

## Comments on EFA FTI Global and Regional Activities Program (GRA) Thematic Area: Learning Outcomes

Anda M. Adams | Associate Director  
Center for Universal Education | The Brookings Institution  
[AADAMS@brookings.edu](mailto:AADAMS@brookings.edu)

**Top-Down.** Overall, the approach strikes us as very top-down. The way the process is explained now, the value at country-level is very minimal as it re-centralizes any helpful country-level data back up at the global level without any explanation of how country-level data will be used to inform practice at country-level. While there may be value to cross-learning from country to country within a region, this has to be secondary to gathering the data for an individual country and determining how that informs decision-making in that country. The current gaps in both financial and learning data at country level demonstrate that this is a good area for FTI work but immediately making it a global repository without attention to the local needs somewhat negates the value of filling this gap.

**Research Process.** The findings and assertions within the paper seem to rely almost exclusively upon a single author's work. This counters the claim that a good deal of knowledge already exists in some of the technical areas about how to improve learning outcomes. Other knowledge from other sources should be cited as appropriate, and specifically where claims are made that could be considered debatable.

**Rationale.** There are four reasons that are provided for why FTI's work on improving learning outcomes should focus on literacy in lower primary. Although not explicitly written as such, the order of the four reasons could be inferred as their order of importance and the fact that "reading is fundamental to all other skills" is listed as the last reason, while need for quick results and donors' desire to work in this area are listed earlier calls into the question the evidence base behind this work. That learning to read is fundamental to acquiring other skills should be the lead rationale for specifying work in that particular area. If the evidence is there on that (which we believe it is), then that will provide evidence for why focusing on that will have a quicker impact and should be why donors are keen to work in this area. (Also, current reasons a and b are too related to be separated out – the ability to show clear and sharp impact is based on the fact that there is evidence already on how to do it).

**Approach to Improving Learning.** The paper focuses too heavily on improving assessment without accompanying focus on how the teaching and learning practices in the classroom impact learning outcomes. Assessment is a way to measure these practices and when those assessments are formative, it can help teachers and learners adjust their practices to improve, but assessment alone will not improve learning outcomes in a significant manner. Scaling up high-stakes examinations may be problematic in their comparability and will likely not serve the needs of the least advantaged children – this is one area where the individual approaches to the three themes (out of school children, financing, and learning outcomes) would have benefitted from being united to ensure that efforts to get currently out of school children into school are not thwarted/reversed by efforts to improve learning outcomes that force those learners right back out again. The whole-scale write-off of prior "teacher training" is problematic, particularly when it is not supported by any specific citations.

**Indicators.** Based on report backs from the meeting FTI convened in January with reading experts, the over-emphasis on words per minute as a leading measure of literacy is surprising.

**Implementation.** In the first few paragraphs under 2. Proposed Activities, FTI states that it will use consultants to generate knowledge products that countries can use. Again, this promotes a top-down approach that seems antithetical to the FTI's mandate. External consultants hired by FTI should not be the first line of knowledge-generators. It is possible with more details that these consultants would be locally-based where possible, but that is not clear from the document.