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Socioeconomic Inclusion During an Era of Online Education



Manuel B. Garcia

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Socioeconomic Inclusion During an Era of Online Education

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Table of Contents

Foreword	xvii
Preface.....	xviii
Acknowledgment	xxiv

Section 1 Socioeconomic Exploration of Educational Processes

Chapter 1 A Macro-Scale MOOC Analysis of the Socioeconomic Status of Learners and Their Learning Outcomes	1
<i>Jose A. Ruipérez-Valiente, University of Murcia, Spain</i>	

Chapter 2 Development of a Socioeconomic Inclusive Assessment Framework for Online Learning in Higher Education	23
<i>Chorng Yuan Fung, Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak, Malaysia</i>	
<i>Sueh Ing Su, Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak, Malaysia</i>	
<i>Esther John Perry, Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak, Malaysia</i>	
<i>Manuel B. Garcia, FEU Institute of Technology, Philippines</i>	

Chapter 3 Exploring the Socioeconomic Facet of Online Inclusive Education in Ghana: The Effects of Technological Advancement in Academia.....	47
<i>Eugene Kofi Ansu-Kyeremeh, University of South Africa, South Africa</i>	
<i>Leila Goosen, University of South Africa, South Africa</i>	

Section 2 The Impact of COVID-19 on the Education Sector

Chapter 4 Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education in Tanzania: A Roadmap for Developing an EPRRM Contingency Plan	68
<i>Reuben Bihu, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania</i>	

Chapter 5

COVID-19 and Remote Learning in the Philippine Basic Education System: Experiences of Teachers, Parents, and Students 92

Jasten Keneth D. Treceñe, Eastern Visayas State University, Tanauan, Philippines

Chapter 6

Compulsory Distance Learning in Uzbekistan During the COVID-19 Era: The Case of Public and Senior Secondary Vocational Education Systems 111

Kasim Khusanov, Turin Polytechnic University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Guljakhon Khusanova, Tashkent State University of Law, Uzbekistan

Mushtariybonu Khusanova, Yeosu Technical Institute in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Section 3

Educational Issues, Opportunities, and Responses

Chapter 7

How Inclusive Is Online Education in India: Lessons From the Pandemic..... 135

Navaneeth M. S., Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India

Ismail Siddiqui, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India

Chapter 8

A Critical Analysis of the Governance of the Moroccan Education System in the Era of Online Education 156

Jabrane Amaghous, Faculty of Law, Economics, and Social Sciences, Cadi Ayyad University, Morocco

Marouane Zouine, Multidisciplinary Research Laboratory in Economics and Management, Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Morocco

Chapter 9

Fighting Through COVID-19 for Educational Continuity: Challenges to Teachers..... 177

Edward C. P. Lin, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Andy J. Yeh, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Chapter 10

Countering Educational Disruptions Through an Inclusive Approach: Bridging the Digital Divide in Distance Education 204

Mallika Krishnaswami, Christ University, India

Lakshmi Shankar Iyer, Christ University, India

Cyril John, Christ University, India

Malmarugan Devanathan, Christ University, India

Chapter 11

Advancing Equity in Digital Classrooms: A Personalized Learning Framework for Higher Education Institutions 225

Lakshmi Shankar Iyer, Christ University, India

Sonika Bharadwaj, Christ University, India

Shilpa H. Shetty, Christ University, India

Vertika Verma, Christ University, India

Malmarugan Devanathan, Christ University, India

Chapter 12

Exploring Issues Surrounding a Safe and Conducive Digital Learning Space in Nepal: A Preparation for Online Education in the Post-Pandemic Era 246

Bishnu Lamsal, Kathmandu University, Nepal

Afterword 264

Compilation of References 265

About the Contributors 307

Index 312

Preface

Socioeconomic inclusion may not be a novel topic in educational research, but its re-evaluation in the era of online education is long overdue. Since its inception back in the 1990s, online education has been established as an extension of mainstream instruction until recently (Garcia & Revano, 2022). The unwelcomed arrival of a global health crisis has forced a radical shift in education settings, positioning online education as the temporary mode of instruction. With restrictive measures imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuity of education required a mandatory relocation of the learning environment (McBurnie et al., 2020; Meinck et al., 2022; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the discontinuation of in-person classes has resulted in significant negative consequences and carries high social and economic costs, particularly for underprivileged and marginalized families. The sense of inclusivity in education has become an abstract ideal that widens the digital divide and creates social injustice (Bormann, 2021; Ciuffetelli Parker & Conversano, 2021; Sun et al., 2022).

Viewing through the lens of educational equity, the primary goal of a socioeconomic inclusive approach is to provide equal opportunities for all students from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Its general existence, or lack thereof, has been acknowledged through the institutionalization of various *diversity, equity, and inclusion* efforts in curricular practices and educational policies (Curran & Petersen, 2017; El-Amin, 2022; Jeffries, 2019). Despite commendable progress in the recent decades (UNESCO, 2017), the temporary activation of emergency remote education revealed cavernous deficiencies in readiness and capability for the implementation of a fully online teaching and learning approach. More importantly, the total reliance of the education sector on the online mode of instruction has exacerbated inequities and inequalities in accessing educational opportunities among different social groups (Frohn, 2021; Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020; Hossain, 2021). For instance, having access to information and communication technology is a commodity in a digital world, and the lack thereof obstructs the continuity of teaching and learning amid lockdowns and school closures. In rural areas where internet connectivity is non-existent and device availability is another stumbling block, these digital deficits imply learning time is next to nothing. For students with special needs who rely on their schools for specialists' hands-on attention (Averett, 2021), online platforms used by other students are insufficient, especially with the lack of integrated assistive technologies. These scenarios echo pre-existing crises preventing equitable outcomes yet necessitate a modern outlook for problem-solving that is applicable in the digital age. If online education is going to be a permanent constituent of modern education, simply reopening schools will not magically remove the additional impediments and new breed of problems uncovered by the present pandemic.

The global health crisis of 2020 is a moment in history that forcefully introduce the arrival of the era of online education. The resulting intensification of digital disparities demanded an immediate coordi-

Preface

nated response from all education and government stakeholders to guarantee that no one is left behind as we navigate the so-called new normal. Without an appropriate intervention and sound policy guidance, negative repercussions may be so widespread that they will remain a problem in the education sector far into the future. Consequently, some questions became gigantic inducements to fight injustices and inequalities. How might we help underprivileged students reach their potential despite low socioeconomic conditions? How might we prepare teachers to provide high-quality learning opportunities in a digital environment? How might we guide policymakers to build a coherent and comprehensive sector-wide approach toward a socioeconomic inclusive education? How might we ensure an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable digital future?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Socioeconomic Inclusion During an Era of Online Education aims to answer emerging questions on inclusive online education by exploring and collating the experiences and lessons learned during the implementation of emergency remote education. With the earlier than expected arrival of the online education era, best practices and innovative approaches from various educational institutions are concrete paradigms for safeguarding the promise of an undivided future of learning through equal access to quality education from a distance. Covering topics from learning space to education governance, this reference work is ideal for policymakers, administrators, practitioners, researchers, scholars, instructors, and students seeking to adjust and adapt to teaching and learning online not only during a pandemic (i.e., emergency remote education) but also during “normal times”. As much as this book raises socioeconomic issues involving online education as the primary mode of teaching and learning, a theme as diverse and expansive as inclusivity and technology-based instruction restricts the opportunity of addressing the multiplicity of viewpoints across various spectrums. Therefore, the anthology of these chapters is consequently and intentionally diverse and echoes the mission of inclusive education by compiling a variety of perspectives, experiences, traditions, and frameworks.

This book project commenced in September 2021 when COVID-19 and social inequality were the consistent top global concerns since the pandemic began (Ipsos, 2021). In the first two months, it received a total of 26 proposal submissions from a large cadre of researchers worldwide. During the initial evaluation process, only 20 (77%) chapter proposals were deemed aligned with the theme of the book. The full chapters of the accepted proposals were subjected to a rigorous double-blind review process with the assistance of 38 peer reviewers from 18 countries. Out of the 20 accepted proposals, only 12 (60%) chapters were accepted. These chapters were written by 28 authors from Australia, India, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, and Uzbekistan. These authors have a cohesive goal of catalyzing a global discussion on how education, knowledge, and learning should be reimagined in a world full of uncertainty and complexity. The final chapters are grouped into three sections:

1. Socioeconomic Exploration of Educational Processes (Chapters 1-3)
2. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Education Sector (Chapters 4-6)
3. Educational Issues, Opportunities, and Responses (Chapters 7-12)

Chapter 1 analyzes data from 7.95 million learners and 3,156 courses across 12 Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) providers in terms of socioeconomic status distribution and the relationship of the Hu-

man Development Index (HDI) with access, completion, and certification. The large-scale nature of the chapter fills the literature gap on the limited generalizability of MOOC-based studies that are typically concentrated on single courses or several courses from a single provider with less attention to minor MOOC providers. The results highlight the powerful influence of HDI on learner access to and course completion and certification in MOOC platforms.

Chapter 2 develops a socioeconomic inclusive assessment framework for online learning in higher education by mapping out key concepts through a scoping review approach. While the exacerbation of pre-existing crises and inequalities has been repeatedly acknowledged in the literature, little attention has been given to educational assessments. This chapter contributes to the body of literature by proposing six components for designing and developing online assessments that are socioeconomic inclusive of all students, regardless of their background. Likewise, it offers practical implications for educators and policymakers to improve the online class experience.

Chapter 3 explores the theme of the book, socioeconomic inclusion during an era of online education, by focusing on the African context. Particularly, this chapter examines the integration effects of technological advancements on the education sector in Ghana at a senior high school level. Apart from laying down the issues, problems, challenges, barriers, and risks associated with the sudden implementation of remote education, this chapter introduces concepts related to the production and transmission of technological knowledge and advancement. This chapter also proposes a preliminary research design and future avenues of online educational research.

Chapter 4 reviews the literature to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures on the processes of teaching, learning, and administration in higher learning institutions. It focuses on the *Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Mechanism* contingency plan that may curb the present pandemic situation for the safety of all stakeholders. Following the results of the literature review divided into three sections (i.e., learning, teaching, and administration), this chapter offers recommendations and calls for the development of an education contingency plan to avoid unnecessary learning breakdown in case of emergencies.

Chapter 5 illustrates the experience of teachers, students, and parents, particularly those in rural areas who have been underrepresented during the compulsory implementation of remote learning. It likewise acknowledges the severity of economic fallout in developing countries and the varying effects of continuous nationwide lockdowns and other safety measures on school communities. The findings of this chapter will be valuable to educational leaders and policymakers for improving online educational systems for all stakeholders inclusive of marginalized groups and vulnerable populations in places where technology is not accessible.

Chapter 6 examines the status of inclusive distance education in Uzbekistan with a particular emphasis on public and senior secondary vocational education systems. It starts by examining the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social and economic systems in Uzbekistan and how the government modernized the education sector. The main highlight of the chapter is the analysis of the *Kundalik* educational platform using attendance and academic performance as indicators of quality education. This chapter also calls for special attention to the vulnerable segments of the population, especially those from remote and rural areas.

Chapter 7 reports on the structural issues that impede the quality of online education with a focus on the inclusivity of the teaching and learning process in India. It utilizes the Indian National Sample Survey to capture consumption patterns in the education sector and employs a SWOT analysis to examine the policy responses in the field. The findings of this chapter elucidate reemerging issues including acces-

Preface

sibility, language barrier, and gender equity. It likewise summarizes the challenges of online learning into themes such as content understanding, pedagogy, technical, behavioral, and the potential future impact on learning outcomes.

Chapter 8 outlines the state of the Moroccan education system and underscores the vital role of governance in the education sector. This sector is acknowledged as a major axis of reform and a national priority in the context of advanced regionalization. This chapter demonstrates how the Moroccan government views the provision of quality education as a key element for producing individual and societal successes. It likewise asserts that providing a well-governed and strengthened education system is a key aspect of empowering stakeholders to respond properly in the face of difficulties and setbacks, be it due to pandemics or otherwise.

Chapter 9 analyzes and synthesizes the findings of research regarding the challenges teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic by applying the methods of literature review and thematic analysis. This chapter addresses the gap in research by conducting a global investigation from which to derive potential solutions that could contribute to ensuring educational continuity whenever a disruption occurs. Following the mission of reforming the education system for a more flexible and technology-integrated pedagogy, it recommends three types of strategies to overcome the challenges of distance teaching from professional learning to contingency planning.

Chapter 10 investigates the expanding gap between digitally empowered and digitally excluded students considering the extensive educational disruptions and loss of opportunities. It derives inspiration from the disastrous effect of the global health crisis on social and economic spheres to formulate a model for countering the digital divide that exists between the levels of technology available for stakeholders. This chapter likewise offers multifaceted solutions and recommendations on how educational institutions can harness technological innovation to drive progress, maintain the continuity of learning, and deliver better online education.

Chapter 11 addresses the increasing individualism in societies by examining the impact of educational technology in higher educational institutions. By reviewing the historical development of learning personalization processes, it is evident that there is a growing technological arsenal for personalizing the academic journey of students in digital learning environments. With all these available tools and technologies, this chapter proposes a personalized learning framework that can promote a technology-supported education, and along with it is an implementation blueprint comprised of strategy, design, curriculum & instruction, support, and operations.

Chapter 12 scrutinizes how executives and information technology professionals at educational institutions perceive organizational difficulties related to online learning platforms. More importantly, it attempts to paint a holistic picture of Nepal's digital learning spaces to provide policymakers with relevant information, evidence, and assessments that could guide the formulation of strategies, policies, and standards related to digital learning environments. With people spending more time in digital spaces, this chapter raises concerns that governments and schools must address to make the learning environment digitally more conducive and safer.

THE FUTURE OF MODERN EDUCATION

The era of online education is already here and is here to stay. Assuming that we cannot return to the world as it was before, the levels of inequality and exclusion that we have suffered in the past years

must be viewed as a much greater concern moving forward. Consequently, there is a necessity for the mobilization of investment in 21st-century education infrastructures as a starting point for reimagining a better technology-enabled education in the post-COVID-19 era. In closing, this book initiating the discussion on socioeconomic inclusion in the era of online education aims to engage a broad audience in the response and recovery process by highlighting reemerging vulnerabilities not only of marginalized populations but also the flaws of online education itself.

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The unwelcomed arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities and inequalities in accessing educational opportunities among different social groups. Abruptly, the idea of inclusivity in education has become more of an abstract phenomenon that widens the digital divide and creates social injustice. The resulting intensification of digital disparities demands an immediate coordinated response from all education and government stakeholders to guarantee that no one is left behind as we navigate the so-called new normal. Without an appropriate intervention and sound policy guidance, negative repercussions may be so widespread that they will remain a problem in the education sector far into the future.

Socioeconomic Inclusion During an Era of Online Education aims to answer emerging questions on inclusive online education by exploring and collating the experiences and lessons learned during the implementation of emergency remote education. With the earlier-than-expected arrival of the online education era, best practices and innovative approaches from various educational institutions are concrete paradigms for safeguarding the promise of an undivided future of learning through equal access to quality education from a distance. Covering topics from learning space to education governance, this reference work is ideal for policymakers, administrators, practitioners, researchers, scholars, instructors, and students seeking to adjust and adapt to technology-enabled education during and after the COVID-19 era.

Topics Covered

- Academic Policies
- Accessibility Issues
- Contingency Planning
- Digital Divide
- Education Governance
- Educational Technology
- Evaluation and Assessment
- Inclusive Education
- Learning Environment
- Online Education
- Personalized Learning
- Social Justice



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