

THE POST-PANDEMIC STRUGGLE: LEARNING LOSSES

by:

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Years after the pandemic, amid significant strides in attempts to reopen classrooms, educators continue to wage their battles. Their problems, which were previously focused on uncovering ways to carry out their instructions, have now switched to dealing with the repercussions. Aside from supporting students in efficiently transferring back to in-person classrooms and re-enrolling dropouts, instructors are confronted with the concern of learning losses. Learning loss is a phrase used to describe any loss of specialized or general knowledge and abilities, as well as reversals in academic advancement. It can occur for a variety of reasons, the most prevalent of which is extended gaps or discontinuities in a student's education (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). The spread of the virus, along with the demand to guarantee both education and safety, caused a major shift to distance learning and school closures. This has resulted in a dramatic reduction in enrollment, compounding the problem of an increasing number of out-of-school youths.

According to an Inquirer article, the US Agency for International Development calculated that the 16.9 percent of children who were not in school in January 2020 had increased to 25.2 percent in April 2020. This substantial increase has occurred in three months. This reduction might be attributed to a variety of factors such as economics, employment, personal motivation, or a lack of resources demanded by the new learning medium. According to the same Inquirer story, from the school year 2020 to 2021, at least 1.1 million Filipino students were unable to enroll owing to a lack of internet connection (Bautista, 2022). The pandemic's constraints and downsides, as well as the resources necessary for distance learning, have caused interruptions to formal schooling for

millions of learners in the country. Aside from those who were denied the opportunity to continue their formal education, some individuals did continue but nearly met the same fate. The new modality was conceptualized and planned in a short period of time, which left plenty of room for errors and refinements. Teachers were inexperienced with the approach, accordingly, students had to adjust, causing both parties to struggle.

Due to these difficulties, several students completed years of online instruction without learning much of what they needed. This leaves educators and other stakeholders to devise tailored interventions to assist these children in coping. Although it is expected in a virus-affected region, learning deficiencies might have serious effects if not addressed.

School closures and poor remote learning efforts in the Philippines have been demonstrated to have substantial and lasting detrimental impacts on children's learning and well-being. It is predicted to impair their mental and emotional health and diminish their productivity for decades. According to the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, the cost of this harm will be felt for decades to follow. This expected damage has driven the ensuing learning losses to become one of the most critical worldwide threats to COVID-19 recovery. The loss to the lifetime earnings of today's generation of students is estimated to be worth \$17 trillion. If not addressed immediately, the economic impact of learning deficits would be enormous, particularly for low- and middle-income nations (UNICEF, 2021).

Aside from the expected economic costs, school closures and the consequent learning deficits hampered efforts to reduce learning poverty. Learning poverty is defined as the percentage of children under the age of 10 who are unable to read and comprehend a simple story. According to the most recent UNICEF assessment, the country's reported learning poverty before the pandemic in 2019 was 69.5 percent, but it has already climbed to more than 85%. According to UNICEF, around three out of every twenty schoolchildren, or less than 15%, in the Philippines can read simple texts. The

aforementioned research attributed such a result to the long school closures (de Vera, 2022). One of the skills that were compromised during the outbreak was reading, an essential skill that learners have to develop, practice, and master. Since it takes continual practice and coaching, which not every student has, it may only be mastered by those who have the necessary means. Those who have working family members or guardians who are not skilled enough to guide them may be affected by this lack of opportunity. This exposes the disparities among students as well as the split between the affluent and the poor. Experiential learning activities, such as those found in scientific laboratories or technical-vocational courses, have suffered the same fate. As students were unable to attend in-person sessions, they were compelled to study through the modules, envisioning themselves utilizing such tools or, if resources were available, doing so at home. Meaningful learning opportunities in which students may learn by doing and experiencing the concepts themselves have become increasingly scarce. This is another component of learning losses that poses considerable hurdles to instructors when these students return. Given that the educational learning system operates on a spiral curriculum, failures to acquire and master fundamental skills during the outbreak in the lower grades may result in increased learning hurdles at the higher levels of education.

Such is the case for individuals enrolled in technical-vocational schools, which value experiential and hands-on learning opportunities for their learners. On occasion, educators may find themselves clarifying and instructing skills that pupils should have grasped years ago, creating opportunities for their learners. They may find themselves prolonging a class to study and fully explore a topic learned previously through the modules. In these classes, there is a lot of evaluation and subsequent adjustment, which is a big part of coping with learning deficits. There are a variety of ways to cope with the losses, and doing so could require an ensemble of stakeholders and some time. Although it may appear tiresome and unattainable at the time, it will be worth the effort if it saves this generation of students from the threat of learning loss.

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