

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

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Abstract

The current impacts of the crisis on higher education are easily documented, but it is debatable which ones will leave their mark on the different actors in the medium and long term. Lack of references to similar crises in the past makes it difficult to predict what may happen in the immediate future. For the students the most immediate impact has naturally been that the temporary cessation of face to face teaching at HEIs has left them, particularly undergraduates and those who are about to finish upper secondary and aspire to enter higher education, in a completely new situation, without a clear idea of how long it will last, immediate impacts on daily life, costs incurred and financial burdens and, of course, learning continuity and international mobility. Teachers are also impacted significantly at the workplace and professionally. First, the fact that not all HEIs have strategies for the teaching continuity activity must be taken into account, and in this instance, temporary contracts may be terminated. Also, the most evident impact on teachers is the expectation, if not the demand, of the continuity of teaching activity using a virtual modality. Non-teaching staff constitute the most vulnerable sector in terms of the possible reduction in the number of jobs that private universities, for example, would have to effect in the face of possible financial curtailment due to the cancellation of fees or reduction in student enrollment.

Keyword- Impact of covid-19, Education

INTRODUCTION

Since its foundation, universities, like any other social institution, have had to face devastating epidemics that have impacted their daily functioning. And they have survived and continued their mission even with their doors closed. In 1665, Cambridge University closed due to a black plague epidemic that struck England. Isaac Newton had to return to Woolsthorpe Manor, his home. One day, sitting in the garden, he saw an apple fall that inspired him to formulate his theory of universal gravitation or, at least, he told William Stukeley who included this anecdote in Newton's biography that he would publish after his death (Stukeley, 1752). The moral of this story is that, inasmuch as the doors of higher education institutions have to be closed, academic activities continue where there are spirits committed to science and training, and, sometimes, with surprising results. Incidentally, the University of Cambridge has closed its doors now in 2020, for the second time in its history.

Longer-term effects the ultimate impact of the crisis on children hinges on how much time it will take for the pandemic to end. A longer struggle to contain the virus not only prolongs

the pain caused by the pandemic, but raises the prospect that the pandemic's impact will have lingering or persistent effects on children. For instance, the longer economies are on shutdown, the less likely they are to “snap back”. At the household level, struggling families will increasingly see breadwinners lose their jobs or be forced to sell productive assets in order to survive, with long-running consequences for child poverty. The same holds true for other impacts of the pandemic. The longer schools remain closed, the less likely children are to catch up on learning and essential life skills that support a healthy transition to adulthood. The longer immunization campaigns are suspended, the greater and more costly will be the struggle to eliminate polio and to manage measles outbreaks. For children caught at the apex of this crisis, there is a genuine prospect that its effects will permanently alter their lives. Children facing acute deprivation in nutrition, protection or stimulation, or periods of prolonged exposure to toxic stress, during the critical window of early childhood development are likely to develop lifelong challenges as their neurological development is impaired. Children who drop out of school will face not only a higher risk of child marriage, child labour, and teenage pregnancies, but will see their lifetime earnings potential precipitously fall. Children who experience family breakdowns during this period of heightened stress risk losing the sense of support and security on which children's wellbeing depends.

In the absence of references to similar crises in the past, it is difficult to predict what may happen in the immediate future. Naturally, it is easy to document current impacts, but not so for those that will impact on the different actors in the medium and long term. In an effort to facilitate an analysis, the real and estimated impacts for the different actors and for the systems as a whole are presented below.

A. Students

The most immediate impact has obviously been that the temporary cessation of classroom activity at HEIs has left students, particularly undergraduates and those on the verge of finishing high school and aspiring to begin tertiary education, in a completely new situation and without a clear idea of how long the impact will last, the immediate effect it will have on their daily life, costs and other financial burdens and, naturally, on the continuation of their studies.

Personal adjustment to daily life

Students have had to rearrange their daily lives to adjust to a situation of confinement. Most of the students who were displaced far from their families, but within the same country, have returned home. However, in the case of students abroad, the situation remains highly variable, with tens of thousands stranded in destination countries waiting for on-site activities to resume or because they are unable to return to their countries due to closure of airports and borders.

Financial costs and burdens

Students and, in many cases, their families will have to continue to bear the costs associated with their higher education. Except in the very few countries where there are no fees, students must continue to face the associated costs, particularly when, in order to pursue their higher education, they have had to seek temporary residence, whether individual or shared, in a place other than their domicile, at a cost they must continue to bear, even if they decide to return to their family home.

The replacement of face-to-face classes

The students have also had to make an effort to adapt to what for many of them are new formulas for teaching and learning where they have been fortunate to find a continuity offer. The choice for continuity solutions that demand connectivity is spreading globally when the reality is one of low connectivity in households in low- and middleincome countries.

International mobility

Since January 2020, the spread of COVID-19 has affected the global travel of thousands of students. Since late February 2020, travel restrictions to various locations, including India, China, Iran, South Korea, and Italy, and later Argentina, Brazil⁴, Spain, Panama, and Venezuela, to name but a few, have impeded the flow of international students, faculty and university staff around the world. In 2017, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimated that more than 5.3 million students were studying outside the territories of which they were nationals, with China being the number one sender of students (928,000) globally. According to estimates by The Times Higher Education, the impact of COVID-19 will likely be settled, with some 80,000 fewer Chinese students entering the United States, 35,000 in the United Kingdom, and approximately 30,000 in Australia.

B. Faculty

Although the focus is always placed on the impacts on students, teachers also suffer significant impact at work and professionally. Firstly, we must take into account that not all HEIs have continuity strategies for teaching activity and in this circumstance, temporary contracts may be terminated. In many countries, full-time university teaching is not common and most teachers have part-time contracts. Also, the cessation of face-to-face teaching activity looms as a threat to those teachers whose contracts focus exclusively on teaching complementary classes, such as practical classes or seminars, and who are frequently part-time and considered an auxiliary or peripheral complement, if not included in students' options. Measures to protect economic activity, favoring, for example, mechanisms for the temporary regulation of employment, can be negotiated for a certain number of these contracts, both in the public and private sectors, which in principle, means temporary suspension.

However, in the event that the situation continues, these suspensions could be long and, additionally, it is possible that the upsurge in the use of the virtual modality could put the return to the previous situation at risk. The most evident impact on

teachers is the expectation, if not the requirement, that they continue to teach using the virtual modality. In theory, at least, virtual education is present in most large HEIs and it is difficult to find one that does not have a virtual campus and, within it, a virtual classroom for each subject, as an extension of the physical classroom. In practice, the ability of each teacher to continue teaching largely depends on their experience in that regard. We must also consider that those subjects which include the development of professional competences through practice (clinics, pedagogical residencies, design careers, engineering, science and generally all those heavily dependent on practical workshops, laboratory work or institutional practices) are a source of greater uncertainty, which will lead to a set of different impacts on the system of the individual university. Mathematics generally presents more difficulties in the virtual adaptation process.

C. Non-teaching staff

The situation of non-teaching staff, in administration and services, is equally risky when their main tasks are not considered critical to the continuity of teaching. Thus, for example, the personnel linked to technical and computer support belong to the critical category, different to the personnel who work in canteens, dining rooms or cleaning services. In all these cases, it will be the measures taken by the governments in terms of employment and social protection that will set the tone. It is also the most vulnerable sector in terms of the 10 https://youtu.be/St_BORSXmew 22 possible reduction of jobs that private universities, for example, would have to implement in the face of possible financial stringency due to the cancellation of fees or reduction of student enrollment.

D. Higher education institutions

It seems clear that throughout the world the temporary cessation of the face-to-face activities of HEIs has been a huge disruptor of their functioning. The impact of this disruption is highly variable and depends, firstly, on their ability to remain active in their academic activities and, secondly, on their financial sustainability. The efforts made to continue teaching courses in virtual mode have been notable everywhere and, given the lack of experience with similar situations in the past, the transfer has not been easy. HEIs also may or may not have sufficiently mature virtual education systems and, even in the best case scenario, it is difficult to think that they can be scaled-up to the necessary dimensions without the intervention of external technical supports such as video servers, for example. In short, it is one thing to have the necessary technological and technical infrastructure to support virtual courses for a relatively significant percentage of graduate students. It is quite another, much different, to provide the technical and technological needs for generally all courses for all students in a time frame that, in many cases, has been less than a week. The effort made is clearly titanic.

E. The system

Higher education systems, as a whole, have reacted in a solidary manner and practically at a global level, have acted uniformly: they have continued teaching

using pedagogical modalities that do not require physical attendance. The doubts arise when one begins to hypothesize about the likelihood of a prolonged duration of this exceptional situation. Should this be the case, the effects on the system will be multiple. These are addressed in the next section from a demand and supply perspective and take into account the additional challenges for governance.

Administrative measures

Generally speaking, governments with the capacity to do so, have endeavored to take administrative measures to safeguard the operation of the system, for example, the modification of the matriculation or examination calendars and the facilitation of the reprogramming of either the accreditation procedures underway or quality assurance. The effects on academic calendars are already being felt worldwide: the International Baccalaureate (IB) exams have been canceled for the first time in history; the March and May exams for the SAT, the benchmark test for access to many HEIs in the United States, administered by the US College Board, have also been canceled - it remains to be seen what will happen with the application call in June. China has canceled the SAT, TOEFL, GRE and GMAT exams taken locally. Other countries, mainly in Asia so far, which have postponed their exams for access to higher education until July are: China with almost 11 million students being affected, South Korea, Indonesia and Hong Kong.

Support for teaching continuity

The fundamental guiding principle of government education policies has been to do everything possible to guarantee the continuity of teaching activity, which has resulted in different initiatives on three different fronts: platforms, teacher training and digital content. The primary and most significant area of initiatives has been to favor the implementation of emergency technological solutions for teaching continuity. Basically, attention has focused on making available to HEIs that lack their own virtual education platforms, the technological mechanisms and resources for teaching distance courses, thereby guaranteeing minimal platform infrastructure. This has been the case for example, of Argentina, Brazil or Chile. While Chile has free access to the Google Classroom platform thanks to a commercial agreement with this company, Brazil, taking into consideration the approximately 19,000 university students at HEIs which do not have their own platform, has chosen to expand the capacity of its National Reed of Encino e Pesquisa (RNEP) to increase the offer of classes by videoconference to federal universities and institutes. In fact, this capacity has been increased by 50% and now allows simultaneous access of up to 10,000 persons to the platform, representing a total of 123,000 students.

Socio-emotional support

The isolation that confinement entails has also been quickly identified by some HEIs and psychological and socio-emotional support mechanisms have been put in place, particularly for students. This is not a common measure, but when it has been taken it has usually capitalized on the resources of the psychology faculties or student welfare services. For example, the Franz Tamayo University (Bolivia) has made 13 psychologists available to the university community, precisely to support them in situations of isolation. Similarly, the Center for Human Development and Counseling (CADH) of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Venezuela) launched a “Psychological Support Group in Times of Pandemic” that, with the help of therapists and via videoconference, offers to break the dynamics of confinement and to reflect on their own experiences and those of others to help them better cope with anguish and anxiety. Also, as already indicated, the University of Cartagena (Colombia) created a virtual window specifically for attention to student welfare issues.

Preparing for tomorrow

We must remember that, as the Chinese proverb says, spring always ends winter. While the calendar for the reopening of HEIs may be uncertain or indefinite, now is the best time to plan our way out of the crisis. To this end, here are some basic principles that from a UNESCO perspective, should guide national and institutional policies; also, some recommendations inspired by these principles that attempt to shed light on some of the more controversial issues. A. Basic principles Although the contexts of the countries are very different, it is important to establish a reference framework that helps decision-making processes in the higher education sector, without forgetting that the first priority must be the protection of health. For UNESCO, this reference framework should start from the following principles:

1. Ensuring the right to higher education of all persons within a framework of equal opportunities and non-discrimination is the first priority and, therefore, all political decisions that affect, directly or indirectly, the education sector superior should be governed by this right. The primary responsibility for ensuring that this right is exercised in practice rests with the States that must generate adequate regulatory, financing and incentive frameworks, as well as promoting and supporting inclusive, relevant, adequate and quality programs and initiatives.
2. Leave no student behind, in line with the main purpose of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The crisis has a different impact on different student profiles, but it is undeniable that it deepens existing inequalities and generates new ones. It is imperative to attend, as a priority, to the pedagogical, economic and also socio-emotional needs of those students who, due to their personal or socio-economic characteristics, may have had or have greater difficulties in continuing their training in non-traditional modalities.

3. Review current regulatory frameworks and policies, to ensure structural measures that see education as a continuum where educational trajectories must be strengthened from early childhood to higher education and beyond, thus minimizing the fragility of the most vulnerable students in reaching higher education.
4. Prepare in time for the resumption of face-to-face classes, avoiding having to rush and offering, from the beginning, clarity in communication to the entire academic community and administrative and academic security, so that teachers, administrative and service personnel, and students can place themselves in the new context knowing in advance the provisions, processes and mechanisms designed to resume teaching activities.
5. The resumption of face-to-face activities of HEIs should be seen as an opportunity to rethink and, to the extent possible, redesign the teaching and learning processes, taking advantage of the lessons that the intensive use of technology may have entailed, paying special attention to equity and inclusion.
6. Governments and HEIs should create coordination mechanisms that allow joint progress to be made in generating greater resilience in the higher education sector in the face of future crises, whatever their nature. It is absolutely essential to involve students, teaching and non-teaching staff in designing the responses that emergency situations demand.

CONCLUSION

Finally, HEIs will have missed a great opportunity if they do not stop to reflect internally, with the participation of students and teachers, about the lessons learned during the crisis about the teaching and learning processes. The critical question is whether the acquired experience can be capitalized for a redesign of these processes, maximizing the advantages of face-to-face classes while making the most of technologies, and, secondly, how far does each institution want or can go. This reflection may be concretized if HEIs have innovation and pedagogical support offices whose role, in addition to developing the pedagogical competences of teachers, is to promote pedagogical innovation and accumulate and disseminate the findings resulting from their evaluation. We usually say that in every crisis there is always an opportunity. Perhaps, in this case, it is an opportunity for a pedagogical review. It is therefore expected that many HEIs will undertake the path of a necessary pedagogical renewal that favors both quality and equality. Governments, university council presidents, quality assurance agencies, and national education councils, with the participation of academic staff and non-academic staff unions and student organizations, should forge a consensus on a national exit strategy, as soon as possible, for the crisis facing higher education. This strategy should not only promote recovery, where the impacts of the crisis have been felt the most, but also the learning of lessons obtained, as well as the promotion of innovation, reflecting on the validity of the traditional model of higher education.

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