Webinar Briefing Paper

Session: 2 Part 2 Panel discussion Expert Perspectives : Experiences in promoting equity in education.

Date: 30 October, 2021

Time: 09.30 – 10.30

Session Overview

Speakers

- Dr.Kann Puthy, Director of Department of Primary Education (PED), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia
- Dr. Naasirah Abdullah Teo, Head of Research and Planning Section at the Department of Planning, Development and Research, Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam
- Datu Dr. Haji Azhar Haji Ahmad, Director, Teacher Professionalism Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia
- Mr. Lee Yan Kheng, Director, Professional Development Branch of the Academy of Singapore Teachers, Ministry of Education, Singapore
- Ms. Nouamkham Chanthaboury, Deputy Director-General, Department of General Education, Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR

Moderator

- Ms. Aarti Saihjee, Chief of Education, UNICEF Thailand

Session Summary

Different Southeast Asian countries have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by shifting the way they deliver education. Many changes were needed to continue education and avoid learning loss. New curriculum and evaluation methods were implemented to meet the new demands and steps were taken to reach students left behind, disadvantaged students, and students in remote areas.

Professional development and training of teachers were undertaken. Countries have helped improve communication between teachers and have facilitated knowledge sharing. The new ICT-based learning platforms were created as teachers adapted to these new measures.

Recommendations

New forms of digital education will become increasingly popular in the future, but special care must be given to those that require alternative forms of education in order the ensure that the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students does not widen too much. Continuity of learning must be achieved by all students and increasing the capacity of teachers, providing resources where they are needed, and collaborating with all stakeholders is key. In addition, recommendations in specific issues are as follows;

- Government Efforts to Ensure Equity:
    1. Prioritize equity in educational policies and frameworks.
    2. Provide up-to-date and situational responses for teachers' professional development.
    3. Ensure access to lessons and learning resources for students by providing customized formats of learning materials through learning devices and internet access.
    4. Collaborate with other related public and private agencies, local communities and learning service providers in providing appropriate infrastructure and services for delivery of learning.
    5. Ensure school's safe learning spaces and well-being by encouraging COVID-19 vaccinations and monitoring the physical and mental health of students and teachers.
- Learning Loss
    1. Ensure continuity of learning. Provide appropriate learning curriculum and evaluation methods for returning students.
    2. Provide enrichment programs for students who are left behind.
    3. Conduct outreach initiatives to increase the attendance of disadvantaged students, especially those living in remote areas.

- Systematic Support for Teachers:
  1. Offer teachers professional development on their digital skills and appropriate tools to help students with special needs.
  2. Provide consultation to teachers and students to ensure their safety and well-being.
  3. Use a school-assessment program instead of traditional exams.
  4. Share knowledge and educational practices with international partners
  5. Invest through the use of ICT-based learning platforms, digitalized learning materials, and capacity building for teachers.

Next Steps

The future of learning will witness a shift from academic-based to a skills-based system and it's the governments job to help usher in this change by promoting the professional development of teachers. As education becomes increasingly digitized, special care must be given to those with special needs, disadvantaged students, and those from remote areas to ensure that equity education is achieved. Education is the responsibility of all stakeholders and new actors will take on new roles as the government applies collaborative leverage on these stakeholders.

Speaker Remarks

Dr. Kann Puthy, Director of Department of Primary Education (PED), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia

"We will use one tool [Grade 1-2 standardized tests] for all primary grades to assess before the school year starts and show the results to parents and teachers who will manage the class to provide the lesson or the content by the knowledge, not by the grade."

Dr. Naasirah Abdullah Teo, Head of Research and Planning Section at the Department of Planning, Development and Research, Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam

"I would like to start ... by reframing the lost year to actually an opportunity year ... for us to push different programs in our ministry .... We cannot deny that learning is also gained in different ways at many levels."

Datu Dr. Haji Azhar Haji Ahmad, Director, Teacher Professionalism Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia

"Providing and supporting teachers training about the use of digital resources for pedagogical practices and promoting teaching practices adapted to this context is key to ensure that ICT is leveraged effectively."

Mr. Lee Yan Kheng, Director, Professional Development Branch of the Academy of Singapore Teachers, Ministry of Education, Singapore

"No student should be excluded from education, regardless of their needs and backgrounds. We are committed to sustaining opportunities throughout one's life from pre-school to the world of work to offer them the best chance to maximize their potential."

Ms. Nouamkham Chanthaboury, Deputy Director-General, Department of General Education, Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR

"We have cooperated with many parties in order to promote the digitalization through our educational system for teachers and students. The Ministry of Education initiated this choice project with the private sector... Our partnership needs to be expanded to allow more remote schools and disadvantage people to benefit from digital technology in order to reduce the development gap."

Key Evidence

There has been a number of direct government efforts to ensure equity in education in their respective countries. Alternative forms of education, multilingual education, and alternative channels of education are reaching out to minority students. Implementing a home-based learning system for students in remote areas has been shown as a potential path toward the delivery of quality education to those in need. Training and capacity building programs have helped teachers prepare and deliver this type of alternative education.

Challenges, good practices

The suddenness of the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust teachers into a digitalized educational community in which they were ill-prepared for. New curriculum and assessment practices were created to handle this sudden shift and support networks were developed to help teachers' professional development, share best teaching practices, and recognize their efforts in education. There are still students that lack access to digital learning and educators were able to deliver learning via various channels that could reach a greater percentage of students.

Country Cases

The example of Laos PDR

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a direct impact on the quality of education in Laos PDR. The government responded by developing strategic plans to deal with the changes and creating curriculum and providing resources for schools and teachers. However, despite these efforts, the equity gap in education has widened and dropout rates remain a problem. The digitalization of education has been set as a priority and help from the private sector has helped realize this goal. As the country reopens, the return to learning can take many forms, such as in-person learning, home learning, tv and radio learning, online, or some kind of blend between these approaches.

The example of Singapore

Singapore has implemented many plans to help disadvantaged students even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As their programs moved to online, government support helped subsidize materials and resources for these students to make sure they had access to the hardware necessary to learn online. Singapore's teachers were also given training on how to strengthen classroom practices. The needs-based resourcing approach taken by the country has allowed flexibility for educators to carry out equitable education.

The example of Cambodia

Cambodia responded to the pandemic by developing and distributing home learning packages to more than 750,000 children in the country. High vaccination rates among students and teachers have raised hopes of a return to onsite learning.

The example of Brunei Darussalam

High internet and social media penetration as well as the integration of different existing software programs has allowed Brunei to switch to online learning fairly rapidly. However, teachers and students still have had trouble adapting to e-learning. Tests and assessments had to be adjusted to meet current demands.

The example of Malaysia

The dropout rates in Malaysia during the pandemic are worrisome, especially for males. Inclusion of all students has been a priority and the government has worked with local foundations to offer learning resources to students and teachers. Programs that created a home-based learning system increased attendance rates in these vulnerable populations. The Zero Students Dropout Program and other interventions were implemented to reach these disadvantaged students and mitigate learning loss.