

SUPPORTING LEARNING FROM HOME

APRIL 2021

Remote instruction during times of school closures has taken many forms, from distributing study packets to students' homes to real-time instruction through online platforms. To mitigate learning losses, all these approaches to support learning at home can continue after schools reopen. Many countries and organizations have already developed resources to support children's learning at home and to help parents support them during lockdowns. Other countries can license or use these materials for free, eliminating the need to build everything from scratch. Given that schools in many countries play an important role in protecting child safety by referring vulnerable students to social services, school closures may have exposed these students to increased abuse and neglect that has gone undetected.

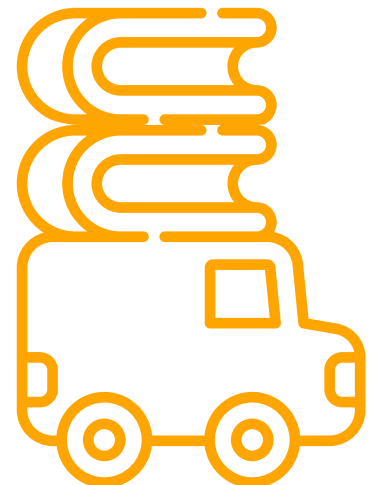
Remote Instruction

Many options for instruction can reach students in their homes, and countries may need to take a multimodal approach since all households may not have continuous access to all modalities, and all learners may not have the same instructional needs. Some of these approaches can be continued during hybrid learning or after the complete return to in-person instruction to provide remedial education. Governments may need to negotiate zero ratings for data and extended broadcast rights so that low-income families can have regular access to instructional content.

Distribution of books and printed materials

In many countries, most children, particularly those from economically and socially disadvantaged groups, have limited access to the internet. To reach these learners when schools are closed or only partially reopened, some education systems have created study packets and deliver them, along with books, directly to students' homes.

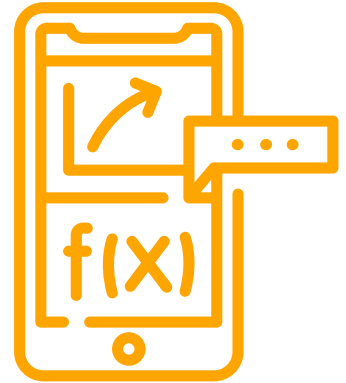
[Evidence from Kenya](#) prior to the pandemic suggests that dropping illustrated storybooks at home and providing training to parents on how to read them with their children improved young children's vocabulary, even when their parents were not literate. In [Northern Macedonia](#), the Read@Home program targets three-to-twelve-year-old children in families eligible for the national social safety net program and delivers a package of illustrated storybooks in their mother tongue, as well as age-appropriate guidance for parents to engage children in reading.



When local health authorities deem it safe, teachers can also visit individual students or groups of students to provide direct support on learning or maintaining students' skills and to encourage families to continue with remote instruction.

Text messages and phone calls

Evidence that this additional interaction between instructors and families may be beneficial comes from a [randomized control trial in Botswana](#) that was implemented during the pandemic. Two different approaches were tested: (1) text messages of 16 to 132 characters with math problems that children could solve, and (2) the same text messages supplemented with a phone call of 15 to 20 minutes from a facilitator. In the second approach, the facilitator spoke with the student and parent together to provide learning support on the math content of the text messages as well as motivation to continue learning at home. While the text messages alone had no impact, when supplemented with a telephone call, the messages significantly improved numeracy after just a few months.



Radio

Many countries have turned to radio and television to deliver remote instruction through live or prerecorded sessions. These lessons are also rebroadcast in other media (such as YouTube or Facebook) or made available through an online portal. The [Rising on Air](#) program, for example, created open-source radio and SMS content in English and French that focused on foundational literacy and numeracy skills for children in kindergarten through secondary school. This program has been deployed in multiple countries in Africa and Asia. The lessons have been broadcast three to five times a week, and content developers have identified parts of the lesson scripts that must be modified for implementation in other contexts.



Television

Some countries, such as Peru, opted for high-production-value televised lessons, using actors or journalists to introduce and sometimes present material. They were paired in the studio with expert teachers and students who interacted with each other in a mock classroom environment.

Similarly, the Ministry of National Education in France partnered with television stations and media companies to develop lessons aligned with the national curriculum. These lessons were [broadcast](#) at different times of day for different grades. So that anyone could access these lessons after they were aired on television, broadcast rights for the lessons had to be extended.

Ubongo, a producer of children's edutainment in Africa, broadcasts [shows](#) for children between three and fourteen years of age. These programs are offered through television, radio, and mobile devices in local languages in many countries in Africa. They cover a variety of subjects, including math, science, literacy, engineering, and life skills.

In Vietnam, learning content and lessons were organized locally and broadcast through 28 television stations across the country. District education officials assigned each school one subject and one grade level for which to develop lessons. Thousands of teachers contributed content, which was reviewed at the district level.



Mobile apps and “web-light” sites

Other countries have also capitalized on high penetration of mobile devices to create mobile apps for content developed for their online portals. In Colombia, the Ministry of National Education created a portal ([Colombia Aprende](#)) to host all learning materials, including television and radio rebroadcasts, for preschool to secondary school students from different education secretariats. To make these materials accessible for low-income families, the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication and the Ministry of National Education created a mirror portal for mobile devices and issued a zero-rating [decree](#) that prohibited internet and mobile service providers from charging users when they accessed the portal.

The four major private telecommunications providers of Peru also agreed to zero ratings for the [Aprendo en Casa](#) site, which hosted educational content from television, radio, internet, and printed materials, as well as for the “web-light” site for low bandwidth users.



Online platforms

Online instruction, whether offered in real-time (synchronous) or as self-paced (asynchronous) activities, has mainly helped higher-income families to maintain continuity of learning. [A few months into the crisis](#), less than 10 percent of households in low-income countries and less than 50 percent of households in middle-income countries had access to the internet.

Nevertheless, the platforms that have been set up to host this instruction can provide helpful source material for other countries to distribute to children through radio, television, and text messages or as printed materials. The French government has opened its [online portal](#) of lessons, activity sheets, and interactive pages aligned with the national curriculum. This portal allowed Francophone countries in the Africa region to access the content, but to make it accessible, certification and authentication requirements and collection of users’ personal data had to be disabled. In addition, the number of users that the server hosting the platform could accommodate had to be increased. Similarly, the Rwanda Education Board has an [open resource platform](#) that includes radio programs, books, and sample assessments in Kinyarwanda and English for pre-primary to secondary school learners, as well as professional development materials for teachers. The Mexican government has also created an [online portal](#) of materials for children from preschool through secondary school, along with guidance for parents and teachers on effective remote learning strategies.



Supporting Parents

While caregivers have always played a significant role in learning during the preprimary years, the current health crisis has heightened the role that they play in learning in the primary and secondary years as well. School closures have disrupted children's learning routines and may have heightened the role that certain psycho-social skills, such as self-regulation and self-efficacy, play in learning, as children cannot rely on the structure of the school day, social norms within school, or peer interactions to direct their attention to learning-related tasks. Moreover, they may lack quiet places to study within their homes.

Parents, however, might not be prepared to supervise learning and provide additional emotional support that children might need, particularly while they are tending to their jobs and other duties within the household. To address these challenges, resources can be distributed (via text or as printed materials) that provide tips for parents to support their children's learning and cope with the stress associated with the pandemic.

A long-time global leader in educational programming for children, Sesame Street, has created materials ([Caring for Each Other](#)) for parents of young children to engage their children in play-based learning activities and discuss emotions. Materials are currently available in Arabic, Bangla, English, Hindi, and Spanish.

Parenting for Lifelong Health has also created open source [tip sheets](#) for parents in more than 100 languages. These resources cover a range of topics including structuring a child's day, stress management, and family budgeting.



Protecting Child Safety

Beyond the direct risk of contracting COVID-19, the pandemic has likely put child safety at greater risk. Economic uncertainty can increase violence in the home, and mobility restrictions reduce children's exposure to other adults who can recognize and address neglect and abuse, including teachers, healthcare providers, and social workers.

While tips for parents on positive parenting and stress management may reduce the risk of physical and emotional abuse, governments may also need to train teachers to recognize signs of trouble remotely. They may also need to develop protocols for asking children about their experiences at home and directing them to available support services. Home visits organized through health clinics may be an alternative way of checking in on children.



Useful Resources



Overview of remote instruction options

- [Survey of countries' remote learning approaches](#)
- [Link to learning continuity stories from around the world](#)

Distribution of printed materials

- The Read@Home [Initiative](#) and [manual](#)

Text messages and phone calls

- [Details on text messages and phone calls in randomized control trial in Botswana](#)
- [Adding interactive-audio instruction to radio programs or mobile apps:](#)

Radio and television

- [Edu Radio](#)
- [Options for delivering remote instruction through television](#)

Support for parents

- UK's Education Endowment Foundation: [short tip sheets in text and comic form](#)

Protecting child safety

- [Key actions for addressing violence against children, women, and older people during the COVID-19 pandemic \(World Health Organization\)](#)

