

# Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic caused changes in the entire social and economic life worldwide in 2020 and 2021. Nearly 1.6 billion learners (94% of the world's student population) were affected by the closure of educational institutions at the peak of the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 crisis also affected tertiary education, where we are likely to experience an unprecedented high in dropout rates and a projected 3.5% decline in enrolment, resulting in 7.9 million fewer students.

Due to the imposed lockdowns, schools and universities were forced to digitise conventional teaching in a very short time and to convert teaching and learning formats partially or completely to Distance Learning. The changes in everyday teaching brought by Distance Learning were felt worldwide. Presumably, these changes were received very differently in many countries. Differences may have arisen, among other things, from the different preconditions with regard to the respective:

- National social structure and existing educational inequality.
- (Previous) Training of teachers and university lecturers.
- Degree of digitalisation in the field of education.
- Speed, content and scope of the reactions of governments and competent authorities.
- Monitoring of the challenge by school and university administrations.

The editors of this book – Harald Burgsteiner and Georg Krammer – want to shed light on the effects of Distance Learning in different regions of the world. For this purpose, we invited contributions addressing specifically these changes in countries and regions across the world. This allows for a value-free comparison of how the COVID-19 pandemic has been addressed in education in different parts of the world and what impacts – positive and/or negative – it has had, is having or may have in the future. The effects of Distance Learning can be manifold. Hence, we looked for empirical and theoretical articles that discuss, analyse, critique, or otherwise address aspects of education in settings of Distance Learning brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics include but are not limited to:

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1 UN Secretary-General warns of education catastrophe, pointing to UNESCO estimate of 24 million learners at risk of dropping out. URL: <https://en.unesco.org/news/secretary-general-warns-education-catastrophe-pointing-unesco-estimate-24-million-learners-0> [2021-10-12].



- technological changes (e.g., expansion of the IT infrastructure used in education);
- sustainable structural changes in the education sector;
- ongoing didactic and methodological changes in teaching and learning;
- individual and personal social, psychological and physical experiences;
- changes for individual pupils, students, teachers and university lecturers;
- differential effects of distance learning, for example for gender groups;
- risks and difficulties to an inclusive classroom;
- developing or implementing educational guidelines and policies;
- teachers' continuous professional development, training and support;
- effects of absence from school on children and young people;
- roles and experiences of parents and caregivers as at-home educators, supplementing or replacing teachers;
- preparedness, mitigation, and responses in regional education systems.

In response to the call for papers, we received more than 40 submissions from all over the world, which underwent a strict scientific peer-review process. First, all submissions were reviewed by the editorial team. Second, selected authors were invited to submit a full paper. And third, all manuscripts were subject to a double-blind peer review process by at least two experts of the respective field.

At this point we would like to thank all our authors and reviewers for their unvaluable contribution to this book and for ensuring the quality of the peer-review process. Without the cooperation of all these people we would not have been able to edit and publish this book.

The final result after the peer-review process is a book comprising 22 articles that give an insight into teaching and learning in schools and higher education during and after the imposed lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The articles stem from 17 different countries. Thus, this book can indeed claim to have "International Perspectives" on this topic. These countries are (in alphabetical order): Austria, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South African, Switzerland, Turkey, USA (California), and Vietnam.

Last but not least, we thank the rectorate of the University College of Teacher Education Styria, namely Prof. Dr. Elgrid Messner, HS-Prof. Dr. Regina Weitlaner and Ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Beatrix Karl, for the possibility and the comprehensive support to publish this book.

We believe that Distance Learning is not only a topic of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having said that we believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown a spotlight on this topic. We hope that this spotlight has fostered technological and pedagogical progress that may be used for the future development of educational systems. We also want to highlight that educational systems have dealt and probably will have to deal again with disruptive changes. Such disruptive change is not limited to pandemics. For example, media reports at the time this book was published<sup>2,3</sup> show that educational developments regarding Distance Learning are useful in humanitarian crisis as we are currently seeing in the terrible war in Ukraine, where teachers are still trying to teach children and adolescences with Distance Learning methods. By designing the cover of this book in the colour „Freedom Blue“, we want to praise these efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Harald Burgsteiner & Georg Krammer

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2 UNICEF (2020): New tech for schools in Ukraine lets children tap into education. URL: <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/stories/education-east-ukraine-goes-online>, last visited: 2022-04-28.

3 Geneva Solutions (2022): Keeping education going for Ukraine's children. <https://genevasolutions.news/peace-humanitarian/keeping-education-going-for-ukraine-s-children>, last visited: 2022-04-28.