

## EXPLAINER

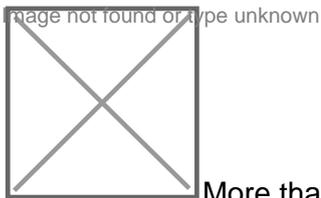
# How to Deliver Effective Remote Learning at Scale



Students can learn at home while schools are closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo credit: ADB.

*Government can partner with telcos and educators and use multiple channels of existing infrastructure to reach as many children as possible.*

## Introduction



More than a billion of the world's school-aged children are out of school and more than a quarter are living under lockdown due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Over the past

months, 6 out of 10 children worldwide no longer have access to their teachers and school-based learning materials due to school closures.

There is no indication when schools will open again, and past experiences show school closures and public health crises can have an adverse impact on a generation of young learners. It is essential that children are supported by effective methods of instruction through remote learning.

# What challenges do low-infrastructure communities face?

Fundamentally, an effective remote learning program ensures that children receive access to academic instruction and to content that has been crafted to ensure that they are actually learning.

In many parts of the developed world, students are living in homes with reliable electricity, high-speed internet access, laptops to download multimedia real-time applications, and are supported by formally educated parents who have access to online resources to supplement their child's instruction.

In contrast, a program for children in developing economies needs to consider the following constraints:

- limited internet access;
- limited access to instructional materials;
- parents who are ill-equipped and with limited time to act as a primary teacher; and
- teachers who cannot be physically present with their students.

Despite these challenges, remote learning is still possible through the creative use of multiple channels and touchpoints provided by existing infrastructure and technologies that are widely in use. Given the varied nature of these components and the need for a vast scale, a turnkey implementation by the government is necessary, rather than a collection of disparate, non-integrated, and difficult-to-support individual solutions run by individual organizations. A program for this specific environment needs to utilize 2G and engagement strategies that have worked in these communities.

Based on national curricula and using clear and impactful instructional design principles, the remote learning program should draw together a range of strategies that are implemented by the government at scale. A 360-degree program uses the full array of channels accessible to communities and is enabled through partnerships with government, telecommunications companies (telcos), and education specialists. It uses radio, audio, SMS, online teaching methods, and printed materials.

An effective remote learning program taps parents, teachers, and government through a comprehensive approach. As parents are often the ones at home with the child, they need to be confident and comfortable to access available resources and know-how to use them to facilitate learning.

Teachers remain at the heart of any remote learning program. They should continue to support and guide the communities, pupils, and parents. Often, this is done through innovative classroom groups using free messaging services or SMS systems. The government, as the program leader and commissioner, brings it all together, driving the usage of the channels among the people and convening telcos and other state partners to this national endeavor.

# What are the key components to scale up a remote learning program?

**1. Use the power of relationships between students, caregivers, and teachers.** Programs must holistically address the needs of all stakeholders while keeping students at the center. Ensure that teachers are still at the center of the learning experience. Through virtual classrooms conducted over platforms, like free messaging services, teachers remain available to children even though they are not in the classroom or through phone calls with students on a rotational basis to answer questions and provide guidance.

**2. Focus on literacy, numeracy, social wellbeing, and constructive play.** It is critical to keep practicing these foundational skills so the child does not lose familiarity and facility. Design programs that keep the learner at the heart of the content. Ensure that there is always a component of joyful play, singing, or other games that keep the child's interest and create memorable moments to share with other children and family members. It is also important to make sure that the content is age-appropriate.

**3. Provide a program for rapid learning and adaptation.** There is a limited evidence base for almost any remote learning strategy. What will be critical in this time of uncertainty are the following: dedicated measurement, quick iteration, and rapid redevelopment of content and programming.

Leveraging qualitative and quantitative data on a real-time basis is essential to know if programs are working. Quantitatively, measure platforms that have the highest user rate, and review data from mobile quizzes and analyze students' scores. For example, if grade 5 students are not doing well in the quizzes on fractions, which have been the focus of the learning guides and study packs for the week, iterate the material design. Qualitatively, if parents are saying that they are unsure whether their children are continuing to learn with the remote learning material, provide them with interactive assessment platforms to help them know whether that is true or not.

**4. Leverage as many touchpoints as possible.** Use broad national reach and higher touch engagement. Communities access resources and platforms in different ways. For some communities, radio is the most effective way to reach the children; for others, it might be SMS or a phone call with a teacher. For all these platforms, the reality on the ground needs to be addressed. Thus, it is important to collaborate with national telcos to zero-rate websites that provide educational resources; partner with governments to secure airtime that is used for learning, and work with internet companies at a local and national scale to provide free data.

# At-home learning program case study

Edo State in Nigeria provides an example of how the government quickly implemented a comprehensive at-home program across its public education system after schools closed. It used mobile assessment platforms through interactive quizzes, self-study activity packs, virtual classroom experiences, audio lessons, learning guides, and digital storybooks to deliver comprehensive programming targeted at individual grade levels.

To implement the program, the government is working with telcos to zero-rate online access. Technology is also being utilized to provide virtual classroom experiences with teachers at the core, and audio resources are being provided for students to listen to learning materials again and again, without being reliant on rigid radio schedules.

A high degree of context-specificity is essential. Edo state suffers from limited internet access, and in many cases, parents are not fully equipped to act as primary teachers. Data from the Demographic and Health Survey show that only 46% of households possess a radio and 69% a television, but 91% have a mobile phone. The percentage of households with access to at least one of them is presumably higher. The multichannel structure of the program takes these constraints into consideration.

## Resources

Bridge International Academies. Bridge@Home.

Edo State Universal Education Board. EdoBEST@Home.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Education: From Disruption to Discovery.

United States Agency for International Development. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program.



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Over the last 2 decades, Sujatha has worked on developing service delivery with a particular focus on affordable education. She led Bridge's entry into India through the establishment of government infrastructure partnership in Andhra Pradesh. She is focused on delivering scale and impact for other governments across Asia.