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EI AFRICA FRAMEWORK ON HYBRID AND REMOTE TEACHING

1. Background

One of the first measures taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was the closure of learning institutions. According to UNESCO sources, this closure has affected over 1.576 billion learners globally, constituting over 91% of global student enrolment. In Africa, about 297 million learners have been affected by the pandemic. In view of ensuring continuity of learning while schools were closed, many African governments adopted distance education measures, including remote and hybrid teaching, but with very little success.

Many African governments tried online, Television, radio, take home packages and other distance education measures, but these did not reach the majority of children, particularly those in rural and remote areas. However, the COVID-19 context has given an   impetus to the need to consider hybrid modes of teaching, combining remote and face-to-face methodologies.

Therefore, it is paramount to examine the advantages, limitations, and challenges of the adoption of hybrid and remote teaching so as to determine the way forward as the continent struggles to achieve the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and the objectives of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016 – 2025.

Most people in Africa do not have access to computers or the internet. Due to this digital poverty, the online learning projects in Africa are but a vain dream. In addition, most copyright laws around the world do not permit distance learning through online and cross border exchange of copyrighted materials.

With the adoption of remote and hybrid teaching in Africa, children living in conflict zones, those with learning difficulties, and those living in rural areas or in extreme poverty seem to have been left out in such difficult times due to a lack of infrastructure, the unavailability of electricity and electronic gadgets, and a lack of adequate training for teachers to assist with online learning, thus, widening the gap between the poor and the rich.[1]

A 2019 EI Congress Resolution, while recognizing the positive opportunities provided by ICT to enhance the quality of learning, had expressed concern about the attempts by private education technology providers to impose generic learning programmes on schools, further and higher education and research institutions and to introduce cheap substitutes for teachers such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The EI Africa survey on how teachers and their unions in Africa responded to COVID-19 indicated that distance education programmes have not been effective, mainly due to connectivity challenges. The survey highlighted how teachers lack the necessary skills, training, and support to deliver distance and virtual teaching and learning.

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[1] 'Rural online learning in the context of COVID 19 in South Africa: Evoking an inclusive education approach' on https://www.researchgate.net/

The current challenges of remote teaching in Africa are a testimony that in-school learning delivered by highly trained, qualified and motivated teachers is the only guarantee for achieving equitable, inclusive quality education for all by 2030. However, given the lessons learnt from the COVID -19 crisis, it is imperative that measures be taken to ensure continuity of learning during crises.

This EI Africa Framework provides key principles and conditions that should be considered by governments and education institutions in Africa when redesigning modes of education delivery in response to the current pandemic and other crises.

2. Fundamental principles to ensure successful distance and hybrid teaching and learning

2.1 On policy and vision

(i)   In-school face-to-face teaching and learning should be the primary mode of education delivery, complemented by the appropriate use of digital technologies, distance education and blended approaches.
(ii)   Governments should involve teachers, education support personnel and their unions in the conceptualization, development, implementation, and evaluation of digital, distance and remote teaching and learning policies and programmes, including hybrid models.
(iii) Fundamental changes in teaching and learning should be the result of wider consultation and be based on research evidence and values ensuring that pedagogy comes before technology. Technology is a tool of education and not the other way around.
(iv)   The African Union should develop a Protocol on the ethical and appropriate Use of Digital Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in Education.

2.2 On the need for capacity building

(v)   Governments should ensure that teachers are trained and supported to deliver distance education, online teaching and learning and hybrid programmes. To that end, initial teacher education and professional development programmes should capacitate and empower teachers to use technology in the classroom.
(vi)   Governments should ensure that teachers and students acquire digital literacy and other skills required to make the best use of digital technology in education.
(vii) Teachers and students should have access to digital infrastructure and facilities, in particular, computers and the internet in order to facilitate teaching and learning.

2.3 On Digital Infrastructure and Access

(viii) Governments should ensure digital inclusion by investing in both basic and supportive digital infrastructure such as computers, wider internet coverage and electrification programmes.
(ix)   Governments should ensure that the needs of schools and other education institutions, educators and students are explicitly included in national broadband strategies and universal access programmes.
(x)   Governments and international stakeholders should promote greater equality in access to learning resources for disadvantaged groups, such as those living in rural and remote areas or in poverty, ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants, and those with disabilities.

2.4 On Regulation of Private Providers

(xi) Governments should protect education from privatisation, commercialisation, and corporate interests, including those of education technology companies seeking to profit from the ongoing or future crises.

(xii) The African Union and governments should regulate data costs, in order to ensure that the internet is accessible to all.