

## UNESCO COVID-19 Education Strategy

### Regional Webinar-Arab States

#### ***'Learning assessment during distance education in the Arab States'***

**Thursday 28 January 2021, 10:30-12:30 (Beirut time) / 12:30-14:30 (Dubai time)**

**Registration: [https://unesco-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_cbjoy003TL29J-ALHarFmw](https://unesco-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_cbjoy003TL29J-ALHarFmw)**

**YouTube Live Streaming: <https://www.youtube.com/unescoibeirutoffice>**

## Background

During the prolonged school closures owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems across the world have sought alternative teaching and learning solutions to ensure learning never stops. Distance education solutions including online learning, mobile learning, TV and radio learning have been developed and employed widely in many countries to cope with the education disruptions.<sup>1</sup> However, this rapid shift from the traditional in-person teaching and learning modality to distance education has posed significant challenges to learners, teachers, parents, policy-makers and other stakeholders. One of the major concerns during distance education is learning assessment.

How to monitor students' learning outcomes and give them rapid feedback through formative assessments, and how to evaluate and validate students' academic performance in summative assessments and high-stakes examinations, these regular questions on education planning have become much more difficult and challenging when the learning assessments are conducted at a distance during the COVID-19 crisis.

## Context

From the beginning of global school closures in March 2020, different strategies have been adopted to manage learning assessments according to the local pandemic situations, technological infrastructure, school reopening agenda, as well as what students have learned during distance education and learning. When conducting formative assessments, digital tools and platforms, such as WhatsApp, Quizlet and Kahoot, are widely used to collect learners' learning evidence, monitor learning performance and provide timely feedback.<sup>23</sup> As for the summative assessments, either maintaining, canceling, rescheduling examinations or shifting to online exams are adopted to ensure the implementation of periodic

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. (April 2020). [Distance learning strategies in response to COVID-19 school closures](#).

<sup>2</sup> Kids Academy. (April 2020). [Formative Assessment Best Practices in Distance Learning](#).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Miller. (April 2020). [Formative Assessment in Distance Learning](#).

assessments on students' learning outcomes.<sup>4</sup> In the Arab region, where digital divides vary among countries, how to assess students' achievement while ensuring fairness, equity and inclusion of the results remains an important challenge.<sup>5</sup>

At the peak of the pandemic in April 2020, almost half of the Arab countries such as **Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine and Syria** decided to maintain the scheduled-exams while around 40%, including **Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Sudan and Tunisia** opted to postpone or reschedule the examinations. However, how to ensure the safety of students and teachers and control the health risk of sit-in exams remains contentious with serious concerns.<sup>67</sup> Other than on-site examinations, less than 20% of the Arab countries chose to organize exams online or utilize alternative assessment tools to replace written exams<sup>8</sup>. For instance, **Egypt** assesses grade 9 students by research projects, and universities in **Saudi Arabia** tend to conduct oral exams. But the authorization of such alternative assessment methods has not been confirmed by the ministries of education in most countries in the region.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the overall struggles, different educational settings also encounter specific challenges in learning assessment. Regular examinations for younger learners have been suspended mostly due to the temporary closure of pre-primary education centres and primary schools. For instance, final exams for primary and preparatory students in **Egypt** have been cancelled. But the organization of high-stake exams and assessments<sup>10</sup> is a serious issue in many countries as it will heavily impact students' academic and career plans, furthermore, affect the labour market and socio-economic development at the national level. Moreover, the validation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has many constraints in the pandemic situation as its assessment relies heavily on the on-site technique and skills performance of the students.<sup>11</sup>

In response to the urgent needs and challenges on learning assessment and also the high possibility of adopting distance or blended learning methods in the gradual school reopening in the Arab region, and in line with the joint commitments made to mobilize resources and provide technical advice on learning assessment in the Regional Ministerial Meeting on Back to Learning in the Arab Region in October 2020, UNESCO Beirut office, in partnership with the Section of Education Policy in the UNESCO HQs and the Regional Center For Educational Planning (RCEP), is organizing a webinar on **learning assessment during**

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO. (April 2020). [Managing high-stakes exams and assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Burton Bollag. (May 2020). [Arab universities struggle with final exams and reopening decisions.](#) Al-Fanar Media.

<sup>6</sup> Middle East Affairs. (June 2020). [Egyptian High-school pupils, masked and gloved, head into exams.](#)

<sup>7</sup> University World News. (April 2020). [Students 'in torment' after minister says exams are still on.](#)

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO. (April 2020). [COVID-19: An overview of national coping strategies on high-stakes examinations and assessments.](#)

<sup>9</sup> Burton Bollag. (May 2020). [Next Steps for New Online Courses: Measure Learning, Prevent Cheating.](#) Al-Fanar Media.

<sup>10</sup> High-stakes exams and assessments refer to the examinations "related to end-of-key levels, school leaving, university entrance exams and gateways for job."

<sup>11</sup> RCEP. (May 2020). [Student learning assessment policy options in emergencies - Policy Dialogue summary report.](#)

**distance education in the context of the COVID-19 crisis** to support regional education systems and shed a light on planning and organizing educational assessments in the new normality of distance education.

## Objectives

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The overarching goal of this webinar is to start **developing a strategic action plan to support learning assessment during distance education in the Arab region in and beyond the COVID-19 crisis** by addressing the challenges in different sets of education and filling the gap of insufficient policy guidance as well as practical recommendations on the management and implementation of different types of assessment and examinations. More specifically, the objectives of this webinar will be:

- Assess the current situation and identify the key challenges of learning assessment in different educational settings in the Arab region.
- Share good practice and successful experiences on learning assessment during distance education in the context of the COVID-19 crisis at regional and international levels.
- Provide policy guidance and practical recommendations on distance/remote learning assessment and examination for decision- and policy-makers at school, community and ministry levels.
- Discuss the possibility of utilizing technology to support learning assessment.
- Explore concrete action plans to ensure equal and fair recognition of the learning outcome and achievement for all learners.

## Expected Outcomes

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- Comprehensive overview of challenges, achievements and innovations in the Arab region with regard to learning assessment in the context of COVID-19 crisis.
- Enhanced capacities in management and organization of testing, assessment and examination in the era of distance education.
- Catalyzed multilateral engagement and cooperation in preparing learning assessment plans and validating the learning outcome and progress of all learners.
- Recommendations at policy and practice levels to support teachers, education personnel and policymakers to develop concrete solutions on learning assessment in different educational settings during distance education.

## Target audiences

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The target audience will include decision- and policy- makers at school and government levels, teachers and educators, education personnel in education planning and management sectors, as well as any other relevant education practitioners working in this field.

## Registration

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- [Registration](#) is free and required in advance.
- Once you register, a unique join URL will be sent to your email.

## Live transmission via Youtube

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[Live streaming](#) will be provided for those who might not be able to register in advance or to join due to limited capacity of the platform.

## Languages

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The webinar will be conducted in Arabic and English. Simultaneous interpretation services (from Arabic to English and vice versa) will be provided.