# Post COVID-19 – The Aftermath

Andy Wong
February 2023

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the education industry, and its effects are likely to be felt for years to come. In Singapore, the period between March 2020 till the end of 2021, educators were forced to find new ways of delivering instruction, and students had to adapt to new learning environments. However, the reality is that many schools who had survived the mayhem, reaped the benefit of being an improved and a more sophisticated version of what they used to be.

## The Challenges

### A. Technology and the Hybrid Learning

With classrooms closed, educators turned to online platforms to deliver instruction to their students. This shift to remote learning has been challenging for many educators, who have had to learn new technologies and teaching methods, but it has also opened new opportunities for students who previously may have had limited access to educational resources. However, there are also challenges that educators faced including the digital divide, as not all students have access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity, and this has highlighted the need for schools and policymakers to invest in technology infrastructure to ensure that all students have equal access to educational resources.

Another challenge is the lack of social interaction that comes with remote learning. Many students have struggled with the isolation of remote learning and miss the social interaction and support that comes with being in a physical classroom. Educators have had to find new ways to provide social interaction and support for students in the remote learning environment.

As the pandemic eases and schools and universities begin to reopen, many institutions are adopting *hybrid* learning models that combine both remote and in-person instruction. Hybrid learning allows for greater flexibility and can help to reduce the number of students in classrooms at any given time, allowing for greater physical distancing and reducing the risk of transmission. Unfortunately, many institutions focused on cost cutting and neglected the need for quality of the delivery of teaching services.

Hybrid learning models are still evolving, and educators are still exploring the best ways to combine remote and in-person instruction. One challenge is ensuring that students receive consistent instruction and that there is continuity between the remote and in-person components of the hybrid learning model.

### B. Economic Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy, and the education industry has not been immune to these effects. Many schools and universities have experienced financial challenges because of the pandemic, including reduced

enrolment, lower tuition revenues, and increased costs associated with implementing new health and safety protocols.

These financial challenges have forced many institutions to make difficult decisions, including laying off staff, cutting programs, and reducing services. There is also a risk that these challenges could widen existing inequalities in the education system, as institutions with fewer resources may struggle to adapt to the new realities of the post-COVID-19 education industry.

The economic condition is now worsened by the increasing operational cost and heightening effect of inflation. In Singapore, the government has recently increased Goods and Services Tax to 8% in 2023 and subsequently to 9% in 2024. Wages are expected to rise and cost of rental has increased tremendously. This has impacted on the growth of many education institutions in Singapore.

### C. Social Impact

The social impact of the pandemic on the education sector has been significant. The closure of schools and universities has disrupted the education of millions of students around the world, with many students experiencing significant learning loss as a result, as seen in Malaysia, Singapore and neighbouring countries. In Singapore, students from low-income families and those with disabilities have been disproportionately affected, as they may not have access to the resources and support needed to participate in remote learning.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of social interaction and support in the education system. Many students have struggled with the isolation and lack of social interaction that comes with remote learning, and educators have had to find new ways to promote social interaction and support for their students.

### D. Innovation and Adaptation

Despite the significant social and economic impacts of the pandemic on the education sector, it has also created opportunities for innovation and adaptation. Educators and institutions have had to adapt quickly to the new realities of remote and hybrid learning models, and many have developed new technologies and teaching methods to support their students.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of investing in technology infrastructure and digital literacy in the education system. As more students and educators turn to remote learning and digital technologies, it is essential that all students have equal access to the necessary resources and support.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of equity and inclusivity in the education system. As schools and universities work to adapt to the new realities of the post-COVID-19 education industry, it is essential that they prioritize the needs of all students, particularly those from low-income families and those with disabilities.


**The Opportunities**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant social and economic impacts on the education sector, and its effects are likely to be felt for years to come. The pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities in the education system, as well as creating new challenges for students and educators. However, it has also created opportunities for innovation and adaptation, and has highlighted the importance of investing in technology infrastructure, digital literacy, and

equity and inclusivity in the education system. As the education industry looks to the future, it is essential that it continues to prioritize the needs of all students and works to create a more equitable and inclusive education system.

The post-COVID-19 era presents numerous opportunities for individuals, businesses, and society as a whole. The pandemic has spurred innovation in the education sector, including the development of new teaching methods and technologies. This has created opportunities for educators and institutions to improve access to education, promote equity and inclusivity, and enhance the quality of education delivery. In another sense, COVID-19 created a renewed sense of community and social engagement. This has created opportunities for individuals and organizations to come together to support vulnerable populations, promote social and racial justice, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

In term of businesses, the pandemic has accelerated the growth of e-commerce and digital business, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses to develop new business models, reach new markets, and expand their offerings. This includes new opportunities for the digitalisation of the education business as well.

Overall, the post-COVID-19 era presents numerous opportunities for individuals, businesses, and society. By embracing these opportunities, we can build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future.

**The New Reality**

While this reality is undoubtedly challenging and has brought about a great deal of uncertainty, there are both positive and negative aspects to consider.

On the positive side, the *New Reality* has forced us to be more creative and adaptable, and has highlighted the importance of innovation, collaboration, and community. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work and digital technologies, creating new opportunities for businesses and individuals to operate and communicate in ways that were previously impossible or uncommon. Additionally, the pandemic has created a renewed sense of community and social engagement, with many people coming together to support vulnerable populations and promote social and racial justice.

On the negative side, the *New Reality* has also created numerous challenges and difficulties. The pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities in society, particularly in terms of access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunity. Additionally, the pandemic has disrupted the lives of millions of people around the world, causing physical, mental, and emotional strain, and has created a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

**The Impact**

The continuous use of technology in our daily lives is a complex issue with both positive and negative aspects, and there is ongoing debate and research about its sustainability and impact on human psychological health.

*Excessive use of technology* can contribute to depression and anxiety in several ways -

- Social isolation
  Spending too much time on technology can lead to social isolation, as individuals may forego face-to-face interactions and social activities in favour of digital

connections. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, which are associated with depression and anxiety;

- Sleep disruption
  The blue light emitted by screens can interfere with sleep, making it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. This can contribute to feelings of fatigue, irritability, and anxiety;

- Overstimulation and distraction
  The constant stimulation and distraction of technology can contribute to a sense of overwhelm and burnout, making it harder to focus, relax, and engage in activities that promote well-being.

*Increased screen time.* With the rise of remote work and distance learning, as well as increased time spent at home, individuals are spending more time in front of screens. According to a report by Nielsen (2020), adults in the United States spent an average of 13 hours per day on screens in the first quarter of 2020, up from 11 hours per day in the same period in 2019. This in turn has impacted on -

- *Mental health*
  The pandemic has led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, and technology use has been identified as a contributing factor. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association (2021), nearly 8 in 10 adults in the United States say the coronavirus pandemic is a significant source of stress in their lives, and 61% of adults say they have experienced undesired weight changes since the pandemic began, with increased screen time and sedentary behaviour identified as contributing factors;

- *Digital divide*
  The pandemic has highlighted existing disparities in technology access and digital literacy, particularly among low-income and marginalized communities. According to a report by the National Centre for Education Statistics (2021), only 67% of households earning less than $25,000 per year have internet access, compared to 96% of households earning $75,000 or more per year;

- *Shifts in work and education*
  The pandemic has accelerated the shift towards remote work and distance learning, with technology playing a crucial role in enabling these changes. According to a survey by McKinsey & Company (2020), 80% of teachers and students in the United States reported using online learning tools for the first time during the pandemic, and nearly 60% of U.S. employees who shifted to remote work during the pandemic say they would like to continue doing so in some capacity after the pandemic ends.


## Conclusion

In summary, the new reality of post-COVID-19 impact on the higher education industry is complex and multifaceted, with both challenges and opportunities for change and growth. The long-term impact of the pandemic on the sector remains to be seen, but it is clear that education will continue to evolve and adapt in response to the changing needs and demands of students, faculty, and society as a whole.

It is difficult to predict with certainty whether the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in the education industry will be sustainable in the long term or whether there will be a return to pre-pandemic practices.

On one hand, the pandemic has accelerated trends towards digital transformation and online learning that were already underway before the pandemic. This suggests that some of the changes implemented during the pandemic, such as hybrid or fully online course offerings, may continue to be part of higher education offerings in the future.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of in-person interaction and socialization in the education experience, which may lead to a desire to return to pre-pandemic practices as soon as it is safe to do so. Additionally, concerns around the quality and effectiveness of online education may also lead to a shift back towards in-person learning in certain fields or for certain types of courses.

Overall, it is likely that the education industry will continue to evolve and adapt in response to changing circumstances and student needs, and that some of the changes brought about by the pandemic may be sustained in the long term. However, the extent to which these changes will be sustained and how they will interact with pre-pandemic practices remains uncertain.

## References

American Psychological Association. (2021). Stress in AmericaTM 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-october

EdTech Magazine. (2018). The State of EdTech: Teachers Share Their Challenges and Recommendations. Retrieved from https://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2018/07/state-edtech-teachers-share-their-challenges-and-recommendations-infographic

McKinsey & Company. (2020). COVID-19 and Remote Learning: A National Survey of Teachers and Parents. Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Percentage of Households by Race/Ethnicity and Income Level with Internet Access: 2019. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cck.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Percentage of K-12 Teachers Who Reported Using Online Platforms for Classroom Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Selected Teacher and School Characteristics: Spring 2021. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp

Nielsen. (2020). Total Audience Report: Q1 2020. Retrieved from
https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2020/total-audience-report-q1-2020/

Pearson. (2020). The Future of Education: A Framework for Change. Retrieved from
https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/corporate/global/pearson-dot-com/files/innovation/Pearson-The-Future-of-Education.pdf

Technavio. (2020). Global E-Learning Market 2020-2024. Retrieved from
https://www.technavio.com/report/e-learning-market-industry-analysis

**Adjunct Professor Andy Wong** is Co-founder and Executive Director of Hitmaker Global Academy, Singapore. He is a Fellow of the Centre for Scholarship and Research.