GPE KIX BRIEF

The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

POLICY INSIGHTS
ON EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THOSE AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT

GPE KIX
KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION EXCHANGE

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A synthesis of four GPE KIX projects in Africa and Asia offers decision-makers effective strategies and recommendations for preventing dropout and supporting out-of-school learners.

Photo: GPE/ Translieu

Worldwide, UNESCO estimates that some 251 million children and youth between the ages of six and 18 are out of school, with millions more at risk of dropping out. To address the needs of these vulnerable learners, governments and other education stakeholders are seeking evidence-based and cost-effective options to increase school retention and ease transitions back into formal education for those out of school.

From 2021 to 2024, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) supported four research projects to test, assess and develop strategies to scale education innovations that can increase access to quality education for out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) and those at risk of dropping out.

THE RESEARCH

Spanning 15 countries in Africa and Asia, the research focused on:

- **Accelerated education programs (AEPs),** which fill important gaps in traditional education models by providing OOSCY with condensed curricula, tailored pedagogy and flexible learning schedules
- **Enhanced school-based practices** — such as improved teacher training, community engagement and extra-curricular activities — to prevent dropout from formal schooling and attract out-of-school children and youth back into the education system

Each project assessed a wide range of programs and school-based practices, deepening knowledge of their characteristics and the quality of their implementation. In total, more than 30 AEPs and practices were reviewed, with students, parents, teachers, education officials and other key stakeholders providing input on what works and what needs to be improved. These findings were used to inform government and other stakeholders about effective policies, strategies and approaches so they can be replicated and scaled up.

A synthesis of findings from across these four projects highlights key features of effective AEPs, what strategies work best to keep children and youth in school, and what impacts these programs and practices have achieved. It also offers a series of recommendations for policymakers, donors and others involved in education decision-making.



Photo: GPE/ Salman Saeed

THE FOUR GPE KIX PROJECTS INCLUDED:

A Comparative Study of Accelerated Education Programs and Girls' Focused Education Models (Comparative Study of AEPs and GFMs)
Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone

The Back2School Project: Scaling an Accelerated Learning Model for Out-of-School Girls in Rural Communities (Back2School)
Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania

A New Model of Bridging Classes to Improve Learning of Out-of-School Children and Youth (Bridging Classes for OOSCY)
Burkina Faso, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger and Senegal

Effectiveness and Scalability of Programs for Children Who are Out of School and at Risk of Dropping Out (Scalability of Programs for OOSCY and At-Risk Learners)
Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal

KEY FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE AEPS

Across different contexts, the following key program features proved effective in meeting the varied needs of OOSCY:

- **Acceleration:** Faster coverage of the curriculum is cost-effective for governments and attractive to parents and older learners who have missed out on learning foundational skills.
- **Flexibility:** Flexible learning schedules, adapted around community routines and economic activities, allow more children and youth to attend school.
- **Parent and community engagement:** Raising awareness among parents and communities on the value of education can transform the socio-cultural norms that keep children and youth out of school.
- **Affordability:** Covering school fees and providing learning materials — and in some cases food, transport and sanitary supplies — is a strong incentive to participation in accelerated learning.
- **Learner-centred teaching approaches:** Learner-centred pedagogies enhance student attention and make their learning more relevant.
- **Mother tongue-based instruction:** Learning in one's mother tongue facilitates literacy and numeracy skills and enhances learners' knowledge and self-confidence.
- **Community-based teachers and facilitators:** Having community-based facilitators and teachers can improve retention in remote or conflict-affected regions and deepen understanding of local barriers to education.

SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGIES

The following strategies were found to be effective in decreasing rates of school dropout:

- **Community and parent sensitization and engagement campaigns** to better connect them with teachers and schools, and to increase parents' self-efficacy in engaging with the education system.
- **Enhanced extra-curricular activities** in schools to improve student retention, reduce dropout and enhance students' interest, engagement and sense of belonging in schools.
- **School-based equity and inclusion workshops and events** on topics such as menstrual hygiene, basic health and hygiene, sexual harassment and anti-bullying to advance gender equity, social inclusion and a safer school environment.
- **Teacher capacity strengthening** in experiential and ICT-based teaching and learning strategies.
- **Individualized interventions for learners with disabilities,** through partnerships between schools and community-based agencies.

THE IMPACT OF AEPS AND SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES ON VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

These four projects demonstrated how AEPs and enhanced school-based practices can improve access to education, school retention and learning outcomes for vulnerable youth — often for less money than formal school provision. Based on their reviews of existing or former AEPs and their testing of AEP adaptations or innovations, the following outcomes were observed:

1. **Increased access to education for marginalized communities:** In Nigeria, some 310,000 OOSCY were educated over seven years through five existing AEPs, providing learners with access to education that might otherwise have been unavailable. In Nepal, parental education campaigns that were piloted through research resulted in a 20% decrease in OOSCY and a 2% increase in school enrolments in districts where the campaigns were conducted.

2. **High rates of transition to formal education:** In Ghana, a review of current and former complementary basic education programs found that 80% or more of AEP learners transitioned to formal education, with higher rates for girls than boys due to proactive selection of girls into programs.

3. **Development of skills that increase economic empowerment:** A review of AEP models in Nigeria found that learners gained skills in literacy, numeracy, communications and daily living that were considered invaluable in their working lives and helped their families to meet household needs, such as reading medical reports.

4. **Empowerment of learners, particularly girls:** In AEP models reviewed in Sierra Leone, learners reported strengthened empowerment, self-esteem and confidence, due in part to the unique teaching methods. In Ethiopia, parents, teachers and communities noted the increased confidence, self-esteem, discipline and responsibility of AEP learners.

5. **Comparable or better academic performance than formal schools:** In innovations piloted in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mali, 70% of AEP learners demonstrated competence in language and communication. In existing AEP models reviewed in Sierra Leone, learners were comparable to formal school learners in word reading, while scoring slightly lower in reading comprehension.

6. **New skills and capacities for teachers and facilitators:** In research on adapted AEP models in Kenya, teachers demonstrated new skills in managing accelerated education learners within classrooms and in meeting their specific needs, leading to improved academic performance.

THE IMPACT OF AEPS AND SCHOOL-BASED PRACTICES ON VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES CONT.

7 **Lower dropout rates:** In Bangladesh, there was an 11% reduction in dropout rates due to multi-faceted interventions tested with teachers, students and the community.

8 **Stronger community and parent support for education:** In Nepal, parental engagement campaigns tested through research enhanced parents' knowledge, belief and self-efficacy in creating positive change in their children's school environment.

9 **Lower rates of early marriage and teen pregnancy:** In Ghana, a review of complementary basic education models across 32 research sites found evidence of a reduction in marriage among girls aged 10-15 years. Girls in AEPs also learned how to prevent abuse, assault and pregnancy.

10 **Cost-effectiveness:** The unit cost of Ghana's accelerated complementary basic education program in 2019-2020 were 21.4% lower than the unit cost for the regular system, excluding the cost of teacher training. In addition, one year of accelerated education is equivalent to 2.4 years of formal schooling, meaning that complementary basic education is twice as efficient as the formal system.



Photo: GPE/ Infinitee!

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A synthesis of findings from these four projects produced a series of recommendations for those involved in education decision-making and program design.

1. **Mainstream accelerated and alternative education programs and practices within government budgets** to enable scale and ensure sustainability.
2. **Develop harmonized and gender-responsive policies, guidelines, quality standards and curricula for AEPs,** drawing on key features and practices that have proven effective.
3. **Use schools to support awareness and enforcement of laws to protect children,** such as those dealing with child trafficking and early marriage.
4. **Strengthen the links between AEPs and formal schools and expand learning pathways for accelerated learners** beyond primary education to include vocational and skills training.
5. **Reinforce programs in formal schools that support access and retention** for vulnerable learners and prevent dropout.
6. **Improve school infrastructure and support accessible and disability-inclusive education.**
7. **Invest in teacher and facilitator recruitment, training and professional development,** with a special focus on women.
8. **Collect comprehensive data on OOSCY and AEPs — including on how gender intersects with other demographic and contextual factors** — to support ongoing evidence-based decision-making.
9. **Put communities at the centre of improvements** to education options for OOSCY and those at risk of dropping out.

These policy insights are drawn from Education Options for Out-of-School Children and Those at Risk of Dropping Out: A Research Synthesis.

GPE KIX is a joint endeavour between GPE and IDRC that aims to ensure partner countries have and use the evidence and innovation they need to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century.

Five synthesis reports were commissioned by GPE KIX to consolidate evidence across research projects conducted between 2020 and 2024 on data systems and data use; early learning; gender equality, equity and inclusion; teacher professional development; and out-of-school children and youth.

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