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Global Educational Ramifications of COVID-19 on Minorities and Students Living in Poverty or Extreme Poverty: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Public education requires all stakeholders to collaborate as a community and focus on the essential factors that create a path for student progress, growth, and maturity. The result nurtures students from kindergarten to graduation and beyond and affords them opportunities to become efficacious members of their communities. Schools are a business operating on the premise of the service industry, working collectively with and for the communities they serve. Their operational parameters are to work with all stakeholders to successfully facilitate excellence in education for all students regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Recent COVID-19 school closures have opened dialogues concerning the ramifications of continued school closures, the slow reopening of schools, and the current chronic educational gap for minorities and students living at the poverty or *extreme poverty* levels. This literature review examines peer-reviewed articles, policy papers, editorials, and global research that examines how the COVID-19 school closures and slow reopening processes affect the equitable global education of minorities and children living in poverty or extreme poverty.

Keywords: early childhood education, school failure, addressing public policy changes

Introduction

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization began to receive reports of a strange but deadly virus first identified in the Wuhan Province of China (Achenbach, 2021). On January 30, 2020, World Health Organization declared a global emergency as COVID-19 had spread to more than 54 countries (Nicola et al., 2020). By March 2020, more than 215 countries and territories worldwide had identified cases of the virus. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund reported that 168 million of the world's learners were affected by persistent school closures along with economic shutdowns impacting millions of families across all borders and all nationalities (UNICEF, 2021). This literature review examines peer-reviewed articles, policy papers, editorials, and global research that investigates how the COVID-19 school closures and slow reopening processes affect equitable global education processes for minorities and children living in poverty or extreme poverty. The peer-reviewed articles, policy papers, relevant editorials, and research used in this review were selected based on topic relevancy, intercontinental reach, and foresight into the current plight of COVID-19's global educational effects on minorities and students living in poverty or extreme poverty. According to the World Bank, poverty is defined as families that have their basic needs of shelter, food, clean water, or have access to the basic services

provided by government or private agencies, while extreme poverty is defined as those who are deprived of their basic needs of shelter, food, clean water, and who do not have access to the service aids of the government or private agencies (The World Bank, 2022). According to the World Bank (2022), 736 million people worldwide subsist in extreme poverty.

Methods

This literature review is designed as a non-systematic review of the limited published articles, policy papers, and global research on the global closure of educational facilities. It does not seek to be an all-encompassing systematic approach on the topic of educational ramifications of COVID-19 school closures. Instead, it seeks to provide descriptive and predictive strategies and identify trends that help convey an understanding of the implications of educational closures for students worldwide living in such extreme conditions. Bias was limited by using globally written articles across cultures, preparedness, and socioeconomic statuses. The limitations of this review include the focus on educational ramifications of COVID-19 for minority students and those who live in poverty and extreme poverty and not on all students. Another limitation is the focus on educational practices during and directly after COVID-19 and not on those before COVID-19 closures.

Literature Review

The literature suggests the global educational ramifications of school closures due to COVID-19 combined with the limited to nonexistent online or distance learning platforms available to minorities and students living in poverty or extreme poverty have impacted this group with a ferocity that leaves the idea of educational recoupment as only an idealistic concept. Teachers report that a substantial percentage of students failed to log on to the online instructional platforms or complete their classwork (Middleton, 2020). Middleton (2020) identified areas of concern with the immediate loss of content instruction and with the longer-term effect due to the implementation of an array of different methods of learning. Additionally, the slow reopening of schools globally plays a critical role in the depth and scope of recapturing any lost learning or lessening the impact of lost educational opportunities for minority students as well as students living in poverty and extreme poverty. This educational projection is recognized as credible not only in the United States but globally. While research brings in concurrent data, the current research and other data presented in this review is a demonstration of the probable long-term global repercussions on learning and future planning from prolonged school closures and inadequate or non-existent online or distance learning platforms.

Global educational systems are facing harsher and more acute challenges rarely considered prior to COVID-19. The obligatory educational closures due to COVID-19 protocol during the 2019-20 school year and the limited opening of the 2020/21 school year thrust teachers and post-secondary faculty members into imprudent online modalities in which they were untrained and unfamiliar (Middleton, 2020). The precipitous movement to provide students with some form of instruction without adequate training or applications of consistent procedural practices impacted the ability of instructors to afford equal opportunity for learning to all students (Middleton, 2020). This instructional change coupled with the lack of appropriate infrastructure to implement reliable networks of internet services to support the online modality of teaching proved to be another fallacy in delivering adequate instruction to all students.

Examples

In India, where more than 320 million students were affected by the COVID-19 crisis, the shift to online teaching methods faced another crisis (Sahni, 2020). In the more rural areas of India, 14.9% of households had access to internet services which limited their ability to connect to the online instructional methods presented (Sahni, 2020). As an added encumbrance, as with most nations, most teachers in India were not prepared to teach using an online platform (Sahni, 2020). Globally, connectivity complications and teacher unpreparedness propagated ineffectual instructional paradigms. Another study indicated that the most disenfranchised populations, such as minorities and those living in poverty or extreme poverty, experienced disruptions in all sectors of life besides education due to COVID-19 (Fortuna et al., 2020). Additionally, poorer communities within larger cities and rural areas that harbor chronic toxic stress from pre-COVID-19 racial and social inequalities are facing even greater challenges with the added stressors of poor physical and mental health as well as poor future socioeconomic outcomes from the lack of face-to-face instruction (Fortuna et al., 2020; Toquero, 2020).

Another factor that impacted the COVID-19 school closures was the reliance on parents as the teacher and academic support systems in the online and distance learning environment. Jaeger and Blaakaek (2020) indicated families in Denmark showed educational inequality in the family's ability to provide effective learning support and opportunities according to their socioeconomic status (Jaeger & Blaakaek, 2020; Thomas & Rogers, 2020). Jaeger and Blaakaek (2020) also revealed that parents who were of higher socioeconomic status and education provided more academic support as well as outside resources to enhance the learning of their students than did parents of lower SES and educational background. Their research observed in many cases minorities and children of lower SES received less parental support and educational assistance from other resources of more than one hour a day than did their more affluent peers (Jaeger & Blaakaek, 2020; Thomas & Rogers, 2020). Parents of minorities and those living in poverty or extreme poverty are less likely to be proficient or consistent in providing the dimensions of learning opportunities necessary for successful content acquisition due to work responsibilities that help keep the family unit uninterrupted. Other important resources, such as online tutoring provided by outside industries, are less likely to be available to minorities and lower socioeconomic status families because of the subsequent costs.

Learning Theory

Life learning experiences occur when students are afforded opportunities or experiences that enhance their chances of interacting with historical sites or figures, cultures other than their own, and visual or conceptual participation in other types of learning experiences. These *life learning* experiences provide background knowledge that enhances the adeptness of young adults to interact or network with peers, thereby augmenting future earning potential. Two interrelated theories associated with *life learning* focus on ascertaining well-rounded learning. First, Albert Bandura's social learning theory accentuates the significance of how the environmental and cognitive factors influence learning (McLeod, 2016). In the case of COVID-19, as Bandura assessed, the environmental changes in learning influenced the cognitive factors of the learning process. Students worldwide experienced a sweeping reformation of their learning environment precipitously changing from face-to-face to the unfamiliar and often unsuccessful attempts at online learning without any form of prior cognitive preparation. These variations in learning

coupled with the absence of familiar faces, sights, and sounds of the classroom created an inadequate connection between the learning environment and the cognitive factors needed for active learning. Carl Rogers' experiential learning theory, postulates that the active process of learning through experiences is imperative to expand the core curriculum (The University of British Columbia, n.d.). His theory concurs with Bandura's social learning theory that students learn best from an active engagement learning environment. Both theories show the immense loss of learning potential experienced due not only to COVID-19 school closures but the loss of environmental or social learning. Minorities and students living in poverty or extreme poverty vary in their availability or the affordability of outside resources that provide the life learning experiences which help to intensify the imbalance of content learning which in turn has a large effect on their possible future earning potential increasing the probability of the continued cycle of escalating the poverty and learning gap for future generations.

Challenges of Access

The lack of academic support from parents of minorities and children living in poverty and extreme sectors has historically been augmented by teachers in the face-to-face approach. Conversely, in online and hybrid genre teaching methods, needed academic accommodations and supports are categorically more difficult to provide for more disadvantaged students. Data signifies the persistence of an educational gap between affluent students, minorities, and those living at or below the poverty or extreme poverty levels. These educational gaps are proliferated due to COVID-19 school closures and ineffectual online teaching practices. While schools are working with technology and learning communities to provide online capabilities with such resources as district-provided hotspots, utilizing national public television, radio, and printed materials some areas remain essentially inaccessible making the online or virtual mode an inequitable model. With current reports estimating 19% of all public-school children identified as living in poverty or extreme poverty coupled with the current distresses of economic downturns associated with COVID-19, the educational gap overshadows even the most ardent supporter of equal opportunity education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Thacker-King, 2019).

Current studies indicate students growing up in poverty or extreme poverty have a 13-point gap in their verbal ability at age three and this gap increases to a 30-point gap by the age of 13 (Doyle, 2020). Dorn et al. (2020) agreed that COVID-19 school closures could exacerbate the level of disparities in achievement among minorities and low SES groups such as those living in poverty or extreme poverty. Dorn et al. (2020) disclosed the widening gap caused by school closures could result in perpetual lifelong economic effects for the most disenfranchised students. Additionally, Lancker and Parolin' (2020) paper for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization identified the COVID-19 closures as a *Crisis in the Making*, affirming an estimated 138 countries closed schools affecting 91% of children across the globe making the school closure dilemma a global predicament. One of a series of briefing papers presented by the Centre for Economic Performance agreed with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's analysis signified the COVID-19 effects will have short-term and long-term effects on learning achievement for all students (Eyles et al., 2020). The authors also indicated that the disadvantaged would assume the brunt of educational and future economic loss.

Health and Social-Emotional Effects

The widening of learning and earning deficiencies among minorities and children living in poverty and extreme poverty is multifaceted and may increase in correlation to the timeframe of school closures as well as the interim of their slow reopening (Eyles et al., 2020; Sahni, 2020). Schools provide more than learning for students: they foster social and emotional nurturing and help to impede food insecurities—two critical factors of inequalities identified in educational outcomes (Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Other critical roles schools play in the lives of children go far beyond core content learning and social and emotional growth and support. Schools provide a variety of resources for children such as advocating for healthier lifestyles, providing physical and mental health counseling, and offering a safety net to assist in navigating issues caused not only by COVID-19 but other environmental issues as well (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020; Sahni, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Schools, churches, and other local charitable organizations are facing proliferated requests from families for services including food assistance, mental health, and family counseling assistance during COVID-19. The pandemic has helped to refocus community efforts to address the inequalities in these areas by ensuring the availability of services to those most in need (Fortuna et al., 2020). Post-COVID-19 returns to academia pose massive challenges to find malleable approaches to repairing the damage caused by the interruptions to the learning focuses of pre-COVID-19 (Daniel, 2020). Other researchers indicated that the psychological stressors of confinement coupled with the lack of interaction with classmates, friends, and teachers create problematic and persistent effects on children, especially those who are most vulnerable (Wang et al., 2020).

Global Ramifications

COVID-19 has thrust global educational systems into a hard reset, necessitating global educational communities to reevaluate current teaching methods to acclimate teaching modes that address post-COVID-19 student instructional needs. Azorin (2020) stressed that the use of passive forms of learning such as the face-to-face lecture approach was already receiving criticism worldwide as an archaic method of instruction. Azorin (2020) provided a Spanish perspective of only two variables that hinder the learning of minorities and children living in poverty and extreme poverty, prolonged school closures and insufficient models of online formats. Hollweck and Doucet (2020) concurred with the disruption of face-to-face learning and added that Canada also shared these concerns. Azorin (2020) showed the pre-COVID-19 educational system was notably vulnerable, taunting high dropout rates, academic failures, poor culture networking, and collaboration efforts as hindering equality in education. Sahni (2020) indicated that most countries face the same vulnerabilities in their current education paradigms. She also stated that taking a village to raise a child requires communities to empower themselves to teach the child (Sahni, 2020). This statement communicates the insight that as a global educational community there needs to be a global collaborative effort to find effective methods of enhancing education for all students regardless of socioeconomic status.

Recommendations

The use of synchronous and asynchronous learning modalities, as well as the eventual slow return to face-to-face mode, will imprint the learning routines of post-COVID-19 schools and beyond. The probability of recouping the lost educational opportunities for minorities and students living

in poverty or extreme poverty requires a global commitment to identifying which factors are impeding student learning. Deficits in the existing online models have proliferated the loss of student learning by not directly identifying and investing in the challenges facing student learning, including the upgrading of technology and infrastructure to facilitate the online teaching models. Accessibility to all educational resources either through print, recorded, or live modes and through radio transmission is imperative to enhance equal learning opportunities.

Meeting students' basic needs before turning to academics has never been more apropos than with the global COVID-19 crisis. Maslow (1987), a noted American psychologist, created the *hierarchy of needs* -a model describing how the basic human needs of students must be met before higher-order psychological ones can be met. Benjamin Bloom, another noted American psychologist, authored *Bloom's Taxonomy*, a similar model of complexity about learning outcomes (Siddiqi & Wuori 2020). Schlesselman et al. (2020) agreed that students handle the stress of COVID-19 differently and concur that when students' basic needs are not met, they will struggle with focusing on or excelling in their academics. It is not possible to obviate the inevitable educational outcomes for minorities and students living in poverty or extreme poverty in a situation where basic needs prevent learning. Schools have long played a pivotal role in providing not only educational materials for families but also many additional resources to help support family units. Resources vary by location and needs of the families but may include food, housing, and medical care. Another area seen as preventative for student success is food and housing insecurities. *Maslow before Bloom* has long been the mantra of educators (Schlesselman et al., 2020). The lack of these basic necessities is a contributing factor in low or lack of educational progress (which may also include behavioral concerns) in minorities and children living in poverty or extreme poverty. Thacker-King (2019) noted one in four children live in poverty or extreme poverty and face food and shelter insecurities. Fortuna et al. (2020) suggested minorities and children living in poverty or extreme poverty incur substantial risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder and other long-term mental health issues compounding the need for more community and mental health professionals beyond what the educational communities can provide. While schools have evolved in their provision of educational services over the past two decades, they are struggling to keep abreast of the mental health needs of students.

Findings

The fundamental implications from this review indicate that prolonged global school closures combined with sustained implementation of online learning or virtual platform and other non-face-to-face platforms causing non-interaction with learned faculty will not only diminish the acumen of all students but will also severely affect the abilities of minority children living in poverty or extreme poverty to maintain or close existing educational gaps. Therefore, significant planning and organization should be undertaken by policymakers, school districts, and other stakeholders to circumvent the deepening of prevailing learning gaps or the widening of categorized learning gaps.

Anticipatory steps should be enacted by policymakers, school districts, and other stakeholders to identify strategies, adapt instruction, and supply supplemental instructional resources to meet better the challenges associated with the COVID-19 educational crisis for our most vulnerable populations. Teachers and other school personnel should be competently trained in the mechanisms of hybrid classes, virtual learning, video conferencing, and other distance learning

platforms to enable appropriate instruction for all students focusing on the special challenges of minorities, and students living in poverty or extreme poverty.

Conclusions

The obvious challenges faced by countries, states, districts, communities, and families require a multifaceted approach. Post COVID-19 educational efforts presented in this review necessitate collaboration between all stakeholders to consider the global ramifications of COVID-19 not only on the educational sectors but also on the future economic earning capacity for minorities and children living in poverty and extreme poverty. Beyond meeting the basic essential needs of students, global considerations must be given to the mental and physical health of students in conjunction with their educational provisions. Collaborative efforts must include a refocusing and redevelopment of student learning engagement fundamentals, content availability, infrastructure, and educational models as well as more concentration on the evolution of technology-led learning to accomplish true lasting success in the elimination of educational and economic disparities for minorities and children living in poverty and extreme poverty.

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