UNICEF Education COVID-19 Case Study
China – Distance learning and school reopening
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China was the first country to face the COVID-19 pandemic, which abruptly changed the lives of over 230 million school-aged children as the country moved to close its schools.

Keeping children learning

Rapidly, the country moved over to teaching the national curricula on online platforms, including the mammoth National Cloud Platform for Educational Resources and Public Service, which has been able to serve millions of simultaneous users. For those children with limited internet access, China offers TV lessons. These complementary digital and mass communication channels have brought structured learning opportunities and a sense of routine and normalcy to the legions of school children in the country. Teachers received rapid training offered via online tutorials and massive open online courses. In the highly connected country, many are able to follow up on their students using social media and messaging.

UNICEF has added value by bringing socio-emotional learning to the fore and empowering parents and caregivers as key educational partners. Since 17 February 2020, it has published weekly activity-based parenting messages and tips to support children's psychosocial needs through the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) sub-page on UNICEF China's WeChat, Weibo, and Xinhua Net (social media) accounts. The number of views recorded to date reached 5,056,571 across these three platforms.

UNICEF is also working to ensure that the needs of younger children who may otherwise be overlooked are also served through daily posts on the "Morning call for babies (children)." Each post includes several key messages and a five-minute

short video on topics related to early childhood education, aiming to raise parents' and teachers' awareness about children's well-being and to support their education and care practices. The number of views recorded up until 7 April 2020 stands at 6,650,855.

School re-opening – opening up better

Schools in China are reopening slowly, and UNICEF is working hard to support the Government in this new phase to open back better. For example, UNICEF has surveyed students and teachers, which revealed many are anxious about going back to school and designed a responsive communication package. This is an important step as such surveys allow educational authorities and partners to listen to children and other key members of school communities and tailor back-to-school activities accordingly. It also affords the opportunity to prevent or respond to stigmatization.

KEY FEATURES

Key features of the China approach were as follows:

- using complementary high-tech and low-tech learning platforms in a flexible manner to reach a greater number of children,

- having national curricula and education resources available digitally, facilitating a rapid switch to distance learning during this emergency,

- mobilising key partners quickly, including ICT companies to boost connectivity and bandwidth to enable millions to use online learning platforms, but also teachers, parents and caregivers,

- engaging celebrities, such as UNICEF China Ambassador Wang Yuan, to amplify messaging, as well as submit first post on #safereturntoschool,

- combatting potential stigma, and

- listening to children and teachers to inform school re-opening, including to their emotional needs, to help schools to open back better.

EMERGENT LESSONS LEARNED

- China was able to switch rapidly to online learning nationwide for all Grades 1 to 12 very quickly. It also responded quickly to support teachers in their new role as facilitators of online learning, including by providing online training, teaching strategies and examples. We can all learn from this experience.

- UNICEF added value in three main areas: 1) social emotional learning, 2) child-friendly messages, which were first informed by listening to students, parents, teachers, and principals, and 3) psycho-social support for all age-groups of children, parents or caregivers, and teachers. UNICEF social media accounts were used as a nimble way to both solicit views and to loop back to key groups.

- The results of the rapid surveys that UNICEF used to seek the views of students, teachers, principals, and parents informed the development of the package of messages that are being used in the safe return to school campaign unfolding currently. The messages are a complete package, tackling prevention, learning and other concerns. This required UNICEF to adopt an intersectoral approach: education, communication, health, and gender working together.

- In a large-scale emergency, age-appropriate psycho-social support is critical for children. The pandemic provoked fear, anxiety and loneliness, all of which may affect learning, but also their overall health and well-being. Similar support for teachers and parents also needs to be factored in.

- To be relevant in a rapidly evolving emergency, it is important for UNICEF to be agile and keep pace with Government counterparts and to engage in constant and efficient communication, leveraging technology to do so.

- The crisis represents an opportunity to engage on longer-term planning to strengthen the resilience of the education system and, in particular, emergency preparedness and response. Digital resources and remote learning platforms should be included in national plans. More thought should be given to preparing teachers to facilitate online learning. This deeper planning could also ensure more equitable access, for example, to bridge better the digital divide for those without devices or internet access and to make the necessary arrangements to support the specific needs of students with disabilities.

OTHER RESOURCES

For other resources, including more case studies, please click here and filter by "Area of Work" (Education).

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