N=22)
- Provided with instruction on distance instruction: 68% (N=22)
- Provided with professional, psychosocial and emotional support: 64% (N=22)
- Provided with teaching content adapted to remote teaching: 41% (N=22)
- Provided with ICT tools and free connectivity: 9% (N=22)
- No support provided: 3% (N=22)

**Support to parents in LAC**

- Guidance materials: 74% (N=23)
- Regular phone follow-up by schools: 39% (N=23)
- Tips for continued stimulation/play: 65% (N=23)
- No learning-related measures: 17% (N=23)

**Remote learning modalities in LAC**

- Online platform: 86% (N=24)
- Radio: 84% (N=24)
- Television: 63% (N=24)
- Take-home packages: 100% (N=24)

- In LAC, 82% countries provide distance learning instructions to teachers.

- Most common support for parents is guidance material for home learning with tips for stimulation.

Source: Authors’ estimates using UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank (2020)
REMOTE LEARNING CANNOT REPLACE FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING
Remote learning cannot replace face-to-face learning

1. STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE

Keeping up with routine greatest challenge – especially for vulnerable children with little family support and/or limited or no access to digital devices. (Only 45 % of students in the bottom quintile have Internet access at home)

2. CHALLENGING FOR TEACHERS TO SUPPORT AND MONITOR STUDENT NEEDS

While most countries in LAC have set up communication lines with families, remote and vulnerable families are not being reached.

3. LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS OF REMOTE LEARNING

Online learning platforms, TV and radio perceived very effective for remote learning only by 36, 28 and 20 percent of countries, respectively.
THE HEAVY LEARNING LOSSES IN LAC COUNTRIES AND THE PANDEMIC IS COSTING MORE THAN THE LEARNING LOSS
The heavy learning losses in LAC countries

- Second largest expected absolute increase in Learning Poverty levels – from 51% to 62.5% - Additional 7.6 million learning poor
- The learning losses may translate into an aggregate economic cost of foregone earnings of $1.7 trillion lost (16% of the regional GDP)

- The share of students BMP in LAC could increase from 55% to 71% for a 10-month school closure (over 2 in 3 students)
- If schools stay closed for 13 months total, over 3 in 4 students would be BMP

Source: Azevedo (2020).


Simulated changes in Learning Poverty

Simulated share of students Below Minimum Proficiency (BMP) levels
The heavy learning losses in LAC countries (cont.)

- Avg. loss in LAYS for 10 months = **1.3 years**

- Countries that do not reopen in 3 additional months (13 months total) with loss in LAYS = **1.7 years**

- The learning losses may translate in to aggregate economic cost of foregone earnings of **$1.7 trillion** lost

The heavy learning losses in LAC countries (cont.)

- The already high socio-economic achievement gap could widen by **12%**
- Wealthiest students could be 3 school years ahead of their poorest peers by the age of 15
- Inequities would be increasing in all countries

---

**Simulated change in mean PISA scores in reading due to COVID-19, by quintile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>Baseline scores</th>
<th>10-month closures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poorest 20%</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richest 20%</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40 points in PISA scale = 1 year of schooling

COVID-19 is reverting years of progress in terms of coverage.

A potential reduction of private education supply (and demand).

Higher education is also suffering from the disruption, particularly in terms of coverage and quality.

Effects on students’ physical, mental and emotional health, and vulnerability to risky behaviors.
A CALL FOR ACTION AND HOW IT CAN BE OPERATIONALIZED
A call for action (and how it can be operationalized)

Coping

While schools are closed:
- Protect health and safety
- Prevent learning loss and drop-outs
- Opportunity to leverage tertiary education

Managing continuity

As schools reopen:
- Keep schools and community safe
- Prevent increases in dropout, especially in upper secondary
- Offset overall learning losses with system-wide measures and targeted remedial measures
- Manage reentry

Improving and accelerating

Throughout, seize opportunities to improve the system for the long term:
- Protect and enhance education financing
- Sustain, adapt and improve successful COVID-response initiatives
- Build-back-better education systems
Coping – The huge costs of the pandemic can be mitigated by retaining students in the education systems and improving the effectiveness of distance schooling (cont.)

- Student retention and distance education reach, especially for groups with risk of exclusión
- Multichannel strategy and interactive communication
- Prioritization focusing on core subjects and basic competencies; content curated and aligned with curriculum
- Teachers’ skills and competences
- Parents’ engagement
Managing continuity - As countries have started to transit to the phase of managing continuity, governments must take action to make sure schools are ready to reopen safely and effectively nation-wide.

Source: UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and World Food Program (2020)
A call for action (and how it can be operationalized) (cont.)

Managing continuity - Emerging lessons can guide countries on how to reopen schools safely and effectively

Safe operations and reopening process

- Schools-level context-appropriate health and hygiene protocols.
- Improving schools’ facilities to comply with health and hygiene protocols.
- Early and regular communication and support.
- Measures to reduce the density of people at schools.
- Prioritizing early grades and exam-preparatory classes to mitigate learning losses.

Posters on safety measures for schools in Ecuador

Targeted resources and measures can help to attract vulnerable groups back to school. Adapted school reopening policies and practices are needed for vulnerable staff and students. Increased provision of mental health and psychosocial support can help mitigate secondary impacts.

### Recovering Learning

Management and pedagogical decisions, including **systemic and targeted measures to teach at the right (post-COVID-19) level:**

- **Simplifying the curriculum** to help deal with continued uncertainty and enable learning.
- **Adapting the academic calendar** to compensate for the lost in-person classes.
- **Diagnostic classroom assessments** to assess learning (and socio-emotional gaps) when schools reopen.
- **Remedial programs** to level and reduce learning gaps. May involve significant investment.
- **Canceling and modifying high-stake examinations** and making certifications more flexible to reflect school closure periods.

- **Well-designed blended learning models** can have very good results; teachers and principals need support in the implementation.

### Including the most marginalized

- Targeted resources and measures can help to attract vulnerable groups back to school.
- **Adapted school reopening policies and practices** are needed for vulnerable staff and students.

### Wellbeing and protection

- Increased provision of mental health and psychosocial support can help mitigate secondary impacts.
Managing continuity - Reopening schools requires protecting and investing more public resources in education

- School reopening could cost US$486 per student (USA)
- Pre-pandemic LAC’s education spending followed a downward trend
- Learning from past crises, countries should consider stimulus packages, new sources of funds and reallocation of resources
- Imperative to spend resources more equitably and efficiently:
  - Prioritization of additional education funding to vulnerable schools
  - In the medium term, smart use of technology and data, teacher allocation and curricular reforms

Source: World Development Indicators, most recent data. 2005 and 2012 are point estimates on the basis of neighboring years. Data for 2018 was calculated as a simple average of available country data (15 countries).
A call for action (and how it can be operationalized) (cont.)

Strategies and reforms implemented during or before the crisis that are showing positive results could be mainstreamed:

- **EWS**: used to identify early students at risk of dropping out.
- Build efficient **EMIS** for continuous improvement and decision-making.
- **TaRL** (for example, using **adaptive technologies**): potential to remediate and accelerate learning.

Source: Translation into English of snapshot from a public YouTube tutorial video by the Ministry of Education in Peru
COVID-19 crisis: An opportunity to transform the entire education system and develop a new vision where learning happens for everyone, everywhere.

A call for action (and how it can be operationalized) (cont.)

Pillars for the Future of Learning

- **Learners are engaged**
  - All learners engage in learning that is personalized, inclusive, holistic, and relevant to their realities.

- **Teachers facilitate learning**
  - Teachers play the role of facilitating learning of all students rather than delivering content and are provided with the training and holistic support they need to play this role.

- **Learning resources are adequate and diverse**
  - Learning resources are adequate and of rich variety so that each child can access quality learning experiences anywhere.

- **Schools are safe and inclusive**
  - School environments have the necessary infrastructure, human resources, policies and norms to enable all children to learn in a welcoming environment, free from discrimination, violence and bullying.

- **Systems are well-managed**
  - At the school level, school leaders are pedagogical leaders and engage with technology to enable more effective and efficient school management.

Parents, Caregivers, and the Home Learning Environment are Supported
Technology Promotes Learning Objectives

Source: Saavedra, Aedo and Arias Diaz (2020)
A call for action (and how it can be operationalized) (cont.)

Areas of emphasis for World Bank support in LAC

1. Enhancing the reach, use and effectiveness of technology for education
   - Digital divides
   - Remote and blended learning
   - Long-term data and technological solutions (adaptive learning, EWS, EMIS, among others)

2. Supporting pedagogical and management reforms for recovery and resilience
   - Assessment, remediation policies, and socio-emotional support
   - Personalized instruction
   - Principal and teacher training, standards and support
   - System management and financing reforms

3. Supporting safe schools
   - Health and hygiene protocols
   - Safety
   - WASH investments
   - Connectivity

4. Developing skills for the post-COVID-19 context
   - Skills in the early years
   - Competency-based, flexible, and affordable secondary and tertiary programs
   - Core transversal skills
   - School-to-work transition
Key takeaway messages

- **Initial estimates of the school closure effects in LAC are staggering.** All learning metrics are worsening dramatically, and the effects of the pandemic also permeate many other areas of students’ lives. Students from lower-income groups are the most affected.

- **Countries should get ready for safe and effective school reopening** to start the long-term recovery from the dramatic learning losses.
  - They can leverage many emerging lessons and evidence on how to do this safely and effectively.
  - Public funding needs to be prioritized and well-targeted.

- **There is a window of opportunity to build back better education systems** that prioritize student learning. There are also notable examples of innovations which could be mainstreamed.
A generation could be lost. The time to act is now!