

# Exploring Education in Emergencies and COVID-19 Through a Digital Lens

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### Introduction and Background

COVID-19 has presented unique challenges for educators, thrust into the world of remote instruction. Through a review of the academic literature this poster explores how digital learning can be reframed within the context of Education in Emergencies and establishes a need for further research.

**In this literature review, we seek to answer the following questions:**

- How can current research of education in emergencies guide educational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How can further research inform the effectiveness of digital learning tools in the context of education in emergencies?

#### **Education in Emergencies Principles:**

Education in emergencies (EiE) is defined by Nicolai, (2003) as a 'set of linked projects that enable structured learning to continue in times of acute crisis or long-term instability.' Typically associated with conflict and natural disaster, the principles of education in emergencies can be equally applied to the current COVID -19 pandemic, which has created unique challenges for educational continuity and quality education for children across the globe.

The core principles of EiE are:

- the right to education,
- the need for protection,
- a community's priority for education.

These principles are grounded in the United Nations 1989 Convention on Rights of the Child, Article 2, Article 28 and Article 31. (It is important to note, that the United States are the only country in the world still to ratify this core legislation protecting children's right in the US.)

EiE responses should provide children with:

- equal access to a free and compulsory education,
- a safe supervised environment,
- engagement in structured activities that maintain daily routines, social interaction and learning support offered by adults and,
- be flexible in terms of timing, location and methods used.

EiE is the bridge from what came before and what comes next.(Sinclair, 2001; Nicolai, 2003).

### Methods

A literature search was conducted in order to explore current research on education in emergencies, identify areas of need in developing guidance to support effective and sustainable virtual practice for schools in the light of the COVID 19 Pandemic. A Literature search using the search terms, "education in emergencies", "digital learning", "COVID-19", was conducted in academic databases. The first sweep of the literature search was done with Google Scholar to identify key resources and refine research questions to define the scope of the literature review. then, a more detailed search was conducted using EBSCO and Psychinfo. This revealed ten key references, which were sorted to gauge the relevance to Education in Emergencies, and the relevance to digital learning pedagogies. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify key concepts.

The following graphic illustrates the needs for digital learning at different levels:

### Results

#### Community

- reliable Internet providers
- Internet access points (public wi-fi)

#### School

- curriculum for digital platform
- reinforce safety/security in digital landscape (such as cyberbullying)

#### Individual

- reliable Internet connection at home
- accessibility to school (computer/tablet)

While virtual platforms afford students the ability to continue their education remotely when in-person learning poses too great a health risk, there are numerous challenges that have arisen from this transition.

The following data illustrate the most common themes from the literature:

#### Theme 1

Education should be used as a primary intervention during crises:

1. Safety
2. Security
3. Community

(Dolan 2018, Burde et al 2017, Montjourides & Liu 2019, Vermesse et al 2017)

#### Theme 2

There is uncertainty of how to best incorporate digital platforms in education:

1. Resource inequity
2. Psychosocial needs (virtual learning fatigue)

(Almasri 2020, Chung 2019, Shah et al 2020, Tierney 2018)

Digital learning environments have proven their abundant potential as educational tools, and many students globally have benefited from them (Almasri, 2020). These benefits involve increased accessibility, creative interfaces and new methods to educate students, and an abundance of new information.

However, a much different reality emerges for the majority of the nation's students:

- a lack of access for particularly marginalized students,
- the cognitive demands of attending to virtual classrooms and,
- the fatigue that follows.

### Conclusion

Overall, the research indicates that that the challenges of digital learning are rooted in resource inequity, and a lack of certainty around digital learning as a continuing stable, accessible platform for learning.

The agenda for further research is detailed below:

- Develop a framework for an ideal digital platform that can be accessed during times of crisis.
- How do teachers in different settings manage to deliver education in a time of crisis?
- How do educators create a sense of security, safety, and community in the digital landscape?
- Utilize lenses of trauma-informed practice, student resilience to address issues of inequity as barriers to learning.

To overcome these challenges, educational policies going forward need to reflect the needs of the schools and emphasize sustainable effective delivery of digital education, such as getting internet to remote areas. An ideal digital platform going forward should focus on creating ways to foster safety and community, and reduce the cognitive demands of virtual learning.

### References

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- A safe supervised environment
- Engagement in structured activities that maintain daily routines, social interaction and learning support offered by adults.
- flexibility



# Methods

- A literature search was conducted in order to explore current research on education in emergencies, identify areas of need in developing guidance to support effective and sustainable virtual practice for schools in the light of the COVID 19 Pandemic. A Literature search using the search terms, “education in emergencies”, “digital learning”, “COVID-19”, was conducted in academic databases.
- Then, a more detailed search was conducted using EBSCO and Psycinfo. This revealed ten key references, which were sorted to gauge the relevance to Education in Emergencies, and the relevance to digital learning pedagogies. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify key concepts.

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# Results

## **Theme 1: Education should be used as a primary intervention during crises:**

In recent years advocacy for education as a humanitarian intervention has increased (Dolan, 2018; Burde et al., 2017; Montjouridès & Liu, 2019), and during times of widespread crisis government attention has turned to education as a primary intervention (Versmesse et al, 2017). The academic literature around education in emergencies explores the pressing matters of safety, security, and community while developing an understanding that students facing adversity and experiencing trauma are at lesser capacity to attend to classes when their primary concerns are survival.

There is considerable diversity among the emergency scenarios that occur in the United States, including natural disaster, domestic and international terrorism, school shootings and the most contemporary challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Theme 2: There is uncertainty of how to best incorporate digital platforms in education:**

- Digital learning environments have proven their abundant potential as educational tools, and many students globally have benefited from them (Almasri, 2020). These benefits involve increased accessibility, creative interfaces and new methods to educate students, and an abundance of new information.
- However, a much different reality emerges for the majority of the nation's students: **a lack of access for particularly marginalized students, the cognitive demands of attending to virtual classrooms, and the fatigue that follows.**

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Overall, the research indicates that that the challenges of digital learning are rooted in resource inequity, and a lack of certainty around digital learning as a continuing stable, accessible platform for learning.

## **The agenda for further research:**

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- How teachers in different settings manage to deliver education in a time of crisis
- How to create a sense of security, safety, and community in the digital landscape
- lenses of trauma-informed practice, student resilience, issues of inequity as barriers to learning

Educational policies going forward need to reflect the needs of the schools and emphasize sustainable effective delivery of digital education, such as getting internet to remote areas. An ideal digital platform going forward should focus on creating ways to foster safety and community and reduce the cognitive demands of virtual learning.

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