CALL FOR PROPOSALS
An Impact Evaluation of the EduApp4Syria Prize Competition Digital Game Apps

Released by: Digital Learning for Development (DL4D)
and All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD)
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1. Introduction

An estimated 2.8 million Syrian children are out of school because of a violent conflict in their country. Many of these children must cope with memories of multiple traumas and high levels of stress in their present living environment. The conflict has disrupted their education and the trauma and stress often affects their ability to learn. To ensure that Syrian children have an opportunity to learn to read and continue their lifelong learning process, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and its partners—All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD), Norwegian University of Science & Technology, Orange and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies—conducted an international innovation competition called EduApp4Syria to develop an open source smartphone application that can build foundation literacy skills in Arabic and improve psychosocial well-being for Syrian refugee children.

ACR GCD and Digital Learning for Development (DL4D) invite all eligible individuals and institutions to submit a full proposal to conduct an impact evaluation of the two winners of the EduApp4Syria Prize Competition.

2. ACR CGD and DL4D

All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR-GCD) seeks to identify and analyze the effects of technology on early grade literacy rates in developing countries to optimize the allocation of resources, inform decisions, and enhance solutions. Launched in 2011 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Vision, and the Australian Government, it is an ongoing series of competitions that leverages science and technology to create and apply scalable solutions to improve literacy skills of early grade learners in developing countries.

Digital Learning for Development (DL4D) is part of the Information Networks in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (INASSA) program funded jointly by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom, and administered by the Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development (FIT-ED) of the Philippines.

DL4D aims to improve educational systems in developing countries in Asia through testing digital learning innovations and scaling proven ones. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Better understand how digital learning innovations contribute to improved educational equity, quality, and efficiency in developing countries in Asia;
- Foster international collaboration and partnerships on digital learning innovation research in developing country contexts in Asia and the rest of the world in order to expand the reach, scope, and impact of the DL4D network; and
- Scale proven digital learning innovations through contributing to educational policy-making and action at national and sub-national levels in developing countries in Asia.

3. EduApp4Syria Prize Competition

Achieving reading and writing fluency (literacy) is foundational for lifelong learning, and therefore an essential skill for all children to acquire. Being literate in the language one uses at home also makes it

easier to learn second languages and hence facilitates the integration into host-country education systems.

However, Syrian children both inside and outside of school are living under the extreme stress of a protracted conflict. Elevated and prolonged stress levels can impede brain development and cause learning challenges, memory problems and emotional regulation difficulties. Given that psychosocial well-being is fundamental for learning, many of the ongoing non-formal educational programs targeting children from areas affected by humanitarian crises and protracted conflict include fun, play, and stress relief approaches as an integral part of their overall learning efforts.

The rationale behind the EduApp4Syria competition was that the high level of smartphone ownership among Syrians makes a digital approach a scalable option for reaching many out-of-school children with a learning supplement that can potentially help build their literacy skills and enhance their psychosocial well-being.

Details of the EduApp4Syria Prize Competition can be found here. More information on the digital game apps can be found here.   The winning game apps will be officially launched in March 2017.

4. Evaluation objectives

The evaluation is intended to assess the impact on Syrian out-of-school children of their use of the winning apps. Specifically, the evaluation must determine:

1.   the effects on literacy learning;
2.   the transferability of knowledge; and
3.   the improvements in psychosocial well-being.

The evaluation should also assess the technical, gaming, literacy instruction and the psycho-social aspects of the apps and compare these against commonly accepted measures of quality and evidence-based practice.

The evaluators may also propose additional aspects related to usage of the apps that should be assessed.

5. Evaluation design and methodologies

A randomized controlled design is suggested but other designs that enable the measurement of the effects of the intervention would also be acceptable.

The proposed design **must** provide for the following:

Impact evaluation. A measure of the size of the difference in learning outcomes between the winning apps, the statistical significance of that difference, and the effect size of that difference, along with an interpretation of the findings and recommendations that will help the prize competition partners and implementing organizations understand the differences in impact of the winning apps.
Technical evaluation. A description of the strengths and weaknesses of each app that would help the competition partners differentiate between the winning apps if the impact evaluation is not conclusive, and that would also provide the app developers information to improve their apps.

Assessing learning gains

Proposals should suggest an approach to the assessment of learning gains, specifically a pre-test and post-test that measures the change in reading skills.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is the most often used instrument for assessing reading gains in young children in programs in less developed countries. EGRA has three Arabic versions (Morocco, Jordan and Yemen).

The EGRA is made up of a set of subtests, each focused on one of the component skills of reading. The most common individual subtest reported is the reading fluency subtest, which yields words correct per minute (wcpm) scores. Typically, the mean score and the percentage of zero scores are reported for each sample.

The evaluation should employ the fluency subtest from one of the three Arabic versions mentioned above. However, given the small dosage of learning expected in this field test, measures of some of the other subtests (such as letter naming, letter sound, real word and nonsense word) are likely to show greater gains. In addition, children are more likely to show growth in skills on subtests that use the letters and words children have been exposed to in the app.

A successful proposal will suggest a set of component skill subtests, some taken from the EGRA instruments and some constructed using the letters and words in the apps, taking into consideration that children are more likely to have learned the material that comes early in the digital game. In some cases, an EGRA subtest might be the same as one developed using the app data (nonsense word or letter sound, for example). Other cases may require two forms (fluency or real word, for example). Content lists for the apps will be provided to the selected evaluation team.

Since learning gains will be related to the amount of time-on-task, the proposal should also suggest ways in which the study could look at learning gains in relation to time-on-task, why some users spend more time than others on task, and whether or not this is a function of the quality of the digital game.

Assessing psychosocial well-being improvement

Proposals should suggest an approach to assessment of psychosocial well-being, specifically a pre-test and post-test, with a control group, that measures changes in psychosocial well-being.

In line with the Inter-Agency Guide to the Evaluation of Psychosocial Programming in Humanitarian Crises published by UNICEF in 2011, a mixed method approach that involves both qualitative and quantitative methods of information collection is preferred. Feasibility, validity (including cultural validity) and reliability should be accounted for. The domains that should be included are emotional well-being (e.g., culturally and age appropriate indicators of distress, sadness, happiness and stress reactions), social well-being (e.g., culturally and age appropriate indicators of attachment to caregivers and relationship with others) and cognition (e.g., attention, concentration and problem solving skills).

Numerous instruments are available,[1] and those chosen should make it possible to detect change but should also be as brief as possible. Only information that will be analyzed should be gathered. Reference should be made to how the chosen instruments have previously been used in similar conditions. Information from different sources (e.g., children, caregivers and teachers) and captured through different means (e.g., observation, interview, standardized instruments and cortisol testing) should be considered.

Although the approach should be as unobtrusive as possible, and negative effects should be reduced to a minimum, emotional reactions are possible, and adequate support should be made available. The competency of testers should be described.

6. Testing site, project duration and funding scope

The testing site is yet to be determined. It will likely be in either Turkey or Jordan.

Project start date is anticipated for 1 April 2017. The evaluation must be completed within six months, including all research activities and final reporting.

Proposed costs must not exceed **USD $120,000** and should be inclusive of all supporting costs such as travel, field mobilization, etc.

7. Eligibilities and qualifications

- All individuals and institutions, including for-profit firms, non-profit organizations and universities, with the capability to undertake research are eligible for this award.
- Fluency in oral and written Arabic is preferred. As a minimum, at least one member of the evaluation team must be fluent in oral and written Arabic.
- The evaluation team must have knowledge of:
  - the theory and practice of how children acquire and improve their reading skills;
  - how children's psychosocial well-being is impacted by trauma and stress and how that impact can be addressed;
  - how to assess literacy skills;
  - how to assess improvements in psycho-social well-being;
  - game flow theory; and
  - how to assess the quality of both learning and entertainment games.

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[1] See for example Robinson, S., Metzler, J. & Ager, A. (2014). A Compendium of Tools for the Assessment of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Children in the Context of Humanitarian Emergencies. New York: Columbia University, Columbia Group for Children in Adversity and Child Protection in Crisis

8. Selection criteria

Proposals will be assessed against criteria described below.

CRITERION	Weight (%)
Research objectives and relevance • well-developed and realistic objectives based on research questions • clear articulation of the intended users and uses of the research outputs • relevance of study to EduApp4Syria, digital learning for literacy and psychosocial well-being	10
Theoretical foundation and literature review • robustness and appropriateness of the theoretical approach • critical review of up-to-date knowledge on the topic	10
Research methods • adequacy and appropriateness of study design to achieve the research objectives • clear description of methods and rigor and appropriateness of methods for data gathering and analysis	50
Project leaders • suitability of the Project Leaders' expertise and experience • credible track record of the Project Leaders in the relevant fields • experience of the Project Leaders in managing complex projects including strong administrative, communication and collaboration skills	20
Work plan and budget • clarity and soundness of the work plan, with activities matched to objectives • clear deliverables and a realistic time frame • clear and complete description of the final report sections and subsections • reasonableness, realism and completeness of proposed costs	10

9. Selection process

Proposals submitted under this Call will be reviewed and assessed by a panel of specialists. Final funding decisions based on the review and recommendations of the review panel will be made jointly by the ACR GCD Partners, DL4D and Norad. Proposals will be either accepted or rejected. The accepted proposal may receive specific comments from the review panel which the proposing institution or individual is required to satisfactorily address before the contract is awarded and an agreement signed. The selection criteria and point system as noted above will be used in this process.

The issuance of this Call, the preparation and submission of proposals by applicants, and the subsequent receipt and evaluation of proposals by the review panel shall not commit the ACR GCD Partners, FIT-ED, IDRC or DFID to award a contract to anyone. Furthermore, in no event shall choosing a proposing institution or individual for presentation, negotiations or otherwise be construed to create any legal obligations on the part of ACR GCD Partners, FIT-ED, IDRC or DFID.

10. Proposal requirements and format

Applicants are required to submit 1) a completed General Information Form (*see Appendix A*), 2) a Technical Proposal, and 3) a Cost Proposal (*see Appendix B*).

<u>Technical Proposal</u>

Technical proposals must include the following sections:
- Title page
- Table of contents
- Abstract (*start page 1 here*)
- Research objectives and questions
- Review of related literature and theoretical framework
- Methods
  - design
  - data collection: subjects, instruments, procedures
  - data analysis
  - gender considerations and analysis
  - ethical considerations
- Work plan: Objectives, activities, outputs and timeline (Month 1, Month 2, …, Month 6)
- Risks and mitigating actions
- Ethics clearance plan
- Open access dissemination plan
- References
- Annexes

Required annexes
- A description of the roles, responsibilities and time commitments of key personnel
- Detailed CVs of the Project Leader/Principal Investigator and all Co-Investigators. CVs must include a listing of related research and publications.
- At least two samples of related work (e.g., published articles, research reports, academic/technical papers, policy papers, etc.) of each Investigator.

Additional requirements for <u>institutions</u>:
- A one-page profile of all institutions involved in the project (the proposing institution and all partner institutions).
- A past performance profile of the proposing institution listing up to five programs or projects within the past five years that are related to the research being proposed.

Technical proposals must directly address each of the selection criteria listed in Section 8.

Technical proposals must be written in English. They must not exceed 15 pages (excluding the title page, table of contents, references and annexes), formatted as follows:

paper size: 8-1/2" x 11"
margins: 1" all around
font: Calibri, 11 points
spacing: single

pagination: continuous, starting at page 1 on the abstract page

Pages that exceed page limits will not be evaluated.

Cost Proposal

Cost proposals must be presented using the Cost Proposal Form (*see Appendix B)*. The cost proposal must include a detailed budget and a payment plan. The payment plan should link payments to the successful delivery of research outputs, and should clearly demonstrate the applicant's acceptance of risk of non-delivery.

Below is an indicative payment plan with suggested deliverables. The applicant may suggest modifications as suits the proposed research design, work plan and timeline.

Deliverable	Due Date	Payment
Signed contract Final research design and plan	before 1 April 2017	20% of total budget
Final instruments (learning gains) Instrument pre-test results Actual field testing plan and schedule	on or before 31 May 2017	15% of total budget
Final instruments (psychosocial well-being) Instrument pre-test results (if any) Actual plan and schedule for data collection	on or before 31 May 2017	10% of total budget
First draft of evaluation report	on or before 31 August 2017	20% of total budget
Final evaluation report	on or before 30 September 2017	35% of total budget

11. Other requirements

a. *Country clearance.* Applicants are encouraged to familiarize themselves with their respective country clearance requirements and take these into account in their research planning.
b. *Ethics clearance*. Applicants shall be responsible for securing all necessary ethics clearances before undertaking research activities involving human subjects. An ethics clearance plan should be included in the proposal.
c. *Gender analysis.* The final evaluation report must include a discussion and analysis of gender issues, as appropriate. Proposals should include a section on gender considerations and analysis.
d. *Accessibility.* The final evaluation report must be Section 508 compliant.
e. *Open access*. ACR GCD and DL4D believe that publicly funded research should be freely and openly available. Applicants must comply with USAID's open data policy and IDRC's open access policy. Proposals should include an open access dissemination plan.
f. *Engagement with winning app developers*. The evaluation team will be expected to engage with the developers of the winning apps on the development of the pre- and post-tests and the game mechanics that aim to improve psychosocial well-being.

12. Submission process

Full proposals with all the required annexes must be submitted by email to **dl4d@fit-ed.org** on or before **5:00 PM, 27 February 2017 UTC/GMT+8 (Philippine time)**. Incomplete proposals or proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

Questions regarding this Call may be sent by email to **rleege@worldvision.org** until 10 February 2017. Responses to questions will be posted by 17 February 2017.

13. Solicitation timeline

Release of Call for Proposals	30 January 2017
Deadline for submission of questions about the Call	10 February 2017
Posting of answers to questions about the Call	17 February 2017
Deadline for submission of proposals	5:00 PM, 27 February 2017 UTC/GMT +8 (Philippine time)
Panel review of proposals	28 February – 17 March 2017
Contract negotiations	20-31 March 2017
Project start	1 April 2017

14. Additional information

a. All responses and supporting documentation shall become the property of FIT-ED, the fund manager for this award, and will not be returned.
b. FIT-ED reserves the right throughout this process to select any contracting option that best meets its requirements regardless of this process.
c. Neither FIT-ED nor its partners will be responsible for any costs incurred by applicants in the preparation of any materials or presentation relating to this process.

15. Permission for use and disclosure of information

By submitting a proposal under this Call, the applicant consents to the disclosure of all submitted documents to the review panel, the EduApp4Syria partners (Norad, USAID, World Vision, the Australian Government, INEE, and Orange), FIT-ED, IDRC, DFID and other third parties who are involved in this solicitation process. If selected for funding, the applicant further consents to the disclosure of the name of the proposing institution/individual, the name of the team leader and the title of the proposed project in any award announcement.