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Using Interactive Radio Instruction to mitigate the impact of COVID-19: a curated resource list

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About this document

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This curated list of resources aims to inform and support the use of Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) to mitigate the educational impact of COVID-19.

IRI is a distance education tool that enables educators to use radio broadcasts to direct active learning in the home. Contrary to “chalk-and-talk” lecture-style broadcasts, radio teachers guide students through interactive content and exercises in IRI programmes. Typical activities include quizzes, singing, role play and storytelling. During lessons, caregivers will receive instructions on how to facilitate home-based learning.

Governments can use IRI programming to target populations with low connectivity and limited technological resources. Education specialists can develop standardised scripts to ensure *all* learners can benefit from curriculum-aligned content and a consistent pedagogy.

Summary of findings

- 1) During the current pandemic, IRI can represent a good short-term investment that enables governments to deliver their core curriculum and to facilitate TPD in support of long-term education improvement.
- 2) After the crisis, governments can use IRI to offer remote learning to children who cannot return to school to promote system recovery.
- 3) Education providers can adapt audio content from previous programmes and other countries to reduce the time and cost of developing high-quality, curriculum-aligned materials.
- 4) Policymakers can use SMS text blasts and supplementary print materials to distribute broadcast schedules, deliver exercises to *all* children and enhance overall engagement with IRI initiatives.
- 5) Curriculum specialists should use an iterative process to design locally relevant and demand-driven content. When developing IRI programmes, governments need to regularly engage national agencies, civil bodies, community radio stations and parents.

Barnett, S. et al. (2018). [*Redesigning an education project for child-friendly radio: A multisectoral collaboration to promote children's health, education, and human rights after a humanitarian crisis in Sierra Leone.*](#)

This paper examines how Liberian education providers adapted the Pikin to Pikin Tok IRI programme after the onset of the Ebola crisis. The study shows how policymakers can engage end-users in open and iterative consultation to design a demand-driven crisis response. This process could involve (1) forming community-level committees of politicians, religious leaders, teachers and parents to promote broadcasts and collate feedback within their localities; (2) organising radio-based panel discussions to allow children, parents and teachers to share their concerns; and (3) inviting children to submit content relating to their experiences. These steps can help governments deliver locally relevant material. In Liberia, for instance, broadcasts featured female role models in lessons and promoted a non-violent male identity to mitigate the increased vulnerability of girls.

Previous [studies on educational television](#) indicate that the inclusion of characters from marginalised groups can reduce social prejudices among learners.

Education Development Center. (2020). [*Learning at Home in Times of Crisis Using Radio.*](#)

This webinar offers a practical introduction to IRI, covering (1) the structure of broadcasts; (2) the design of IRI initiatives; and (3) the challenges of radio-based education. Before implementing an IRI programme, governments need to identify aspects of the curriculum that will have the biggest impact on a student's future academic progress. Education providers could, for instance, focus on primary-level numeracy. Policymakers should consult civil bodies and religious groups in the decision-making process to reduce potential opposition to audio content.

The following [report](#) provides an example of how EDC overcame religious opposition to the Tucheze Tujifunze IRI programme in Zanzibar.

Foulds, K., & Bucuvalas, A. (2019). [*Playing Every Day on Sesame Street.*](#)

This paper on play-based programming examines how policymakers can encourage caregivers to facilitate children's learning in the home. Parents may refrain from actively supporting their children's education as they feel ill-prepared to engage with unfamiliar content and new technologies. The study found that the most effective messaging strategy involves functional suggestions on short activities that caregivers can easily integrate into their daily routines without extra resources. Messages with tips on how to reuse and recycle basic materials for games and learning exercises resonate most with parents.

Hallgarten, J. (2020). [*Evidence on efforts to mitigate the negative educational impact of past disease outbreaks.*](#)

This review paper finds little evidence that high-tech digital solutions can effectively mitigate the impact of pandemics in low-income countries. Even though radio-based education does not compensate for a loss of schooling, IRI can help children maintain a link to learning. Governments, however, need to recognise that marginalised children may not be able to access low-tech solutions as families prioritise food or lack radios.

Policymakers can distribute low-cost radios and collaborate with community radio stations to deliver local language programmes to learners in hard-to-reach areas.

Save the Children's [Tiyende!](#) programme shows how educators can mobilise community radio stations to deliver lessons in isolated regions.

Ho, J., & Thukral, H. (2009). [*Tuned in to student success: Assessing the impact of interactive radio instruction for the hardest-to-reach.*](#)

This review of 15 IRI projects finds that educational radio can improve student learning outcomes in mathematics, literacy and social studies when combined with printed learning materials and interactive activities. Evidence shows that IRI can enable marginalised groups in low- and middle-income countries to achieve better academic results. Meanwhile, observational data from past radio-based TPD programmes suggests that broadcasts can successfully train teachers in student-centred pedagogy. The study indicates that governments can use IRI to deliver their core curriculum in the short-term and strengthen teaching practices ahead of schools re-opening. Policymakers can, also, develop IRI programmes to offer continued support to children who cannot return to school after the current crisis.

The [Taonga Market IRI programme](#) in Zambia and the [Speak Up! Initiative](#) in South Sudan provide recent practical examples of how IRI can support out-of-school children.

INEE. (2020). [*Distance Learning during COVID-19.*](#)

Policymakers need to draw on their full educational toolkit to ensure equitable access to education during the pandemic. For example, governments could take the following measures to support IRI initiatives: (1) use SMS text blasts to distribute broadcast schedules; (2) establish hotlines and virtual helpdesks to answer questions from parents and teachers; and (3) deliver educational newspaper supplements to students without radio access. Governments should sequence their response to increase the impact and accessibility of education programmes. After setting up an IRI initiative, policymakers could consider sending parents image-based, low-text instructions on how to facilitate interactions with media content.

The following [Skoll Foundation webinar](#) shows how education providers in West Africa and Pakistan have developed multi-modal distance learning programmes in response to COVID-19.

Richmond, S. (2020). [*Repurposing Established Radio and Audio Series to Address the COVID-19 Educational Crises.*](#)

This toolkit offers a framework to update and repurpose previously developed IRI programmes. The document explains how to (1) revise content to meet new education standards; (2) support caregivers to facilitate home-based learning; (3) deliver critical print materials to students; and (4) raise awareness of radio broadcasts in targeted communities. In the context of the current pandemic, IRI programmes should incorporate health and safeguarding messages to protect out-of-school children.

Participants in a recent [Skoll Foundation webinar](#) noted that first-generation students acted as an important source of basic health information for non-educated family members during the Ebola crisis.

World Bank. (2005). [Improving Educational Quality through Interactive Radio Instruction](#).

Educators need to invest time and money to design high-quality, curriculum-aligned IRI content that reflects the context in which students learn. During the current pandemic, education providers can adapt and re-record scripts from other countries to account for national curricular standards and local cultural traits. Governments can repurpose existing materials to reduce the time and cost of developing and testing content for a radio-based education response to COVID-19.

Education providers can find curriculum-aligned IRI materials on the following websites:

- 1) [Rising Academies](#) provide pre-recorded audio content, downloadable scripts and SMS packages for English and Maths at the following levels: Early Childhood, Lower Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary. This site also hosts materials for radio-based TPD.
- 2) The [Education Development Centre](#) offers content from government-approved IRI programmes. Materials come in 15 languages and cover topics such as literacy, maths, social studies, science and life skills.

A full list of references can be found in [the EdTech Evidence Library](#).

Document selection criteria

The research team adopted a holistic approach to reviewing materials and selected documents from multiple sources. These resources meet the following criteria:

- Peer-reviewed articles or current policy guidance from established international bodies (e.g. World Bank)
- Offer actionable advice rather than abstract and theoretical ideas
- Published after 2000 (when IRI projects began to focus on all core subjects rather than single topics)
- Refer to one of 7 recurrent themes that the research team identified in 4 webinars on the COVID-19 education response: accessibility, script development, programme design, content selection, stakeholder engagement, teacher training and multi-modal education.