Reimagining Education:
Perspectives From Students, Teachers, and Parents

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is general recognition that 'Education has the power to transform the world' and equip young people to build a sustainable and peaceful world. As a step towards understanding the current state of education and collectively reimagining the future of education, a series of focus group discussions were conducted with students, teachers, and parents from all over the world. Eight prominent themes emerged from the participant discussion as follows: (1) education as a means to an end, (2) external influences on education system, (3) test centric system of education, (4) constrained curriculum and teaching practices, (5) education as a social and emotional activity, (6) school climate and power dynamics in the classroom, (7) educational infrastructure, and (8) technology and remote learning. Based on participant insights, the major issues in education, emerging innovative solutions, and recommendations for the future are discussed.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Human societies have been marred with several issues of social and economic inequalities and continue to face newer challenges such as climate change and global pandemics. As much needs to be done to address global problems that we face individually, and collectively, there is general recognition that education has the power to transform the world and equip young people to build a sustainable and peaceful world (UNESCO, 2015). Thus, education is identified as a key factor in ensuring human flourishing in the generations to come.

By April 2020, the COVID-19 health crisis had affected more than 1.5 billion school students (UNESCO, 2020). There was disruption in the 'normal' way of being. Interventions such as social distancing impacted education systems with students affected the most. Nearly 90% of learners were unable to attend school with uncertainty on when effective schooling will resume. This statistic along with other global debates on education have renewed impetus to rethinking and reimagining education systems for the future.

While several questions about education today and for the future are worth contemplating, these questions cannot be answered in isolation and require participation and collaboration with the key stakeholders i.e., the students, teachers and the parents. As a step towards understanding and reimagining education, a series of focus group discussions were conducted with key stakeholders in education, i.e., the students, teachers and parents from all over the world. Through a thematic analysis of these focus group discussions, the major issues in education and emerging innovative solutions were identified.

EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND REFORMS

While education systems were present in civilizations around the world from 2000 BC, systems of modern mass education originated in 16th century Europe, and since then have been adapted in various forms world over (Bowen, 2018). During the 19th and 20th century, compulsory education gradually came to be mandated by most governments across the world. In 1948, education was recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly. Adapting and morphing with local and global changes through the years, the current education system is intricately situated within the existing socio-cultural, economic and political systems (Ghaffarzadegan, Larson & Hawley, 2017).

With constantly evolving societal needs, the purpose and expectations of receiving an education are often debated (Mayfield, 2019). This process of negotiating the

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