

Same same but different? Swiss Schools' Challenges and Strategies after two years of COVID-19 pandemic

Suter, Francesca¹; Maag Merki, Katharina²; Sposato, Gloria²; Plata, Andrea³; Melfi, Giuseppe⁴; Gaspoz, Deniz-Gyger⁴; Mehmeti, Teuta⁴; Castelli, Luciana³

¹ University of Teacher Education of the Grisons, PHGR, Chur, Switzerland

² University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

³ Department of Education and Learning of the SUPSI, Lugano, Switzerland

⁴ University of teacher Education BEJUNE, Neuchâtel, Switzerland

In spring 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic presented major challenges to all areas of society. In most cases, no tried-and-tested strategies for action were available and this particularly holds true for educational settings (UNESCO, 2020). Core tenets of school and teaching such as the transfer of knowledge and the promotion of the domain-specific and cross-curricular competencies of all pupils were suddenly at stake and a number of studies report of learning losses due to the pandemic (e.g., Tomasik et al., 2021). In no time alternatives to “regular” forms of teaching were required that would both allow for reaching out to students at a distance and to teaching remotely (Hodges et al., 2020). Even after the abrupt start of the pandemic, schools had to continuously adapt to new pandemic-related regulations and challenges and the need for agility in conditions of high uncertainty has ever since never waned. This may have a long-term impact on learning, teaching, collaboration and organization in and among schools.

The first results of the trinational S-CLEVER study in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, Germany and Austria (2020-2022) in which school principals ($N = 802-1449$ principals) participated through three online-questionnaires, suggest that since the outbreak of the pandemic (1) the use of digital learning have grown, (2) students have been more required to take responsibility of their own learning and (3) collaboration among teaching staff and with parents has enhanced (Feldhoff et al., 2022). Additionally, a first longitudinal analysis suggests that pre-pandemic experience in digital learning and a culture of knowledge sharing among colleagues before the pandemic had positive effects on schools' capacities to deal with the pandemic and the professionalization of teachers a year later, in summer 2021 (Suter et al., 2022). However, studies with data from 2017 show that schools in the French- und Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland tend to have less digital equipment than schools in the German-speaking parts (educa, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic might have, hence, led to further educational inequalities. In order to better assess the situation and to work out future requirements, nationwide studies are needed that take all language regions into account. This is the goal of S-CLEVER+, which is a follow-up study to S-CLEVER. The following research questions will be at the core:

1. *Challenges and strategies*: What challenges do schools face two years after the COVID-19 pandemic and how do they handle them?
2. *Effects and changes*: What effects have been perceived by school principals in terms of teaching, individual support for pupils and schools as a whole? What further changes do school principals anticipate?
3. *Regional differences*: In relation to RQ 1–2, to what extent are there differences between language regions?

In order to address these questions, a survey of school principals has been carried out in summer 2021 in various Swiss cantons (AG, BE fr., GR, JU, LU, NE, SG, TG, TI, ZH) and in

Germany.

Data collection will be finished by September 2022. We will be able to present preliminary results from descriptive and multivariate analyses concerning the Swiss sample at the conference.

The study results will allow us to better understand Swiss schools' moments of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by comparing the different regional contexts. Furthermore, they will inform school authorities regarding factors that are important for positively navigating through a long-lasting crisis. Moreover, the results can help to identify equity and inequality issues in the Swiss educational system, which in turn can be the basis to develop strategies in order to reduce educational inequalities.

References

educa. (2021). *Digitisation in education*. Educa. https://www.educa.ch/sites/default/files/2021-08/Digitisation_in_education_short_version.pdf

Feldhoff, T., Radisch, F., Maag Merki, K., Jude, N., Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz, S., Maaz, K., Arndt, M., Habeck, L., Suter, F., Wüst, O., Rettinger, T., Reschke, K., & Selcik, F. (2022). *Erfahrungen von Schulleiter*innen in Deutschland, Österreich und in der Deutschschweiz während der COVID-19-Pandemie. Zentrale Ergebnisse der Längsschnittstudie "S-CLEVER. Schulentwicklung vor neuen Herausforderungen"*. www.s-clever.org

Hodges, R., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educause Review*, 27. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>

Suter, F., Maag Merki, K., Feldhoff, T. & Rettinger, T. (2022, January). Pandemic As a Driving Force for Improvement? An Analysis of Predictors and Long-Term Effects. Paper presented at the International Conference of School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) Conference, Online.

Tomasik, M. J., Helbling, L. A., & Moser, U. (2021). Educational gains of in-person vs. distance learning in primary and secondary schools: A natural experiment during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Switzerland. *International Journal of Psychology*, 56(4), 566-576. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12728>

UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education - All means all*. UNESCO.