



Harnessing Digital Technologies for Education amid COVID-19

22 July 2020, 15:30-17:00 (Manila Time), via Microsoft Teams

I. Background and Context

1. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)¹ and the ensuing pandemic has created a severe impact to countries in Southeast Asia and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Without a vaccine, countries have moved to contain the virus by closing borders, restricting passenger transportation and labor mobility, reducing business operations, closing schools, initiating lock downs, and putting a sudden stop to economic activities. The social and economic implications of these measures are significant.²
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the existing learning crisis especially for low-income and middle-income countries in Asia and the Pacific which in turn can lead to greater losses in lifetime opportunities and earnings. According to UNESCO, around 1.5 billion students are out of school in over 165 countries affected by the pandemic. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, physical access was not an issue, but with the ensuing crisis, access and poor learning are now key contributing factors to realizing effective literacy and numeracy skills of school children.
3. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has also suddenly transformed learning and teaching globally. Governments around the world need to find innovative and practical approaches to improve learning and teaching. A sudden increase in online learning provides opportunities to reimagine education amid COVID-19 and beyond. In the PRC, the government is working at an unprecedented scale and speed with private platform providers to continue classes. At least 260 million students from primary to high school have signed up for on-line platforms during the epidemic.³ Several lessons can be learned from the PRC where the surge in online learning during the outbreak highlighted the importance of infrastructure (networks and devices), platforms (stability, interactions and ability to improve), and preparedness of teachers, students and parents.⁴
4. As countries act to address the COVID-19 crisis, massive school closures have led to increased interest in distance learning and solutions using EdTech or the use of technology and digital innovations to improve learning and teaching. The projected value of global EdTech has almost doubled to US\$1 trillion by 2026 due to COVID-19. However, policymakers, the not for profit sector, and other relevant stakeholders must innovate to bring the benefits of digital technology to the bottom 75% of the population.
5. Countries in Southeast Asia and the PRC are exploring measures to balance short-term solutions to unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic with their medium and long-term education objectives. EdTech solutions can help countries achieve the balance by working in five areas: government policies; infrastructure; schools and teachers; parents and students; and private EdTech providers. For EdTech to be equitable, enduring, and efficient, these five areas should work in tandem during the COVID-19 pandemic response, recovery and rejuvenation phases.⁵

¹ COVID-19 is the short term for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

² ADB. 2020. *What Drives Innovation in Asia? Special Topic: The Impact of the Coronavirus Outbreak—An Update. Asian Development Outlook*. Manila

³ Jeffrey Jian Xu, Sungsup Ra and Brajesh Panth. Lessons learned from the massive shift to online learning due to COVID-19. ADB Blog published on 1 April 2020 accessed on 16 July 2020 from <https://blogs.adb.org/lessons-learned-from-the-massive-shift-to-online-learning-due-to-COVID-19>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Brajesh Panth and Jeffrey Jian Xu. Blending education and technology to help schools through the pandemic. ADB Blog published on 18 June 2020 accessed on 16 July 2020 from <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/blending-education-and-technology-to-help-schools-through-the-pandemic>

II. Seventh PACER Dialogue

6. Recognizing that each country's situation is unique, countries need to plan their activities based on their specific needs and must align to different phases of readiness. Several policy options drawn from good practice examples are available for governments to consider and adapt to their own phased education recovery efforts focused on EdTech solutions.

7. Countries can learn from the experience of the Central Square Foundation and Ashoka University in improving the quality of school education for all students (especially from low-income communities in India) and higher education through evidence and innovation driven educational reforms and using Edtech solutions for improved learning and employability. For its part, Coursera, one of the leading educational technology companies providing massive open online courses, launched the Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative to provide free access to Coursera for Government to assist countries, states and cities to support and reskill their citizens leading to improved employability. Coursera's offer to universities around the world with free courses in response to COVID-19 has generated huge response globally.

8. In this context the ADB will convene the seventh **Policy Actions for COVID-19 Economic Recovery (PACER) Dialogue** in virtual format on 22 July 2020 (Wednesday) from 15:30–17:00 (Manila time) using Microsoft Teams. The title of the seventh PACER Dialogue is **"Harnessing Digital Technologies for Education amid COVID-19."** The PACER Dialogues are organized under the ADB-supported BIMP-EAGA, IMT-GT, and GMS (B-I-G) Capacity Building Program, and will explore measures that can help "B-I-G" member countries, Singapore, and Timor-Leste "bounce back better" from the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. Objectives

9. The seventh PACER Dialogue will feature global good practice examples and policy options using EdTech solutions to help countries transition their short-term education objectives to the medium and long-term as they mitigate COVID-19 impacts and accelerate recovery. The objectives are to:

- promote a better understanding of policy options in adopting EdTech solutions for governments to not only mitigate COVID-19 impacts and recover in the aftermath of the crisis but also to reimagine education for a new normal;
- disseminate global best practices and lessons on how to promote inclusive and innovative EdTech solutions amid COVID-19 featuring the experience of Central Square Foundation, Ashoka University, and Coursera; and
- provide a platform for policy makers, development planners, and education practitioners to share knowledge and experience and collaboratively learn from each other.

10. At the end of the dialogue, a Policy Brief will be produced to summarize the policy options and recommendations discussed.

IV. PACER Dialogue Background Paper, Structure and Timing

11. The PACER Dialogues are envisaged to help decision makers broaden their perspectives, appreciate the wider implications of critical policy choices, and identify concrete policy actions. During the open discussions, participants are requested to provide inputs, share analysis, country experiences and lessons on education and EdTech policies and solutions taken to mitigate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerate recovery.

12. A background paper will be circulated to all participants as advance reading. The indicative structure of the 1.5-hour (90 minute) PACER Dialogue is summarized in the attached program.

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TIME	DETAILS
15:30-15:35	<p>Seventh PACER Dialogue – Overview and Objectives <i>Moderator: Mr. Ramesh Subramaniam, Director General, Southeast Asia Department (SERD), Asian Development Bank (ADB)</i></p> <p>Moderator to deliver introductory remarks on the seventh PACER Dialogue context, objectives, and structure.</p>
15:35-15:55	<p>Reimagining Education amid COVID-19 and Beyond <i>Mr. Ashish Dhawan, Founder and Chairperson of Central Square Foundation and Co-founder of Ashoka University in India</i></p> <p>Presentation on good practice examples, lessons, and policy options in using EdTech solutions to help countries transition their short-term education solutions to the medium and long-term amid COVID-19 and beyond. The experience of the Central Square Foundation and Ashoka University in India will be highlighted.</p>
15:55-16:15	<p>Empowering Higher Education and Workforce Development with Digital Technology <i>Mr. Chad Pasha, Head of APAC for Global Government Partnerships at Coursera</i></p> <p>Presentation on good practice examples, lessons, and policy options on how to empower higher education and work force development through digital technology. The Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative and online platforms for higher education delivery will be presented.</p>
16:15-16:55	<p>Open Discussion and Fielding of Questions <i>Moderator: Mr. Ramesh Subramaniam</i></p> <p>PACER Dialogue participants exchange information on education and EdTech policies and solutions in an open discussion format.</p> <p>To enrich the PACER dialogue discussions, the moderator will request country delegations to provide inputs and share analysis, country experiences, and lessons on education and EdTech policies and solutions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving medium- and long-term recovery.</p>
16:55-17:00	<p>Synthesis and Summary Closing Remarks <i>Mr. Ramesh Subramaniam, Director General, SERD, ADB</i></p> <p>Moderator summarizes the policy discussions, key recommendations, and closes the Dialogue.</p>