What Works in Education
A Decade of Learning: Experience and Evidence in Education Informing Policy and Practice
March 7-8, 2023
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The education context

Pre-C19 most 15-year-olds were not reaching minimum proficiency in maths & reading

Low proficiency in Math in selected PISA-D Countries

- Cambodia: 3% Eligible for PISA and proficient in math, 72% Eligible for PISA and not proficient in math, 25% Ineligible for PISA (not in school or below grade 7)
- Senegal: 2% Eligible for PISA and proficient in math, 71% Eligible for PISA and not proficient in math, 27% Ineligible for PISA (not in school or below grade 7)
- Zambia: 1% Eligible for PISA and proficient in math, 64% Eligible for PISA and not proficient in math, 35% Ineligible for PISA (not in school or below grade 7)

Source: Authors calculations based on PISA for Development 2018 data. For more see: “PISA-D Reveals Exceptionally Low Learning”, RISE blog.

COVID-19 adds to a pre-existing learning crisis

Children affected by school closures struggle to recover – Pakistan data

What does evidence uptake success look like at country level?

Global experts/Academics → In-country think tank/coordinating organization → Local researchers, university academics, Civil Society → Government (Ministry of Education Planning & Reform Units) → Global “best buys” Evidence Synthesis → EMIS Units, Dept of Stats, Min of Finance

Demand → Responsive Research
What Works Hub Global Education Vision

A global platform to support governments who want to transform their education systems in a sustainable way, maximising the impact of education evidence to inform cost effective reforms to benefit all children.

**Synthesise** and **curate** the best evidence in ways that governments and practitioners need for bold reform.

Strengthen education and finance ministries’ **capability** to use and contextualise data and evidence, for example through establishing policy labs within Ministries of Education.

Create a new field in **implementation science** that produces evidence and supports our partner governments to use a ‘diagnose, test, learn and adapt’ cycle to take education reform to scale.
Pooling our collective expertise

Our approach to research:

- **We are guided by critical evidence gaps** and potential to improve our understanding of how to support the most marginalised. We consider where our research is likely to generate greatest returns for girls.

- **Work collaboratively** with development partners across the education sector to raise the rigour of education research globally.

- **Take a platform approach** using our joint EGIR/EdGE new ‘What Works Hub for Global Education’ to ensure that our research has impact both internationally and nationally.

- **Gender and equity is a priority** across all of the programmes.
Influencing for transformational change
1. STRUCTURAL CHALLENGE
‘selling’ of interventions commercial interests may drive decisions conflicting advice - often with low quality evidence absence of a high-level panel e.g. IPCC in climate science

2. EVIDENCE CHALLENGE
low levels of investment in education research despite the growing evidence base e.g. RISE, JPAL, EdTech, ESRC, MRC there has been no synthesis of what works with a focus on cost

3. MEASUREMENT CHALLENGE
No comparative measure of learning that captures costs Lack of investments by key donors including Gates

The triple challenge
To address learning gaps, we need both local context knowledge and global evidence.

Governments and donor organisations develop deep understanding of context, and system and diagnose needs and priorities.

Locally decide which of these Smart Buys address local need and can be implemented well locally alongside wider system reform.

Panel hopes to provide clear recommendations based on rigorous research. These are generalized lessons on what are the Smart Buys in education for LICs and MICs.

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Why Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS)?

- Typical education measure used is schooling
- Schooling ≠ learning
- LAYS adjust schooling for learning

In Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda three-quarters of grade 3 students cannot read a basic sentence such as “the name of the dog is Puppy.”

Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS)
Effectiveness:
Learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS) gained, showing studies both with and without cost-effectiveness data
Tiers of Smart Buys

We group educational interventions and categories of interventions into the following tiers, reflecting their cost-effectiveness at improving learning and the strength of the evidence.

**GREAT BUYS**
These interventions are highly cost-effective and are supported by a strong evidence base.

**GOOD BUYS**
There is good evidence that these interventions are cost-effective.

**PROMISING BUT LOW-EVIDENCE**
For these approaches, there are some small but rigorous studies that show high levels of cost-effectiveness, but overall the evidence base is more limited.

**BAD BUYS**
Strong, repeated evidence shows that these programs have not worked in the past in many situations or are not cost-effective.
GEEAP Recommendations Expanded to Policy Recommendations During and Post Covid

“Smart Buys” Report

Lessons learned during Covid and earlier evidence are key to strengthening education systems and enhance learning.

Immediate concerns about Covid are low in many countries, but effects from school closures need to be addressed.
Thank you
Smart Buys need to be part of systemic reform

Individual interventions are not all that matters – **systemic reform** is crucial for sustainable systemwide improvements in learning.

Requires an education system that is **coherent and aligned toward learning**, and alignment should encompass the key system actors, policies, incentives, pedagogy, and capacity.

This in turn requires **political commitment** from the top to help systems escape low-learning traps (e.g., Brazilian state of Ceará, which has made remarkable gains over a decade).
Criteria for the selection of research for the 2020 Smart Buys report

The Panel’s classification decisions consider the following:

**Key outcome is foundational learning in basic education**

Focus on **cost-effectiveness**

Greater weight given to evaluations conducted **at scale** and to **longer-term impacts**

**Equity focus** - interventions shown to promote learning for all, and especially for more marginalized children, rather than for the elite

Panelists have brought their diverse expertise to **interpret** the evidence; this is not just a counting exercise

Selection criteria for evidence in the Covid report

- research that is published and peer-reviewed, also draw on working papers and presentations.
  - Studies were sourced by reviewing the academic literature, the grey literature, and policy reports and by seeking expert guidance across disciplines (including education, economics, psychology and public health), building on the panel’s broad expertise.
  - Structured search of largest research databases. Descriptive evidence and the different contextual responses to the pandemic.
  - When judging the effectiveness of different interventions, we gave greater weight to quasi-experimental and randomized research studies.
  - The paper emphasizes evidence with an equity focus to promote learning for all. Where relevant, the Panel has also included insights from studies outside education, to illuminate the appropriate education responses to the crisis.