31 Nigeria: Edo-BEST@Home

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Type of intervention: public-private partnership (led by the government)
Website: http://subeb.edostate.gov.ng/home-school

General description

Nigeria has the largest population in Africa and even before COVID-19 faced the challenge of having over 13 million children out of school, which is approximately 20% of the total out-of-school child population in the world. Moreover, there is a constant threat to schooling, emanating from insurgent activities and attacks on schools that have especially targeted women and girls. On top of these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that about 38 million students (from pre-primary to secondary) were unable to continue going to school.

To prevent further spread of COVID-19, Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education closed all schools in mid-March 2020. This decision was accompanied by an education response plan to COVID-19 that was developed by a task team set up by the Ministry of Education and the Universal Basic Education Commission. At the same time, states such as Lagos released radio and TV learning programmes to mitigate learning loss as a result of school closures, as did other states.

The State of Edo launched Edo-BEST@Home, a mobile-based remote learning programme that extends the pre-existing Edo Basic Education Sector Transformation (Edo-BEST) programme, a public-private partnership between the Edo State Basic Education Board, the World Bank and Bridge International Academies.

Edo state has a population of over 4 million (half of whom are under 30 years old), and access to devices and connectivity needed for remote learning varies across the state. According to data from the [Demographic and Health Survey](#), 46% of households possess a radio, 69% a television, but 91% have a mobile phone. The Edo-BEST@Home programme therefore decided to focus on the mobile phone as the main medium. Approximately 29% of primary school students in Nigeria frequently accessed the Edo-BEST@Home remote learning solutions.

The remote learning programme enables students to learn from resources that can be downloaded for free from an online repository while at home. The EdoBEST@Home unimodal mobile-based remote learning programme includes interactive audio lessons, digital self-study activity packets, digital storybooks, mobile interactive quizzes, learning guides for parents and virtual classrooms that enable interaction between teachers and students.

To foster effective use of the educational resources provided and to ensure learning, Edo-BEST@Home focused on four key aspects: 1) providing engaging programming focused on content aligned to the curriculum; 2) constant support from teachers and parents to students; 3) formative assessment in the form of interactive quizzes; and 4) ongoing support to teachers through virtual coaching.

Main problems addressed

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented more than 260 000 primary school students in the Edo-BEST programme from being physically present at school. There were three problems that Edo-BEST@Home wanted to address in this context:

1. the programme had to deliver quality instructional materials to all students in a state where access to the Internet is limited
2. teachers could not be physically present due to social distancing restrictions
3. parents and caregivers were ill-equipped and had limited time to act as learning facilitators at home.

Edo-BEST officials developed a mobile phone unimodal solution to provide remote education to all students across the state, from pre-primary to junior secondary (middle school). The public-private partnership aimed (and succeeded) to offer the remote learning solution not only to government schools that were already benefiting from Edo-BEST, but also to students from other schools in the state.

Mobilising and developing resources

Edo-BEST@Home leveraged its existing education model and adapted it to a remote learning solution. At a conceptual level, Edo-BEST's new remote model continues to be based on its five key principles: 1) scientifically based lessons on curriculum-aligned content; 2) ample student practice for each concept; 3) assessment; 4) data-driven focus on reading proficiency; and 5) individual and small group attention for each student. At a practical level, Edo-BEST@Home has been able to leverage existing resources at four main levels:

1. ***Teacher capacity.*** Edo-BEST@Home has capitalised on having more than 11 000 teachers who had already gone through a pedagogical and digital training programme in the past two years. Thus, a good number of teachers were equipped with pedagogical and technical skills to support students remotely while schools are closed.
2. ***Content and learning activities.*** Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Edo-BEST programme had already developed a rich repository of content such as guides for teachers, practice exercises for students, reading activities and quizzes that were distributed for each lesson. These learning activities and content have been adapted for a remote learning environment and are readily

available through the Edo-BEST@Home site for free. Now, students have access to four hours of [interactive audio lessons](#) that are aligned to Edo's curriculum, [digital self-study activity packets](#) that are distributed through WhatsApp and on line, and [mobile interactive quizzes](#) for students to use at home every day.

3. ***Online learning platforms.*** Before the pandemic, Edo-BEST also had an [online learning repository](#), which was further strengthened during the school closures with more content being uploaded for students and teachers in the state. Moreover, MTN, a telecommunication operator in the state, agreed to zero-rate Edo-BEST@Home digital resources so that students and teachers can access all the available educational resources without paying for the bandwidth.

4. ***Strong databases.*** Since 2018, the Edo-BEST programme, with the support of its more than 11 000 teachers across the 900 schools that it operates, has been building a database with the profile and contact information of every student. With this information, teachers were able to contact parents as soon as the government announced school closures, to maintain personal contact, deliver learning materials and provide remote support to ensure that children continued learning while school buildings were closed.

Fostering effective use and learning

- ***Engaging content aligned to the curriculum.*** All programming focuses on content from the curriculum and has been created to foster constructive play to keep students engaged in the learning process. Content and learning activities are released every week for each grade level. For example, the interactive audio lessons incorporate engaging stories, nonfiction passages, maths instruction and practice, and songs and games to provide students with a joyful and robust learning experience. The self-study activity packets include practice problems that help students progress through the core concepts of the Edo curriculum. Similarly, the digital storybooks allow students to practice their reading and comprehension through stories that are accessible for every age group.

- ***Student support.*** Parents, caregivers and teachers are being equipped with tools to help them effectively support students through the remote learning process. For example, friendly [learning guides](#) have been designed to be used by a member of the household with the student. These guides have targeted practice exercises and answer keys to allow caregivers and children to reflect on the results.

- ***Automated assessment.*** Students can access [interactive quizzes](#) through a mobile phone on a daily basis. Quizzes are effective to help students practice, retain what they learnt that day for each course and receive instant automated feedback through WhatsApp or a text message. All quizzes are also aligned to the Edo state curriculum and the education level, and allow students to practice a wide range of skills, from using vocabulary to solving maths equations.

- ***Teacher support.*** Learning and development supervisors and quality assurance officers have been trained to virtually coach teachers and support them while they are using the Edo-BEST@Home platform. This virtual coaching programme has been available to all teachers, but those without smartphones were not able to participate, so the state provided extra face-to-face support for them.

  Teachers that did have the technological devices received approximately three hours of coaching and training per week. Moreover, a virtual helpdesk has been set up to allow teachers and other members of Edo's education community to ask questions or request specific support.

Implementation challenges

Different challenges emerged as the Edo-BEST@Home programme was being implemented. Among them were changing the delivery channels as well as sustaining student participation in urban areas.

- *Delivery channels.* Edo-BEST@Home initially planned to deliver remote learning through interactive radio lessons to reach as many students as possible across the state. This radio learning programme was going to provide four hours of daily content for all education levels. However, late in the planning phase, Edo-BEST officials decided to change this delivery channel, as it was going to be challenging to track participation levels and engagement through the radio programme. The delivery methods that were in fact implemented combine WhatsApp, interactive text messages and the Edo-BEST@Home web platform. As 91% of households possess a mobile phone, this method was considered to be the most effective to reach a large percentage of the student population.

- *Sustaining student participation.* Especially in urban areas, it has been a surprise that student participation rates in the remote learning programme were not as high as expected. This is mainly because working-class parents have to use their mobile phones for their job. Moreover, if parents have more than one child, it becomes more complicated to share one device among many children. Edo-BEST officials have run communication campaigns in different markets to sensitise parents regarding the importance of continuing their children's education while schools are closed.

Monitoring success

Edo-BEST already had a monitoring and evaluation system in place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme has been monitored carefully since its launch in 2018. The programme leverages modern digital technologies to conduct real-time monitoring of learning inputs, attendance and learning outcomes. Edo-BEST has a Quality Assurance team in charge of monitoring the effectiveness of the programme gathering data to take evidence-based decisions and providing feedback for continuous improvement of the teaching-learning processes. For example, prior to COVID-19, learning and development officers visited schools every two weeks to coach teachers and quality assurance officers visited schools once every three weeks to ensure operations were running smoothly.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Edo-BEST leveraged its already existing Quality Assurance team to monitor and evaluate the remote learning experience. The monitoring and evaluation process was initially piloted by randomly selecting virtual classrooms and observing the remote teaching and learning processes. Currently, the Edo-BEST@Home programme is reaching approximately 900 out of Edo's 1 000 primary schools, and over 7 000 virtual classrooms out of 9 000 actual classrooms have been created to deliver remote education. Moreover, Edo-BEST@Home mobile interactive quizzes not only help students to practice a wide range of skills, but also provide real-time data on learning achievement to the Quality Assurance team.

Still, the monitoring and evaluation process remains a challenge for the Edo-BEST@Home remote education programme. The Quality Assurance team needs to better understand the actual reach of the channels being used to deliver remote learning and identify those students who lack access to these resources to offer them alternative learning solutions. For those who are actually using the Edo-BEST@Home platform and mobile solutions, it is critical to understand the frequency of use, track engagement levels and verify if students are actually learning.

Adaptability to new contexts

Edo-BEST@Home's remote learning strategy has successfully managed to leverage its existing education model, which relies on digital technologies to improve teaching and learning, and adapt it to a remote learning solution while schools in the state are closed. This remote education programme has been rapidly scaled at a state level and is also being used by other schools in other states in Nigeria; thus, it is easily scalable at a state or national level in countries with high mobile phone penetration. The State of Edo was able to quickly pivot to a remote education solution because the government has been working to transform the education sector since 2018. Lesson plans and learning activities were already digitised, and teachers were equipped with the digital and pedagogical resources needed to teach remotely. The Edo-BEST@Home remote learning programme has been designed to be sustainable over time, as a complementary resource to the Edo-BEST on-site classroom-based education.

Box 31.1. Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. Assess the penetration of devices needed for remote learning: identify the student population that can be reached through mobile phones and clearly identify households that lack access to mobile phones so that alternative learning solutions can be provided for them.

2. Consider public-private partnerships: Edo-BEST@Home benefits from a public-private partnership between the State of Edo, Bridge International Academies and the World Bank. The private sector provides expertise in school management, teacher training and educational technology. The state provides resources to operate the programme in more than 1 500 public schools. The World Bank supports with technical assistance and results-based financial resources.

3. Support teachers and ensure that they are equipped with the digital and pedagogical resources required to teach remotely. Remember that remote teaching is new for most teachers; thus, complement training provided prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with virtual coaching support to help teachers adapt to the new scenario.

4. Sustain student engagement by producing interactive content, engaging learning activities and automated formative assessments. The State of Edo has been able to offer interactive audio lessons, digital self-study packets and interactive quizzes that are all delivered through WhatsApp or text messages.

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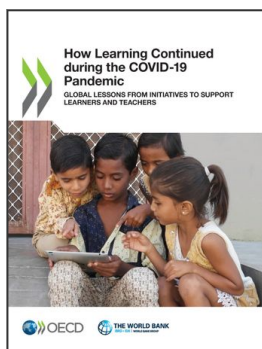
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