IES Institute of Education Sciences

FAQ: What considerations have education systems across the world made when choosing a distance learning model?

Distance learning for all students in grades K-12

A Publication From Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific at IES

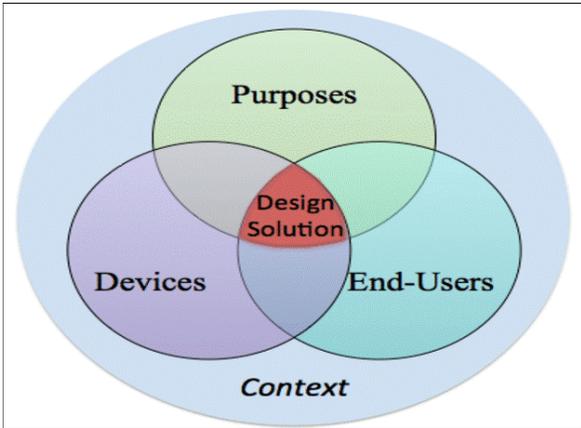To access the RELs' evidence-based COVID-19 response resources, visit https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/covid-19.

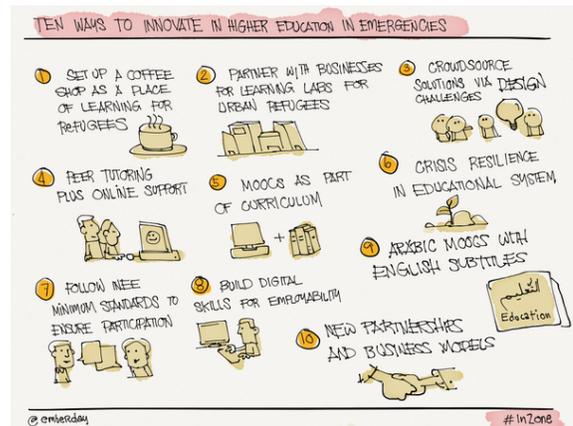**Primary Audience:** School Leaders   **Secondary Audiences:** Teachers and State Policymakers

Across the world, education systems and the organizations that support them are addressing school closures due to COVID-19 in a variety of ways depending on their infrastructure, preparations, and funding availability. This involves confronting preconceptions about the effectiveness of distance learning and drawing upon its best practices to ensure that students receive quality education no matter the context. This Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific FAQ highlights international education practices to provide a sample of common and effective distance education models and additional resources to support education stakeholders as they strengthen students' access to learning opportunities.

What considerations have education systems across the world made when choosing a distance learning model?

- The following common models for distance learning (individual or combined) provide several opportunities for education systems to leverage available technologies and expand learning opportunities independent of geographic or social contexts:

  - **Print-based** (e.g., take-home packets). Any paper-based model, especially for young children, can and should include interactive elements, with easy-to-read instructions for caregivers.

  - **Audio-based** (e.g., interactive audio). As leveraged during the Education Development Center's work throughout the Ebola epidemic, radio instruction can be adapted to require a volunteer (such as a parent or older sibling) to act as a task manager while students listen to their lesson. This can help mitigate any potential gaps in content or instructional knowledge among a student's at-home support system.

  - **Televisual** (e.g., educational TV programs). Popular television shows like *Sesame Street* have shown positive outcomes for young children, but depend on the level of exposure and family involvement.

  - **Computer-based multimedia** (e.g., CD-ROMs). When well-designed, computer-based multimedia can engage both teachers and students on several cognitive levels and can address multiple learning styles.

  - **Web-based models** (e.g., online courses). In addition to considering access, it is also important to determine whether the model includes any modifications (such as browser extensions that can alter fonts, remove distractions, or schedule break times) that can support students with disabilities.

  - **Mobile models** (e.g., lessons delivered via cell phone). Mobile models have been shown to increase interactivity and access to both information and instant feedback when learning, especially for women and girls, but require stable connectivity to be effective.

- No matter the education model used (including face-to-face ones), the primary objective is to design, develop, and deliver pedagogically sound education. This must be prioritized before determining how educators will deliver their instruction.

- Education leaders can use the following frameworks to consider distance learning strategies:

  - The Information and Communication Technologies for Education (ICT4E) Framework (see right) advises attending to the following components to unpack which aspects of education technologies are most important for designing solutions:

    - *Purpose:* Is the intervention or education-driven technology learning design formal or informal? What learning activities and content does it provide? Can/does it collect and monitor data? Is there a communication platform involved?

    - *Devices:* Which devices are currently available? How can we repurpose current devices?

    - *End Users:* How compatible is the learning design to the interests, language(s), and cognitive skills of the learner?

    - *Contexts:* Which social, cultural, and linguistic factors are crucial for effective learning?

- The Maslow Before Bloom Framework suggests that short-term solutions first require attending to basic needs of learners: their health, safety, and wellbeing. Long-term planning must address social inequities to prevent increased gaps between socioeconomic groups.

- In the Pacific region, mobile phones can be leveraged to provide learning activities and content to teachers and students, while social media sources can use crowdsourcing to produce usable information and solutions. Successful strategies for distance learning in the Pacific include:

  - providing material that is relevant to students' context and culture.

  - teacher and course flexibility and acceptance that family and community obligations are prioritized over coursework.

  - developing and maintaining regular communications and support structures.

- As was the case during the Ebola outbreak, schools must develop strategies to reach children in vulnerable situations, who often may not return to school once it reopens.

- Innovative approaches and practices may emerge as educators and schools shift their courses and training online and at a distance. Creating spaces to document and share these innovative practices will help contribute to the research on effective distance learning strategies. The graphic on the right provides one example of innovative practices for higher education institutions that can be readily adapted to different contexts.

Source: https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/10-ways-to-innovate-in-higher-education-in-emergencies/

Related Resources

- Guiding principles for effective learning design will support outcomes-driven learning regardless of where educators may be across the continuum of distance learning strategies.

- UNESCO

  - Distance Learning Solutions, a list of education applications, platforms, and resources for a variety of technology capacities.

  - Stories and Ideas, a compilation of examples and initiatives from around the world to inspire action.

  - COVID-19: 10 Recommendations to plan distance learning solutions.

- The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)

  - A collation of distance learning research and resources.

  - A webinar on distance learning during COVID-19.

  - A decision tree for distance learning during COVID-19.

- Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Research, Education, and Action to create Change and Hope (REACH) program website draws upon its lessons learned and includes a blog containing a student and her teacher's reflection on school closures in Lebanon.

- Pedagogy during a Pandemic, a *FreshEd* podcast discussing the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning.

- USAID's All Children Reading web page includes a list of applications, sites, and other materials for elementary literacy instruction.

- World Bank's Guidance Notes provide ways to support young children and their families during COVID-19 and offer suggestions for early childhood care investment.

- Commonwealth of Learning has provided both a list of resources for learning from the elementary to tertiary level, as well as a repository of studies on the effectiveness of distance learning across the globe.

- Planning for the Future:

  - INEE's resource list for transitioning students back into school following interrupted education.

  - The Global Partnership for Education's *Guidelines for Transitional Education Plan Preparation*.