

Forum: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

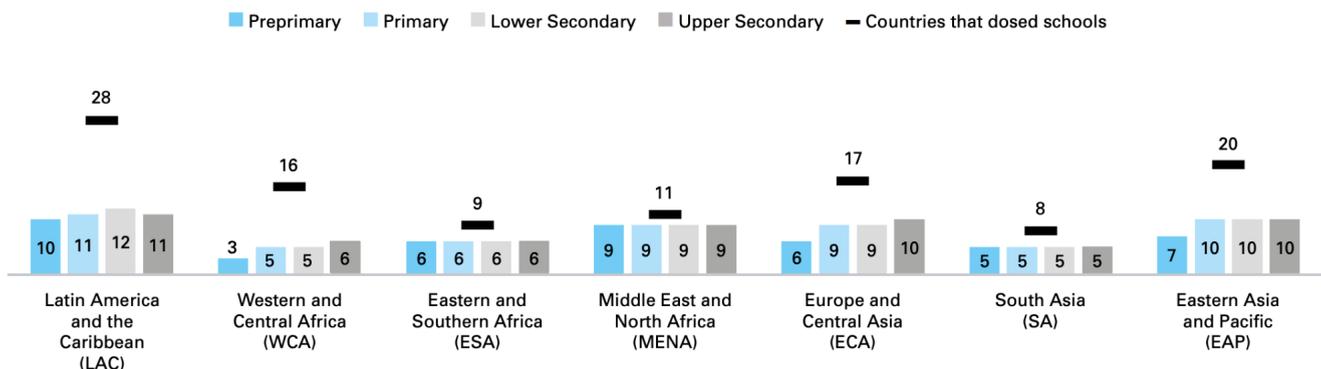
Issue: Mitigating effects of learning loss following COVID-19

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Introduction

COVID-19 has indirectly caused a global concern for learning loss, consequential to the time schools and educational institutions have had to take off in precaution for the pandemic. This learning loss is what the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) alongside UNESCO and the World Bank has been working to collect data from two surveys and 164 countries to solve. As schools are slowly reopening in recovering nations, it is UNESCO's goal to make up for the learning loss that resulted from this time of uncertainty. It is important to understand that this issue discusses educational strategies instead of health or hygienic aspects of schools reopening. Below is a graph included in the UNICEF report of the countries that had set a date for the reopening of schools, by region and level.



(Source: UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey, May-June 2020)

Caption: UNICEF report of countries who have set a date for the reopening of schools

It appears as some schools slowly reopen, there has not been much action taken to deal with the learning loss that has already taken place from when schools had temporarily closed. Schools continue their curriculum and students are expected to catch up. What many schools fail to realize is, just as there is a "summer learning loss" following a long pause of learning in summer breaks, there is also a learning loss that prevents students from simply "resuming" the school year. This learning loss should be taken

into account, while teachers as well as curriculums are ideally supposed to be flexible according to students.

The issue of learning loss should not be overlooked merely because it does not produce immediate results. This short period of time off from school is correlated with students falling behind or dropping out of school. A short pause in learning can later accumulate as students who did not catch up originally continue to fall behind. A three month pause can accumulate into being a whole year and a half behind. This was the case when Pakistan suffered from its catastrophic earthquake in 2005. It is estimated that 7 million to 9.7 million students will drop out due to the economic impact of the pandemic. Because of the lower levels of learning and potential of drop-outs, the World Bank has estimated around a loss of \$10 trillion in earnings. Many of these students whose futures and careers depend on the education they receive are also strongly affected and it is up to nations and schools to decide how to ensure them a proper education.

Because of the shutdown of many schools and educational institutions, many students have fallen behind on their studies and schools are just as new to remote learning as it is to students. As the world continues to fight COVID-19, United Nations organs such as UNICEF and UNESCO work to make sure the students of the world do not fall behind and take the fall for it for the rest of their lives.

Because of the shutdown of many schools and educational institutions, many students have fallen behind on their studies and schools are just as new to remote learning as it is to students. As the world continues to fight COVID-19, United Nations organs such as UNICEF and UNESCO work to make sure the students of the world do not fall behind and take the fall for it for the rest of their lives. The goal is to strategize a remedy for this learning loss through remedial programs before it adds on and worsens. Even within a pandemic, the learning loss crisis persists.

So, why does this issue persist? There is no exact answer but reasons ranging from the governments' priorities and unawareness to the issue as well as the slow development of what the perfect remedial program is all apply. However this issue may be solved, the consequences cannot be ignored. This falling-behind is prone to accumulate and result in a major learning loss in the years to come. Keep in mind, the temporary closing of schools had affected 1.6 billion children from attending school. What can make up for such a big learning loss?

Definition of Key Terms

COVID-19

COVID-19 is an ongoing pandemic that has resulted in not only a major health crisis, but an economic, educational, and social downfall from the global community. As of 2022, there are roughly 300 million cases and 5 million deaths worldwide as the numbers continue to go up with each passing day. Variants, such as the new Omicron originating from South Africa, continue to emerge as the virus hits new parts of the world and nations are scrambling to follow-up with vaccines. This is also the primary reason for the closing down of schools – in an attempt to keep students physically away from each other.

Learning Loss

Learning loss refers to the loss of learning from students who are no longer able to normally participate in their daily education in person at their schools. Because of the shutdown of schools and educational institutions from COVID-19, students have had to change platforms to remote or virtual learning. For some less developed countries (LEDCs), this is not as easily implemented as devices are not as easily accessible across the nation. Not only that, but countries who are considering reopening schools must also decide how to go forth with the gap in learning that has resulted from the time off.

Remedial program

Remedial programs are programs designed to help students reach the expected level of competency for core subjects. This may be implemented in either a situation where a student has fallen behind and must compensate for the work or in a health crisis – an event that requires the shutting down of programs and gatherings. In the context of this issue, remedial programs mitigating the COVID-19 learning loss work to fill the gap in learning that resulted from the temporary closure of schools. These programs may take place as school days are extended, mandatory school break programs, or an extended semester. Much more discussion and detail is required to craft the most effective remedial program.

Accelerated learning program

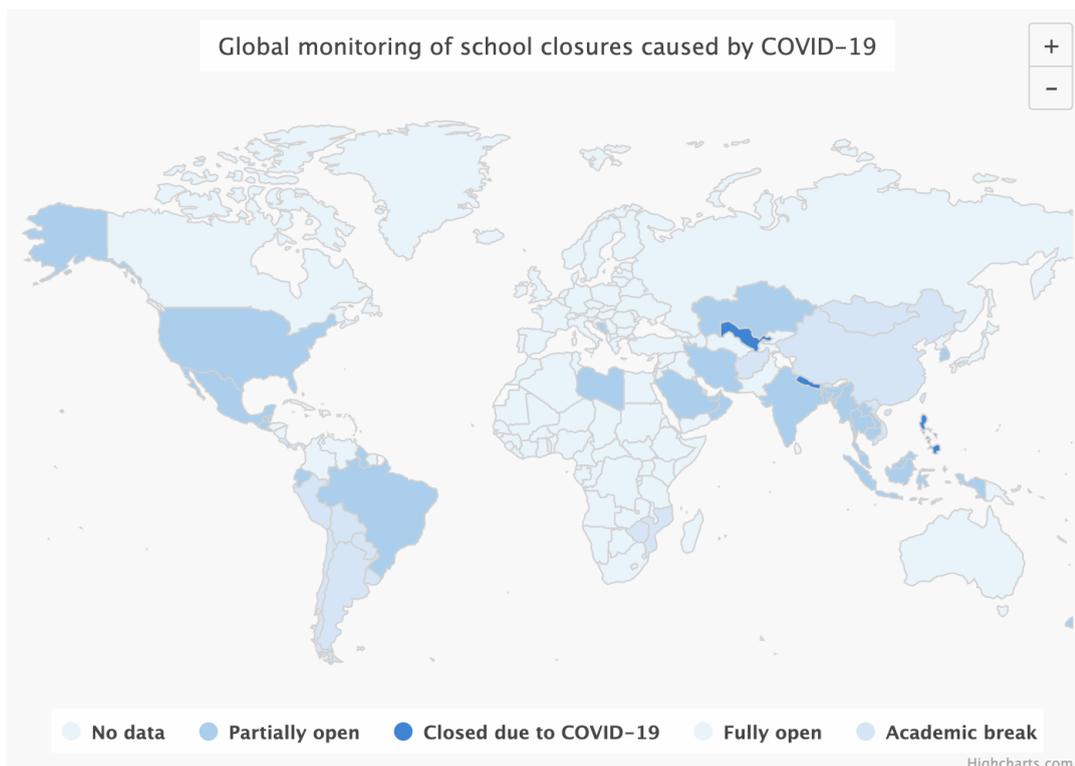
Accelerated learning programs offer education to disadvantaged, out-of-age, out-of-school children and youth. This emphasizes the “outreach” aspect of this issue. It should be every nation’s goal to reach to every corner of their people to recruit anyone seeking or could potentially benefit from an education. Lifelong learning is promoted. Especially in the context of this issue, accelerated learning programs may reach out to the less developed countries (LDCs) that seek extra assistance in executing the same level of education offered in more developed countries (MDCs). These programs attempt to find a balance in the distribution and equality of accessible education.

Digital Divide

The digital divide refers to the gap between regions that may access modern information and communication technologies, as opposed to those that may not be able to access these. Essentially, this relates to how developed a country is and how many of its people may have access to the newest technology and the information given out on the said technology. This gap not only causes LDCs to be less aware of current updates on the pandemic, but also makes remote learning (which may be done virtually on a screen or other technology) harder. With a smaller digital divide, nations can better focus on creating a standardized remedial program for mitigating all learning loss (assuming that all countries are then equipped with the same resources for these programs).

History

COVID-19 is unfortunately not as much history as it is present. Nonetheless, it has already made some quite permanent changes to the world. Putting aside the horrible health and economic concerns, students across the world have suffered from learning loss due to the temporary closing of schools as the COVID-19 outbreak worsened. The closing down of schools was initially put in place to physically distance students from each other. This goes with the “social distancing” policy promoted with other COVID-19 precautions. While the first few closings were temporary, like an emergency break for a bad snow day or earthquake, no one expected the pause to become a long three month break. (Different countries and schools took different times off, but mostly they were three months more or less.)



Caption: Global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19

During these three months, students were mostly at home as advised from their government and thus began the learning loss. This is not unlike the usual learning loss that occurs with long breaks or vacations that happen throughout the school years (such as summer break and winter break).

However, schools had to decide what to do with the material they were missing out on. Were they to continue where they left off? This way, they would always be behind. Were they to continue the semester according to the original time schedule and make up for the lost material some other time? Many challenges were posed at schools struggling to not only fight a pandemic but also keep students motivated and learning. Thanks to technology, remote learning was quickly proposed as a way to continue classes. Schools continued school days via virtual meetings and essentially had entire classes or lectures with a multi-person call or video chat. Nonetheless, online learning is unable to fully convey all that is provided through in person learning. The engagement levels dwindle as well as the ability for teachers to ensure students are properly participating in class. It goes without saying that there are still flaws to online learning that cannot make up for being at school in person. Especially for testing and group projects, this “virtual learning” system does not prove convenient. How will schools gain an accurate understanding of a student’s progress? Better yet, how will the schools continue their teachings once the students return to school in person? Are they to continue from where they left off virtually? Or do they go over what was taught during the time school closed in person again to assure that students properly obtained the information? These are all things to consider for remedial programs.

The biggest victims of this issue are clearly the students that suffer this learning loss. However, as these students grow up and enter society – and go on to run this society – the entire world is to witness its consequences. These students will have an imperfect education that leaves a gap at the time window during the temporary closure of schools as well as falling behind afterwards. Education, being the pillar of what makes a person and a *society* intelligent, is a basic human right and these students should not have it hindered or deprived from them if possible.

Key Issues

Issues with Learning During COVID-19

The issues with learning during COVID-19 range from lack of engagement, problems with assessing student outcomes, to group learning or hands-on learning. Without the in person learning attributes such as keeping close contact with students and higher in-class participation, online learning fails to make up for all that in person learning provides. Teachers are unable to keep such close tabs on the performance of students as test taking and homework completion cannot be tracked under as close

surveillance as that of in person learning. Students are able to look up and copy work without the in person authorities watching over them. Though, of course, this is not the ideal pathway students turn to, it is given that teachers are unable to exert the same level of control over the classroom as that of in person learning.

Impact Moving Forward

The issue is the learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This learning loss could worsen if students are not caught up or back on track with their curriculum. Schools must ensure that students are able to properly return to learning following the short pause in learning and/or the remote learning. This learning loss results in students dropping out of school, unmotivated learning, and could even affect their job or income in the future. These consequences are long lasting and accumulate to something irreversible as time carries on. It is time to take action while we can.

The issue persists as no action has been taken to push for remedial programs. Many nations are still in an unstable situation with the pandemic and those that have recovered enough to open schools have not prioritized the learning loss as a main issue. It is vital to raise awareness of its consequences and ways to take action. Do students know about this learning loss? Do schools? How much is a teacher to expect a student to perform following such a break from learning? How well is remote learning truly able to bring out the same effect as school taught in person? The progress of students should be closely monitored and curriculums must consider what is the best way to go forth.

The damage of the learning loss has already been done though it may not have immediate consequences. This falling behind and accumulation of it will only become obvious years later, as students become so far behind that they are a year or more behind. The affected generation will then become more prone to disadvantages in tests and standards in higher education. This chain reaction then goes on to affect their competency in the workplace later on as they enter society. Issues such as these must not wait till beyond repair. With remedial programs, it is possible to leave little to none of a learning loss effect on students. Of course, this requires the cooperation of students and schools to implement these programs. This will be another aspect to consider when drafting a solution.

As previously mentioned, there are concerns for the accumulated material students will potentially fall behind on. With carefully designed remedial programs, hopefully we may avoid a situation like this in the future. Either that be a health crisis or a catastrophic event, there should be a fallback plan for how to properly implement education plans when schools are not able to open.

Students dropping out, falling behind, or losing motivation to work as they fall behind are all scenes common to the victims of learning loss. This learning loss may not be as critical of a health

concern as it is for the education and future of the world – but it is just as crucial that we work to make up for what was lost.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is a United Nations agency in charge of humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. They are amongst the most recognizable social welfare organizations globally, with a presence in 192 countries and territories. UNICEF has provided much of the data for the reports concerning this topic. With children making up the majority of the students who are affected by the transition to online learning, UNICEF finds responsibility in controlling any potential of learning loss from this transition. To achieve this, UNICEF has been encouraging nations to prioritize reopening schools once it is safe to do so. They have advised nations with professional opinions on how to do so and expect nations to take immediate action in preventing any potential learning losses. UNICEF’s Let Us Learn initiative is a good example of this immediate action.

World Bank

The World Bank is an international financial institution that provides loans and grants to governments of low- and middle- income countries in pursuit of capital projects. They are also very involved in the discussions regarding this issue, providing much valuable insight and data in reports analyzing the learning loss phenomenon. In fact, the UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey gave insight to the educational responses from May-June 2020 from 118 countries to incorporate in reports on such topics. The survey was distributed to the Ministries of Education of each country. The World Bank also cooperates with the UNICEF Framework for Reopening Schools to provide professional advice to nations considering reopening schools.

Montenegro

Montenegro has risen to the challenge that COVID-19 has put upon its nation. The UN system in Montenegro has recognized the children who are unable to access the internet, children with parents who suffer from substance abuse, and children with disabilities. These children are the most vulnerable to the learning loss as they may be physically incapable of accessing the online material. The estimate of falling behind by at least one year is once again reiterated in its reports. However, through the efforts of the #PlayAtHome campaign and teachers working to put out the best quality of online education, the #UciDoma is much applauded for its contributions to mitigating the learning loss due to COVID-19.

Brazil

Brazil's 180,000 schools which have closed and 47 million students which have gone online have all been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Busca Activa Escola or School Active Search is a Brazilian institution that focuses on monitoring out-of-school children and understanding why they are out of school. In a country where education is mandatory up to the age of 17 such as Brazil, this approach is the first step towards creating policies, programs, and projects for out-of-school children. Partnered with UNICEF, the Busca Activa Escola is in fact a free program. There are many sectors to the organization, some concerned mainly on locating those who are out-of-school, some solely focused on visiting why these students dropped out. School Active Search is able to be implemented on devices, through platforms such as SMS.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of Event
Feb. 28, 2020	Closing of Schools in England - Fourteen schools had closed by then in England.
March 18, 2020	Announcement from United Kingdom Governments - The Welsh government announced that all schools in Wales will be closed by March 20. Schools in Northern Ireland are suspended immediately and to staff on March 20. It is announced that schools will be closed for an unspecified amount of time and the Prime Minister Boris Johnson states that schools will continue looking after the children of key workers.
March 25, 2020	The Coronavirus Act 2020 - The Coronavirus Act 2020 gave relevant ministries and institutions to close schools and childcare premises. In addition, GCSE and A Level exams were canceled, which was an unprecedented action from the UK. Students were to be graded based on teacher assessments and grade predictions.
June 1, 2020	Reopening of English Primary Schools - Beginning on June 1, many nursery schools and pupils in the year groups of Reception (ages 4-5), Year 1 (ages 5-6) and Year 6 (ages 10-11) opened. Despite the original plan of most schools reopening by the end of June, many schools didn't open and many students did not return to school until half a year later. This had much to do with the government's concern with the rate of infection that would be influenced with the return of students to schooling in person.
June 15, 2020	Reopening of English Secondary Schools - Secondary schools in England reopened for year groups 10 (ages 14-15) and 12 (ages 16-17). However, it was still advised that schools primarily educate their students at home and minimize the amount of face-to-face lessons. Secondary schools only returned in full for the new academic year in September. In fact, school attendance was not mandatory until the start of the 2020-21 academic year.
June 29, 2020	Reopening of Welsh Schools - Students of all age groups returned to the schools of Wales. However, until the summer holidays, school attendance was

	non-compulsory and part-time. Once schools reopened in full for the new academic year, changes were made to accommodate the social distancing policies.
August 11-18, 2020	Reopening of Scottish Schools - Scottish schools reopened during this time frame and at first planned to utilize a “blended model” – where students would study part-time at home and part-time on campus. However, once schools returned, they aimed for full-time on campus. Schools in Northern Ireland reopened for “key cohorts” (students preparing for exams or transitioning between schools) in August, whereas others reopened in September.
Dec. 11, 2020	Vaccines Become a Beacon of Hope - The US Food and Drug Administration issues its first authorization for a vaccine preventing the coronavirus – the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine. This is the beginning of the world’s many stages in debuting different vaccines.
Dec. 13, 2020	Back to Remote Learning - After another surge of growth in cases, the London borough of Greenwich sent orders for schools to return to remote learning. Other boroughs such as Islington and Waltham also took similar steps in transitioning to remote learning. At first Gavin Williamson asked for schools to remain face-to-face learning, but then the Greenwich council quickly reversed its decision in fear of legal actions from the government.
Jan. 4, 2021	Move to Online Learning - All schools in Wales transition to online learning, with the exception of provision for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.
Feb. 7, 2021	Reopening Tensions Mount - The Chicago Teachers Union reaches an agreement on how to safely reopen schools. This means ensuring the teachers and staff are all vaccinated and safety measures are in place.
Feb. 21, 2021	Long-awaited CDC Guidelines Released - The CDC announces how schools should prioritize having all their teachers vaccinated. However, it also adds that schools are allowed to reopen before all the teachers are vaccinated.
March 1, 2021	A New Education Secretary - The US Senate confirms Miguel Cardona’s role as the new US Secretary of Education. He is chosen by the newly elected US President Joe Biden. As of this time, 856 active and retired K-12 educators and personnel have died from COVID-19. Of the 856, 233 were active teachers.
March 2, 2021	A Declaration on Vaccinations - US President Joe Biden declares he is using the full power of the federal government to challenge all educators, school staff, and child-care workers to get at least one dose of vaccination by the end of the month. This is a step towards recovering and ensuring the safety of in person learning.
March 15, 2021	Welsh Schools Return on Site - Remaining secondary and primary school students in Wales are able to return on site.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

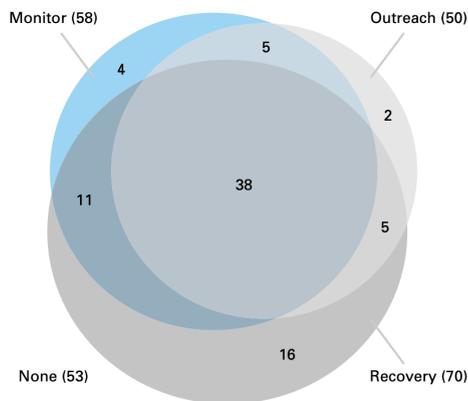
- Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), 2 April 2020 (A/RES/74/270)
- International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19, 20 April 2020 (A/RES/74/274)

- Maintenance of international peace and security, 1 July 2020 (S/RES/2532)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Monitor, Outreach, and Recovery

There are mainly three reopening strategies in mitigating the learning loss: monitor, outreach, and recovery. “Monitor” refers to tracking the re-enrollment and attendance of students. Of the 164 countries in the UNESCO report, 58 countries use the monitor strategy. “Outreach” refers to reaching out to students who do not return to school after reopening. This also includes out-of-age or out-of-school students who could benefit from joining or rejoining schools. Of the 164 countries, 64 countries use the outreach strategy. Lastly, “recovery” refers to recovering the lost learning time. Nations and schools plan to do this by extending the school day or even the semester (and thus shortening the breaks). Of the 164 countries, 70 countries use the recovery strategy. Keep in mind, countries may use more than one or none of the strategies. Below is a graph included in the UNICEF report of the number of countries using three key reopening strategies in mitigating the educational impact of COVID-19.



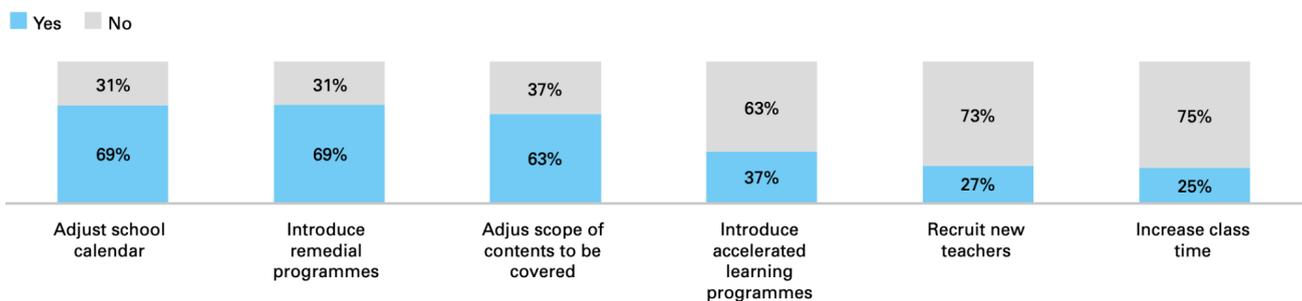
(Source: UNICEF Education Tracker Survey, 21 May 2020)

Caption: Distribution of nations who chose each initiative.

The benefits of monitoring help enhance a school’s ability to better assess their record of students’ attendance. With a better understanding of the situation, a school is then better prepared to combat the issue of students dropping out or returning to school. However, monitoring is only an action of tracking, rather than actually motivating students themselves to return to school. The action of monitoring must be paired with further actions such as outreach and recovery.

The benefits of outreach are very directly communicating with the core of the problem – the students out of school. This is a great way to tackle the problem so as to gain a better understanding of where some of these students are coming from and how a school can better support them accordingly. However, there are still drawbacks to outreach. Not all students are able to be reached in their situation, especially with the situation of the pandemic. Even with the use of technology, contacting students via the internet, not all students have access to this technology. Students in more rural and less developed areas are the main issue to this action.

The benefits of recovery are self-explanatory. A school is simply expected to make up for the lost learning and *mitigate the learning loss*. However, this is more easily said than done.

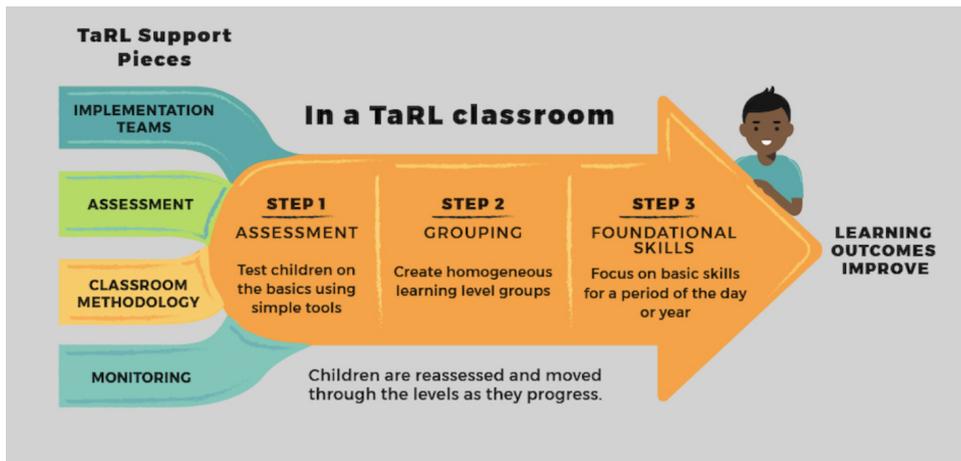


(Source: UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank survey, May-June 2020)

Caption: A UNICEF report graphic on the different countries' use of initiatives to address learning loss.

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)

The Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) uses a speedy oral assessment to sort children in their last years in primary school according to their suitable levels, instead of being sorted by age. They are focused on the children in Africa, currently being implemented in 12 African countries. They understand how enrollment in school does not guarantee learning, and that learning must be achieved with these evidence-based approaches. TaRL also realizes how COVID-19 opens a new window for school reform in Africa. This is where they come into the discussions of post-COVID-19 learning. They hope to use the many more countries that now also need catch-up classes as an opportunity to jolt other nations to provide it. However, it should be noted that of the 19 effect estimate cases tested, while 10 cases showed a positive effect of the program, 9 showed none.



Caption: Overview of the TaRL mission.

Education Management Information System (EMIS)

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) collects data and works to monitor and support decision making regarding policies of the education system. This includes budgeting and all levels of planning for the education system. The EMIS has successfully contributed and been involved in many reports regarding the issue of mitigating learning loss post-COVID-19 as it provides much of the data for students at risk of dropping out of school or out-of-school children. They are concerned about those who are hit hardest by the learning loss, the ones who leave school permanently. Every nation's EMIS should be utilized throughout the pandemic to monitor the learning situation and for governments to better understand what could be improved upon. However, it should be noted that the EMIS merely provides support and data, but provides no direct action or problem-solving to the issue of learning loss.

Possible Solutions

1. High-dosage tutoring as well as extended academy hours to effectively improve the mathematics and reading skills of students.
 - **Pros:** A concentrated way of teaching whilst prolonging the amount of time students spend on work is a reasonable way to make up for and further improve a student's academic progress.
 - **Cons:** There must be a very delicate balance grasped within this make-up program to challenge the students enough to make up for what has been lost, yet not cramming them to the point of backfiring. An aspect to consider is also the students who have dropped out due to the pandemic and closing of schools. How will this invite or motivate them to return to school?

2. Establishing the early signs and detection of a student falling behind and setting a concrete routine in place for students and teachers to follow for efficient learning.
 - **Pros:** This system focuses on damage control – making sure the issue at hand does not worsen and to better detect when it does. By allowing teachers to understand what signs to look out for in a student falling behind, schools are better able to support and help these students. This lessens the learning loss and encourages a better relationship between not only the students and teachers but their relationship to school and learning through the support of the school.
 - **Cons:** There may always be exceptions to students who show no sign of falling behind yet decide to drop out of school. This is harder to detect and may not be easily prepared for.

3. Implementing scheduled standardized testing for the better assessment of students' progress and performance would work to help schools oversee the levels of learning loss and where to improve.
 - **Pros:** Testing is an efficient and effective way to judge and make decisions on the performance of students. This way, schools are to better accommodate the areas of difficulty for students and provide the exact learning necessary to compensate for their weaknesses.
 - **Cons:** Standardized tests fail to fully encapsulate the necessary qualities and skills a student must possess. It is a very specific skill to excel in these tests and very possible for an intellectually competent student to not perform as well on these tests. Many circumstances and factors weigh in on the results of these tests, therefore making the results less of an accurate judge of skills.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. China - Case Study
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- II. Potential effects of COVID-19 school closures on foundational skills and Country responses for mitigating learning loss
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- III. Strategies to Help Mitigate Learning Loss
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