EDUCATION ANALYTICS SERVICE: TEACHER DEVELOPMENT MULTI-YEAR STUDIES

Impact of COVID-19 on teaching practices in Lao PDR, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu: A discussion paper for practitioners and policymakers

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to education systems around the world. Many governments responded abruptly, quickly closing schools and transitioning to home learning. This paper explores the impact of extended school closures due to COVID-19 on teaching and student learning in three countries – Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), Timor-Leste and Vanuatu.

This research extends the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s multi-year Teacher Development Studies, which are commissioned under the Evaluation Analytics Service (EAS). This study series involves the investigation of DFAT-funded teacher development initiatives in Laos, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu to understand the extent to which the investments have improved teaching quality and student learning. In 2021, regular data collection for the study was extended to include COVID-19 impact questions, thereby providing an opportunity to understand a wide range of education stakeholder perspectives on their experience of transitioning and implementing home learning, the impact on teaching practices and student learning, and the level of support teachers were provided during the pandemic.

Stakeholders from across the three countries found immense challenges transitioning and adapting to home learning, thereby providing insights into system-wide capacities in preparing for and responding to crises, and specifically in the case of implementing an effective home learning strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Common findings were:

- Principals, teachers and parents received limited guidance from government on how to effectively transition to home learning and back to face-to-face classes, and ensure learning continuity during the pandemic.
- In Laos and Timor-Leste, the government developed online/TV/radio programs, while in Vanuatu schools developed home packages. Limited access to telecommunications infrastructure meant most students could not access such government programs and teachers had difficulties communicating with parents and students to support home learning.
- The successful implementation of home learning in each country relied on parental support, but many parents were unable to assist their children due to low levels of literacy, time availability and lack of guidance from schools.
- Upon face-to-face classes resuming, teachers faced challenges with adjusting their practices to balance curriculum expectations (given they had to revisit previous lessons), provide remedial support to students, and manage reduced class hours due to health and safety protocols.

Based on these findings, this paper presents some recommendations for practitioners and policymakers to consider for building resilient and adaptive school systems that can prepare and respond to crises:

- **Evaluate communication infrastructure readiness at the community-level:** a government assessment of communication readiness could support the identification of gaps for future investment priorities to support home learning success in the longer term.
- **Integrate parents in planning and execution of home learning strategies:** engage parents and communities as key partners in home learning and build in the provision of active and ongoing support to parents and communities as part of design and implementation.
- **Build and maintain peer support networks for teachers:** build and maintain peer networks to support teachers during and after crises and provide ongoing teacher professional learning to better prepare them for crises.

- **Develop home learning strategies and activities:** develop home learning strategies and activities that teachers can readily access and implement during crises.
- **Identify students' learning gaps after school closure periods:** build teachers' capacity in classroom-based assessment practices and provide guidance on their use following crises.
- **Establish clear lines of communication between ministries and schools:** ensure there are clear lines of communication during crises between ministries and schools.

Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic saw worldwide disruptions to regular schooling. Public health measures led to extended school closures to curb the risk of COVID-19 infections. This impacted classroom teaching and learning as students were directed to complete home learning activities. The concern with school closures is that it risks student learning progress and may entrench inequality of teaching and learning, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

This paper explores and discusses the impact of extended school closures due to COVID-19 on teaching and learning in Laos, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu, which are part of DFAT's multi-year Teacher Development Studies commissioned under the Evaluation Analytic Service (EAS). The three country studies investigate how DFAT's investment in teacher development initiatives have led to improved teaching practices and student learning.[1]

Specifically, this paper explores:

- The qualitative experience of transitioning and implementing remote learning.
- The impact school disruption has had on teaching practices and student learning.
- Support provided to teachers during the pandemic.

A primary objective of this research is to support education practitioners and policymakers to understand the comparative experience of school disruption, and system-wide capacity to effectively transition and implement remote learning. It is hoped that this research can contribute to DFAT's understanding of the COVID-19 impact on teaching and learning in the three countries, as well as provide a starting point for discussion among stakeholders on how to build a resilient and adaptive school system that supports continuity of teaching and learning during times of crises.

Methodology

The EAS was able to expand on the existing three country studies to collect data in 2021 on the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. For this report data were collected from a series of qualitative, in-depth interviews with teachers, school principals, as well as pedagogical support advisers in Laos, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu. In Laos a survey was also included for teachers, school principals and pedagogical advisers, and in Vanuatu, community focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs provide a deeper understanding

of teaching and learning disruptions from parent and community perspectives. For consistency, data collection in each country focused on the following aspects: length of teaching disruption; how the disruption impacted teaching; and the types of support provided to teachers during the disruption.

The table below summarises the sample and research participants in each country that responded to COVID-19 questions.

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[1] For more information on the Teacher Development Studies and EAS, go to: Stability for education |

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (dfat.gov.au)

While there is an existing and growing body of research on COVID-19 impacts, a key feature of this research is that it provides insights into lived experiences of a range of education stakeholders on the impact of COVID-19 school disruptions.

Early global research on the education impacts of COVID-19 pandemic has explored aspects of system capacity and estimated the extent of "learning loss". This meant exploring themes such as teacher readiness for online teaching (Howard et al., 2021), strategies on remote learning (Mahmood, 2021; Results for Development, 2021), or areas for future curriculum adaptation for home learning (Zhao & Watterston, 2021).[2] The themes that emerged from the discussion and analysis have so far led to early conclusions that extended school disruptions undermined governments' capacity to prepare and coordinate system-wide crisis response.

This paper provides insights into stakeholders' experiences of adapting to a remote learning system, which highlighted systemic inequalities in transition and adaptation to home learning (Greenhow et al., 2021).

While several preliminary studies have been published on estimating the extent of "learning loss" due to extended school closures (Azevedo et al., 2020; RISE Programme, 2022), models and estimates provide system-level overview and may not be sufficient to provide on-the-ground experience of school disruption and adaptation. This paper provides empirical, qualitative evidence of COVID-19 impact on teaching practices and student learning.

Lao PDR	Vanuatu	Timor-Leste
Case studies in 12 schools across 4 provinces: • 33 interviews with principals, Grade 1 teachers and pedagogical advisers	Case studies in 8 schools across 2 provinces: • 44 interviews with principals/head teachers, teachers, school improvement officers, provincial trainers and provincial education officers • 13 focus group discussions with parents	Case studies in 8 schools across 2 municipalities: • 61 interviews with school coordinators, adjuntos, teachers, mentors, municipal directors, inspectors, and superintendents
Questionnaires to 345 principals and 363 Grade 1 teachers in 355 schools		34 short interviews with teachers in 16 schools across 4 municipalities

Table: Summary of sample and research participants in each country that responded to COVID-19 questions

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[2] Various terms have been used to describe distance education in lieu of extended school closures, which include (but not limited to) online teaching, remote learning, online learning, distance education, distance teaching, distance learning, etc. For this paper, we will use the term "home learning" throughout our discussion and analysis. Home learning is defined here as any learning activities for students to complete by or without direction in lieu of school closures. The term is used to allow for flexibility in analysis as online facilitation of teaching and learning as well as distance education programs are optional, rather than core, elements of the adaptation strategy to adjust to suspended in-person classroom teaching and learning.

Country level findings

Each country findings in relation to COVID-19 are explored individually, outlining perspectives from teachers, principals, pedagogical advisors, and (where possible) from the community on their experiences of adapting to home learning, their perspectives on the impact on teaching and student learning, and their experience of supports provided to teachers during the pandemic.

Laos

Schools in Laos entered lockdown for approximately three months from March 2020. Teachers, principals, and pedagogical advisors were interviewed and surveyed on their adjustment to COVID-19. **They highlighted the challenges of implementing home learning activities due to limited access to telecommunications infrastructure and low levels of parent literacy, and difficulties for teachers and students in catching up with lessons as in-person classes resumed.**

Challenges to adapting and transitioning to home learning

Case study teachers, principals and pedagogical advisors reported that students were provided with varying levels of advice and support for home learning. There were recommendations from sub-national staff for teachers to provide homework and facilitate home learning using television programs or online learning watching Lao language programs on YouTube. Many case study respondents reported that remote learning was not feasible due to challenges related to rural locations, limited access to the internet and low levels of parental literacy.

Communication challenges limited the extent of the home learning strategy and its implementation in Laos. Communication infrastructure readiness, which is understood as having the necessary access to internet and mobile reception, is a crucial element to enable the success of home learning. Access to the

internet was noted as a particularly critical utility as more access can enable parents and communities to access more learning resources for self-directed learning at home (Dreesen et al., 2020). Interview respondents reported that access to internet or mobile phone reception were limited, which made it difficult for students to access home learning material or teacher by using mobile phone or the internet. Communication challenges discouraged respondents from pursuing distance or online learning strategies because it meant that home learning was not a feasible and effective strategy to replace schools. Further, this also meant that support provided to students for remote learning was quite limited (particularly in case study schools in the Southern region).

Respondents also reported difficulties in engaging with parents to provide support to student learning. This was partly attributed to parents' illiteracy, but also that parents "did not know how to help their children to learn from home". This suggested that parents' support is important in maintaining student learning during school closure and its absence is a critical challenge for the education sector's ability to implement contingency plan during the pandemic.

These challenges meant schools had to find alternative ways to support student learning. For example, in the Northern region, provincial staff suggested students in urban areas be provided homework, but not students from rural areas. In another, teachers encouraged students to study with siblings or their friends who live nearby.

The findings from the survey confirmed that online teaching was not a common mode of curriculum delivery and that elements of offline teaching was preferred. This suggests that preparation for distance education curriculum is not yet unified across the country. Few surveyed teachers and principals adapted lessons for online delivery, but nearly all teachers and principals

agreed that lessons were adapted for offline delivery.

Impact on teaching and learning

The findings suggest that COVID-19 school closures had an impact on teaching practices and student learning. Most case study respondents confirmed that students forgot lessons upon returning to school. Thus, teachers repeated lessons to cover the curriculum from during school closure to catch up with pre-pandemic learning. Some teachers reported that they also forgot the lessons given the lack of teaching continuity after extended school closure.

Many teachers reported they could not cover all the new curriculum content. In a few cases, teachers reported they adapted their lessons so that they covered content that were deemed a priority (such as Lao language) instead of less important subjects (such as art or sports). However, some teachers resumed teaching as per their practices before the lockdown. And only three of the 15 case study teachers reported assessing their students when classes resumed. Overall, this suggested that many teachers were not provided with advice and support on how to manage curricular expectations and delivery upon school resuming and how to transition students back to school and provide remedial support.

Supports for teachers during disruptions

Case study teachers reported very limited, or no support was provided to them by other teachers, their principal, or their pedagogical adviser to teach during the disruption. Support from pedagogical advisers focused on COVID-19 prevention measures. Some teachers raised the challenge of relying on parents to provide support to student learning.

Participating in collaboration activities was also limited following disruptions. Survey teachers and principals were asked about time spent participating on support or collaboration activities on Lao language teaching (the focus of the EAS Study) with colleagues following the COVID-19 disruption, whether time increased, decreased or

stayed the same compared to before the disruption. Around two-thirds of teachers surveyed reported that their time spent on each of the activities had decreased or stayed the same. As students received minimal guidance at home for learning and teachers were pressed for time to deliver the curriculum, this trend highlighted the need for teacher support for when in-person classes resumed.

Timor-Leste

Depending on the municipality, Timor-Leste schools entered lockdown for approximately one to three months between March to June 2020. During this time, most schools were closed throughout the lockdown but some schools stayed open, or closed periodically, depending on the local municipality case numbers. Teachers, mentors, school coordinators, inspectors, *adjuntos*, and regional directors were interviewed about the impact of COVID-19 on teaching. **They highlighted the challenges of accessing students during school closures, and difficulties adjusting teaching practices to meet curriculum expectations when schools shifted to an alternating class schedule.**

Challenges to adapting and transitioning to home learning

Case study respondents reported there were limited strategies on how to deliver curriculum through home learning for students when schools closed. The adjustment to the pandemic was shaped by expectations of how students learn at home. Many case study teachers said they believed the students were too young to understand the severity of the situation and the need to continue with learning, and therefore self-directed learning activities were not feasible. Other teachers mentioned that parents had limited involvement with their children's learning during the lockdown period.

Inspectors, school coordinators, teachers and mentors explained that some teachers took the initiative to contact parents and students to monitor their self-directed learning activities, and

check access to the government developed online/TV/radio 'study at home' program.

However, as reported in Laos, the communication infrastructure readiness in Timor-Leste posed a challenge for students to continue with home learning, particularly in rural areas. Respondents reported that the online and televised learning programs developed by the education ministry were largely inaccessible due to limited access to internet, mobile reception, and televisions or radios. Some respondents confirmed that only private schools were able to provide online learning for students.

Some teachers attempted to address this issue by providing families with physical resources for self-directed learning, however they were often unable to monitor students' progress. This was especially difficult in rural areas due to limited connectivity and transportation, compounding the impact on the same families who were least likely to have access to the government's 'study at home' program, due to lack of electricity and internet connection.

These experiences suggest that effective home learning using either online or distance learning modalities, would be a difficult and expensive strategy to implement in Timor-Leste, requiring significant investment in telecommunications infrastructure and hardware distribution.

Impact on teaching and learning

Case study respondents reported that teaching was significantly disrupted because teachers were not able to cover the curriculum as expected. The challenges seem to stem from limited capacity to deliver the curriculum during school closures, ongoing student absences when classes resumed, and the challenges of resuming in-person but staggered classes without a modified curriculum.

Timor-Leste resumed in-person classes with an alternate on and off class schedule. The alternating class schedule meant students were divided into multiple groups and attended school in an alternating schedule, either daily or weekly on-off classes, to reduce the number of students in the classroom. The resumption of in-person teaching and learning could be viewed as a positive trend for a country to restore a level of normality. However case study teachers and administrators reported that they struggled to cover curriculum as teaching hours for students were reduced to accommodate the new schedule. There were some attempts to support students' learning at home by making books available and assigning homework. In some schools, Saturday catch-up classes were also held.

Supports for teachers during disruptions

Case study teachers reported that they received some supports for both remote and in-person teaching and learning. During school closures, they were provided with Lafaek magazine from Care Australia (Care Australia, n.d.). UNICEF also provided masks, disinfectants, and soaps to be used in schools. Government support was focused on health and safety protocols rather than pedagogical or curriculum support, such as provision of masks, hygiene kits, health and safety training for school staff, evaluation of school reopening plans, and disinfecting classrooms. While the ministry did develop online and televised programs, there were no clear guidelines for teachers and principals on how to modify curriculum for home learning or to sustain teaching practices during school closure.

However, case study interviews suggested that the pre-existing peer support network (Grupu Traballu ba Professor - GTP) established through the DFAT-funded initiative became an important community of support for teachers to adapt during disruptions. Case study teachers mentioned that the long-running peer support network was an important outlet to connect with each other and share stories on how they could approach difficulties in classroom. During the pandemic, it was an avenue to share information. But while teachers were able to support each other through existing networks, they reported that direct support from school leadership, mentors, and inspectors was varied. Many teachers reported that they received continued support throughout school closures. Some

reported GTPs and mentoring sessions were suspended when schools were closed. Others reported that they received no support. Interviews with the mentors, inspectors, and school coordinators revealed that they tried where possible to support teachers, but support from administrators was focused on sharing information to mitigate health risks from COVID-19 rather than pedagogical support.

Vanuatu

Schools in Vanuatu entered lockdown for approximately up to two months from the latter part of March 2020. Tropical Cyclone Harold also hit Vanuatu on 5 April 2020, causing destruction to mainly the northern islands, and extending school closures in some areas. Interviews were held with teachers, principals, School Improvement Officers (SIOs), and Provincial Trainers (PTs) about the impact on teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. FGDs collected insights on parents' and communities' experiences of home learning throughout the school closure period. **They highlighted the challenges that parents faced in supporting their children with the home learning activities, and difficulties for teachers and students in catching up with lessons once face-to-face classes resumed**.

Challenges to adapting and transitioning to home learning

The case study data suggests the transition to learning from home was abrupt and parents were not well-equipped to teach students throughout the distance learning period. Students in Vanuatu were provided with "home packages" to continue learning from home. These home packages included a series of self-contained activities that students could complete during the school closure. Such packages were prepared by teachers, under principal supervision, to make sure that students were able to continue with the curriculum.

One of the significant challenges to the success of Vanuatu's home learning strategy was that it was

difficult to sustain student engagement at home. Case study respondents reported students not completing home packages and struggling to keep up with classroom learning when schools reopened. Some parents reported that they struggled with supporting their children's learning at home and balancing their work commitments. Others reported that parent literacy levels, especially in rural and remote parts of the communities, made it difficult to support students with home learning. Teachers also reported that only a small number of parents contacted teachers to ask for help on home packages despite having their contact details. There was also a lack of resources in most students' homes to support learning.

Impact on teaching and learning

One of the primary concerns that teachers reported was their inability to complete their teaching plans due to the disruption and levels of student engagement during the school closure period and upon classes resuming. Teachers said they were unable to effectively introduce new concepts through home packages, and provide targeted support to students. During school closure periods, parents and other respondents reported that students did not complete the activities in the home package provided. Some parents reported that students were not used to continuing with unstructured learning in the home environment. The lack of discipline upon returning to school was noted as a particular concern as some teachers reported that students "went on a holiday" during the school closure period. Principals, teachers, and parents were aware of this issue but they reported that they found it difficult to monitor student behaviour in the community outside the classroom structure.

Some teachers observed that, upon the resumption of in-person teaching and learning, students failed classroom tasks, class attendance was an issue, and they struggled with the pace of curriculum. When face-to-face learning resumed, teachers reported that they implemented remedial strategies to their classes, such as repeating or going over topics slowly, or covering

less topics from the curriculum. Teachers said they were exhausted because they had to balance curriculum expectations and students' need for additional support in context of reduced class teaching hours due to health and safety density limits.

Supports for teachers during disruption

Challenging conditions in Vanuatu meant that systems-level support (including funding to instructions for pedagogy) for teachers was critical to make sure that they were able to continue with teaching during the pandemic. Standard teaching practices for in-class learning were diverted to prepare home packages, such as developing activities for home learning and delivering home packages. Some provincial-level staff reported that they were confident in schools' preparation of home packages and transition to home learning during the school closure period. This assumes teachers and principals that received system-level support were well placed to lead the transition to home learning in their community.

However, there was limited organisational and pedagogical support provided to teachers to implement an effective home learning strategy. Teachers reported that there was little to no training or instruction received from the education ministry to develop home packages. Some teachers reported that they received support from their principal on how to modify the curriculum for home learning, but others received only logistical support such as photocopying material to prepare the package. There was a time pressure on teachers to prepare home packages to be delivered to students on time. Teachers reported that they relied on peer support to exchange information and cover the extra teaching responsibilities to put together the home package.

The other critical challenge was that the education ministry did not reimburse schools for expenses during the development of home packages. The lack of a consistent support provided for teachers from the ministry down to principals during the school point to a need to develop a focused, teacher-oriented approach for future policies and crisis responses.

Common themes and recommendations

This section discusses some common themes emerging from the country-level findings, and corresponding recommendations for consideration. Respondents confirmed that a vast majority of stakeholders from across the three countries found immense challenges transitioning and adapting to home learning, thereby providing insights into system-wide capacities to implement an effective home learning strategy. The hope is that lessons learned from Laos, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu can inform future policy responses and build an education system resilient to a range of crises, in addition to pandemics. For example, principals, teachers, and parents in Vanuatu, recognised that there was a strong need to prepare for school closures especially for disrupted schooling in cyclone season.

Evaluate communication infrastructure readiness at the community-level

A government assessment of communication infrastructure readiness could support the identification of gaps for future investment priorities to support home learning success in the longer term.

Findings from all three countries suggested that access to community-level communication infrastructure was a crucial element to facilitating effective home learning strategies and one of the key barriers to students and parents being able to undertake home learning activities. Findings reported that students were provided with a variety of take-home activities with the view that these alone would be sufficient to sustain learning during school closure periods. The success of home learning assumed that communities have the necessary infrastructure to help support children to complete home learning activities.

Access and availability of mobile phones, television or radio, and the internet would help parents to have more learning material to guide

their children through the school closure period. In Laos, for example, some students in rural and remote areas were not provided with home learning, because these students would not be able to access the ministry learning programs delivered via television, radio, or the internet. Furthermore, limited access to communication infrastructure created challenges for parents to interact with educators. The findings in all three countries showed the importance of having teachers that could reach parents to provide advice on home learning strategies and to monitor student progress.

Given the contextual challenges in each of the three countries, it is likely that different modalities will continue to be needed to support home learning, with a mix of low- and no-tech learning supports. A government assessment of communication infrastructure readiness will support the development of a home learning strategy that is fit for context, and signal priority infrastructure investments.

Integrate parents in planning and execution of home learning strategies

Engage parents and the communities as key partners in home learning and build in the provision of active and ongoing support to parents and communities as part of design and implementation.

Active parental support to students' home learning was integral in maintaining student engagement throughout the school closure period. Interviews from across the three countries highlighted a trend where teachers provided home learning material with the aim that students could complete the largely self-directed activities, with some parental support. This was met with disappointing results as teachers found students returning to in-person classes had not completed the home learning activities. The success of home learning

assumed that parents would have the requisite literacy levels, time and understanding of how to support their children.

Maintaining student engagement to complete the home learning material would need active and ongoing parental support. This means future home learning strategies need to make clear parents' role in supporting students' education at home, through adequate instruction for parents and ongoing communication between parents and teachers, and monitoring. In Vanuatu's case, for example, while teachers prepared home packages for students, many said the instructions for parents were inadequate. A sustained engagement between schools with parents and students throughout the home learning period could foster a disciplined learning routine at home to support students' learning throughout the school closure period. Acquiring a community-wide support could come from the teacher level, by developing instruction material targeted for parents, or at the government level, by organising a public campaign to spread information on home learning as part of the crisis response management.

Build and maintain peer support networks for teachers

Build and maintain peer networks to support teachers during and after crises and provide ongoing teacher professional learning to better prepare them for crises.

Teachers in all three countries were not well prepared to teach remotely and transition back to in-person classes. A common theme was the limited support to teachers provided by ministries and colleagues during and after school closure periods. For example, a challenge was the pressure school closures placed on teachers to catch-up on the curriculum once in-person classes resumed. Teachers reported that they struggled to teach when in-person classes resumed. Key issues included extended teaching hours, and the

need to go over previous lessons and provide remedial support to students.

One of the important findings was that teachers in Timor-Leste found peer support groups as an important network to support each other, share information, and trade experiences on how to manage difficulties in teaching during challenging times. It was also one avenue where mentors and principals were able to connect with teachers. Peer support networks can also be important avenues for ongoing teacher professional learning. Communities of practice and peer learning networks can be used to provide direct guidance and professional development to teachers to give them the skills and competencies to support them to implement strategies for learning during crises. For example, teachers would benefit from capacity building in areas such as how to deliver and support home learning programs, classroom based assessment, and remedial education approaches.

Develop home learning strategies and activities

Develop home learning strategies and activities that teachers can readily access and implement during crises.

Resilient education systems should have a plan for how to prepare and respond to disruptions. The response to COVID-19 school closures in all three countries showed a lack of preparedness. Principals and teachers were provided with minimal instructions on how to proceed with home learning when schools closed during the pandemic, and found the process difficult. On one hand, there was time pressure to develop materials as reported in Vanuatu. On the other hand, difficulties in designing and developing home learning content stemmed from a lack of unified guidance from ministries, diversity of home learning strategies and activities including suggestion of strategies that were not appropriate for the context (for example,

online activities in rural and remote communities in Laos).

Lessons learned from the pandemic can assist education ministries to develop ready to access home learning strategies and activity packs for principals and teachers to use during crises. It would provide a common understanding of how home learning should be approached, including modalities, what areas of the curriculum to prioritise, and a pre-prepared take home packages of activities. Involving teachers in this process of development, such as in Samoa, would make sure the strategies and packages are well-targeted to students and their home environments. Identifying and contextualising a set of resources for home learning would also ensure that these resources a simple and easy to use.

These preparatory activities would alleviate pressure on teachers and principals from having to plan, develop, and execute a home learning strategy at the last minute as reported in all three countries. Ideally, ministries would consolidate curriculum to focus on key skills and knowledge required for further learning, such as literacy and numeracy – both to be applied during the home learning period as well as upon resumption of in-person classes. This has been done in countries such as Indonesia. A consolidated curriculum would give teachers the authority to focus on priority areas and reduce the pressure teachers have to cover all curriculum areas.

Identify students' learning gaps after school closure periods

Build teachers' capacity in classroom-based assessment practices and provide guidance on their use following crises

Teachers from across the three countries recognised that upon returning to face-to-face classes, students needed additional support to

re-engage in classroom learning, and in many cases go over previous lesson content due to the lengthy closure periods. Across the three countries, few teachers discussed the use of assessment to identify student learning gaps upon their return to school.

There may be a need to deviate from resuming 'regular' teaching practices and to develop new pedagogical strategies to make sure that students are well supported to transition back to school. This could be achieved by, for example, implementing classroom-based assessments to understand where students are at and, in doing so, enable teachers to pursue teaching strategies to provide remedial support for students to catch up.

Providing teachers with the capacity and assessment tools to conduct and interpret classroom-based assessment upon schools reopening, could support teachers to identify students' learning needs and tailor strategies to where students are at with their learning. Teaching methods such as Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach[3], which groups children by learning needs instead of age and grade, could be considered to support differentiated learning.

Establish clear line of communication between ministries, local administrators, and schools

Ensure there are clear lines of communication during crises between ministries and schools

Exchange of information was highlighted as an urgent concern by interview participants across the three countries. A key issue identified was the lack of ongoing communication between ministries, local administrators and schools on teaching and learning during COVID-19.

While most respondents reported that their governments provided adequate basic hygiene

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[3] For resources on TaRL, go to: FLN Resources at https://www.flnhub.org/focus-area/teaching-at-the-right-level

kits to support preventative health measures, and advice on health and safety measures they noted the lack of advice and support on teaching and learning continuity.

A clear message communicated from ministries to administrators, principals, teachers, parents and communities outlining information regarding school closure, transition to home learning, strategies for school resumption, and general information regarding severity of crisis would be a strategic first step to coordinate transition to home learning.

But it is also equally important for local administrators and ministry officials to receive feedback from teachers and principals on difficulties and successes of the home learning strategy. Clear exchange of information between the government and educators at the local level may enable teachers the ongoing improvement of strategies to support learning during crises.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this paper contributes to the regional and global understanding of the impact on COVID-19 school disruptions on teaching and learning. It offers stakeholders' perspectives on their experience of transitioning and implementing home learning, the impact on teaching practices and student learning, and the level of support teachers were provided during the pandemic. We hope that this research from the three countries could provide a starting point for discussion among stakeholders on how to build a resilient and adaptive school system that supports continuity of teaching and learning during times of crises.

The paper presents six recommendations for practitioners and policy makers to consider in response to common themes that have emerged from the research.

These highlight the need for governments to: evaluate communication infrastructure to better prepare for future crises and develop context-appropriate home learning strategies; work closely with parents in the planning and execution of home learning strategies; build and maintain peer networks for teachers as a source of support and avenue for ongoing professional learning; develop home learning strategies and activities that teachers can readily access and implement; support teachers to identify and respond to students' learning gaps following school closures; and establish clear lines of communication between ministries and schools.

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