



Editorial

IJED Vol. 99 Article Summaries

Volume 99 is unusual in several ways. It begins with an editorial written by its editors titled: “A Year of Missed Opportunity: Post-Covid Learning Loss – a Renewed Call to Action”. The press release explained it in this way:

At the end of primary school when children cannot read, it is called ‘learning poverty’.

Because of being out of school for an extended period during the pandemic, learning poverty became catastrophic. While school systems reopened, they have placed children back in regular classes without recognizing that cognitively the children are not the same as they might have been two years earlier. This is the third anniversary of the pandemic. Cognitive repair needs to happen before the new school year opens or the losses will be permanent.

A joint statement released by senior academics from China, Ethiopia, Malaysia, Chinese Taiwan, Tunisia, Israel, Switzerland, and the United States has called for immediate action. The paper points out that guidelines for learning recovery have already been developed. But earlier calls for action have seemed to fall on deaf ears of school systems. Candid admission by educational authorities to admit, calibrate and make up for the learning losses is missing. The same ‘business as usual’ operations are evident in large and small school systems and at widely disparate levels of economic development. It appears like a tsunami has occurred. The village has been flattened. But educational authorities are allowing classes to reopen with teachers untrained to address the learning losses, with curricula unfocused on learning losses, and without the concentration on learning losses as opposed to the wide range of normal educational objectives. The IJED editors call for greater state-NGO partnership, increased collaboration between countries in the global south and the global north in terms of sharing strategies.

The second unusual element in volume 99 is the appearance of the first paper in a special issue on ‘faith-based education’. Schools and universities have long developed in conjunction with faith organizations – Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu among others. The IJED first touched on this in an article by Katherine Marshall in which it was mentioned that the field of development economics had systematically ignored the educational importance of faith organizations, to its detriment (Marshall, 2018). A subsequent article by Roy et al., (2020) delved into the details of the different faith-based organizations and educational systems in one country, Bangladesh. Following that the editors decided that the topic deserved a Special Issue. A proposal was approved by the two special issue editors T.J. D’Agostino and Niaz Asadullah, and the first paper appears here in volume 99. Authored by Piotr Roszak and Weronika Kudla and titled: “Faith-Based Education in Polish Public Schools –from battleground to common ground”. The authors analyze the legal provisions from the child’s, the parents’ and the teachers’

perspective which highlight different conflicts over the presence of religious symbols, practices, and references in public schools. The article points out that in many European countries public schools have been emptied of religious references. This, they suggest, is a detriment. They mention that references to faith play an enriching role in Polish public schools and should be considered not a threat but an ‘opportunity to maintain religious and cultural diversity.’

Among the thorniest problems in the education sector concerns the tendency for interventions to have differing impacts on different strata of the student populations. Two articles in Volume 99 illustrate. In “Teaching Quality and Student Learning Achievements in Ethiopian Primary Education: How effective is Instructional Quality in Closing Socio-economic Learning Achievement Inequalities?” authors Jean-Baptiste Mohammadou Bassirou Sanfo and Inoussa Malgoubri point out that teaching quality does indeed affect learning achievements, but the impact is greater on students from families with higher socio-economic backgrounds. They conclude that teaching quality increases the achievement gap between wealthy and less wealthy families.

In the article titled “Indicators of Higher Education Quality and Salaries of University Graduates in Russia,” author Ilya Prakhov shows that salaries of university graduates are higher than those who have not graduated from a university. However, the salaries of those who have graduated from an ‘elite’ university are considerably higher than others. Like the authors of the manuscript in Ethiopia, Prakhov concludes that the benefit of an educational intervention may act to exacerbate socio-economic differences among pupils.

The influence of COVID 19 on reading and mathematics achievement has been a common concern in IJED and two articles in volume 99 speak to that issue. In the manuscript titled “Gender Disparities Among Students at Jordanian Universities during COVID-19” authors Linda Alkhawaja, Mohammed Idris, and Hanan Ibrahim find that the effect of COVID-19 and the necessity of using on-line learning depressed scores across the board, but significantly more so in the case of women.

This disappointing conclusion however may contrast with a finding from Brazil. In their article titled: “COVID-19 School Closures Negatively Impacted Elementary School Students’ Reading Comprehension and Reading Fluency Skills,” authors Isabella Starling Alves, Guilherme Hirata, and Joao Batista Araujo e Oliveira discover that after closing schools for about two years, scores declined. However, after schools were able to re-open it was found that COVID-19 was associated with score gaps, but not losses in reading comprehension or fluency. This is the first good post-COVID news we have seen.

Several manuscripts in volume 99 have confirmed what had long been assumed. Much hope has been placed on the possibility that improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) can

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102758>

improve school efficiency (the ratio between outputs and inputs). A paper in volume 99 posed this question across 2,757 schools in ten countries. Titled: “Technological Resources, ICT Use and Schools Efficiency in Latin America,” authors Tommaso Agasisti, German Antequera, and Marcos Delprato conclude that the availability of ICT is positively correlated with school efficiency and basically confirms the long-held assumption.

Similarly, it has been assumed that students with degrees from outside of Japan may be advantaged in the local academic labor market. In the article titled: “Careers of Faculty with Foreign Degrees: The Attributes and Impact of Academic Ranks in Japan,” Naki Kato finds that with foreign degrees scholars were more likely to achieve the rank of professor, be women specializing in the social sciences and humanities, at private universities in metropolitan areas.

Because international definitions of primary school begin with grade one, preschool structures and administrative arrangements have often been excluded from the norm, which may have negatively affected the professional status of preschool teachers. One manuscript raises this issue by asking how common is it for preschool teachers to be treated differently from primary school teachers in China? In the paper titled: “The Status, Pathways, and Discourses of Professionalism for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teachers in Chinese Policies,” authors Yi Yan and Nirmala Rao conclude that in China ECE teachers have lower status reflected by their lower requirements for professional qualifications, terms of employment, and remuneration.

‘Context matters’ is a common conclusion about the importance of educational administration. Three manuscripts in volume 99 speak to this point. Much hope has been placed on the possibility that school autonomy and local control could augment student achievement. Results have been less than ideal. In volume 99, one manuscript helps explain why. In their article titled: “How Context Shapes the Relationship Between School Autonomy and Test Scores: An Explanatory Analysis Using PISA 2015,” authors Christian Buerger, Jane Arnold Lincove and Catherine Mata find that the relationship between test performance and school autonomy varies by context both between and within countries. They conclude that autonomy is effective when contextual factors and policies of decentralization are aligned.

The second concerns the problem of student psychological depression. In Japan, some students socially ‘withdraw’ from participation. ‘Hikikomori’ is a significant concern, and much attention has been directed to ameliorating its practice. What can school do? In their article titled: “The Relevance of Educational Contexts in the Emergence of Social Withdrawal (hikikomori). A Review and Directions for Future

Research,” authors Gianluca Coeli, Anne Planas-Llado and Pere Soler-Maso review the evidence. Many analysts, they conclude, have concentrated on single factors of the individuals, while others have favored interventions in the school environment. The authors believe the latter are more likely to contribute solutions.

Lastly there is the universal aspiration that schools may contribute to a person’s ‘resilience’. In their article titled: “Resilience in Educational Systems: A Systematic Review and Directions for Future Research,” Elaine Borazon and Hsueh-Hua Chuang survey the literature on resilience studies. They find that those studies focus on three elements: (i) classroom environment, (ii) experiences and background of individuals and (iii) the school programs which contribute to pupil resilience.

Jordan is the focus on one manuscript in volume 99 concerned with learning poverty (the portion of children aged 10 which cannot read with comprehension). In their paper titled: “Weak Foundations in Arabic Literacy: Drivers of Learning Poverty in Jordan,” authors Lama Nusair and Robert Palmer find that 60% of the school population in Jordan suffer from learning poverty. They attribute this to the lack of parental engagement with their children’s literacy (often because of their own learning poverty), low levels of professional competence of early grade teachers, automatic grade progression (allowing teachers to pass on students with learning poverty to higher grades), and low levels of quality in school infrastructure including crowded classrooms and poorly resourced libraries.

Sometimes, we need manuscripts to reinforce challenges to our assumptions. One is written by Alix Ziff titled: “Aid Accessibility: Equity and Education in Kenya.” It points out that despite the claims, the beneficiaries of foreign aid are not always the neediest or most deserving. The author concludes by noting that his study “demonstrates how the political preferences of donors and recipient governments can divert aid away from the populations and places that need it most, reducing its effectiveness.”

Though readers of the IJED already know this, sometimes it is necessary to be reminded of common truths.

References

- Marshall, K., 2018. Global Education Challenges: Exploring Religious Dimensions. *International Journal of Educational Development* Vol. 9 (No. 1), 184–199.
- Roy, S., Huq, S., Binte, A., Rob, A., 2020. Faith and Education in Bangladesh: a review of the contemporary landscape and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Development* Vol. 79, 102290. #.

Stephen P. Heyneman, Editor-in-Chief