

Assessing Learning From Home Experiences During School Closures in Côte d'Ivoire

Around the world, more than 1.5 billion students were affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Côte d'Ivoire, schools were closed in 2020 for four months as part of emergency measures and then for summer vacation. During this time, the government broadcast radio and television programs for students to continue learning.

Learning losses occurred in COVID-19 even when distance learning resources were available and can occur in other instances of extended school closures.¹ Thus, understanding households' experiences during these periods can help inform the government in designing effective distance learning programs in the future. These programs may also provide additional learning opportunities for students outside of the classroom when school is in session.

With the Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, IPA assessed the educational activities of children during the COVID-19 and summer vacation school closures and families' experiences with the government's distance learning programs.

Key Findings

Family support and supervision were critical both for students' safety and continued studying

- Caregivers were interested in educational activities as a way to keep their children occupied and secure.
- Caregivers cited a lack of motivation as one of the key reasons why children were not engaged in educational activities, particularly in households in poverty.
- The level of caregiver involvement and financial capacity was a determining factor in their children's educational activity, benefitting children whose caregivers spent more time and effort supporting them or could pay for private tutoring. Remote learning activities might accordingly be exacerbating existing educational inequality.

The learning programs served a need, but they faced engagement challenges and mixed opinions about their future use

- Radio and television were important information sources within and between households about health and compulsory education. The programs were also seen as having an educational purpose.
- Some caregivers did not engage the programs with their children, rural households did not access the programs, and the content appeared to be too fast for children to follow.
- When schools reopened, 1/3 of caregivers deemed the programs unnecessary. Others valued them for vacations, learning reinforcement, and as an affordable alternative to private tutors.



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Policy Implications

- Radio and television are effective ways to share recommended health and education information with the public and can continue to be leveraged and experimented with to increase community engagement.
- The importance of caregiver involvement in their children's educational activities and success is a key area for distance learning programs to emphasize.
- Efforts should be made to ensure program content is designed for a representative sample of the country's population and is easy to follow.
- Investigating current access to educational resources and opportunities for families may need to be explored to reduce learning barriers.

The Research

As part of the RECOVER initiative to generate rigorous data and evidence for policymakers to use to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, IPA partnered with the Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Employment and Social Protection to assess children's educational activity during school closures.

IPA conducted two rounds of telephone surveys with households across the country in June and October 2020. Topics included the educational experience of the children, the kinds of educational activities they completed, their assessment of those activities, and the government's radio and television distance learning programs.

IPA also conducted qualitative interviews with households to further investigate their experiences with the learning programs. To do this, IPA analyzed the responses of households from the second round of telephone surveys to gather diverse profiles and experiences. Within each profile, households were then randomly selected to participate in the interviews.

Results and Policy Implications

Family support and supervision during the closures were deemed to be critical both for students' safety and continued studying.

Government radio and television broadcasting served an information-sharing need, but the learning programs contended with accessibility challenges during implementation and mixed opinions about resuming in the future.

Caregivers were wary about child safety and studying

- Caregivers were wary of lockdown measures and the spread of the virus, so supervising their children in educational activities was a way to ensure their safety and security.
- Children had little motivation to study on their own, making caregiver involvement necessary to ensure they did.

Impacts on student learning varied based on caregiver support and financial capacity, which potentially drove educational and socioeconomic inequities

- Children of caregivers who were more involved in their educational activities were more likely to succeed compared to children of less involved caregivers.
- Many families had to give up private tutoring during the pandemic for financial or health reasons. Families with financial means to pay for tutoring continued to do it, creating learning gaps between these children and children from families that could not afford it.

Radio and television were successful in sharing information across the community and serving an educational purpose

- Both were important sources of information about pandemic protocols and the benefits of compulsory education, which was discussed by caregivers with neighbors, family members, and colleagues.
- Caregivers associated the distance learning program with education rather than entertainment, increasing their acceptance of having children engage them.

Issues of engagement impacted the learning programs' broader success

- Some caregivers did not engage the programs with their children, which hurt the latter's learning.
- Rural households did not have radio or television and felt left out of the programming.

- Caregivers said the content was too short and fast for children to follow.

Mixed opinions about the future of the radio and television programs once schools reopened in September 2020

- One-third of caregivers thought the programs were no longer needed.
- Other caregivers thought the programs could be useful during vacations, helping children learn through repetition, and serving as an out-of-school learning resource for children without private tutors.

Overall, important learnings were revealed about the educational experiences of families in Côte d'Ivoire during COVID-19 and summer vacation and the successes and limitations of the government's distance learning programs. These can help to inform interventions to support and improve learning for households of all backgrounds in the future, both during school closures and regular programming.



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¹ Slade, T. S., Piper, B., Kaunda, Z., King, S., & Ibrahim, H. (2017). Is 'summer' reading loss universal? Using ongoing literacy assessment in Malawi to estimate the loss from grade-transition breaks. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 12(4), 461-485.

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Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) is a research and policy nonprofit that discovers and promotes effective solutions to global poverty problems. IPA designs, rigorously evaluates, and refines these solutions and their applications together with researchers and local decision-makers, ensuring that evidence is used to improve the lives of people living in poverty.

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