**World Bank Expert Answers: How Do We Educate Children During the Coronavirus Pandemic?**

**Paul Blake:** Specifically the impact of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic on global education. As you may know, around the world school are being shuttered as ountries work to slow the spread of Covid-19. But it leaves students out of classrooms, and it begs the question “How we educate children during a crisis?”. Well, to get an answer to that and other key questions about dropout rates, school meals and distance learning. I had the chance to speak to the World Bank Group’s Global Director of Education, Jaime Saavedra, from his home, in Lima, Peru.

**Paul Blake:** Hi, thank you so much for being here, I wanna ask in short term there’s been a lot of focus on health impacts. Can you talk a little bit about how global education has been impacted, give us a sort of global overview.

**Jaime Saavedra:** Thanks for having me, Paul. We’re living a huge crisis. As of now, as you were saying, more than 80% of children who should and young people who should be in school and are not in school. 173 countries have closed their institutions. In most, the vast majority, completely shuttered and we have almost 1.6 billion children who are out of school. This is a huge crisis.

**Paul Blake:** You were the education minister in Peru. I’m sure you’ve seen different big stops and problems in education. How would you characterize this moment for global education?

**Jaime Saavedra:** So interruptions in education process, I mean, something happened, there could be national disaster, there could be a strike, so that has happened. But it has never happened in this magnitude globally and remember that we were already living a learning crisis, pre-COVID. We were saying that in the low and in the middle of countries only 53% children were able to read and understand a text at an age 10. And in addition to that, now we have a long interruptions in the schooling process, so that crisis will be deepened.

**Paul Blake:** One of things we’re seeing, I think, certainly here in the U.S. other part of high-income countries, is this relatively easy transition to online learning. I mean, Have you seen the same in low and middle-income countries? Have they been able to make that same transition?

**Jaime Saavedra:** Now, I would challenge the view that in richer countries this has been easy. I don’t think it has been easy anywhere. And we go to middle and low-income countries, the situation is much more complicated. The fraction of students who will have a device and will have a bandwidth and conectivity that is needed is relatively small.

**Paul Blake:** That must creates a huge kind of equity issue then, right? Between the sort of the have and have not of the internet become the have and have not of iteration.

**Jaime Saavedra:** Correct, so we knew that there was a digital device, now digital device is creating a potentially extreme impact on inequality of opportunities. So that’s why many countries what they are thinking is a multi-platform approach to remote learning. We need to be very creative use all possible means but with that idea that we need to reach everyone.

**Paul Blake:** You’ve written a blog on the world bank website and in one that one point you raised is students dropout rates. Explain the dropout concerns here.

**Jaime Saavedra:** Students, particularly secondary education students or students who are attending now tertiary education, would not come back to the system, will not come back to the system because this is gonna be a huge economic shock, so familiers might have resources, our sample after resources to work. Others will just the fact that they are disconnected for such a long time and might have been students who were in the brink of dropping out then they will.

**Paul Blake:** Now the sudden stop of schools is also having some knock-on effects that we might not immediately think about what happens to the students who depend on school for food. Can you talk a little bit about the sort of nutritional impact of the school stoppage and how big a concern that is for you?

**Jaime Saavedra:** Last numbers that I have seen is about 300 million children who receive their main meal at school and that has been suddenly intterupted. So many countries are trying find ways of compensating that either through cash transfer programs or trying to make sure that they can receive those that food through different other mechanism, it might could be, even sending it at thome but there’s something that countries should emphasize.

**Paul Blake:** There’s been a lot of concern about recessions and that sort of thing, how quickly do you think global education will recover after the pandemic sort of passess or the worst of the pandemic globally passess?

**Jaime Saavedra:** First of all, there’s gonna be a squeeze in public budgets in general. We’ve seen in other crisis that migh have an impact by own social sector expenditures including education. At the same time, you will have the families will have less resources to invest in education. Either in tertiary education or in the cases in which you would have. You still have to pay fees. There will be a lower disposable income and education might suffer. Third, you will have in that same context in which public budgets are gonna be squeezed, in many countries you’re gonna see a shift of enrollments from private sector to the public sector, which is free, right? Because families will not have resources to pay private education in those countries in which there is a sizeable share of private education.

**Paul Blake:** We’ve, over the past few minutes, laid out a fairly bleak picture for education around the world in the wake of the pandemic. Now there’s some signs of hope, the world bank has recently announced this kind of large-scale financial support package up to $216 billion in financial support for countries fighting the pandemic over 15 months. Can you talk a little bit about what the education team is doing to support countries in the face of pandemic?

**Jaime Saavedra:** So at this stage, the main support to countries in the work that all our teams are really focused on is the coping strategies, a lot working precisely in that designed and technical assistance related to and support related to the planning and implementing those remote learning multi-platform strategies that we were talking before. Things will start shifting as time passess, I mean more focus on scholarship, on demand size interventions and then support countries in that recovery phase.

**Paul Blake:** Jaime Saavedra, Thank you so much for joining us from Lima, Peru. Jaime Saavedra is the Global Director for Education at the World Bank.

**Paul Blake:** If you wanna learn more about the world bank’s response to ongoing covid-19 pandemic head on over to World Bank, be sure to follow all of our social media account. Stay safe, continue to socially distance, thank you so much for joining us.