

PacificMUN

Dare to Speak



UNICEF-Topic B
Backgrounder Guide



Reformation of Education Curriculums to Reduce Student Absenteeism - UNICEF

Topic B

PacificMUN



Letter from the Director

Welcome to the Pacific Model United Nations 2019!

I am Ellen Li, a grade 10 student at Crofton House School. I am incredibly honoured to serve as your Director. I believe that that Model United Nations is not simply a passion and addicting hobby – but an investment in both your future and the world's. The requirements for not only research and preparation, but also the standards for communication give you experiences you cannot receive anywhere else. The interactions that happen at these conferences allows each delegate to explore an entirely new set of worldviews, and pushes one to grow not only as a person, but as a citizen of the global community. MUN debates expand your horizons, goals, and abilities. I hope that at this iteration of PacificMUN, your passion for debate and diplomacy grows exponentially.

Over the course of this weekend, we will address the problems of the Proliferation of Child Smugglers and Reformation of Educational Curriculums to Reduce Student Absenteeism. Both topics are extensively covered in the UNICEF's mandate. This backgrounder will provide you with a convenient overview of each topic and supply some direction for your research. Note that to be eligible for an award, delegates must submit a position paper.

Furthermore, I truly aspire for this conference to deepen your understanding of the semantics involved with the marginalized group we call youth. Whether or not the issues span human rights abuses or generational empowerment, may this debate be well-researched, productive, and overall unforgettable. Godspeed.



Ultimately, we as the dais wish you good luck on your Moden United Nations journey! Feel free to email us at unicef@pacificmun.ca if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ellen Li
Director of UNICEF
PacificMUN 2019

Committee Overview

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund was established on December 11th, 1946, by the United Nations. Its original goal was to establish a grounded global effort to provide emergency aid for the children in post-war Europe and China. Now, UNICEF invests itself in long lasting positive impacts made upon the global community of youth. These endeavors include, but are not limited to, immunizations, educational programs, and emergency relief efforts.

UNICEF commonly monitors the global situations of children in crises, and is guided by the Convention of the Rights of the Child to establish ethical principles. The code of conduct outlines a specific forward-thinking criteria that combats social issues – spanning institutionalized health issues facing women and children, to battling malaria and AIDS crisis. UNICEF has the power to work both privately and publicly – with donors from all sectors. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation donated a portion of their \$24.2 billion dollar funds to UNICEF. An example of an innovative health initiative that this organization supported is RapidSMS mobile technology to deliver diagnosis results for infants. This enables a far more efficient form of testing that enables quick-time responses in order to combat HIV. Nine out of ten staff members work with local and federal governments to achieve mission statements, and cooperate with international partners.

UNICEF has many goals, which include Basic Education and Gender Equality, Advocacy and Partnerships for Children’s Rights, and the general realization of the vision of peace and social progress – that represents the Charter of the United Nations. In terms of UNICEF actions, famine was declared in parts of South Sudan as of 2017. UNICEF provided treatment to more than 600,000 malnourished children in their various habilitation centres. In regions that commonly suffer terrorist attacks and warfare, UNICEF provides tablets and internet access for education. During the Syrian crisis, UNICEF provided more than 1.5 million people with a hygiene kit, got almost 1 million children enrolled in formal education, and had more than 21 million children under 5 vaccinated against polio. Some critics argue that UNICEF is incompetent in terms of legislating and monitoring government policy.



Topic B: Reformation of Educational Curriculums to Reduce Student Absenteeism

Introduction

Student absenteeism has multifaceted links, mechanisms, and impacts. There are several categories of people who are most affected by the curriculum and thus do not attend school, and their are various outcomes – some quit school indefinitely, while others suffer from ‘chronic absenteeism’ (Chronic absenteeism is typically defined as missing 10 percent or more of a school year – approximately 18 days a year, or just two days every month).¹ On a global average, around 84 percent of children attend secondary school. In lower income countries, that average drops to around 70 percent. In the span of just five years until 2015, out-of-school children’s population in lower secondary school age decreased from 97 million to 62 million, but progress has slowed since 2007. Secondary school participation suffers the greatest losses in Sub-saharan African, as well as South Asia.² In the status quo, millions of children are forced to drop out or never even attend school; financial situations necessitate early contribution through work. However, there is also a substantial population of youth who are structurally disenfranchised with their school curriculum. They either drop out due to academic failure, boredom, or because of the irrelevant school system. This way, they never access the benefits high school education brings, in knowledge or even just as a filled requirement that stands as a prerequisite for many jobs. In fact, around 60% of all jobs in the American market requires at least a high school General Education Diploma (GED). People who graduate from high school are not only more likely to earn more with better jobs, but are paid more due to their more impressive seeming skill set.³ Another sub-group of people who currently undergo the hardships and fallacies of the high school educational system are those who miss significant parts of school, being those who are chronically absent. This sort of absence increases the likelihood of individuals dropping out of school, hinders their learning, and dramatically impacts their grades. These effects carry on all the way through tertiary levels of education.⁴

Historical Analysis

Originally in Europe, education was instated and repeatedly reinforced not only for scholarly purposes, but also for practicality. When students were in school, that lessened the risk of them being forced into child labour. When the youth were focusing on studies, education also lessened the influence of other

¹ <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/addressing-chronic-absenteeism-anne-obrien>

² <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-world-s-lowest-high-school-enrollments.html>

³ https://www.theamericanacademy.com/blog/why_a_high_school_diploma_is_important

⁴ <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/working-with-childs-teacher/the-problem-of-chronic-absenteeism-what-you-need-to-know>



stigmatized and potentially dangerous activities. On the flip side, involvement in work related activities also greatly increases the chances of premature dropout. Even with numerous reforms in education being held, North America still faces many challenges in terms of dropouts. There are huge issues surrounding that of gender-identity, wealth, and access that play into the prevention of children going to school. However, the revision of school curriculums poses a unique take on the combatting of these problems. Where in developing nations children are often taken out to work and support their family, wealthier and more developed countries have massive droves of students dropping out due to the non-stimulating or relevant educational system that they partake in.

An aspect of educational curriculum pertains to the actual enforcement of education itself. An example of such enforcement is corporal punishment, where students use physical means to punish their students in response to irresponsible behaviour. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child defines corporal punishment as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however slight,” and it calls physical punishment “invariably degrading”.⁵ 51 countries have banned such means of education, including all of Europe, Canada, and numerous African and Asian nations. The way teachers are given control over their students in many ways may be considered problematic, and while some condone these methods, scientific research has deemed it detrimental for a student’s performance and mindset. According to the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) Islamabad, a local (NGO) advocating the rights of children, 35,000 high school pupils in Pakistan dropout of the education system each year due to corporal punishment.⁶ The methods of

The specificity of curricular reform influence over dropout rates often may address more developed nations, seeing as those in less developed nations have little economic choice to enroll or quit school due to interest factors. The changes in how the school implements the subjects they choose and the details of their lessons often are the deciding factor of how students choose to view their schooling. When over 20 percent of high school dropouts in North America cite the “irrelevance” of the schooling they receive, it juxtaposes a larger issue with the conception of how their educational system stimulates youth.

Current Situation

Quite apparently, education poses as a very important anchor for the socio-economic stability of each country. It is an intrinsic investment for human and international development, as well as economic growth. Education is also considered as one of the largest drivers of poverty alleviation and is the forefront of social progress in every nation. When students complete their basic education, they are

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crc/pages/crcindex.aspx>

⁶ <http://ijecm.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/3693.pdf>



almost automatically granted access to higher qualities of life, and immediately offered more opportunities.

Another recently emerging issue is the feminization of the education industry. In fact, a study done by UNICEF indicates that in European and Central Asian nations, four out of five women are teachers. This results in a differing view of education, as well as how it must be implemented. Salaries are also affected, and the position is seen as less desirable.⁷

If youth do not complete their GED, they are automatically put at a disadvantage compared to those who do. Fewer jobs, loans and general opportunities are offered to them, while they are also unable to apply basic skills and competencies to their everyday lives. A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report shows us that in 2000, thirty million children in the developing world dropped out of school, and thus were denied their basic right to mandatory education. The dropout rate in rural China as of 2004 was about 40 percent, far exceeding the national 3 percent average. The main reason behind the exit of rural students was quoted to be dissatisfaction with their studies. In fact, Hu Yong Qiang, a ninth-grade dropout himself says that “some dropouts are pushed hard by teachers but cannot pass exams, so they run away”. The increasing lack of graduated students will in turn exponentially up unemployment, and hinder economic growth and stability throughout all of China.⁸

A study on the USA identified that many students disenrolled in their schools because they found their classes boring, were previously absent from school for a long time, or were unable to manage their work. Many individuals simply found their studies to be time-consuming, and were not interested in studying. The over complication of the curriculum seems to be a recurring factor as to why students are unstimulated and not incentivized to pursue an education.

According to Vision 2030, “Education is a key component of economic growth because it has a direct influence on entrepreneurship, productivity, growth and increases employment opportunities, as well as the empowerment of women. Education [enhances the ability, creativity of youth]... Student dropouts reduce the literacy rate of a country and push forward a non-innovative environment. [With an absence of students in high school classrooms], the economy also ha[s] to pay [a] cost; [an empty] class of students”.⁹ Such individuals can cost the country over \$200 billion in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue every year. People who do not complete their education are unable to get jobs, and far more likely to become victims of unemployment and rely on government assistance. Extensive literature review needs to be conducted to conceptualize the theme of study, and to generalize the concept to suit a wider range of the population.

⁷ https://www.unicef.org/eca/ru/CEECIS_teachers_ENGLISH.pdf

⁸ <https://reap.fsi.stanford.edu/news/caixin-media-chinas-rural-youngsters-drop-out-school-alarming-rate-researchers-find>

⁹ vision2030.gov.sa/download/file/fid/417



United Nations Involvement

UNICEF has an extensive history in conducting numerous studies and research products monitoring the education tendencies and patterns throughout the globe. For example, they have discovered numerous gender and wealth disparities when it comes to different aspects of educator job occupation. In different countries, education is prioritized with varying amounts of funding. UNICEF often raises awareness considering curriculums that are too densely packed, and force students to have an overbearing workload – resulting in potential psychological stress or damage. An example of a United Nations constitutional review initiative is found in Kenya, where The Constitution of Kenya Review Commission initiated a national recommendation process for achieving constitutional goals throughout a plethora of human rights and policy issues. The Kenyan reform was spearheaded with a skirmish to revolutionize the political system from one party to a multiparty democracy. At the forefront of the movement were religious, gender and human rights organizations, and the Constitutional Commission burdened with running the reform organized a far-reaching participatory process – it encouraged civil society organizations to provide civic education. The process made it possible for the Commission to gather information for crafting specific provisions on the rights of children.¹⁰ UNICEF has stated that “by focusing so strongly on teacher development (i.e. teacher training) over the past 20 years, we have collectively allowed ourselves to be distracted from the main goal of improving teacher performance.” They categorize teacher performance as a sort of mindset that results in effective education for children. The more that children learn, the better UNICEF perceives the performance of the education facilitator to be. Other factors include motivation and morale, incentives and rewards, accountability and responsibility. Even when working on teacher development, the focus has been mainly on In-service training; Initial Teacher Training (ITT) has been largely neglected. More worryingly, most in-service training initiatives have failed to gather evidence of their impact and those few that have done so have at best been able to show only small gains. UNICEF fights for a world in which the root of education, being that of the educators, may have a solid basis to work upon.

Seeking Resolution

Consensus during past years has spread regarding the sorts of necessary reforms if education is to be implemented. These are not simply proposals that are currently dormant; they exist not only in academic papers or in cases shown at international conferences but are actually being put into practice all over the world – through piloted experiments and at the national scale. The corresponding successes are not independent actors or isolated events that cannot be replicated in other contexts or scenarios. Instead, these ideas have been shown to be pragmatic evidence of the ‘education revolution’, whose

¹⁰ https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Handbook_on_Legislative_Reform.pdf



infrastructures are now unilaterally acknowledged and accepted, and whose core values are being developed in varying configurations around the world. Academia throughout the globe is often criticised for being out of date and overloaded with content and homework. This is especially prevalent in nations like China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and many more Asiatic nations. Educational systems were also seen as far too theoretical or philosophical, and unfocused on the intrinsic development of competencies and skills. (Competencies are sets of individual performance behaviours which are observable, measurable and critical to successful individual performance, and individual characteristics of a person which result in an effective and superior performance in a job.¹¹) Changes in economic activities and global workforces have been greatly intensifying the incentive to better the competitiveness of countries, especially those with globalised economies. This has thus led many countries to revise their curricular content and pay more attention to skills, competencies and the notion of flexibility. Hence, curricular changes in the past 15 years included an emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills (the so-called foundational skills), and a general shift from a highly specified content-based to a minimally specified outcomes-based curriculum, with increased attention to the development of a set of competencies and skills. Consequently, a competency-based curriculum was introduced in several countries across the globe. According to some, such reforms sought to subordinate education to economic needs and to align the development of competencies and skills with the needs of the economy.

In the majority of classrooms in low and middle income countries, pedagogical practices are described as authoritarian, rigid, formalistic, teacher-dominated and lecture-driven. Students' activities are often limited to memorising facts and reciting them to the teacher or reproducing such knowledge during exams. Various studies confirmed that this type of teaching and learning practices foster memorisation and rote learning. Such practices do not encourage spontaneity or initiative, nor stimulate cognitive development, or the development of conceptual learning, critical thinking and problem solving skills. There has also been a growing understanding among educational stakeholders that traditional teaching styles do not facilitate effective student learning, and is largely responsible for low levels of education quality across low income countries.

Through wide varietal backgrounds, reducing the basic cost of education and providing subsidies can boost school participation quite significantly. Individuals choosing to attend school seems subject to societal norms and time efficient preferences. Merit scholarships, school health programs, and information about returns to education can all cost-effectively incent school participation. However, negative ramifications in education systems, such as weak teacher incentives and elite-oriented curriculums, undermine the quality of in school participation and the impact of increasing existing educational spending. Merely informing parents about status quo school conditions seems insufficient

¹¹ <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/what-are-competencies.htm>



to improve teacher incentives, and evidence on merit pay is mixed, however hiring teachers locally on short-term contracts has been proven to both save money and improve educational outcomes.

Educational attainment has risen dramatically over the past 40 years. In 1960 in low-income countries, 14% of secondary school–age children were in secondary school, and the working-age population had an average of 1.6 years of education. By 2000, 54% of secondary school–age children were in secondary school, and the average education in these countries was 5.2 years. Nonetheless, 100 million children of primary school age—15% of the worldwide total—are not in school. Of these, 42 million are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 37 million are in South Asia, while 55 million are girls. As previously covered, education has many wealth, cultural, and gender disparities.

Subsidizing education can further increase school attendance. The pioneering Programa de Educacion, Salud y Alimentacion (PRO-GRESA), a contract-protected cash transfer program in Mexico, provided up to three years of monthly cash grants equivalent to one-fourth of average family income. This mainly was offered to economically challenged mothers whose children attended school at least 85% of the time, with priority offered to older children and specifically girls in secondary school. In household surveys, the reported increase of enrolment was by 3.4–3.6 percentage points for all students in grades 1 through 8 and increased the transition rate from elementary school to junior secondary school by 11.1 percentage points from a base of 58 percent. In the elder children category, girls' enrollment increased by 14.8 percentage points, a significantly higher amount than boys' enrollment, which grew by 6.5 percentage points. The hefty change among older grades suggests that educational attainment could potentially be increased further if the subsidies were targeted more heavily toward older students. Returning students who had initially dropped out increased within older children and younger children repeated grades less often. This directly enforced improvements in effort among the treatment group. Such programs display a financial and facilitative approach to increasing participation in school settings.¹²

Bloc Positions

Japan

An example of a country that has gone through processes to ensure a 99 percent literacy rate in Japan, which ranks second in Pearson Education's annual global educational performance report, places fourth in reading and seventh in math in the influential Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey – which tests 15-year-old students worldwide in order to compare countries' education system. Japan's high school dropout rate settles at a mere 5 percent; however, there are many complaints against this pacific islander nation's educational system. The intensive amounts of homework and exam

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3740762/>



preparation almost completely eradicate a student's free time, directly linking to high stress levels and detriments to mental health. In addition, it is said that the Japanese educational system rejects individuality and flexibility in both methods and outcomes – being that of the direction a student wants to take.

Finland

Finland is a rare phenomena of a high-performing western country with the top five ranked students in the world. In the mid 1990's, Finland was struggling economically and intellectually. Instead of market reforms, they turned to educational ones. Unlike other studious and well ranked nations, such as South Korea and Japan, their curriculum contains only one standardized test per year, with very little stress and competition. There are no rankings between peers or groups, and the Finnish government has banned private schools. Mandated education begins at age 7, and all assignments and assessments are tailored by each teacher, and classrooms never surpass a twenty student to one teacher ratio. School days are usually no longer than 5 hours, with much time spent outside. Homework is also minimal. There are also no university fees for any Finnish citizens or those who possess a European Union passport. The role of a teacher is one of the most prestigious in Finland, with connotations of respect, dignity, and high pay. One must at least possess a masters degree to apply for any kind of educational role.

East Asia

Confucianism, an ideology deeply ingrained in Asian culture, has cultivated a hierarchy in which the scholar presides on the top, and where pursuing knowledge is considered as a priority. In general, studies are pursued almost religiously and hold great importance. In the past 25 years, many Asian nations have implemented an extraordinary level of high investment rate (of about 10 percent) return from education. College graduates earn up to 2.5 times more than their colleagues with a junior high school degree. With the rapid industrialization of the continent, East Asia's call for labour is deeply separated into diverse educational backgrounds. Due to this classification, completing higher levels of education is considered intrinsic to the market. Three fourths of high ranking government positions are occupied by graduates from Korea's top ten universities. These nations also hold outstandingly large budgets dedicated towards public/state sponsored education. 20 percent of the Korean government expenditure is focused on education, and The Ministry of Education has a budget of US\$29 billion.

Discussion Questions

1. What resources are available for students to increase participation in your country?
2. What solutions will target and have an effect on both developing and developed nations?



3. What is your nation's dropout rate? How many students begin going and drop out, and how many students enrol in the first place at all?
4. Is your national curriculum considered on average an advanced one, mediocre one, or lagging/behind others?
5. Does your country currently have any reforms in place? What sets it apart?
6. How do countries with already existing infrastructure retain student participation?
7. How does your country prioritize the secondary vs primary vs tertiary education of youth?
8. How much does your government spend on public education? Is it being efficiently spent? Where does it come from? (eg taxes etc)

Further Reading

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3740762/>

<https://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/researchschool-attendance--final-version.pdf>

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-lynch-edd/high-school-dropout-rate_b_5421778.html

https://www.theamericanacademy.com/blog/why_a_high_school_diploma_is_important



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