UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti
Terms of Reference
Consultancy for Research on Digital Learning and Innovation in Education

READ (Research on Education And Development) Unit

1. Background:

The Office of Research-Innocenti (OoR-Innocenti) is the dedicated research office of UNICEF. It undertakes and commissions research on emerging or current issues of relevance for children in order to inform the strategic directions, policies and programmes of UNICEF, Governments and their partners. The Office explores emerging issues, identifies research gaps, brings together existing researchers, and supports or undertakes research and data collection to address critical questions and to inform policy dialogue and implementation at country level.

Every Child has the right to learn. However, some 1.5 billion children have been put out of school because of the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures.; And even before COVID, the world was facing a serious learning crisis with wide disparities across countries and within countries. Over 50 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries are unable to read by the age of 10. In low-income countries, the learning crisis is even more acute, with the 'learning poverty' rate reaching 93 per cent. COVID-19 has exposed these disparities in a dramatic fashion. The gap between the children who have technology at home and are supported by their parents and teacher, and those who don't, has never been more glaring. In 71 countries, less than half the population has access to the Internet and about 35 per cent of households from the poorest quintile don't even have electricity.

The pandemic also brings an opportunity to re-imagine better education systems for all children, and to make bold decisions and investments to address the learning crisis for all children and young people. To respond to COVID-19 and beyond, we need to tap on the potential of digital learning in a way that does not widen even more the disparities against the most vulnerable. In this context, there is a crucial need for more and more robust evidence on what works, and what does not, in different contexts, in response to the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

Education is a key focus of UNICEF Innocenti, which constitutes a primary source of robust, comparative evidence on education and learning to support solutions for education systems, policies and programmes. Working with UNICEF Headquarters, regional and country offices as well as universities and international partners, the education team supports 50+ countries worldwide in conducting evidence-based reviews and field research through multi-country studies, including research on COVID and education research since the beginning of the pandemic.

2. Objective(s):

The Office aims to select one full-time consultant in order to support its innovation in education research work with the goal to provide policy-relevant evidence that is helpful for Governments during school closures and school re-openings and beyond, with emphasis on the most vulnerable children.

The consultant will support developing and implementing research into key digital learning programmes such as the Learning Passport and the Akelius digital language course. The consultant will work closely with colleagues in various UNICEF offices (HQ, RO, COs) to i) develop research protocols and systems that generate rapid and useful evidence to inform digital learning programmes; ii) provide technical support to the M&E and data systems for use in digital learning programmes; and iii) support the overall innovation in education research agenda contributing to innovation in education programmes and support to research on remote learning.

3. **Specific activities to be completed to achieve the objectives:**

In order to achieve the objectives above, the consultants will perform the following activities:

a. **Support to research for digital learning initiatives (80%)**

- Develop implementation research strategies for key digital learning initiatives (Including Learning Passport and Akelius digital language course).
- Support global partnerships for digital learning – developing research fit for implementation and use at country level coordinating with implementing country offices and partners, regional offices and HQ.
- Report writing for research related to the impact and implementation of digital learning programmes.
- Develop and implement quantitative and qualitative methodologies for research -including but not limited to impact evaluation, positive deviant methodologies, behavioral and scaling science and implementation research- and ensure the use of their findings at country level

b. **Support to the innovation in education research agenda of the UNICEF Office of Research (20%)**
- Contribute to the development of new digital learning and remote learning education research proposals.
- Contribute to the overall COVID-related research activities of the Office and to the use of their findings by policy and decision makers at country level.
- Participate in and/facilitate interdisciplinary research through involvement in selected cross functional teams and consultations
- Support research dissemination and use at country level and participate in networks of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the areas of education and learning.

4. **Specific outputs/products/results with specific delivery dates:**

Specific outputs and delivery dates are as follows:

Deliverables	Estimated nb of months (full-time)	Estimated Deliverable deadline	Grant source and WBS
Rapid literature review on the use of digital learning programmes, best practices in implementation and use in blended or remote learning environments.	1	Day 1 + 1 month	2220/A0/10/001/003/008 SC190332
Development of global research action plan for learning passport partnership developed in consultation with partnership and country level stakeholders.	1	Day 1 + 2 months	
Data collection and cleaning protocols developed (contextualizing global research plan) for implementation of digital learning initiatives in 2 countries.	1	Day 1 + 3 months	
Data collection and cleaning protocols developed for implementation of digital learning initiatives in additional 2 countries.	1	Day 1 + 4 months	
Development of feedback loops for action research and regular reporting for use at global, regional and country level	1	Day 1 + 5 months	
Contribution to the Office of Research COVID-related work programme	1	Day 1 + 6 months	

5. Qualifications and/or specialized knowledge/experience required and desirable for undertaking the assignment:

- Advanced university degree in social policy, economics, education, statistics or related social sciences.
- A minimum of five years of progressively responsible professional work experience at national or international levels in design and implementation of rigorous research, with developing country level experience essential;
- Strong data and analytical skills and extensive knowledge of common statistics software packages (e.g. STATA, R, SPSS)
- Demonstrated experience in both qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation designs and methods, including experimental and quasi-experimental methods;
- Experience in managing large rounds of data collection and related trainings; experience in using common online / offline data collection packages (e.g. ODK, Kobo, SurveyCTO) an asset;
- Excellent written and oral communication skills and excellent attention to detail;
- Experience in education, technology and digital learning very desirable.
- Strong interpersonal skills and demonstrated ability to work well as part of a geographically dispersed team and to forge and manage partnerships;
- Commitment to UNICEF's core values of care, respect, integrity, transparency and accountability;
- Ability to work in a multicultural, multi-ethnic environment; experience working in the UN or other international development organization an asset.
- Fluency in English required; Fluency in French desirable; Fluency in another UN language an asset

6. Duration of the consultancy:

The consultant will work <u>full-time</u> over a period of 6 months (with a starting date in Quarter 4 of 2020).

7. Supervision and work arrangements:

The consultant will work remotely and be part of the READ (Research on Education And Development) team of the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti. The consultant will report to the Education Manager. The consultant will work closely with the other Innocenti staff and consultants from the education and other units. Conditions permitting in reference to the COVID-19 crisis, the consultant may travel to programme countries and to dissemination events as required for quality implementation of the activities. Applications need to include all-inclusive fees, taking into consideration health insurance and, as relevant, taxes.