

STUDYING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to history's most significant educational disruption, affecting nearly 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle-income countries (UESCO CONCEPT, 2020).

Like all countries in the world, Armenia has not escaped the damage caused by the pandemic.

The impetus for the implementation of such a program has come from the initiative of the UNESCO's Associated Schools Network (ASPnet), which aims to raise awareness in the current COVID_19 epidemic and to study the education processes and conditions, quality of education, as well as advantages and disadvantages of distance learning in the general education system.

This study aimed to achieve the 4th goal of sustainable development in the general education system in pandemic conditions. During the program, students were introduced to the difficulties and benefits of hybrid and distance learning, the importance of participation, the opportunity to self-learn, and the need for empathy and mutual assistance during COVID-19.

UNESCO Associated and UNESCO Partner schools have been selected for participation in the research. These schools have actively participated in the previous projects implemented by UNESCO and have had involvement in different national and international projects.

The project results showed that learning is more effective with the parallel introduction of distance and face-to-face (traditional) learning. Hybrid learning has ensured high student performance by solving modern organizational problems and using modern information technologies.

Keywords and phrases: quality education, distance and hybrid learning, pandemic conditions, educational crisis.

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Համառոտագիր

ՔՈՎԻԴ-19 համաճարակը հանգեցրել է մատմության պատմության ոնջ ընթացքում կրթության համակարգի գործառնության ամենամեծ խափանմանը, որն ազդել է գրեթե 1.6 մլրդ սովորողների վրա ավելի քան 190 երկրներում և բոլոր մայրցամաքներում: Դպրոցների և այլ ուսումնական հաստատությունների փակումն ազդել է ուսանողական բնակչության 94 տոկոսի վրա, իսկ ցածր եկամուտ կամ միջինից ցածր եկամուտ ունեցող երկրներում այս ցուցանիշը հասել է 99 տոկոսի (Հայեցակարգ ՅՈՒՆԵՍԿՕ, 2020թ.): Ինչպես և աշխարհի բոլոր երկրները, Հայաստանը ևս անմասն չի մնացել համաճարակի հասցրած վնասից:

Նմանատիպ հետազոտության իրականացման համար խթան է հանդիսացել ՅՈՒՆԵՍԿՕ-ի ասոցացված դպրոցների ցանցի կողմից իրականացվող նախաձեռնությունը, որի նպատակն է ներկայիս ՔՈՎԻԴ-19 համաճարակի պայմաններում իրազեկել և հետազոտել հանրակրթությունում ընթացող կրթական գործընթացները, կրթության որակը, առցանց դասերի առավելությունները և թերությունները:

Սույն հետազոտության նպատակն է համաճարակային պայմաններում խթանել հանրակրթության ոլորտում կայուն զարգացման 4-րդ նպատակի իրագործումը: Ծրագրի ընթացքում սովորողներին ներկայացվել է ՔՈՎԻԴ-19-ի ժամանակ առցանց և հիբրիդ ուսուցման դժվարությունները և առավելությունները, մասնակցության կարևորությունը, ինքնուրույն և ինքնավար սովորելու կարողությունը, ապրումակցման և փոխօգնության կարևորությունը:

Հետազոտության իրականացման համար, որպես օբյեկտ ընտրվել են ՅՈՒՆԵՍԿՕ-ի ասոցացված և գործընկեր դպրոցներ, որոնք ակտիվ մասնակցություն են ունեցել ՅՈՒՆԵՍԿՕ-ի կողմից իրականացված նախկին ծրագրերում, ինչպես նաև ներգրավված են եղել տարբեր տեղական և միջազգային ծրագրերում:

Ծրագրի արդյունքները ցույց են տվել, որ կրթությունն առավել արդյունավետ է առցանց և առկա (հիբրիդ) ձևերի զուգահեռ իրականացման դեպքում: Հիբրիդային ուսուցումը հնարավորություն է տվել, օգտագործելով ժամանակակից տեղեկատվական տեխնոլոգիաներ և լուծելով կազմակերպչական որոշ խնդիրներ, ապահովել աշակերտների բարձր առաջադիմություն:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ. որակյալ կրթություն, առցանց և հիբրիդ ուսուցում, համաճարակային պայմաններ, կրթական ճգնաժամ:

ИЗУЧЕНИЕ КАЧЕСТВА ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ОБЩЕОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ СИСТЕМЕ В УСЛОВИЯХ КОРОНАВИРУСНОЙ ЭПИДЕМИИ

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Аннотация

Эпидемия COVID-19 привела к крупнейшему в истории расстройству системы образования, в затронувшем почти 1,6 миллиарда учащихся в более чем 190 странах и на всех континентах. Закрытие школ и других образовательных учреждений коснулось 94 процентов мирового контингента учащихся, причем в странах с низким и средним уровнем дохода этот показатель вырос до 99 процентов (Концепция ЮНЕСКО, 2020 г.). Как и все страны мира, Армения не избежала ущерба, нанесенного эпидемией.

Основой для проведения данного исследования послужила инициатива Сети Ассоциированных Школ ЮНЕСКО, целью которой являлось повышение осведомленности учеников и изучение образовательных процессов, качества образования, преимуществ и недостатков онлайн-обучения во время пандемии COVID-19.

Целью данного исследования было содействовать достижению 4-й цели устойчивого развития в общеобразовательной системе в условиях пандемии

коронавируса. В ходе программы студенты были ознакомлены с трудностями и преимуществами гибридного и дистанционного обучения, важностью участия, возможностью учиться самостоятельно, необходимостью проявления сочувствия и оказания взаимопомощи во время COVID-19.

Для проведения исследования были выбраны ассоциированные школы ЮНЕСКО, а также школы-партнеры, которые активно участвовали в предыдущих программах ЮНЕСКО и в различных местных и международных программах.

Результаты проекта показали, что обучение более эффективно при параллельном внедрении дистанционного и очного обучения (гибридная форма обучения). Гибридное обучение позволило обеспечить высокую успеваемость учащихся за счет решения современных организационных задач с использованием современных информационных технологий.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: качественное образование, дистанционное и гибридное обучение, пандемические условия, образовательный кризис.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the most significant disruption of education in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in all countries and continents and an additional 23.8 million children. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle-income countries (UESCO CONCEPT, 2020).

Education is not only one of the basic human rights; it is also a fundamental right on which the realization of other human rights directly depends. Moreover, education is a global process, the most powerful driving force for progress in achieving all 17 goals of sustainable development and a just, equal and inclusive base for peaceful society [3].

COVID 19 Worldwide and in Armenia

Coronavirus infection was registered in China in 2019, and in a short period of time, it quickly spread around the world, infecting millions of individuals. Coronavirus causes different respiratory diseases, severe illnesses and death. As a result the World Health Organization (WHO), on March 11, 2020, has declared the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic [5]. Soon, many measures were taken to prevent the spread of Coronavirus: borders were closed, educational institutions were closed, public meetings and gatherings were prohibited.

According to the document "National education responses to COVID-19: The situation of Latin America and the Caribbean", the suspension of in-person classes has jeopardized both the progress made towards fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal 4

and the targets set for 2030. The pandemic has brought consequences and costs with it, particularly for the most marginalized and at-risk populations.

It states that the unequal conditions in school infrastructure, access to computer equipment and connectivity at schools and homes, combined with deficits in the development of teachers' and students' ICT skills in the region's countries, have been significant factors that have led to expanding previously existing gaps in access and learning [2].

Like all the countries of the world, Armenia was not spared from the damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic. On March 1 2020, the first case of coronavirus infection was officially confirmed in the Republic of Armenia by a citizen from Iran. All those who had had contact with the latter were isolated, educational institutions were suspended until March 9. On March 16, a state of emergency was declared in Armenia, imposing several restrictions in all spheres of life [7].

Freedom of movement was restricted; rallies, vehicles, events and educational institutions were prohibited [1].

The education crisis has also affected the general education learners in the country. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, as well as the implementation of the 4th goal of sustainable development in the RA, the UNESCO Chair on "Education for Sustainable Development" of the Center for Ecological Noosphere Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia in 2020 initiated the project entitled "COVID19: Equal Right to Quality Education" in the UNESCO Associated and UNESCO Partner Schools.

The impetus for implementing the given research has also come from the initiative of the UNESCO's Associated Schools Network (ASPnet), which aims to raise awareness in the current COVID 19 pandemic and study the education processes conditions in the UNESCO Associated Schools.

To study the quality of education, the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, the UNESCO Chair on ESD has decided to survey those schools [8].

The main goal of the project is to introduce distance and hybrid learning students with:

- Advantages and disadvantages of distance learning
- Importance of participation
- Ability to study independently
- Ability to self-learning
- Importance of empathy
- Importance of mutual assistance

Human Resources, methodology and the course of the research

UNESCO Associated and UNESCO Partner schools have been selected for the implementation of the research. Priority was given to schools, which have actively participated in various projects implemented by UNESCO and have participated in different national and international projects. For example, in the research of "COVID_19. Equal Right to Quality Education" participated three UNESCO Associated Schools from Yerevan, Republic of Armenia: Yerevan basic school N 20 named after John Kirakosyan; Yerevan high school N 198; Yerevan basic School N 78 named after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan and one UNESCO partner school "Novoshkola" private educational centre from Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan.

After selecting schools, the UNESCO Chair team coordinated the whole research process and cooperated with school participants and coordinators. In addition, various online and in-person meetings were organized with schools.

During the meetings, participants were asked to develop a questionnaire to conduct a survey among their friends. The main purpose was to identify the educational processes in their school and the quality of education and its accessibility in the context of the COVID19 pandemic.

An online meeting was organized on 22th of April 2021, and final questionnaires for schools from the cities Yerevan and Ufa were developed.

Learners from 1-12 grades took part in the survey. As a result, a working group of 5-7 students has been formed in each school.

After conducting surveys, participants have made analyses and prepared slide shows, which were presented during the final meeting on May 25, 2021. Then participants were given certificates of participation.

Results and Discussions

The following data were obtained from a survey conducted by UNESCO partner "Novoshkola" private school from Ufa.

62.5% of the surveyed students think online education is inconvenient, 75% think technical subjects are complicated to teach, and 12.5% think creative subjects are more challenging to master. The remaining 12.5% consider that humanitarian is the most difficult one. 50% of the respondents had organizational problems, and the other 50% did not have any organizational problems. 87.5% easily adapted to this new form of education, but 12.5% did not adapt to distance learning.

According to the learners, in quarantine conditions, they learned to organize themselves, to be more disciplined. 46.9% of children surveyed said that education during the quarantine did not affect their performance, 35.4% said it had a negative

impact, and 17.7% did not notice any changes in their progress. The surveyed learners mentioned that in addition to several advantages, online education also has some disadvantages - 59.4% stressed the lack of communication and that online education takes more time than in-person education. 72.9% do not want online education to be the only method, and 50% mentioned that there were times when they did not want to join online classes due to a lack of live communication, despite being more comfortable at home.

A survey conducted by the basic school N 20 named after John Kirakosyan revealed that 90% of students participated in distance learning, 10% partially, and non-participating students made up 0%. 54% of students are in favour of parallel distance and in-person education. During the online lessons, 64% had technical problems, 20% had problems with knowledge acquisition, and 16% had other problems. 55% of respondents were unfamiliar with hybrid education, 21% were familiar with it, and 24% were partially aware of this form of education.

The mentioned advantages of online education were: a) reduction of the number of COVID_19 infected people, b) resources being not limited, c) free environment for students, d) feeling of comfort about not wearing a mask at home. Disadvantages included headaches, eye and back pain, cheating by students to skip lessons, technical problems, incomplete lessons, and lack of concentration. 80% think that teachers have always taken into account technical issues, and 20% think these issues have not been taken into account. 65% believe that COVID_19 affects students' academic performance, 10% do not think so, and 25% had difficulties answering. Did children from low-income families attend online classes? 29% of those surveyed said they did, while 30% said they did not, and 41% found it difficult to answer. 62% do not want to replace in-person education with online, 15% want, and 23% want to combine in-person education with online. About 58% of students think that online education deprives them of live communication, 10% do not think so, and 32% think that it limits human relationships.

According to the Yerevan High School No. 198 data, the 91% of students participated in online classes, 60% encountered technical problems, 20% had scientific problems, and 10% did not encounter any problems. 46% of the respondents were familiar with hybrid education and were in favour of in-person education. 73% of the respondents mentioned the reduction of the quality of education to 3 on a 5-point scale. The mentioned advantage of online education is that it allows listening to the lessons several times and spending the day more effectively. Disadvantages included technical problems, reduced academic level, lack of communication, incomplete understanding of information due to technical reasons, falsification of tests, and difficulty in the work of teachers.

The data of the basic school No. 78 named after Hayrapet Hayrapetyan are: 20% of the participants mentioned the preference for hybrid education, 30% are in

favour of online education, and 50% prefer in-person education. According to the participants, online education is one of the main requirements of the modern world. It has many advantages, helps to manage time, the student can join the lesson from a convenient place, and listen the material of the lesson several times. According to the participants, online lessons facilitate the process of learning.

Conclusion

Based on the above quantitative analysis, it can be concluded that the majority of students surveyed, both in Yerevan and Ufa, believes that online education alone is not an effective and convenient option for organizing the educational process. However, in their opinion, the use of online education tools can be considered effective in parallel with the traditional learning process improving the application of IT technologies:

A large number of **learners** stated that they do not want to replace the existing teaching method with the online version. Still, at the same time, they strongly emphasize the joint use of the two (hybrid education), as online education also has many positive features.

Even though information technologies have long been used in educational processes, students still highlight several gaps, which directly affect academic progress. These gaps are mainly technical. However, it can be said that in addition to technical problems, children still need to develop skills for self-organization and discipline, which is a significant obstacle to ensuring high-quality education through distance learning. As a result, almost all schools reported a decline in students' academic performance and difficulties in grasping educational materials.

Thus, hybrid education is the best way to ensure an equal right to quality education in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. Using modern information technologies, hybrid learning will enable students to achieve high progress by solving organizational problems.

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