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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING



Cambridge Partnership for Education

# Recover Learning and Rebuild Education in the ASEAN Region Roundtable – Policy Brief



16 March 2022

14:30 - 18:00 (GMT +7)

07:30 - 11:00 (GMT)

# Overview

Since 2020, COVID-related school closures have affected the quality of education for more than 152 million children in Southeast Asia (ASEAN, 2022). Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states have adopted a wide range of responses to tackle this challenge and are now rebuilding to both recover from the effects of the pandemic and strengthen their education systems for the future.

On 16 March 2022, ASEAN Ministers of Education met UK government officials and education specialists to discuss education challenges following the COVID-19 pandemic.

*The Recover Learning and Rebuild Education in the ASEAN Region Roundtable* was co-hosted by the ASEAN Secretariat; the Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam; British Expertise International (BEI); Her Majesty's Department for International Trade (DIT) in the United Kingdom; and the Cambridge Partnership for Education.

This policy brief summarises the key discussion points that arose from the roundtable and includes policy recommendations derived from the contributions and insights of the attending ministries. These included representatives from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

**The roundtable and the recommendations in this document are organised according to three overarching themes:**



Learning loss and accelerated learning



Access to education



Building education system resilience

These themes capture not only a wide range of challenges that ASEAN member states' education systems have confronted, but also a number of inventive, proactive and innovative solutions implemented over the last two years.



# Executive Summary

The discussions in each panel demonstrated the variety of experiences each member state has had during the pandemic and the need to implement policy within the education system tailored to the specific demands of each ASEAN member state.

However, several important consistencies emerged and these inform the following high-level policy recommendations.

## LEARNING LOSS AND ACCELERATED LEARNING

### Recommendations:

1. Address learning loss as a holistic challenge that goes beyond knowledge and skills loss
2. Prioritise addressing learning loss for the groups most at risk
3. Take the opportunity to rethink national curricula to reflect a new vision of education for the future

## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

### Recommendations:

1. Build on the accelerated progress of digital transformation brought about by the pandemic
2. Leverage the power of data to support monitoring and improving universal access to quality education
3. Continue addressing underlying barriers to access to education by working across government sectors

## BUILDING EDUCATION SYSTEM RESILIENCE

### Recommendations:

1. Embrace the opportunity to transform education for the future while addressing pre-existing system weaknesses
2. Celebrate and invest in schools as essential stakeholders within communities
3. Recognise the central role of school leaders and teachers as agents of change and invest in their training accordingly

# Panel Discussions



## LEARNING LOSS AND ACCELERATED LEARNING

### Common challenges and responses:

- ◆ ‘Learning loss’ is not a blanket term; different demographics experience loss differently and with different long-term effects:
  - Younger students are more vulnerable, potentially losing their foundational learning (specifically literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skills) on which future learning will be built.
  - Secondary-level near-graduates leaving the education system may represent a terminal loss through entering marriage or the labour force. Solutions discussed in the panel included improved communication targeted at these groups and continued lifelong support.
  - Quality and access impacts have been worse for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), where students were no longer able to experience work settings or complete on-the-job training.
  - Socio-economic effects are keenly felt: economically disadvantaged demographics were more likely to



experience greater loss of learning opportunities due to pre-existing access issues and unequal access to digital resources.

- Education policy responses (and their success or failure) are highly dependent on wider social policies – particularly health – and integration of responses across departments is essential.
- Teachers also experienced learning loss: there are new challenges for teachers who have had to adjust to new approaches to teaching, while simultaneously losing professional development opportunities.



- ◆ Not 'just' recovery: the post-pandemic environment offers opportunities for transformation. For example, digital and technological reforms, improved student and teacher capability and new systems that have been put in place will be relevant in the future, and represent improvements in system capacity compared to before the pandemic.
- ◆ 'Smarter' curriculum compression: compressed or reduced curricula (via different models) are increasingly adopted – feedback largely suggests that responses to these interventions from parents, students and teachers are positive. Many ministries reported that learning was of higher quality and greater depth. Some have focused on a holistic approach to curriculum reform, for example Singapore, which has emphasised the importance of co-curricular opportunities and focus on values and competencies.

### Recommendations:

- ◆ **Address learning loss as a holistic challenge that goes beyond knowledge and skills loss:** the disruption to school life caused by the pandemic has affected school communities, teachers, students, parents, school leaders and support staff at many different levels; learning loss solutions need to consider wellbeing and mental health of school communities as essential preconditions for effective learning.
- ◆ **Prioritise addressing learning loss for the groups most at risk:** school closures have had a more significant impact on long-term learning and the future of younger learners, vulnerable learners and learners on alternative and/or vocational pathways; it will be important to target these groups with differentiated approaches, such as a focus on basic foundational skills or communication campaigns, to incite potential drop-outs back into school.

- ◆ **Rethink national curricula to reflect a new vision of education for the future:** during the pandemic, many countries have reviewed and reduced their curricula and discovered that less content can lead to deeper learning, reinforce foundational skills which are essential for long-term learning, and engage learners more in their own learning. Reviewing national curricula to take this into account, as well as the impact of digitisation and global issues such as climate change and sustainability, should be at the heart of education transformation for the future.



## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

### Common challenges and responses:

- ◆ As with learning loss, access is experienced and achieved across several differentiated dimensions:
  - Infrastructure, internet connectivity and device availability underpin access outside of school.
  - Home environment and parental involvement are key determinants of access.
  - Access is also defined by the quality of participation once learners are reached, which is often determined by the capability of teachers.
  - The same social dimensions (gender, socio-economic status, etc.) that impact the experience of loss also impact access.
- ◆ Does digital learning provide greater access? The consensus is yes, but it does not replace the quality of face-to-face learning – so blended learning is the future. Support and training for teachers are essential to accomplish this aim, and while students may have improved their independent learning capability, they have also potentially learned the value of being in school, experiencing face-to-face teaching and being amongst learner-peers.
- ◆ Cost of closures: most ministries emphasise that the best solution is to keep schools open and return to school as soon as possible by providing strong safety protocols, support and resources to schools. This approach is being incorporated and reinforced in future emergency and resilience planning.
- ◆ Digital transformation is widely viewed as a longer-term solution for a range of problems in systems – the pandemic has accelerated the resolution of these problems.

- ◆ Data collection and reporting on access for different populations are vitally important – responses cannot be targeted without understanding the issues of differentiated access for girls, Early Years (EY) / new starters, Out-of-School Youth (OOSY), etc.
- ◆ Many ministries were proactive in identifying barriers to access – e.g. basic expenses on uniform, equipment, etc. – and providing these for free.



### Recommendations:

- ◆ **Build on the accelerated progress of digital transformation brought about by the pandemic:** all countries have made great progress in increasing internet access, developing education system platforms and providing digital devices to students and teachers; this has allowed progress in addressing the digital divide and widened access to education for pre-existing vulnerable groups. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure universal access, so it is important to continue prioritising digital transformation, from addressing the digital divide to ensuring all teachers are trained to make the most of this new environment.
- ◆ **Leverage the power of data to support monitoring and improving universal access to quality education:** new technologies can empower governments to understand national trends and target interventions where they are most needed. This ensures greater and fairer return on investment and more visible, positive short-term and longer-term results in improving learning outcomes for all.
- ◆ **Continue addressing underlying barriers to access to education by working across government sectors:** digital transformation is not the only solution to universal access; underlying socioeconomic and cultural issues continue to be part of the problem. Accurate, timely and regular data collection and increased cross-sector government collaboration should be part of the overall solution.



## BUILDING EDUCATION SYSTEM RESILIENCE

### Common challenges and responses:

- ◆ Stakeholder roles: the involvement of the private sector must be sustainable, for example using public-private partnerships (PPPs) for specific service provision around online learning. Increased involvement of communities and parents offered a valuable resource during closures and should also be preserved in the future.
- ◆ Expansions of monitoring capability and data reporting – built to manage students and teachers remotely – are now ‘baked in’, and this added capacity will improve data quality on the performance of education systems in the future.
- ◆ There is an opportunity to integrate the crisis response elements of teacher training and student support into future training, making the most of the new skills developed.
- ◆ As indicated by the findings regarding opportunities for curriculum development: there is value in ensuring the curriculum is designed to work on a variety of platforms, media and devices. The same requirement extends to preparing teaching and learning materials.
- ◆ New practices have led to new challenges: a broadening of the areas in which teachers (and other stakeholders throughout education systems) need to incorporate new practices into their ‘normal’.





## Recommendations:

- ◆ **Embrace the opportunity to transform education for the future while addressing pre-existing system weaknesses:** the pandemic has revealed pre-existing weaknesses such as the scale of the learning gap and digital divide within countries. However, it has also ‘turbo-charged’ the digital transformation of education systems through cross-sector collaboration, PPPs and an intensive learning curve for all education stakeholders, providing strong foundations on which to build.
- ◆ **Celebrate and invest in schools as essential stakeholders within communities:** school closures have increased the understanding of the crucial role that schools play in communities, beyond providing education to young people; there is a global consensus that learning in schools is more effective, but also that the future of education is blended learning. Investing in schools to ensure they are adapted for this new model and training teachers and learners to work in this new environment will improve access to quality education for all.
- ◆ **Recognise the central role of school leaders and teachers as agents of change and invest in their training accordingly:** school leaders and teachers are at the forefront of education transformation; they have had to adapt quickly during the pandemic, showing their resilience and ability to develop new teaching and learning practices, often without much training. Investing in developing their knowledge and understanding of the new learning environment will be a crucial part of developing effective education systems in the future.





# Contributors to the Report

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## Speakers

**Sir Steve Smith**, UK Government International Education Champion

**H.E. Dr. Nguyen Kim Son**, Minister of Education & Training, Vietnam

**John Collick**, Education Working Group, British Expertise International (BEI)

**Dr. Bo Chankoulika**, Director of Policy Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia

**Emma Mba**, Senior Education Advisor, Cambridge Education Mott Macdonald

## Panel 1: Learning loss and accelerated learning

**Chair: Jane Mann**, Managing Director, Cambridge Partnership for Education

**H.E. Mr. Nadiem Anwar Makarim**, Minister of Education, Culture, Research & Tech, Indonesia

**H.E. Datuk Dr. Radzi Jidin**, Senior Minister of Education, Malaysia

**H.E. Ms. Sun Xueling**, Minister of State for Education, Singapore

**H.E. Dr. Suphat Champatong**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Thailand

**H.E. Dr. Nguyen Van Phuc**, Deputy Minister of Education & Training, Vietnam

## Panel 2: Access to Education

**Chair: Tony McAleavy**, Education Director, Education Development Trust

**H.E. Dato Hamzah Hj Sulaiman**, Minister of Education, Brunei Darussalam

**H.E. Diosdado M. San Antonio**, Undersecretary, Department of Education, the Philippines

## Panel 3: Building education system resilience

Chair: Sri Widuri, Palladium

H.E. Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Cambodia

H.E. Dr. Sisouk Vongvichith, Vice Minister for Education & Sports, Lao PDR

H.E. Dr. Zaw Myint, Deputy Minister for Education, Myanmar

## Closing remarks

H.E Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN

## EVENT PARTNERS

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## GET IN TOUCH


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