



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Education
Sector

COVID-19 Educational Responses Webinar

COVID-19 challenges and curriculum related actions in African Portuguese speaking countries (PALOP)

Wednesday, 2 December, 2020
14:00 - 16:00, Geneva Time

SYNTHESIS REPORT

Framework

UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO, or IBE), in dialogue with national authorities of the five African countries of the official Portuguese language, PALOP, organized a webinar on 2 December 2020 for a reflection on curricular actions¹ and learning challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The main objectives of the PALOP webinar are:

1. Create a joint PALOP platform for the dialogue of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to education systems.
2. Share the experiences and lessons learned from the strategies and actions implemented by different countries to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning process in the context of a pandemic.
3. Discuss priorities and support needs to consider for all future curriculum actions in the light of COVID-19

¹ Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique.

The preparation of this webinar counted with the active collaboration with the UNESCO Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations (PAX), Field Offices, Permanent Delegations, and National Commissions, which facilitated the dialogue with the ministries of education and the relevant services in the field of curriculum.

At the request of the IBE, each country has appointed a panelist to intervene in the webinar in accordance with the agenda.

Opening speeches

With the moderation of **Mr. Yao Ydo**, Acting Director of the IBE-UNESCO, the opening session was punctuated by the speeches of **Ms. Stefania Giannini**, UNESCO's Assistant-Director General for Education and **Mr. Ismael Nheze**, in a representation of **H.E. Ms. Carmelita Rita Namashulua**, Minister of Education and Human Development of Mozambique..

After expressing welcome and appreciation to the national authorities, panelists, and officials of UNESCO, **Mr. Yao Ydo** recalled the importance of the curriculum and the concern of the IBE-UNESCO to support the PALOP to face the situation posed by the pandemic at the level of curricular management.

Ms. Stefania Giannini delivered the opening remarks, focusing on the unprecedented disruption of education systems caused by the global pandemic. She highlighted the difficult situation in developing countries, particularly those with low incomes, whose lost school time was more significant - 17 weeks compared to 11 weeks in high-income countries. PALOPs are no exception in this context of upheaval in education systems. She noted the innovative efforts of developing countries to safeguard the continuation of education, while ensuring the safety of learners and teachers. She recalled UNESCO's various initiatives to support Member States in safeguarding and continuing education during the crisis, in particular:

- (i) Global Education Coalition, which includes United Nations organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media to help countries provide inclusive and equitable distance education;
- (ii) The Global Education Meeting (GEM 2020), which examined the responses to education related to the crisis and advocated for the protection of education and the safeguarding of the future of all learners.

In this regard, she referred to the commitments made by the Heads of State and Government, particularly with regard to safeguarding the financing of education. At the same time, these leaders have identified priority areas of action, namely, the reopening of schools, support for teachers as front-line workers, capacity building and the reduction/eradication of the digital divide. According to Ms. Giannini, the crisis can be an opportunity to reinvent education - she spoke of new paradigms - at the service of society, the economy, the protection of the environment. This requires knowledge,

skills, values and emotional and social skills. Technology including artificial intelligence must enable the diversification of the quality and relevant educational offer for all (present, remote or hybrid). All these concerns remind us of the crucial importance of the curriculum that is at the centre of educational action. She urged the IBE-UNESCO to continue its leadership role in the curriculum field while hoping that it will strengthen this position in the coming months. Finally, Ms. Giannini thanked the participants for their commitments and reiterated UNESCO's support for PALOP.

In his speech read by his Representative, **Ms Carmelita Rita Namashulua**, Minister of Education and Development Human of Mozambique² thanked UNESCO for its support and welcomed the holding of this webinar in the hope that the exchanges between the participants will help the country manage two major aspects of Mozambique's educational current affairs, namely, the situation created by COVID-19 and the reform of the court. At the moment, the process is completed for basic education 6 years, the generalization of which is planned for 2022. The high school education is due to be initiated in 2023. Mozambique has restructured its education system by approving a new law of the national education system that provides for the expansion of 9-year compulsory education. Finally, she spoke of the challenge of quality and inclusion. In this regard, the country has decided to implement bilingual education for regions and children who do not speak Portuguese. The concern for inclusion has also led to the introduction of sign language.

Session1: Highlights

Ms. Zulmira Rodrigues, Chief of Section for Cooperation with Regional Organizations in Africa at the UNESCO Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations, moderated the first session. She stressed the experiences and lessons learned **by PALOP's education systems in relation to COVID-19**. Before passing the floor to the first panelist, she thanked the IBE for creating this long-awaited space by the countries of Portuguese-speaking Africans.

Ms. Amapola Alama, IBE Education Specialist, in her considerations recalled that the curriculum is at the heart of the education system because it defines what we want children to learn, when, how, where and how much. The curriculum guides and guides the work of the various actors in the education system so that the aims of the education system are accomplished, namely that students learn. For the IBE, the curriculum is broken down into four levels:

Level 1: The Official Curriculum (Prescribed) that defines: Which school? For which citizen, for what society, for what national development? That is the level of policy. Who: Ministry (executives, teachers, parliament, civil society)? What: Curricular framework

² Because of difficulties of Internet connection, the representative of the Mozambican Minister took place after that of Ms. Amapola Alama.

that guides the mission and work of all stakeholders in the education system. "This is the constitution of the education system".

Level 2: Curriculum interpreted curriculum/textbooks - teacher training content aligned/continuing education. Who: Experts from the Ministry of Curricula, teacher trainers, teachers, international experts, publishing houses, etc.?

Level 3: The curriculum taught-implemented: what teachers actually do in classrooms, supervised by inspectors and pedagogical advisors (real). They interpret the curriculum according to their training/s, skills, mastery, availability of teaching materials and teaching guidance.

Level 4: The curriculum assessed (class, national and international level). These are the achievements of the students on the basis of the elements interpreted and selected by the teachers and authors of the textbooks.

This presentation further highlighted the interdependence between these different levels and instruments by talking about the need for curricular linen and coherence in implementation. Alignment and coherence require the development and use of textbooks and other teaching tools, teaching coaching and support practices, training (initial and continuous) and, also, the management, management and means of the education system that must be in line with the requirements of the curriculum. She stressed the need for a systemic vision and practice of the curriculum and drew attention to the risk of fragmentary approaches. Otherwise, the curriculum may remain on paper. She referred again to the fact that COVID-19 has dramatically disrupted the education systems and raised in question, including the "where" (in class, at home, elsewhere), the "how" (by what pedagogy) and the "how much" (fundamental content) of learning and even the "who" (increased role of parents in times of crisis). All these questions remind us of the importance of the curriculum and its management.

- **The case of Angola**

The panelist for Angola, **Mr. André Diasala Jacinto**, Director of the National Institute for Research and Development of Education (INIDE) presented the main measures taken by the Angolan government following the declaration of the pandemic status by the World Health Organization, with the aim of reducing the impact of the health crisis on the teaching and learning process. These measures have been the subject of consultations with social partners, provincial and local education officials. As far as the curriculum and related areas of intervention have been implemented by the Ministry of Education. In this regard, he indicated the redesign of the school calendar for the year 2020-21, the development of minimum programmes (fundamental content) with the clarification of the pedagogical approaches and the knowledge and skills to be transmitted. The Ministry of Education has triggered the process of de-development of new and appropriate teaching tools, including the guidance guide for teachers, parents and community tutors. The authorities had to start hybrid teaching – semi- face-to-face (rotating) and remote using radio and television. There are also initiatives to overhaul the evaluation system and train teachers. Referring to the difficulties, Mr. Jacinto

mentioned the example of educational workers to manage the situation created by COVID-19, especially the setting up of courses through radio and television. Adapting to the new context has been laborious to say the least.

- **The case of Cape Verde**

The Cape Verde panelist, **Ms. Rosa Silva**, Director of Educational Management and Curriculum Development of the National Directorate of Education presented a fairly broad and diverse list of initiatives and measures taken. Here are some examples that we think are the most significant. It distinguished two moments: (i) the continuation and conclusion of the pandemic-disrupted 2019-20 school year during the second term (March) and (ii) the preparation and start of the 2020-21 school year. Regarding the first moment it is worth noting the suspension of courses, the development of the calendar and the resumption in the form of distance education through radio, television and internet for the third quarter (last). The distance educational offer covered preschool, basic and secondary education. Distance courses were complemented by a guidance guide for teachers and parents of students. Given the social and geographical inequalities in access to radio, television and the internet, adapted tools have been developed and made available to pupils and parents. The evaluation system has been re-adapted with exams for students at the end of the cycle and the last year of secondary schooling. Regarding the year 2020-21 it is worth noting the variable learning of the start of the school year depending on the health situation of each island or municipality, the definition of minimum content, hybrid teaching (alternate and distance semi-face-to-face) teacher training in distance education, including the use of internet platforms, strengthening national and disciplinary coordination, defining/clarifying the period of catch-up and upgrading for certain subjects and knowledge. It is still worth noting the approval of the individual and domestic teaching modality and the addendum to the evaluation system. She also mentioned among other initiatives the selection of teachers for the production of distance courses, the expansion of access to the internet, the distribution of equipment (tablets, televisions) of instruction sheets and apostilles.

- **The case of Guinea-Bissau**

The panelist of Guinea-Bissau, **Mr. Allende Quadé**, Director of Curricular and Environmental Education Services at the National Education Development University, INDE, was unable to make his intervention for technical reasons (quality and stopping the internet connection). The summary sent out previously provides an article on the situation of his country in this report. First of all, he notes a context characterized by multiple constraints that preceded the pandemic and the declaration of the state of emergency - lack of class, triple vacation, teacher strikes, school dropout, delay in the start of the school year, high school failure rate and lack of quality of teaching and learning. The government has adopted a package of measures to safeguard the continuation of the education process. At the curricular level and related areas, the definition of a reduced education program must be noted, reduction of classroom

enrolment, introduction of classes on Saturdays, improvement of school hygiene, strengthening of health education, training and support for teachers, extension of the school year, introduction of distance education, adaptation of the evaluation system, adoption of automatic promotion in some cases and partial cancellation of the school year in other cases. Pre-crisis difficulties and constraints have increased with the implementation of the pandemic and rekindled the sense of urgency in relation to the capacity building of the Ministry of Education and its services.

Session 2: Highlights

Session 2 on **Priorities and Challenges for Curriculum Action** was moderated by **Mr. Paul Gomis**, Head of Office of UNESCO's Office in Maputo, Mozambique. Mr. Gomis congratulated IBE for organizing this webinar for Portuguese-speaking countries. He recalled the economic, political and social changes in court in Mozambique and the context of the health pandemic that challenges and priorities the curriculum and gives a new dimension to distance education.

- **The case of Mozambique**

The graduated panelist of Mozambique, **Mr. Ismael Nheze**, Director of the National Institute for Development of Education, recalled the evolution of curricular issues since the independence of the country in 1975, and the partnerships and support received that have permitted two curricular reforms. He highlighted the growing emergence of capacity through national universities that have begun to offer advanced training (master and doctoral) in curricula and related fields. This facilitated the national application of the curriculum process. He referred to the extension, the independence and length of Mozambique (almost rectangular form) and the existence of three levels of curricular management - central, provincial and local, designated ZIP, areas of educational influence, (set of schools under the same supervision) and the underlying challenges. The national level is fundamentally involved in monitoring government policies and decisions, the provincial level of educational supervision and delivery of education programs, and the ZIPs of course planning and integration of local reality into the curriculum. He also mentioned the concern for evaluating the implementation of the curriculum, as a work of national and regional studies, while stressing the importance of the results of national examinations and the evaluation of knowledge and skills at the primary level as relevant sources of information.

Following this guidance, the panelist identified some challenges for Mozambique: (i) integration of curricular innovations into the teacher training system and practices; (ii) training of trainers from teacher and university training institutions; (iii) challenges and requirements for educational supervision at all three levels (central, provincial and ZIP), (iv) training of technicians and managers (capabilities) to monitor innovations and indicators at the provincial; (v) funding constraints and difficulties. Despite budgetary

appropriations and the contribution of partners whose resources are being developed by Bank M, there is a particular need for resources to be committed at a time when the country is engaged in the process of developing a new curriculum. On coaching and supervision training, he highlighted the complexity of bilingual education³ and different types of special education. At the request of the moderator, Mr. Nheze added Mozambique's strategy for the most part of education during the pandemic, slightly different from those described by the representatives of Angola and Cape Verde, which is explained by the school calendar with the return to the day in February. Pay preferred to articulate its strategy in the round of learning cycles. After the interruption and gradual resumption of classes, the country plans to postpone catch-up actions for the next school year, with a particular focus on years of examinations that benefit from intensive courses and exceptional opportunities for knowledge control. The digital divide and partial coverage of the internet have forced the choice of paper teaching tools and the use of radio.

- **The case of Sao Tomé and Príncipe**

The panelist from Sao Tomé and Príncipe, **Ms. Bleizy Costa**, Director of Planning and Educative Innovation, accompanied by a few colleagues, spoke of the gradual resumption of classes in September 2020 after a long period of suspension (March 2019) with the aim of reviving/continuing the learning process and preventing school drop-out. The resumption was preceded by the reorganization of the curriculum and the adapting of certain aspects of school operations, including the management of the teaching and learning process. The strategic plan for the resumption of courses was developed with the support of a few partners (GPE, UNICEF, World Bank). Beyond the health and social components, this plan provides for hybrid education with three practical modalities: face-to-face classes (5 and 3 hours for primary and secondary respectively) and distance courses, through radio and television. She mentioned some urgent challenges such as the development of classes for radio and television courses in addition to face-to-face and guide to educational structures. The 2020/21 school year has been programmed to last 40 weeks with the reduction or even the elimination of holidays. The curricular reorganization has resulted in the selection of the fundamental content for each year and education cycle and new evaluation methodologies focused on priorities and relevance of content. In this regard she noted the priority given to Portuguese language disciplines and mathematics. The success of the plan requires the creation of favorable conditions for its implementation, such as the capacity of supervisors, teachers, school leaders in the field of catch-up, distance learning methodologies and the use of digital tools. "The coincidence with the retirement of a significant number of experienced teachers will certainly make the implementation of the adjustments under the plan more laborious" she said. The children's welcome and supervision outside the school space call for the strengthening of the training of school principals and also community leaders. Some court planning exercises, such as the

³ This issue will be the subject of a note that will be attached to this report.

definition of quality of education models, will need to be reassessed and reviewed in light of the situation created by the pandemic.

For the medium term, it outlined the following priorities: (i) contingency plan for the education system; (ii) creation of specialized distance learning facilities and services (radio, television, multimedia...); (iii) building institutional capacity for curriculum development and related areas; (iv) initial and continuing training plans for teachers, university professors (teacher trainers) and inspectors;

Session questions and answers

After the panelists' intervention, there was a Q&A session moderated by **Ms. Zulmira Rodrigues**, which allowed the speakers to clarify doubts and answered a number of questions asked by the participants. On a question about the official curriculum, Ms. Amapola Alama returned to the systemic vision of the curriculum, with 4 levels and the imperative need for teachers to be able to apply it in the classroom. Age/class scaling due to the risk of duplication caused by the pandemic was introduced. Apparently and at this stage this issue does not appear to be a major problem given the number of school years affected and the strategies implemented to support students and the learning and learning process. The specific situation of illiterate parents who find themselves unable to support their children's learning has also been raised about the enhanced role of the family in education as a result of the health crisis. The panelists mentioned various solutions put to the test, such as home visits by teachers, mobilization of community support and the designation and training of community tutors whose performance and impact have not yet been evaluated. Regarding the medium and means of distance education the moderator drew the attention of the participants on the predominance of paper, radio, television and a marginal use of the internet. This is basically due to the reduced rate of coverage and technical and economic access to the internet (digital divide). The moderator reiterated the call of the African Union and UNESCO to Member States for more consistent efforts to accelerate the reduction of the digital divide and the development of teachers' digital skills. The academic results and learning levels of students in Africa, in general was raised, recalling the crucial importance of teacher training and full integration of the curriculum into training programs and practices. The webinar heard the interesting experience of a country in this area (Angola). It remains to be seen whether it is valid for all PALOPs, which the participants were not able to discuss due to lack of time. For the same reason plenty other questions asked by the participants have not been addressed.

Recall of the major points mentioned above

Mr. Victor Borges, the IBE's contact person for the preparation of this webinar, recalled the major points discussed. As his intervention was greatly shortened, given the delay in rapport's initial programming, this report contains some points that were not presented during its short intervention. Here are the points:

- (i) The PALOP are a rather heterogeneous group. Two countries - Angola and Mozambique - stand out because of their territorial dimension, demographic weight and natural resources to name but a few. In both countries, there are three levels of public management - central, provincial and local versus two for other countries. The breadth and complexities of the managerial and underlying governance challenges are different. Another striking feature of PALOP is the geographical discontinuity and distance between countries.
- (ii) The panelists' interventions suggest that there is no joint reflection and shared knowledge of the reality of the five countries, at least at the curricular level.
- (iii) Due to a differentiated school calendar, the impact of the pandemic has not been the same. For some, the effects of COVID are spread over two school years (2019/20 and 2020/21). For others, the pandemic coincided with the start of the 2020/21 school year (Mozambique).
- (iv) The moderator recalled the need for systemic understanding of the curriculum and the challenge of levels and consistency in action for the curriculum to arrive in the classroom. This necessarily requires the full integration of the curriculum into the teacher training system and practices and in educational management at the central, provincial, local and educational levels.
- (v) The presentations showed that PALOP have institutional settings and diverse capabilities to manage the curricular issue. In some countries (Cape Verde, Sao Tomé and Príncipe) the curricular process is led directly by the central services of the Education Ministry. In the others, this function is assigned to specialized and autonomous institutes. How the curriculum is socialized and appropriated by educational management structures at the central, provincial and local level, speaks teacher training institutions and schools requires clarification.
- (vi) Respecting the specificity and autonomy of the institutions, the curricular question calls on all the actors involved - officials, ministerial technicians and specialized institutes, officials, and professors of universities, teacher training institution trainers, school principals - to set up and/or strengthen the coordination mechanisms. It is vital that teachers leave universities with mastery of the official curriculum and/or modifications dictated by exceptional circumstances, such as that sponsored by the Covid-19.
- (vii) As a result of the pandemic and restrictive measures of movement and clumping of persons, and the five countries have made adjustments in the school calendar and in programmes by defining priority content and skills, given the decrease in

school time. At least two interventions are reminded of the importance of an aspect not mentioned by the panelists. These are emotional and social values and skills. This is particularly important in times of restrictions on human contact, including physical and social distance. The socializing function of the school goes beyond academic learning.

- (viii) Countries have noted that distance or hybrid education cannot be improvised. It requires resources, infrastructure and capacity. Governments are reminded to be more consistent in their efforts to create human, technical and infrastructure conditions for distance education, including the diminution of the digital divide. The pandemic is an opportunity for innovation.
- (ix) The pandemic has exacerbated and made more visible the socio-economic precariousness of disadvantaged social strata and the amplified negative effects on the education of children from these backgrounds. Safeguarding the learning process requires strategies, approaches and supports that are tailored to the concrete situation and needs of these children. It is to be consistent with the known importance of education (SDG 4) for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the motto subscribed by all countries not to leave anyone behind.
- (x) On the valued role of families in pandemic education and distance education, the particular question of illiterate parents who are in the need to help their children has arisen. The panels shared some experiences and drafts of responses to this specific situation - home visits, community support, the appointment and capacitation of community guardians - which have not yet been assessed. In any case, PALOP, like other developing countries, will continue to seek the most appropriate and effective solutions for the education of these children with a view to safeguarding and improving the learning process.
- (xi) Curriculum management is a particularly critical issue in countries where the institutional environment, school management and leadership practices and the level of qualifications of teachers, even those who graduate, do not guarantee the creativity, research and educational innovations that society needs or expects.
- (xii) The exchanges of email and telephones during the preparation phase, the response time to various solicitations and the interventions made during the webinar made it possible to discern a framework, although variable, of institutional fragility and multiple constraints of the education systems of the PALOP.
- (xiii) The current health crisis and the risk of similar situations in the future on the one hand and the political, economic, social, cultural and individual necessity to preserve education and learning, on the other hand, are a pressing reminder for the strengthening of the capacity of education systems at all levels and fields. Without capacity there can be no mastery of education systems, let alone its rapid deployment or adjustment in times of crisis.

- (xiv) About capabilities the moderator, also, defended a holistic vision and approaches. Capacity development cannot be reduced to isolated, dictated, sometimes, only by ad hoc requirements. As important as they may be for the execution of a project or an intervention, capacity development is something else. There needs to be a systemic approach that allows as many executives as possible to raise the level of knowledge, create/consolidate individual technical and managerial skills, adjust and improve the performance of teams and institutions and, above all, facilitate the emergence of an institutional and managerial environment conducive to the use of individual skills or work teams. This applies to the curriculum and also to other specific areas of education.
- (xv) The crucial importance of monitoring, inspecting and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum has been stressed many times. These activities are fundamental to support teachers in the field, to collect information essential to the development of practices, to the control and critical appreciation of the options devoted to the curriculum and its implementation of the official curriculum. Understanding the mechanics of success or failure must be the starting point for curricular review, adaptation and/or reform operations.

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