

Great Expectations: A Framework for Assessing and Understanding Key Factors Affecting Student Learning of Foundational Reading Skills

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This paper reviews recent data regarding how different types of donor interventions (structural or pedagogical) have contributed to improved reading outcomes. Moreover, effect sizes are compared over a series of intervention studies conducted from 2003 to 2015. We identify the programme design characteristics and types of interventions that increase the likelihood of successful expansion of the interventions commonly referred to as ‘scaling-up’, the ability to sustain interventions, and the value of reading programmes in low- and middle-income countries.

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- The Education for All (EFA) movement is a global commitment to providing high-quality basic education for all children, youth, and adults.
- Basic education is a human right, is central to countries' economic, social, and political development, and leads to better family health and nutrition, improved capacity of the poor to participate in the political process, and higher lifetime incomes.
- Reading skill acquisition is most effectively achieved by instruction in languages that the student speaks and understands, a phonics-based approach, and a materials-rich environment.
- To achieve basic education outcomes, a move from focusing on access to focusing on quality and learning is required.

Moving from access to learning: the EFA era

- The number of out-of-school children worldwide has been reduced by half since 1990, although approximately 57 million children and youth remain out of school.
- The 2011 global youth literacy rate of 90% masks huge regional differences; for example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 30% of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are considered illiterate.
- Most low-income countries failed to meet their targets. By the end of 2015 (of those countries with data), only

14 of 122 countries had ensured that 8 out of 10 children were enrolled in school, and only 13 out of 90 achieved completion rates near 97% for primary education.

- Nearly 40% of the world's children (some 250 million) do not acquire basic skills in reading and maths.
- Three major challenges have been identified: large gains are required quickly; achieving the required standard and making a system reform will not be easy; we need to be committed (and strategic) about how to do the system reform.



The study

This paper reviews recent data on how different types of donor interventions have contributed to improved reading outcomes. Moreover, it compares effect sizes over a series of intervention studies conducted from 2003 to 2015. We present a framework for understanding how the intensity, frequency, and fidelity of the interventions as well together with the enabling environments of reform affect the magnitude and rates at which reading and learning outcomes can be expected to improve. This article identifies the programme design characteristics and types of interventions that increase the likelihood of successful expansion of the interventions commonly referred to as 'scaling-up'.



Findings

- Effect sizes of the interventions vary greatly, from 0.03 to 0.85.
- The programmes that achieved strong effect sizes focused narrowly on reading in the early grades and provided teachers with substantial support through coaching and supervision.
- The World Bank projects that tended to focus on direct pedagogical interventions and support rather than classroom- or school-based management tended to achieve higher effect sizes; thus, they exerted greater influence on learning outcomes.

Duration of intervention

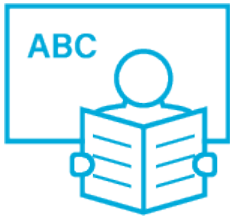
- Duration refers to the length of time that interventions are provided to participants.
- When support for interventions is provided for a longer time, the chance that those interventions will take hold and demonstrate positive results increases.

Dosage of intervention

- The 'dosage' refers to the frequency and intensity (or strength) of interventions, and is found to make a difference to outcomes.
- Implementation dosage refers to strength of preparation that stakeholders (such as teachers) receive to deliver an intervention (for example, pedagogical method).
- Intervention dosage refers to the frequency with which an intervention is provided to a particular stakeholder.
- One 'dose' of an intervention is usually not enough. Professional development interventions should be delivered more intensively, and usually with a longer duration or higher frequency to make a difference.

Enabling environment

- This refers to a set of interrelated conditions (political, institutional, technical, and cultural) that affect the capacity of actors (teachers, parents, communities, donors, and governments) to engage in development processes in a sustained and effective manner.



Implications

- Dosage and duration of intervention as well as an enabling environment affect the success of the intervention.
- Donors and implementers should endeavour to instigate more comparisons between different approaches within their implementation designs and test multiple hypotheses to answer key policy and practice questions.