Accelerated Education Working Group:
Learning Agenda

Introduction

This Learning Agenda, developed by the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), aims to organize and generate evidence to inform strategic planning, project design, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation and in-service training efforts of Accelerated Education (AE). The Learning Agenda is comprised of a set of research questions in priority development areas for which the AEWG intends to organize and disseminate existing knowledge and data, generate new evidence, and produce conclusions and recommendations through academic research, program evaluations, and multi-method tests of the assumptions and principles that have been developed to guide AE programming. The Learning Agenda is for 5 years (mid-2017 – mid 2022) with an annual review. The research themes and questions are priorities for the next 2 years.

Background

The Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG)[1] defines an Accelerated Education Program (AEP) as: *A flexible age-appropriate program that promotes access to education in an accelerated timeframe for disadvantaged groups, over-age out-of-school children and youth who missed out or had their education interrupted due to poverty, marginalization, conflict and crisis. The goal of AEPs is to provide learners with equivalent certified competencies for basic education and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity.*

The SDGs clearly articulate the need to reach out to all children and youth with appropriate education opportunities. As defined above, the AEWG believes that AE is a key approach to meet this need. However, the evidence base for AEP effectiveness is markedly thin. A fundamental challenge is there is a very wide variety of what constitutes an AEP. This has made it difficult to carry out research and evaluations across multiple projects, as indicated in the USAID commissioned literature review on AE[2]: "*There is an incredible diversity of programs labeled AEPs. Not only do AEPs respond to different contexts, but also their objectives evolve alongside the situations to which they are responding...there exists a high-degree of variability in the intensity and quality of implementation of various components of accelerated learning and education.*" (NORC 2016).

Two key recommendations arising from that analysis of AEPs in Crisis and Conflict contexts were to "*Provide standard program guidance,*" and "*Utilize evaluations and tracer studies to help researchers, practitioners and policy makers better understand how AEPs can be more effective[3]*".

Recognizing the critical need for clarity around AE as a basis for research, evaluation and effective delivery, the AEWG has developed a clear definition of AE[4] and reviewed, distilled and field tested a set of global good practices and guidelines for AEPs: [AE 10 Principles for Effective Practice, AE Guide](link) (draft) and [AE definitions](link). The AE 10 Principles provide a framework for research and learning by establishing i) core elements of an AEP and ii) effective

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[1] The AEWG is a working group made up of education partners working in Accelerated Education (AE). The AEWG is currently led by UNHCR with representation from War Child Holland, UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, Save the Children, Plan, NRC, IRC and ECCN. The overall objective of the AEWG and its work is to: Strengthen the quality of Accelerated Education programming through a more harmonized, standardized approach.

[2] NORC / University of Chicago (2016), Accelerated Education Programs in Crisis and Conflict: Building Evidence and Learning, USAID

[3] NORC / University of Chicago (2016), Accelerated Education Programs in Crisis and Conflict: Building Evidence and Learning , USAID, page 70 and 72

[4] We will also include programs that may not result in certification but which facilitate transition into the formal system

practices for AEP implementation. The Principles can therefore generate a set of research questions to test causal outcomes such as whether AEPs effectively reach disadvantaged out-of-school children and youth, providing opportunity for further education and livelihoods. During 2016 and 2017, the AEWG field tested the AE Principles through a survey of 22 projects and four case studies, in 3 locations, each implemented by a different organization. This research validated the utility of the Principles, and provides a basis for more rigorous assessments of AEP effectiveness and costs.

It has been widely recognized that rigorous evidence is needed to move from the perceived to the demonstrated benefits of AE and that evidence in this area is scarce. It has also been noted that a deeper understanding of how AEPs are currently being implemented and how effective AEPs are in reaching these perceived benefits is needed.

Methodology

Methodological rigor is fundamental to advancing this learning agenda. This refers to the strength of the research design underlying logic, clear mapping of research questions to methods and protocols, a comprehensive articulation of research limitations, and a discussion of the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn; recognizing the value of a breadth of methods including but not limited to: experimental, quasi-experimental, developmental evaluations, and case studies.

Objectives

The AEWG's Learning Agenda has two broad objectives:

❶ Further assess the efficacy of AE programming using the Principles in terms of outcomes: access and equity, equity of learning outcomes that meet set standards, completion, and transition to multiple pathways: further formal or non-formal education (including vocational training), and supporting the creation of livelihood opportunities.

❷ Evaluate the contribution and cost-effectiveness of AEPs to national and global provision of equitable access to quality basic education, particularly for fragile, insecure, and underfinanced environments.

PRIORITISED RESEARCH THEMES AND QUESTIONS: 2017–2019

Theme	Questions	Illustrative Learning Activities
Policy influence	1. How many and what proportion of fragile, insecure, and underfinanced states have policies and programs recognizing AEPs as a core part of lifelong learning	Identification of relevant states, compilation of policies against relevant AE Principles
	2. What contribution do AEPs make to basic education enrolment, learning outcomes, and completion rates in fragile, insecure, and underfinanced states? Is this contribution 'counted' within the government's education information system?	Analysis of EMIS data, interviews with relevant government staff
Access, retention, and completion	3. What is the comparative contribution to access, learning outcomes, retention, and completion of AEPs which do, and do not, adhere to the AEWG AE Principles?	Review of AEPs against AE Principles

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Theme	Questions	Illustrative Learning Activities
Equity	4. To what extent are AEPs successful in reaching marginalized and disadvantaged groups[5]? 5. Which of the AE Principles are most influential in expanding access, learning, retention, and completion to underserved populations? 6. To what extent are AEPs a successful model of gender transformative programing?	Identification of marginalized populations, and degree to which they are served by sample AEPs Gender analysis[6] of a sample of AEPs that adhere to AE Principles, including in country interviews with key stakeholders
Modalities (Curriculum, pedagogy, teachers, training and supervision, psycho-social support)	7. What is the impact of 1) a compressed curriculum, 2) a partial curriculum[7], and 3) a curriculum that is both compressed and partial on retention and learning outcomes? 8. How common is the use of 'accelerated learning' pedagogy in AEPs? What is the effectiveness of an accelerated learning pedagogy on learning outcomes? 9. What is the time on task in AEPs for core skill subjects (e.g. reading, math) in comparison to the formal system? What impact does that time on task have on learning outcomes? 10. What teacher characteristics, training, supervision and support are related to time on task and learning outcomes?	Secondary impact data review of AEPs using these types of curricula. Case study review of ongoing AEPs
Effectiveness and resource efficiency	11. How successful is AE in integrating students into formal education, vocational education or livelihoods? 12. What is the effect of AEPs on student psychosocial wellbeing and mental health? 13. What are the comparative unit costs for AEP participant access (annual), completion (e.g. % completing * # years * annual unit cost), and learning outcomes (for completers) in relation to equivalent per/pupil unit costs in formal school programs?	Tracer studies Value for money (VfM) analysis of AEPs in their last year of implementation

Get Involved...

If you are interested in doing work linked to these research themes and questions please register here*. This will enable us to track research to build the evidence base for AE and also enable you to see who else is working on similar themes.*

For more information please contact:
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[5] Marginalized and disadvantaged groups will be defined according to context

[6] Gender is an example; this could be an analysis of AEP's by other marginalized or disadvantaged groups as defined according to context

[7] Partial curriculum: refers to a curriculum that does not cover the entire curriculum e.g. none examinable subjects are removed