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**GUIDELINES FOR REMOTE LEARNING AND BLENDED
LEARNING IN AVSI COMMUNITY BASED EARLY CHILD
EDUCATION AND BASIC LITERACY AND NUMERACY
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	4
SECTION 1: GUIDELINES FOR REMOTE LEARNING	6
WELL-BEING - LEARNING AND TEACHING	6
CONTENT	6
PEDAGOGY, LEARNER SUPPORT AND LEARNER ENGAGEMENT	7
COMMUNICATING LEARNING AND ACCESS	9
SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS, EDUCATORS, TEAM MEMBERS	10
CAREGIVERS	10
EDUCATORS	11
TEAM MEMBERS	11
RETENTION OF CHILDREN IN THE REMOTE LEARNING PROGRAMS	12
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	13
PARTNERSHIPS	14
SECTION 2: THE PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR BLENDED LEARNING	15
BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGY	16
BLENDED LEARNING MODALITY	16
BLENDED LEARNING EXPERIENCES	16
ACCESS TO LEARNING	17
SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS	17
SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS	17
SUPPORT FOR TEAM MEMBERS	18
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	18
RETURN TO FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING	18

Introduction

The following guidelines are the result of the experience gained by AVSI staff in Lebanon with children enrolled in four main non-formal education programs:

- The Community Based Early Childhood Education Program (CB-ECE) engages children between the ages of 3 to 5 years who do not have access to formal early childhood education.
- The Basic Literacy and Numeracy Program (BLN) and Adapted Basic Literacy and Numeracy Program (A-BLN) engages children between the ages of 10 to 14 years who have had limited or no previous formal schooling or have been out of school for more than two years.
- The Retention Support Program engages children in formal schooling who have been identified as “at risk of dropping out of school” with homework support and other learning experiences to enable them to pass their grade level and/or remain in schools¹.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, AVSI engaged children in learning and development experiences face-to-face, in community centres and public schools across Lebanon. As a result of the lockdown measures that took place in Lebanon, and to ensure the continuity of learning of all children, AVSI was able to swiftly shift learning to take place remotely. From March to December 2020, a total of 4,117 children across Lebanon took part in remote learning experiences of the non-formal education programs at AVSI, namely the CB-ECE, BLN and A-BLN.²

The aim of this study is to draw on AVSI’s experience with remote learning in Lebanon to propose:



1. Guidelines for the use of remote learning processes in AVSI’s non-formal education programs
2. Guidelines for blended learning in AVSI’s non-formal education programs

The proposed guidelines are based on the positive outcomes recorded in the distance learning process undertaken by AVSI and are draw on the experience of AVSI staff (managers, technical teams, field teams, teachers and caregivers).

¹ This report does not include the retention support program

² AVSI. Evaluation of Distance Learning in Non-Formal Education. 2021.

The guidelines were based on the results of the following research exercises and discussions:

- A comprehensive evaluation of the distance learning process conducted by AVSI's MEAL team that, through a large variety of quantitative and qualitative data collected during the implementation of the non-formal education learning programs in 2020, assesses the learning experience analysing children's engagement in learning, retention and dropout across different age groups and activities.
- A working session conducted with AVSI's management and technical teams to understand their views on the successes and challenges of the remote process and recommendations for improvement.
- A qualitative survey administered to AVSI teams on the field including education officers, education assistants and field coordinators to learn from their experiences of working directly with educators, caregivers and children.
- Focus group discussions with teachers.
- Focus group discussions with caretakers.

SECTION 1: GUIDELINES FOR REMOTE LEARNING

Remote learning or distance learning, also called distance education, e-learning, and online learning, is often defined as a form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication.



AVSI embraced remote learning as a result of the emergency created by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure continuous access to education to the children participating in non-formal education programs in March 2020. The switch to remote teaching and learning mainly consisted in delivering educational content through accessible video lessons for children following a low-tech, inclusive approach to distance education.

However, according to UNICEF, “the ‘supply’ of hardware or educational content, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own to produce learning outcomes. Learning occurs when access to technology is combined with relevant and engaging content, a well-articulated instructional model, effective teaching presence and learner support, and an enabling learning environment”.³

Building on the findings of the studies done on AVSI distance learning programs in Lebanon, this Section aims to identify practices that proved to be successful in the implementation of remote learning in non formal education and to suggest areas for improvement.

WELL-BEING - LEARNING AND TEACHING

CONTENT

Adapt learning objectives and content to ensure the continuity of learning and well-being for all.

- Adapt all program objectives and content for learning to be facilitated remotely and continue to evaluate and re-adjust objectives based on educator and learner experiences.
- Adapt all program objectives, content and pedagogies to suit the needs of learners with special educational needs and disabilities.
- For specific topics, review the objectives to be covered by one single session (or video) since some topics need more time to be covered more effectively.

Include extracurricular and recreational activities as part of the remote learning experience.

³ Andaleeb Alam, Priyamvada Tiwari, UNICEF. “Putting the ‘learning’ back in remote learning”, June 2020, page 1.

- Understand the extent to which extracurricular activities will benefit children’s wellbeing and learning in both the CB-ECE and BLN programs and the feasibility of implementation in a remote setting. If so, consider:
- Develop extracurricular activities for caregivers and children that are fun, relevant, enjoyable and provide an opportunity for play.
- Partner with organizations who already provide extracurricular activities remotely and/or curate materials from available online and in-print resources that can be used by children.
- Adjust designed extracurricular activities based to suit the needs and interests of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Monitor the frequency of remote learning sessions offered per week, and extend the time needed to cover the whole program.

- The frequency of remote learning sessions offered per week should be a maximum of four days per week (children appear to be more engaged in learning when the frequency of distance learning weekly session was 3 or 4 as opposed to 5 or 6 learning sessions per week⁴).

Monitor the educator-child ratio.

- Ensure that the educator-child ratio is between 30 and 35 children per educator at a maximum to result in higher quality learning opportunities for each child⁵.

PEDAGOGY, LEARNER SUPPORT AND LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

Ensure the remote learning experiences are based on active learning approaches.

- Ensure, to the extent possible, that the remote learning experience is based on active and participatory pedagogies and learning strategies where learners, at the centre of the learning process, have the opportunity to construct understanding, practice their learning by doing, express and share their learning and receive continuous feedback to reflect on and improve learning.
- Ensure that the learning experiences include differentiated instruction to support the wellbeing, learning and development of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Flexibility, sharing and engaging children in learning.

⁴ AVSI. Evaluation of Distance Learning in Non-Formal Education. 2021.

⁵ AVSI. Evaluation of Distance Learning in Non-Formal Education. 2021. It appears that educators facilitating learning to 40 students and above faces challenges in Provide support to children and caregivers. p. 16

- Provide a consistent system designed for learning remotely in which learners and caregivers can follow systematically (receiving and watching video, engaging in task and assignment, re-sharing learning with educator) the lessons.
- Provide children with the flexibility of re-sharing their assignments in the modality that they feel most comfortable with (video, photo, or voice note).
- Provide children and caregivers with the flexibility in engaging in learning at the time that suits them best. This may include:
 - a. Identify learners who are not able to access and re-share their learning effectively and understand how to target strategies more effectively (children who are particularly vulnerable and can't access learning: working children or children whose parents work away from home).
 - b. Design learning activities that do not necessarily require a lot of time for active engagement of caregivers which can include individual work or when possible, siblings or peer-to-peer learning activities.
- Work on additional strategies to ensure greater engagement of children with special educational needs and disabilities in learning that may include one-on-one online sessions and/or home visits and provide specialized services simultaneously to the learning cycle.

Build on successes in relation to educator support for children.

- Provide the opportunity for one-on-one communication between educators and caregivers and children through WhatsApp to continuously monitor learning and development and provide the necessary learning-related support for children.
- Provide the opportunity for one-on-one communication and additional support between each educator, inclusion officer, Child Protection officer, child and caregiver, for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Engage learners in Psychosocial Activities.

- Conduct a review to understand challenges faced by learners in engaging with the PSS activities remotely.
- Adapt the content, objectives and pedagogies of the PSS activities to motivate children to engage more effectively while maintaining the opportunities for learners to engage in activities where they are “doing”, “building”, “creating” etc.

Create opportunities for children to engage in learning with and from peers.

- Create sessions (weekly or bi-weekly) where educators meet online through video with a small group of learners from the same cohort (or the whole class) in a common activity, share their work with one another, check for understanding by the educator, or have “circle time” etc. where peers can learn with and from each other and have the opportunity to express themselves (or invite learners in small groups to the centres if safety measures and situation permits).



Formative assessment and evaluation of learning

- Continue with the one-on-one communication to continuously identify each learner’s needs for additional support in learning and provide the support and strengthen processes for checking understanding.
- Develop remote assessment methods to evaluate the children’s progress.

COMMUNICATING LEARNING AND ACCESS

Ensure learners and caregivers have access to the necessary devices, tools and materials to access learning experiences and resources.

- Use WhatsApp as a platform for communicating and sharing learning materials and contents:
 - a. It allows caregivers and learners to save teaching and learning resources and to review them
 - b. It allows for one-on-one communication between educators and caregivers and children
- Provide caregivers and learners with printed materials, stationery and creative kits to support children’s learning and wellbeing.
- Ensure caregivers have the necessary devices needed to ensure access to learning resources, especially if other modalities of communication are selected.
- Ensure caregivers have the necessary data bundles required to access learning resources.

- Identifying caregivers and children who are most in need of additional devices and resources to access learning and provide them with the necessary tools or adapt modalities of communication accordingly.

Use several platforms for video calls and synchronous learning experiences to increase educator-children and children-children interaction in learning.



- Identify the most suitable way or platform for the caregiver to set up video calls with the children and accompany the caregiver to become familiar with the chosen platform.
- Develop the ability of educators to organize sessions using video calls to enhance learning interactions and ensure that educators have the support and time to organise the sessions.

Develop a learning platform or learning resource pack of activities that caregivers and learners can choose from to enrich their learning and development.

- Develop enriching activities and materials that support children in their learning and development and make the materials easily accessible for caregivers and learners to choose from and engage in on their own time and based on their needs and interests.
- Adapt resources and materials or create additional resources to support the learning and development of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS, EDUCATORS, TEAM MEMBERS

CAREGIVERS

Provide opportunities for follow-up with caregivers on the learning, development and well-being of their children.

- Raise the awareness of caregivers on the importance of remote learning for their children.
- Follow-up with caregivers on a one-on-one basis through WhatsApp or calls to support them with their children's learning and wellbeing.

Involve caregivers in the learning and wellbeing of their children.

- Provide caregivers with opportunities to be effectively involved in the learning and development of their children.
- If measures related to COVID 19 allow and while taking precautions open the centres and invite caregivers to visit educators if they need support for their children.
- Develop content or workshops with caregivers to raise their awareness on stress and anger management and positive parenting strategies.

- Develop content (in print, or video, etc.) to share with caregivers and/or provide them with training opportunities or awareness sessions on themes like:
 - a. Providing children with the opportunity to continue their learning and education remotely
 - b. Learning strategies, motivation techniques to engage their children in learning
 - c. Creating a home environment that is conducive to learning
 - d. Managing stress resulting from remoting learning (or other factors in their lives).



Provide support for the most vulnerable caregivers to engage their children in learning and wellbeing activities and programs.

- Understand the challenges of the most vulnerable caregivers to enrol their children in remote learning experiences (technology support, internet access or financial support).
- If AVSI is unable to provide sufficient financial support to caregivers consider involving other organizations in assistance and support the beneficiaries.

EDUCATORS

Establish a platform to share resources and experiences and create a community of practice among educators.

- Create a platform where educators can share resources and discuss their challenges.
- Create opportunities for educators to support one another in their practice.
- Ensure the participation of coordinators, officers and technical teams in the community of practice and platform.

Provide additional relevant training opportunities for educators, especially if introducing new modalities (e.g., video sessions).

- Gain a deeper understanding of the capacity building needs of educators, including teaching foreign languages, and if necessary, design additional professional development opportunities related to remote learning such as technical support, instructional design and pedagogies and student engagement.

TEAM MEMBERS

Review, if necessary, the terms of reference of team members especially education officers, education assistants and field coordinators.

- Review the roles and responsibilities of team members since in remote learning setting they will be changing in terms of:
 - a. Educational and administrative responsibilities: monitoring delivering of homework, assessment criteria, keeping track of progress
 - b. Workload: adapt the learning objectives to a remote setting, time to invest in dialogue with both children and caregivers etc

Monitor and be mindful of these issues to ensure they are able to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

- Identify different talents, capacities and experiences of team members and capitalize on them in relation to educational tasks.



Provide additional relevant training opportunities for team members, especially if introducing new modalities.

- Gain a deeper understanding of the capacity building needs of team members and if necessary, design professional development opportunities related to remote learning.
- Prepare team members, especially education officers and education assistants, to engage in a leading role in establishing and leading the community of practice among educators (if implemented).

RETENTION OF CHILDREN IN THE REMOTE LEARNING PROGRAMS

Following-up with caregivers and children to ensure their participation in the remote learning program.

- Follow-up with caregivers on a one-on-one basis to ensure children's participation in remote learning programs and to understand reasons behind lack of participation.⁶

Enhance processes of following-up with children to ensure their participation in the remote learning program.

⁶ In remote learning programs, the lack of participation was considered when a child did not share his/her homework with the educators after watching the video lesson. Educators were following up daily on caregivers to ensure that children were completing their daily lessons. However if a child did not participate in learning for 3 lessons in a row, the case was referred to AVSI staff for an individualized follow up (phone call with the family or family visit).

- Identify strategies and solutions – especially for boys, working children, and other children who are at a greater risk of dropping out – to retain them in the programs (solutions may be internally or through partnerships).

Ensure all caregivers have access to necessary devices and internet bundles.

- Provide devices to children whose caregivers are away from home for a longer period of time (sometimes two weeks) so they can have equal opportunity in accessing and engaging in learning.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation system that not only informs program decisions but more importantly responds to the learning experiences and achievement of children.

- Assess the learning experience of children and their achievement to continuously inform and in turn review learning design and program strategies.

Monitor children's learning and well-being

- In addition to the pre and post-tests, establish formative assessment processes to monitor and continuously support the learning and understanding of children.
- Evaluate children's achievement in relation to program design and implementation.
- Implement monitoring and evaluation processes that are specifically tailored to assess the effectiveness of:
 - a. The content, objectives, teaching and learning strategies and evaluation processes used with children with special educational needs and disabilities
 - b. The communication and support given to caregivers
 - c. Strategies used to ensure access and retention of children with special educational needs and disabilities in the program.
- Involve educators, caregivers and learners in assessing the remote learning process.



PARTNERSHIPS

Establish new and/or enhance existing partnerships, when necessary, to continuously respond to changes and to enrich the remote learning process.

- Explore opportunities to be innovative in the design and implementation of learning experiences – cases of strategic partnerships through which AVSI can build internal capacity.
- Coordinate with stakeholders in the sector to ensure alignment and synergies among all actions.
- Build partnerships and tap into external resources and expertise to support all adopted remote learning methodologies, practices and system.

SECTION 2: THE PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR BLENDED LEARNING

As defined by UNICEF, “blended learning combines multiple modalities, including in-person teaching and learning, the use of education technology applications and students’ interactions with online learning. In this case, education technology applications and online learning are some of the teaching strategies to support students in reaching their learning goals. Blended learning can also include distance learning”⁷.



There are various approaches to deliver blended learning. One model is for learners to be present at the learning institution but alternate between online and teacher-led sessions in various stations, while another model allows for learners to learn remotely and come into a classroom setting at various times depending on the program. Most blended learning models are based on structured online learning experiences. These models can be adapted to contexts with poor internet accessibility, and can be based on low levels of technological solutions.

Designing the Learning Experiences for Blended Learning

The blended learning experiences should be clearly designed to ensure effective learning and progress towards learning objectives and enhanced wellbeing. Depending on the modalities selected, the online or distance learning experiences and face-to-face learning experiences could be developed or curated from existing resources. However, the learning experiences should be comprehensive and holistic (designed for the purpose of blended learning) and should take into consideration:

- The learning and teaching strategies for the distance and in-person learning experiences
- Opportunities for learners to practice their learning and engage in active and participatory learning with and from their peers
- Opportunities for learners to receive continuous feedback and support on the development of their learning
- Opportunities to effectively evaluate learning achievement

⁷ UNICEF Europe and Asia. “Building Resilient Education Systems Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations for Education decision-makers at national, local and school levels”. 2020. p.6.

BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGY

Develop a rationale and strategy for blended learning.

- Develop a rationale for blended learning to clearly understand the reasons behind designing blended learning opportunities for children.
- Understand the readiness of communities, caregivers, children and educators (in terms of technology readiness or instruction and learning) for implementing blended learning programs.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for blended learning based on the rationale.
- Build partnerships with relevant organizations and experts and develop synergies with other organizations in the sector to ensure effective design and implementation of the blended learning process.

BLENDED LEARNING MODALITY

Decide on the most suitable modality for blended learning programs.

- Decide on the modality for blended learning based on the needs and interests of children and the program's learning objectives for each domain.
- Build on the successes and lessons learned from the remote learning experience.

BLENDED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Design the learning of blended learning experiences.

- Deliberately design, curate or partner with organizations to design the learning and wellbeing experiences for face-to-face and distance or online learning for each domain, including Life Skills, PSS and extracurricular activities.
- Build on the successes and lessons learned from the remote learning experience.



ACCESS TO LEARNING

Ensure all children have access to the learning resources and experiences.

- Ensure that all learners have access to the technology, online learning programs or printed materials required for the blended learning modality.
- Ensure that all learners have the technology and know-how to engage in online learning.
- Ensure that all learners are able to engage in self-guided learning effectively.
- Adapt resources, materials and/or technologies used to cater for the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS

Develop a strategy for caregiver engagement in the blended learning process.

- Decide on the extent to which caretakers will be involved in the blended learning process on both educational levels and access to learning resources and devices.
- Ensure that learners, especially older children, are empowered to access learning experiences and resources independently and can engage in autonomous learning (to the extent possible).
- Provide caregivers with opportunities to learn about the blended learning process, especially prior to the start of the program and to gain skills necessary to support their children in their learning.
- Build on the successes and best practices of the remote learning process.

SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

Ensure educators are involved in designing various aspects of the blended learning process and provide them with the necessary support for implementation.

- Involve educators in specific phases of the blended learning strategy development process.
- Ensure the involvement of educators in the design of blended learning modalities and learning experiences.
- Ensure that all educators are effectively prepared to design and facilitate learning experiences in a blended learning setting.
- Organize monthly meetings with caregivers and educators to keep them informed of their children's learning and development, support them technically, and to respond to their concerns.
- Build on the successes and best practices of the remote learning process.



SUPPORT FOR TEAM MEMBERS

Engage education officers, education assistants and field assistants in all aspects of the blended learning process and provide them with the necessary support for implementation.

- Understand the needs and interests of team members (interest in educational aspects, organizational, logistics etc.) and build on their interests.
- Ensure teams are involved in the development of the strategy for blended learning.
- Ensure that education officers and education assistants are prepared to lead educators in designing and facilitating blended learning experiences.
- Take into consideration the workload and tasks of team members prior to the implementation process.
- Build on the successes and best practices of the remote learning process.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Continuously monitor and evaluate learner achievement and program design and implementation to inform programmatic decisions.

- Adapt monitoring and evaluation processes for the blended learning process to continuously inform programmatic decisions in relation to the development of children's learning and wellbeing.

RETURN TO FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

Prepare for the return of face-to-face learning.

- Develop health and safety protocols related to COVID-19 for reopening schools and centres: social distancing, sanitizing, wearing masks, rules for play, classroom learning.

