

# INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY GLOBAL EVENT - UNESCO WEBINAR

## Summary of discussions



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture



Romanian  
National Commission  
for UNESCO

Commission nationale  
de Roumanie  
pour l'UNESCO

The 53th edition of the International Literacy Day took place all around the world despite the global unusual context. The Covid-19 crisis has brought to light new challenges that might put into question our perspective of education, but more specifically of literacy. If the percentage of adult literacy has increased from 76% to 86% since 1990, 773 million adults and young people still lack basic literacy skills. Indeed, the Covid-19 crisis has shown that 40% of the governments failed to provide support for youth but also adults during this time, which will deepen inequalities around the world.

However, there is still hope because if 40% failed, 60% managed to tackle the issue by relying on new partnerships, new actors, new forms of literacy teaching and learning with the help of educators. As a result, the global meeting of this year focused on the following theme: '**Literacy teaching and learning in the COVID-19 crisis and beyond: the role of educators and changing pedagogies**'. Ms Stefania Giannini -UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education- emphasised the need to provide more recognition and support for literacy educators, who were the frontrunners during the crisis while remaining in the shadow.

The conducted survey has shown that Covid-19 negatively impacted education, which induced a higher illiterate risk for children and adults, and exposed a lack of readiness and of capacity to move to remote learning. It required alternative solutions such as distance teacher training in Egypt, learning in digital and printing format associated with guidelines for families in both Guatemala and Costa Rica. All these measures could not have been implemented without the governments' financial support, but it seems that education would have to accommodate with a smaller budget. As Mr. Borhene Chakroun -Director of Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO- argued 'societies will not recover better, if there is no investment in education' and we need to invest in high-tech and low-tech to ensure the efficiency of the investment.

Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis stressed the dependency of literacy policies on other factors. For example, in Africa, 53 out of 55 countries shut down the institutions leaving almost 100 million of young people without education access. First, governments tried to provide access to education through TV, online platforms, but a very small number of them effectively reached the targeted people, because of poor connexion or lack of electricity, especially in rural areas. This problem was encountered in Afghanistan too.

The government adopted a comprehensive approach to implement new education response plans by expanding the broadcast of education TV while relying on the weakness of infrastructures.



Secondly, school closures hugely impacted girls and women: they were exposed to child marriage, genital mutilation that would prevent them from attending school again, which was the case with the Ebola crisis also.



As a result, it was underlined that right to education needed to be affordable, reliable and accessible to all.

In fact, many parts of the world faced very similar problems and had to reimagine literacy teaching and learning, and the role of educators. These evolutions produced different consequences around the world.

Supplying educators with a solid background to teach is one of the key tools that will enable literacy. In Senegal, the Minister of Education adopted a more global vision of the education system by considering formal, and informal sectors on an equal footing. This vision led to the reform of formation centres in 2010, which educated the whole educational personnel to reduce the lack of qualification of educators, but also developed partnerships with other international universities and companies. But educating educators is not good enough, they need technological skills to take literacy to a higher level.

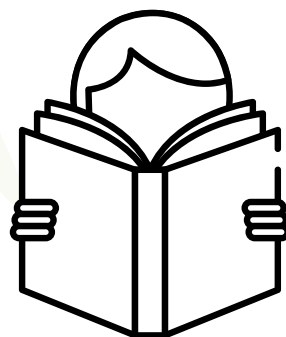


The educators must provide deep understanding and need a language to express themselves. The Covid-19 crisis proved the role of technologies in providing knowledge and that connectivity is 'an artefact' according to Prof. Judy Kalman -Department of Educational Research of the Center for Research and Advanced Studies of the *Instituto Politecnico Nacional*. Connectivity allows the development of knowledge construction and foreshadows the reinvention of teaching and learning with or without technologies. Providing that educators are sufficiently apt to teach; they need to be more inclusive.

As said before, the Covid-19 crisis isolated girls and women but also rural areas, which calls for a more inclusive approach to marginalized groups, including women, disabled people, transgender people, refugees. In order to achieve this goal, educators would need to take into account cultural context, local languages, ethnographic issues, everything that would allow them to adapt the learning process to these groups. Furthermore, these groups would be included in the reform of teaching methods to develop a democratic space where every voice is equal.

Finally, the adaptation of teaching and learning should recognize the political dimension of education that requires the implementation of long-term actions in order to increase equality. For example, the learners are actors of the learning process and should be more included in changing view of literacy and illiteracy.

To put it in a nutshell, the Covid-19 crisis has awakened a new area of innovation by triggering new perspectives on teaching and learning but also by underlining the key role of educators in the path to literacy.



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# UNESCO International Literacy Prizes

Every year, UNESCO acknowledges literacy programs by awarding them the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes, which aim to speculate on main factors that enable teaching and learning, as well as educators to be effective.

This year, the **UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize** seeks to promote literate education with a specific consideration to mother-tongue languages in developing countries. As explained by his Excellency Mr. Dong Gi Kim-Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Korea to UNESCO, 'literacy is something more than the simple ability to read and write' as it is 'a gate to the world' that will empower people to make choices. Both of the Laureates aim to be more inclusive and support small communities. It was awarded to:

- Ageing Nepal (Nepal),
- United World Schools (UK)

The second prize, the **UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy** focuses on literacy programs serving rural adults and out-of-school youth, particularly women and girls and relies on Confucius's belief that education needed to be universal. It was awarded to:

- Just Commit Foundation (Ghana),
- University Center for Social Participation of the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (Mexico),
- Refugee education in General Literacy Office in Sanaa (Yemen)

Details on the laureates are available at the following link:  
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy/prizes/2020>

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