Practices and experiences of distant education during the COVID-19 pandemic: The perspectives of six- to sixteen-year-olds from three high-income countries

# Details

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* Learning
* Wellbeing
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

1751 participants aged 6-16 from Luxembourg (n = 771), Germany (n = 781) and Switzerland (n = 259).

## Implications For Educators About

* School innovation
* Professional development
* School networking

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

The paper explores children's perspectives of distance education, their learning experiences and school satisfaction in Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data stem from an online questionnaire completed by 1773 primary and secondary school children aged 6–16. While the paper uses quantitative and qualitative data, it aligns with the qualitative research tradition and predominantly uses an inductive approach. The findings show that teachers offered varied types of distance education and that parents supported children. The children's contact time with teachers and their time spent on schoolwork varied within and between countries. Their school satisfaction dropped in the three countries. The paper calls for training and development on distant education.

# Outcome

Online school activities were from most to least common writing, reading, watching videos. Activities where the children needed to look up information themselves were rather rare.
Secondary school children had more contact time with their teachers than primary school children. Most children had no contact with their teachers daily (depending on the country, between 6% and 40% of the children had contact with their teachers on a daily basis). Most children had Internet at home (87%-91%). Yet nearly half of the children owned a computer or a tablet (41%-60%). Primary school children missed school a lot and more than secondary school children. Primary school children missed school “a lot” with 51% to 68% and secondary school children missed school less with 38% to 49%. For schoolwork most secondary school children use tablets and/or computers(69% - 89%) as primary school children used these devices less (42% - 49%).
"More than 80% of the primary school and 94% of the secondary school children indicated coping “well” or “very well” with the technology."
(Claudine Kirsch, Pascale M.J. Engel de Abreu, Sascha Neumann, Cyril Wealer, 2021, page 6)
Most children perceived their schoolwork to be useful, regardless of primary or secondary school. On the question if they perceived the schoolwork as interesting, most answered with “sometimes” which was more often answered by secondary school children. A high percentage of secondary school children in all 3 countries agreed on, that the work was “almost never” or “only sometimes” interesting. The schoolwork was perceived as understandable from both primary and secondary schools. For most children in the 3 countries the work was “sometimes” or “almost never” abundant, yet a high percentage of children in both primary and secondary school perceived their work as “oft” or “very often” too much.
"For each country and each school level more than 90% of children in primary school and 84% in secondary assessed their work as “almost never” or “sometimes” as too difficult"
Claudine Kirsch, Pascale M.J. Engel de Abreu, Sascha Neumann, Cyril Wealer, 2021, page 7)
On average children in Luxembourg spent 3.6h per day on schoolwork, in Germany 3.1h and 3.5h in Switzerland. These values are higher for secondary school children and lower for primary school children.
From qualitative data, children perceived the support form teachers and parents as either the worst or the nicest thing. Some children felt neglected as they did not get feedback, which they found very demotivating.
"When children commented positively on teaching, they almost always referred to the absence of tests which reduced pressure."
Claudine Kirsch, Pascale M.J. Engel de Abreu, Sascha Neumann, Cyril Wealer, 2021, page 6)
"The analysis of the answers in the two open-ended questionnaires indicated similar topics categorized under “learning”. Volume and dif- ficulty were frequently mentioned as negative aspects (“worst thing”). Almost all children who commented (23 in Luxembourg, 11 in Germany, 10 in Switzerland) mentioned the quantity of homework which left them little time to do other things. Some children mentioned that they did not understand the work given."
Claudine Kirsch, Pascale M.J. Engel de Abreu, Sascha Neumann, Cyril Wealer, 2021, page 8)
The children also expressed emotions as fear, as they had the feeling of learning less, or worries about falling behind or failing their class.
Most children were satisfied or very satisfied with school before the pandemic (90%), this decreased during the pandemic (64%). Children being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with school increased also from before the pandemic (10%) to during the pandemic (35%).