

Africa can recoup over half of pandemic education-related GDP losses by using evidence-based ‘accelerated learning’ to help children catch-up

- Global study highlights key lessons from a decade of accelerated learning across Africa condensing three school years into one for out-of-school children affected by extreme poverty, conflict, and Ebola
- Foundation says Africa can lead world in learning recovery, launches [evidence-based guide](#) for education leaders to design post-COVID catch-up learning plans

Zurich, 7th September 2022 - African countries could recover over half of the pandemic-related GDP losses caused by the lost earnings from a generation of children whose education has been interrupted, *if* countries adopt evidence-based ‘accelerated education’ approaches to help children catch up on lost learning, an educational foundation said today.

It is [estimated](#) that full and partial school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will cost Africa US\$28 billion in lost GDP. Children across Africa have lost on average 34 weeks of learning since 2020, this on top of the [105 million children and youth](#) out of school before the pandemic - the highest rates globally.

[Education.org](#), a non-profit initiative to bring the world’s best available evidence into the hands of education leaders, calculates that African countries could recover US\$18 billion a year if they apply the best accelerated education interventions to recover lost learning and reach children who were out of school even before the pandemic. This GDP recovery figure builds on [McKinsey estimates](#) of earning losses, combined with the foundation’s analysis of accelerated education programmes (AEPs), largely drawn from African countries.

Dr Randa Grob-Zakhary, Founder and CEO of Education.org said: “While the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in the worst education crisis in history – with huge implications for the futures of an entire generation of children - the good news is that Africa can lead the world with solutions drawn from a decade of accelerated education work with children missing school due to extreme poverty, conflict, refugee crises and health challenges like the Ebola epidemic.”

Education.org has packaged a wide range of evidence, much of it previously unpublished, into an [Evidence Synthesis](#) and a [High-Level Policy Guidance Document](#), outlining the steps education leaders can take to strengthen accelerated learning in their countries.

This research illustrates how the best AEPs can condense three grades of primary school into one school year, cutting the overall length of instruction by two-thirds. AEPs have successfully supported students’ transition into the formal education system by compressing the curriculum to focus on the essentials of literacy and numeracy, while recruiting and training educators to teach in a more child-focused, activity-based way and supporting students’ wider wellbeing.

Ethiopia’s Speed Schools are highlighted as a pioneering example of the accelerated learning approach. Over the past decade, they have supported more than 250,000 out-of-school 9-14-year-olds to learn, transitioning 95 per cent into formal schooling, with higher-than-average results. These

Speed Schools are so successful they have been adopted by the Ethiopian Government, with a dedicated Speed School Unit, and the model has spread elsewhere.

Accelerated education has often been used in emergency contexts such as South Sudan where half of all primary-aged children are out of school as a result of the civil war. It is now being piloted in a scheme to help practicing teachers there to attain their secondary education. Research from Liberia, Northern Nigeria, and Sierra Leone demonstrates the value of AEPs in supporting education systems in countries affected by war, the Ebola epidemic, and related crises of teenage pregnancies. In Kenya and Uganda, they have provided vital support to vulnerable refugee children.

As African leaders gear up for the United Nations Transforming Education Summit, 16th – 19th September, set to address “the profound structural flaws of education systems worldwide,” Dr Grob-Zakhary said the successes of accelerated education offered a vision for how leaders could rethink their education systems.

“This research demonstrates to leaders that concrete action is possible, to support catch-up learning strategies post-pandemic and to transform African education systems,” she said.

“In the successes of accelerated education programmes across Africa and beyond – in their pragmatism, their child-centred approach to learning and the support they give to teachers and communities - we believe lie some of the answers for how to reimagine education systems from the bottom up.”

Education.org’s peer reviewed analysis includes a deeper look at accelerated learning experiences in eight African countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Uganda. It highlights to education leaders the importance of:

- Starting with a thorough assessment of the national or local situation in each country
- Anchoring accelerated learning into existing national education plans, curricula, and calendars
- Implementing policies for the flexible assessment, placement, and promotion of learners
- Supporting communities in enrolling, teaching, and retaining children in school

Notes to editors:

- For more information, interviews with Dr Grob-Zakhary & government & NGO representatives, and for accelerated education country case studies across Africa, please contact:
 - Stephanie Mithika in Nairobi on smithika@webershandwick.com
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- To read Education.org’s research, please visit: www.education.org/accelerated-learning

About Education.org

Education.org is an initiative of Insights for Education, a young foundation created to advance evidence and improve education for every learner. Our sole purpose is to make existing evidence easier for education leaders to access and use in plans, policies and guidelines. Operational since 2020, Education.org is supported by a visionary co-investor collective and are growing partnerships across governments, agencies, NGOs, universities, businesses, and foundations around the world.