

Short summary of the impact of COVID-19 on schools in Cyprus

Data from a sample of teachers, parents, and pupils across primary and secondary education public and private schools in Cyprus revealed important insights about their experiences during the pandemic related to COVID-19. Regarding teaching in the lower levels of public primary education schools (grades 1, 2, and 3), during complete lockdowns, students only received teaching materials and homework through Viber. There was no electronic synchronous learning for these ages. On the opposite, for grades 4, 5, and 6, students were taught using the synchronous electronic method for about 2 hours a day and only for the subject matters of math, language, and science. When students returned to school, there was no provision of blended learning. If students were absent, then they received some materials via Viber.

For the case of private primary schools, the situation differed. During complete lockdowns, all grade levels had online classes according to their regular schedule in private primary schools—students in lower grades needed to have their parents by their side to do the synchronous online lessons. In addition, the duration of each lesson was 30 minutes and not the regular 40 minutes to minimize the students' screen time. After the lockdowns, the teachers used the blended learning method when students stayed at home due to covid.

For the case of public and private middle and high schools, there were online classes according to the regular schedule during complete lockdowns, and after return to school, there was blended learning.

Regarding the quality of online learning, students in public schools had many problems with connectivity issues and a lack of computers, especially in schools where there were many students with low socioeconomic status (primarily immigrants). This was not the case with the private schools.

All teachers in all schools, private and public, stated that they preferred the face-to-face method to teach even though they learned a lot about teaching and learning online. However, they also said they would keep some practices, such as posting materials and assignments in Teams.

Students said that they had trouble, in the beginning, concentrating online because they were at home and they wanted to do other things. Also, they did not like the closed cameras because they could not see or talk with their friends. Some students said that they enjoyed staying at home, but they did not like that they still had to do homework.

Parents said that it was challenging to have their children learn using the online method at home. Some parents said that they did not have the skills and or knowledge to help their children while learning online and that as a result of this, their children fell behind and were not able to perform well during the online teaching sessions.