Covid-19 and Education Poverty: Moving Beyond Disruption to Healing

Roundtable Discussion

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has escalated learning poverty. Lockdown had implications in terms of when and how education would be delivered. Problems were compounded by issues such as households not having access to the internet or being able to provide safe learning spaces. In many developing countries large segments of the population are without electrical power precluding engagement with e-platforms, further depriving those segments. The discussion will be pitched around the theme of education poverty and the lost learnings accrued by the pandemic and will explore how, from a learning and teaching perspective, this worsening of educational poverty might be mitigated.

Keyword: Covid-19, Education poverty

Introduction

The session focuses on important themes around disruptions in learning and impoverishment in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing crisis as academic institutions were forced to close, amplifying the scope for more learners to be educationally deprived. Despite the vast efforts that educational institutions have made to implement remote learning, opportunities will not be fairly distributed national or internationally.

The purpose and focus of the discussion is to explore how educators can move beyond a cycle of curriculum disruption to healing post Covid-19. It will focus on the lessons learnt by educators during the pandemic, and how we might do things differently to overcome the challenges presented. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has had an obvious impact on industries and employment around the world, the educational poverty that has been created or amplified is likely to impact on students for years to come. Informed by the literature on education poverty and Covid-19 the roundtable discussion will contribute to the search for improved, effective teaching and learning in management, lessons learned and innovative pedagogy in terms of the delivery process and modes of assessment. It will question the priorities placed upon management education given the short and long term implications for economic growth, society's wellbeing and social capital in the context of how big institutions develop and implement strategies that deal with the changing face of poverty post pandemic. The discussion will explore what we, as educators and policy makers, can do to help students progress their learning given disruption due to Covid-19.

Key learning outcomes of the session will be, first, capture of the lessons learnt and, second, ideas as to how effective learning and teaching can be co-created post pandemic across the different educational tiers in terms of pedagogy and how we use and engage with technology. These will be considered in terms of how we address the poverty gap in the process.

There is an urgent need for debates on how some of the learning lost might be recovered through the repurposing of curricula and assessment and how equality, diversity and risk management strategies can be formulated for the benefit of disadvantaged groups. There are implications for assessment because, of the questionable effectiveness of education platforms created when the physical classroom is denied to students, along with patchy access to technology. In this respect, the Covid-19 outbreak has not only impacted on the immediate social and economic wealth of countries around the world, closing economies and causing various degrees of meltdown, but has also had significant implications for the long term accumulation of human capital. This has created both opportunities and challenges for institutions to rethink their attitudes towards how the future of learning might look and how this feeds into the skills that need to be accrued for the world of work in the future. In the short-term and in response to the pandemic the disruptions caused have led to and stimulated a rethinking of modes of delivery, how learning outcomes will be achieved using these different routes and how learning will be evaluated. For example, in the UK, much of the debate has been centred on assessment structures, whether GCSE, A level and BTEC exams should be coursework driven, the timetable of future exams and how pedagogic approaches might mitigate the immediate effects of the crisis. Although electronic platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google classroom have become more routine methods of delivery and teaching approaches have by and large been adapted to become a mix of asynchronous and synchronous this still does not adequately address the issue of learning poverty and the future divides that are likely to occur within societies in which the lower incomes tiers will not have had access to appropriate resources and technology. These problems have all emerged in addition to the challenges that staff and students have had to deal with because of, first, the logistics and speed in which change needed to occur; second, the differences in internet availability to end users even in wealthier economies such as the

UK; and third, variability of the quality of education that individuals receive. Whilst the pandemic has required educators, governments and institutions to deal with the immediate emergency of the situation, in future there will be a need for wider discussions around the long term effects of the pandemic on student learning and the opportunities that could be lost if strategies for combating educational poverty are not addressed early.

Theoretical Foundation/ Teaching Implications

Primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education models of education have all been affected in different ways but arguably with similar impacts. In the secondary sector students worry about what this means for their progression to higher education. University students worry about what this means for their learning experience and their future employment trajectory.

In the developing world the shocks experienced from the pandemic will undoubtedly interfere with any earlier paths that these countries tried to follow to ensure spaces and opportunities for learning. In the developed world the impact is likely to highlight the increasing of inequality of opportunity arising from disruption of education and restricted or no access to information technology among the less privileged.

For all students the public good issue relates to the implications of learning losses for economies of the future. How will the future workforce be able to transition in the digital era and what tools should they develop, nurture, exploit in their visions for the future? These issues present great challenges across the different stakeholder groups (i.e educators, employers and government, society, students) in the 21st century. How we innovate now and the decisions we make will have global implications given the interconnected world in which we live and work. Central to the discussion will be how we reposition education in light of the poverty challenges that have surfaced in response to the pandemic.

Even prior to the pandemic educational poverty differs significantly from region to region, country-to-country and across developed, developing and developed nations. The pandemic has also exposed the issue that access to the internet and other forms of modern educational technology exacerbate inequalities. In the long term widening educational inequalities have implications not only for the generation of students that are currently having their educational experiences and learning disrupted by Covid-19, but also for social welfare, economic growth, jobs and opportunities arising from shifting competitive advantage among regions and countries. This potential long-term divergence underlines the considerable importance of current educational management and teaching.

These factors are important because they influence the type of education that people receive and the resulting social and economic benefits that may or may not be attained in terms of inclusivity, equality and social mobility. In this sense the education system serves as a major contributor to how nations perform and compete on the global stage through their competitive ability.

The need for agility in times of crisis is important to minimise the disruption of the learning cycle of our students, but this needs to be set against a discussion around possible losses and gains in the learning and teaching environment. The resources, technology paths, and educational spaces available to make this realisable will differ given the disparities that exist between developed and developing countries. As we move from a scenario of a year of disruptive education to a more stable one, what are the skills that need to be developed and how might the picture of work look in the future in terms of both the great world initiatives (such as responses to climate change) and the local changes as institutions respond to the fall out of the pandemic? What has the crisis contributed to developing/highlighting the educational poverty gap within different communities and countries and what corrective mechanisms might help us alleviate this in future? What then are the challenges to the

opportunities for transformative learning and teaching practice resulting from our reflections as educators on our experiences and practices during the pandemic?

Session Description

The aim of the roundtable discussion will be to develop lively discussion around issues of poverty, education, practices and inequalities incurred as part of the pandemic by debating how this has disrupted the educational processes and by road mapping how effective teaching and learning can be implemented.

Using an interactive format between the session organisers and the audience, the session will focus on such topics and issues as:

- How can innovative pedagogic learning and teaching practices be developed for addressing the issues around learning poverty and future skills gaps that are likely to occur through these approaches to build inclusivity and diversity more generally?

- How can Covid-19 disruption to education be reframed so as to seal and join some of the gaps in education: nationally and internationally?

- Is there a way that the lessons learnt from Covid-19 can be used to alleviate education poverty more broadly?

- Are there common problems that need to be solved across the different education tiers and what might we do as educators to address them?

The session will start with introductory slides around the theme that set the scene for moving the conversation forward: Covid-19 and Education Poverty: Moving Beyond Disruption to Healing. This will be followed by a discussion of issues and problems around how the future of education might look and be reshaped as we recover from Covid-19 and the role of governments and educators in enabling the student experience to shift from disruption to healing. What are the opportunities that have arisen from our efforts as educators to alleviate the educational poverty gap and the disruptions to education that were generated by

the pandemic. The discussion will end with a brainstorming activity around possible solutions as we move forward from the pandemic phase to one of recovery in learning and teaching.

Through discussions, we will explore the factors that lead to education poverty, the constraints and the enablers of learning against the backdrop of what can be done as we move forward in reshaping education in the future. It is probably reasonable to assume any strategic planning by educational management pre-2020 would not have included scenarios such as "global pandemic". Moving swiftly to implement corrective cycles for managing teaching and learning post pandemic is a hot topic that needs to be addressed, along with corrective actions for reducing the poverty learning gap.