

EFA FTI Global and Regional Activities Program (GRA)

THEMATIC AREA: LEARNING OUTCOMES

Comments from UNICEF

- The paper does not balance efforts supporting assessment of learning outcomes and work on improving strategies for raising the quality of learning-teaching methods. It also does not link learning outcomes to institutional quality standards. The focus should be on **quality education and learning outcomes**. Special attention should be given to sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia because they have the lowest levels of student achievement in the world. This includes improving learning outcomes in lower grades of primary school with the goal of advancing children's performance in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- No effort is made to improving the quality of education within schools by developing and demonstrating effective **learning-teaching techniques in class** to improve the mastery of basic reading, mathematics and life skills education during the first years of school. The paper does not address the impact of disparities based on poverty, location, gender and disability on the quality of learning in classroom and the learning outcomes for girls and boys. It should identify quality practices with a high potential for expansion to other schools within the country and elsewhere in the world. It does discuss scalable experiences around ESP but without linking quality education with learning outcomes. It should address quality good practices that are cost-effective and respond to existing conditions in government schools, because government ownership from the onset is critical. Government ownership will facilitate dialogue on various aspects of learning-teaching, preferably initiatives developed locally (curriculum and teaching methods, life skills education, water and sanitation, use of materials, tools for assessing student progress, and teacher development).
- The paper does not include information on **life skills**, although EFA goal 6 on measurement of learning clearly states measurable learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and life skills.
- There is a serious problem with the apparent absolute focus on **EGRA**. EGRA is not bad in and of itself, although the over-emphasis on phonics to the detriment of whole language approaches and reading for meaning are open for debate. We should request the Learning Outcomes be opened up further to include 4 main themes: i) EGRA (under which 3.2 and 3.3 can be subsumed); ii) Exam Reform, with funds available for 5-10 countries to undertake and document major exam reform; iii) PISA roll out to additional lower middle income countries and to repeat PISA in other MICs; iv) school management and system efficiency and the links with learning outcomes. This brings outcomes into the broader milieu of school and teacher governance. Specifically for the EGRA focused draft, some comments:
 - In the second paragraph on page 7 "All results framework . . . If students are learning in school what the curricula are supposed to teach, they will be less likely to drop out." There are a lot of assumptions in this paragraph that deserve testing.
 - 1.3 – Any Indicator Repository must have Indicators in as many languages as possible.

- 1.4 – No mention here of whole language or other than EGRA based phonic approaches and scripted reading aloud. The point does not even mention creating masses of graded readers.
- 1.4.2 – This is of serious concern. Laos is currently dealing with a WB supported project (through SEAMEO) where they are calling the teaching of Lao as a second language to pre-school and Grade 1 ethnic minority children (using mother tongue to teach Lao) as bi-lingual education. Can we simplify this area and make it more specific to "Production and Distribution of Reading Material for Children in Ethnic Minority languages" - with provision for review of policy environment for engagement with NSP/PPP, for links to teacher training and training of community teachers and for engaging with ethnic minority communities to document their poems, songs and children's stories and turn them into children's books.
- 1.4.7 – There is no mention of PPP/NSPs engagement to develop, distribute or in any way support textbook production and distribution. Why not look at the policy environment in successful countries?
- 1.4.8 – Why can't we encourage Exam Reform instead?
- **3.3.5 Teacher training and supervision:**
 - The message given in the paragraph here is that teacher training has little effect on student achievement. The issue should be presented with a more balanced perspective mentioning that the reason for this can also be found in the quality of the teacher training.
 - The sentence about 'observational learning' is not clear. The concept should be explained. As this concept is also recommended in the points of issues under this heading - it should be clarified why 'observational learning methods' should be promoted and not child-centered/active learning methods?
- **3.3.8 Performance measurement and evaluation:**
 - This part of the paper could be more the objectives of the different learning achievement tests suggested: Who will the information collected be for? Is the objective to collect information about the 'health' of the education system, or will there also be information about performance on the test given to teachers, students, and parents? It is important if administering tests where students are given the results, that one does not make the students feel like failures when performing badly.
 - What will be the use of the test findings? How will it be used to improve learning achievement?
 - What about focus on support for teacher to improve continuous assessment methods in the classroom (the most important type of assessment)?
- The paper does not address "**multi-grade**" classrooms. Most of the time the classrooms exist by default (because of shortage of teachers or the presence of very small schools in remote areas that are sparsely populated) as opposed to by design, and this has implications for learning-teaching.
- **Financing:** The need to improve the financing of learning outcomes is not addressed. Funding is discussed only in relation to the pricing of textbooks. The paper should focus on improving the funding and management of school systems. This should be done by having the EFA FTI support budget monitoring and similar activities to encourage transparency and accountability of funding earmarked for education. The EFA FTI should support independent assessments of learning outcomes to focus greater public attention on quality; develop government systems to assess learning; and develop innovative funding mechanisms to align aid with learning outcomes.
- **Other issues:**

- The paper does not look at existing national school leaving examinations, and the possibility of including information on learning outcomes in EMIS.
- It would be important to include research that shows how much children practice via worksheets etc. has an impact on learning outcomes (just not textbooks).
- The paper does not pay adequate attention to improving civil society and governments' competence to assess children's learning.
- The EFA FTI should work with partners in countries to involve communities in monitoring school outcomes; and support additional forms of advocacy within countries to emphasize the importance of learning.
- It would be very useful to collect what is done and what works in each of the areas, and each area can be contracted out. Care needs to be taken that the contractor is not also pushing their own philosophy.