Chapter 96
Psycho-Social Well-Being of Young Learners During Emergency Remote Teaching: General Scope and Suggestions for Improvement

Ayse Taskiran
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1913-7296
Anadolu University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started through the end of 2019 and which seems to continue for an unknown period of time, has had unprecedented effects that are not limited to health conditions only, but also include financial, sociological, and psychological consequences. This global pandemic forced schools and universities to close their doors, causing a large-scale educational disruption for a large number of learners worldwide. Despite the measures taken to compensate for education at all levels, there still is another concern for K-12 level learners' psycho-social well-being. This chapter elaborates some points that should be considered in case of emergency remote teaching applications in terms of enhancing psycho-social well-being of young learners.

INTRODUCTION

Many countries around the world have been struggling against COVID-19 pandemic, which started through the end of 2019 and which seems to continue for an unknown period of time. The effects of the pandemic are not limited to health conditions only, but also include financial, sociological and psychological consequences. As the virus was found to be spreading between people through close contact with an infected person, social distancing policy, announced by World Health Organization (WHO), has been adopted as a measure to slow down the spread of the pandemic. This unprecedented pandemic led to unprecedented

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7540-9.ch096

restraints. Countries around the world have had to take large-scale measures against the outbreak. The measures included quarantines, strict isolation, banning large events and mass gatherings, travel restrictions, curfews, closing of borders, closing of entertainment centers, closure of businesses, limitations in public transport and of course execution of nationwide school closures worldwide (Aquino, 2020). This global pandemic forced schools and universities to close their doors, causing a large-scale educational disruption for unprecedented number of learners worldwide, and consequently making 2020 a year like no other. In such extraordinary conditions, worldwide emergency remote teaching practices have been initiated to ensure the continuity of formal education and to compensate for its interruption at all levels. Around the world schools and teachers at all levels had to make a shift to online lessons or TV broadcasts to continue formal education. Although these measures might help young learners' education at K-12 level continue uninterrupted, there still are other concerns. There are questions about the effectiveness of the remote learning applications as it is put forward that most K–12 students and their teachers had little experience with online instruction and many students miss out access to technology (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Another concern is about the working parents who strain themselves trying to educate and provide care for their children during the extended school closure (Harris, 2020), as uncertainties about when everything will be back to 'normal' leads to anxiety (Daniel, 2020). The ambiguous future is likely to result in low motivation towards remote learning applications. Consequently, parents of those students with low motivation feel anxious about their children's academic progress and achievement at home. Not only worries about the uncertainty of future but also homeschooling of low-motivated children make parents feel even more nervous (Daniel, 2020). Most importantly, psychosocial well-being of children is worthy of attention during home confinement and long lasting school closures. Findings of a recent study indicate that due to school closure students are challenged by the social isolation from their friends, lack of contact with their classmates, teachers, and overall their school environment. What makes it even worse is that this social isolation affects their moods, emotions, and feelings (Pozas et al., 2021), which was emphasized by previous research regarding the potential negative impact of social distancing on primary school students' psychosocial well-being (Flack et al. 2020). Children and adolescents may exhibit milder clinical signs of COVID-19 compared to adults; however, the burden of this pandemic is not limited to physical health issues. Instead, and more importantly, the short and long-term psychoogical effects of the pandemic on this age group may be overlooked and not addressed. Therefore, screening children and adolescents and providing appropriate management strategies addressing their psychosocial well-being will help rebuild emotional intelligence (Cardenas et al., 2020).

The worldwide school closures have been assumed to create a rapid transition from traditional to online distance education. Countries around the world have come up with wide range of solutions to continue the disrupted education process such as online libraries, TV broadcasts, guidelines, resources, video lectures, online channels (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020, p.3). Although these attempts are assumed to be distance education practices, actually they are not even close. Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) make a clear discrimination between concepts of 'online distance education' and 'emergency remote teaching'. According to the authors, online distance education involves elaborative planning of the learning process that provides learners with choices, agency, responsibility, and flexibility. It includes detailed planning on course design that aims to create the optimum learning ecology. Distance education approaches the concept of 'distance' from different perspectives that are defined through transactional distance, while remote distance teaching takes the concept of 'distance' solely as a spatial matter. The one that is being applied around the world during the pandemic should be called 'emergency remote teaching' as it is rather a rapid temporary solution. Considering these definitions, it is likely that the emergency remote