



# Distance learning at early grade levels

**Links to the webinar:** <https://tinyurl.com/ycyptxn6> or [shorturl.at/gASZ5](https://shorturl.at/gASZ5)

## Context

To control the spread of COVID-19, governments in Africa and elsewhere across the globe are implementing social distancing measures including population confinement and school closure. Consequently, to ensure continuity of learning, governments and teachers have put in place some mitigating systems to facilitate delivery of quality education through distance learning programs and mechanisms.

Among the mitigating systems put in place by governments include facilitating delivery of distance learning programs through TVs and radios; encouraging the use of online tutorials through forums such as webinars and podcasts; and subsidizing internet connectivity rates so that more families, teachers, and schools can afford connectivity. In addition, some teachers have initiated several distance learning mechanisms to ensure that learning continues – including preparing take-home packages for students; establishing school based on-line teaching and learning platforms; and using social media platforms like WhatsApp to share learning materials and tests<sup>1</sup>.

## Early grade learning

Research evidence has associated provision of quality early grade education with higher levels of learning achievement, better social adjustment including reduced incidences of indiscipline, and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.iicba.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/UNESCO-IICBA%20Learning\\_assessment\\_during\\_school\\_closure\\_15April2020v3\\_0.pdf](http://www.iicba.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/UNESCO-IICBA%20Learning_assessment_during_school_closure_15April2020v3_0.pdf)

lower school dropout rates in later years of schooling<sup>2</sup>. Beside, investment in quality early grade education programs have been reported to provide higher social and economics returns than investments in later age education programs and is associated with increased educational efficiency in the primary classes. Indeed, it has been argued that early grade education provides children with basic foundation skills required for learning and thriving in later school grades<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, Agenda 2063 of the African Union (AU) recognizes that while early grade education is the pillar on which future learning and training are grounded (CESA 16-25), it is a sub sector that is largely neglected. It is with this recognition that the AUC department of HSRT established and launched the Early Childhood and Education and Development Cluster. The main objective of the CESA ECED Cluster is to support achievement of the CESA objectives related to early childhood that aim to increase equitable access to quality early learning across the continent.

The early years represent the most vulnerable period in a person's development, it is the best time for building solid foundations for success in later schooling years and improved life chances. With school closures however– how can teachers ensure continuation of quality education at early grade levels involving children in pre-primary school and those in lower primary school grades 1-3? How can parents and caregivers be empowered to provide meaningful play engagement to promote early learning? What distance learning methods are effective for delivering quality education among early learners?

It is in this context that UNESCO-IICBA whose mandate is to strengthen the capacities of teaching staff and teaching policies in Africa in collaboration with The Africa Early Childhood Network, coordinator of the CESA ECED Cluster is organizing a webinar to help share information and experiences in distance learning in early grades including play based learning during school closure and looking forward beyond the current crisis resulting from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speakers will share information and experiences enabling the following questions to be answered:

- How have governments prepared (or are preparing) to support early grade teachers to continue delivering quality instruction in distance learning environments? What types of

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Hungi & Ngware (2018). The effects of preschool participation on mathematics achievement of Grade 6 pupils in Uganda. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 17: 105–126; Broekhuizen, et al. (2016). Classroom quality at prekindergarten and kindergarten and children's social skills and behavior problems. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 36, 212–222; Hewitt, B., & Walter, M. (2014). Preschool participation among indigenous children in Australia. *Family Matters*, 95, 41–50.

<sup>3</sup> See for example La Paro & Pianta (2000). Predicting children's competence in the early school years: A meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(4), 443–484; Sylva, et. al. (2004). The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: Final report. A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997–2004. London: DfES/Institute of Education, University of London

capacity-development are being provided to early grade teachers lacking skills in distance learning methods including the use of digital learning platforms? How are parents involved in supporting delivery of early learning programmes

- How are early grade teachers working in remote or rural contexts being supported? How are governments enabling these teachers to continue delivering quality education without access to the internet or digital technologies?
- What innovative distance learning models (high-tech, low-tech, or no-tech) are being implemented (or are available for implementation) by early grade teachers to ensure education can continue?
- How can governments and ECD experts promote play-based learning through the innovative learning models?

## **Objective**

To share information about how governments and other education stakeholders are supporting early grade teachers to continue providing quality education during school closures. In addition, to share experiences on distance learning in early grades and to consider how to guide and promote play-based learning at home. The webinar will facilitate knowledge exchange across national borders.

## **Audience**

The target audiences for the webinar are Ministry of Education officials responsible for teacher development, management and early childhood education; key early childhood education stakeholders in the African region including AU, ADEA, UNICEF, World Bank and AfECN; pre-primary and early primary school grades 1-3 teachers; university lecturers, professors and teacher educators; education researchers; and UNESCO colleagues.

## **Technical specifications**

The webinar will use Microsoft Teams as a technical platform.

**Date: Wednesday, June 24, 2020**

## Agenda

Item	Time	Person
	Addis Ababa	
<b>Welcoming remarks and introduction of the themes</b>	14:00-14:10	Dr. Yumiko YOKOZEKI, Director, UNESCO Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa
<b>Keynote speaker</b>	14:10-14:20	Dr. Lynette OKENGO, Executive Director of the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN).
<b>Sharing of information and experiences</b> (10 minutes for each speaker)	14:20 - 14:30	Mr. Creesen NAICKER, Director of Partnership, Curious Learning <i>Topic: Free and open source high impact early literacy mobile apps</i>
	14:30 - 14:40	Prof. Hasina Banu EBRAHIM, University of South Africa, Early Childhood Education <i>Topic: Digital Learning in Early Childhood Education in Africa: problems, effect, solutions</i>
	14:40 - 14:50	Dr. Teresa MWOMA, National Coordinator ECD Network for Kenya and Senior Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Department of Early Childhood Studies and Special Needs Education. <i>Topic: Early grade learning in Kenya amidst the COVID-19 crisis</i>
	14:50 - 15:00	Ms Karima GRANT, Founder & Director, ImagiNation Africa <i>Topic: Experiences from ImagiNation Africa</i>
<b>Questions &amp; answers</b>	15:00-15:20	Chat moderator: <TBD>
<b>Closing remarks</b>	15:20-15:30	Ms Maniza NTEKIM, Regional ECD Advisor, UNICEF ESARO

\*Agenda subject to change.

## Speaker profiles

**Creesen NAICKER** is the Director of Partnerships at Curious Learning. Curious Learning aims to localise and distribute high impact early literacy mobile apps (free and open source) into African languages that need it most, and find ways to get this content to those that need it most.

Creesen holds an International Master in Management, Law and Humanities. He also studied a Master's degree in Organisational Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and completed Post-Graduate work in Result-Based Management at the University of Witwatersrand's Graduate School of Public and Development Management.

Creesen has previously been selected as one the Brightest Young Minds in South Africa, is a winner of the Alberto Madella Award, and is a Mandela Washington Fellow.

**Hasina Banu EBRAHIM** is a Professor in Early Childhood Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). She is a rated researcher with the National Research Foundation in South Africa and her research focus is on Early Care and Education policy, practice and teacher education. The key theme of her research is EARLY CHILDHOOD AT THE MARGINS – and this is the title of her latest co-edited book. In addition, she is UNESCO Co-chair in ECD, and Chair of the ADEA ICQN-ICD early learning workforce taskforce – where she is involved in capacity building efforts for professionalizing the early learning workforce, mentoring and growing leaders for the field in Africa.

She won the 2017 Women in Research Award at UNISA and in 2018 she was the first runner up on the South African Women in Science Award.

**Karima Grant** is a social entrepreneur, educational leader, co-founder Ker ImagiNation Playschools. With over 25-years of experience working in the field of human development and education on three continents, she seeks to change the ecosystem of learning for over 1 million young change makers in Africa.

In her current role as founder and Director of ImagiNation Africa, West Africa's first children's learning and innovation hub, she lead an amazing diverse team of change makers, designing and developing innovative educational programming integrating local culture, play and experiential learning to develop creative and critical thinking in children 6 months to 19 years and implementing our ecosystem approach to supporting young African changemakers across West Africa.

Karima's vision: a world of African children change-makers solving the problems of development.

**Lynette Okengo**, is the Executive Director of the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN). She is an early childhood development expert whose professional experience spans policy and strategy development, program design and evaluation as well as advocacy and capacity building.

Prior to her work with AfECN, Dr. Okengo held positions as a Senior Technical Advisor and Consultant for the Open Society Foundations, the World Bank, UNICEF Eastern and Southern Regional Office, PATH and Save the Children, among others. A major focus of her work across the region has been the design of strategies to enhance the work of governments, parents and teachers in providing the best possible environment especially for poor and marginalized children. She has received numerous awards and honors for her work, serving twice as a Salzburg Fellow, twice as the Africa Team Coordinator for the World Forum for Early Care and Education and a Senior Fellow - Early Childhood Development for Children's Investment Fund Foundation.

Dr. Okengo has over 12 years of experience teaching at the university level, and has authored and presented widely on early childhood development programming in the region. She holds a PhD in Early Childhood Studies from Kenyatta University.

**Teresa MWOMA** is The Chair and National Coordinator ECD Network for Kenya. She is also a Senior Lecturer, Department of Early Childhood Studies and Special Needs Education, Kenyatta University. Dr. Teresa is currently managing Higher Education in Emergencies as a Coordinator Kenyatta University Dadaab Centre. Previously, Teresa was the Director International Centre for Capacity Development, Kenyatta University. She is representing ECD Network for Kenya in the National Early Childhood Education Committee. She participated in the curriculum reforms in Kenya as a member of the National Steering Committee 2016-2019 providing technical support on early childhood education. , Teresa is a DAAD Scholar who holds a PhD in Early Childhood Studies from Kenyatta University. She is a Research Associate University of Johannesburg Faculty of Education since 2016. Previously, Teresa was a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in Education and Care in Childhood at University of Johannesburg.

**Maniza NTEKIM** is the Regional Adviser at UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO). She provides advice and guidance to over 21 countries on ECD. Prior to taking up this post she was Senior Programme Officer at the Open Society Foundations (OSF) where she led on OSF's global ECD advocacy programme, supported ECD systems strengthening in Africa and represented the Private Sector and Private Foundations on the Global Partnership for Education's Country Grants Committee. Maniza has worked as a policy advisor and advocate for the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, Amnesty International UK and the Confederation of

British Industry which is the UK's largest employers' federation. She has also worked as a consultant for Save the Children UK, UNESCO, Oxford Policy Management and DfID. Maniza's relationship with UNICEF begun in 2007 when she worked as an education advisor in Rwanda and then in Tanzania.

Maniza holds a Masters in International Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London and a BA in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from the University of Oxford.