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BRIEF

Accelerated Education Programs in Crisis and Conflict: Building Evidence and Learning

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OBJECTIVE AND SUMMARY

As of 2013, almost 50 million primary and lower-secondary-age children were out of school in conflict-affected countries.¹ Of these, 28.5 million were primary-age; more than half of them are girls.² In addition, millions of older children and youth have been deprived of an education through the impact of crisis and/or conflict. Many of those deprived of an education had this loss compounded by displacement, being in a child-headed household, being an ex-child soldier (including cooks, porters and sex slaves) or disabled.

Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs) are flexible, age-appropriate programs that promote access to education in an accelerated time-frame for such disadvantaged groups—specifically, for out-of-school, over-age children and youth excluded from education or had their education interrupted due to crisis and conflict. AEPs are typically implemented to fill a critical gap in the provision of essential educational services to crisis and conflict-affected populations and ensure learners get an appropriate and relevant education responsive to their life circumstances.

Policymakers and practitioners are interested in understanding how Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs) progress towards their goals, whether they are the right policy tool for a particular context, which components of an AEP are integral to success, and how to better program them to optimize access, learning, transition to formal schools, and employment outcomes, among other objectives.

This review originally endeavored to answer the above questions; however, consultations with experts and researchers in the field made it clear that the paucity of evidence and documentation around AEPs, particularly in crisis and conflict-affected environments, requires a step back to establish a deeper understanding of how AEPs are currently being implemented and whether and how programs are measuring success. This insight can in turn inform a discussion about how to determine the effectiveness of AEPs. As a result, this review focused on the following critical questions:

1. In operation, what are the profiles of AEPs? How do the elements of these profiles differ from the theoretical elements of accelerated learning?
2. What outcomes, if any, are reported on AEPs, and what can they tell us about how AEPs increase access and improve learning outcomes for out-of-school youth?

Box 1: What are Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs)?

The Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) defines an AEP as: “A flexible age-appropriate program that promotes access to education in an accelerated time-frame 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 AEP is to provide learners with equivalent certified competencies for basic education and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity.”¹

This term replaces Accelerated Learning Program, “ALP,” and other terminology as the standard descriptive term.

¹ SCF Report undertaken by UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report: *Attacks on Education: The impact of conflict and grave violations on children's futures*.

² Ibid.

3. What are the critical questions related to the structure and outcomes of AEPs, and where are the gaps in the literature?
4. Based on what we know about AEPs, and the difficulties associated with evaluating AEPs and other education interventions in crisis and conflict-affected environments, what recommendations can we make about how to evaluate AEPs and operationalize the research agenda around AEPs?

METHODOLOGY

Literature for this review was identified through: 1) Key informant interviews to locate grey/unpublished literature (Key informants were initially identified by USAID and experts of emergency education. As conversations occurred with the initial list of key informants, more key informants were interviewed); 2) A systematic database search executed by a University of Chicago librarian; 3) References from previous reviews or evaluation reports of AEPs; and 4) Internet searches.

Box 2: Inclusion Criteria

Is there a compressed or modified curriculum?

Is the program ultimately aimed at increasing access to out-of-school, over-age children and youth?

Does the program state they have an interactive methodology?

After creating a comprehensive pool of available resources, close to 90 documents, the team used the inclusion criteria outlined in Box 2, some of which are also reflected in the current *“Is AE Appropriate for my context?”* flow chart produced by the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG)² and the AEWG definition of AEPs. This criteria was used to decide whether to review a program and include it in our discussion.

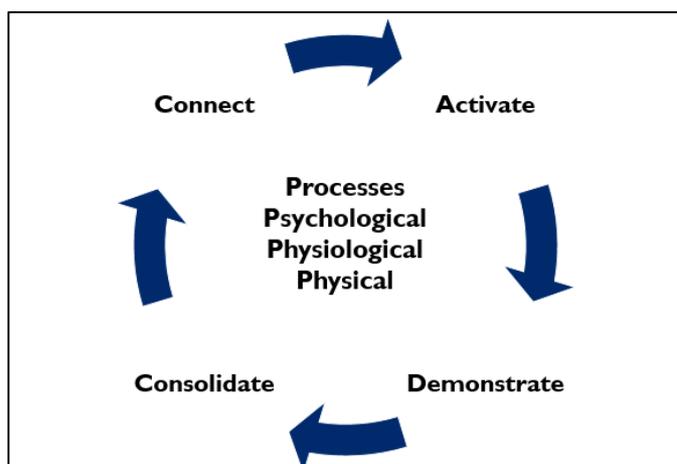
While the review searched for programs whose elements reflected the principles of accelerated learning outlined in Box 2, AEPs were also reviewed if they were self-labeled “accelerated learning” or “accelerated education.” We narrowed our list of “relevant” literature to 44 documents, ten of which were either mid-term or final performance evaluation reports.

The focus of this study is primarily on AEPs implemented in crisis and conflict-affected environments. Proper documentation, understandably, was harder to locate on AEPs that were implemented in less stable contexts. To help enrich the conversation, documentation from more stable contexts, including from AEPs that were not implemented in crisis and conflict-affected environments, was included in this study.

THE EVOLUTION OF ACCELERATED EDUCATION

Research on AEPs requires a grounding in the theory of accelerated learning and how it was subsequently incorporated into alternative education programs in crisis and conflict-affected environments. Accelerated learning theory has its roots in the multiple intelligences approach, incorporating the theory of brain-based learning by focusing on how learning is done as opposed to what learning is done. This original theory behind accelerated learning did not focus on increasing speed so that learners achieved more quickly; rather, it was focused on enabling more effective learning, depth, and clarity. This conception of accelerated learning required an extremely well-resourced classroom and exceptionally well-trained teachers.

Figure 1: Smith’s Accelerated Learning Cycle



The accelerated learning cycle involves four elements³: 1) creating an awareness for learning (processes), 2) developing a relationship for learning (psychological), 3) ensuring readiness for learning (physiological), and 4) creating movement and space for learning (physical). These elements, in turn, are needed to form an interactive and learner-centered pedagogy, which itself consists of four general activities:

Connect (Teachers asking: what do learners already know? What do they need to know? How will the benefit from knowing?); *Activate* (the teacher poses problems to be solved); *Demonstrate* (the teacher provides opportunities for learners to show a variety of understandings); and *Consolidate* (learners are asked: what have we learned? How have we learned? How will we benefit?).⁴

This model of accelerated learning was later adopted by agencies and governments working in developing countries and/or crisis and conflict-affected environments. However, it was not originally conceived or designed to be implemented in these contexts, where there are numerous challenges in infrastructure and resources.⁵ As elements of the AL cycle were increasingly incorporated in alternative education programs, especially in crisis and conflict-affected environments, a modified AL model emerged, with three critical components: condensed content, interactive and learner-centered pedagogy, and longer instruction time + music/arts/sports.

Figure 2: Modified Accelerated Learning Model for Conflict and Crisis Settings

Condensed Content	Interactive and learner centered pedagogy	Longer Instruction time + Music/arts/sports
Education authorities take responsibility for condensing or compressing the curriculum	Teachers are trained in a rights-based, interactive methodology, encourage learners to ask and answer questions freely, set up group work, and utilize a range of teaching activities to ‘match’ individual learning styles	School managers ensure extra time is provided in the school day/week for the other ways of learning – music, art, physical activities, etc. individual learning styles

PROFILING AEPS

One of the issues that emerged during the course of this review was the incredible diversity of programs labeled AEPs and how they tracked with the modified accelerated learning model in Figure 2. AEPs are generally implemented in response to needs, where it has been

decided that accelerated education, in some form, is the most appropriate response. Many of the characteristics, while shared amongst AEPs, are in fact specific for the context to which they are responding, making it difficult to compare or aggregate findings. Within this context, this review attempts to document available information about AEPs, highlighting the diversity in their designs and implementation.

Below are some key findings from our review of available documentation across different characteristics on AEPs:

Instruction Time and Curriculum Compression: Theoretically, a critical component of AEPs is longer sessions of instruction time; ideally, the teaching methodology is interactive and learner-centered, and other aspects of multiple-intelligence learning (such as music, the arts, and sports) are incorporated. Because of the “accelerated” nature of AEPs, they should also compress the curriculum and include condensed content. Our review of available documentation finds that expanded learning time was the exception, not the norm. Furthermore, while many of the programs reviewed included alternative subjects in their curriculum (life skills subjects, peace, civics, environment, HIV/AIDS, landmine education), these subjects responded to the context and did not necessarily respond to the multiple intelligence approach. In addition, no documentation described how much time was given to these subjects. Without adding more time than that of regular school hours, adding these subjects alongside interactive child-centered pedagogy while attempting to cover more ground in a shorter amount of time is likely not viable.

Program Duration and Funding: In crisis and conflict-affected environments, where AEPs are often seen as an appropriate response, funding cycles are most often single-year cycles. This can make planning for programs such as AEPs incredibly difficult—for example, if a program that requires a minimum of three years of funding for its cohort to complete the program receives single-year funding, that cohort cannot complete the AEP.

Most of the programs reviewed in these settings fulfilled at least one cycle, ranging from three to five years. However, in several programs the number of years the program was implemented did not match the number of years required to run a full program. Funding for only one cycle implies that the program was not in existence long enough to see more than one cohort of learners graduate from the program. If learners are still part of the cycle when the program ceases, it could be detrimental to their education—they likely cannot transition to formal schools due to limited skills and knowledge base, sit external exams because their education has been interrupted again, or, if the program was established to relieve contextual issues such as location or exclusion, cannot access another school.

Box 3: Characteristics of AEPs Examined During Review

Instruction time and Curriculum Compression

Program Duration and Funding

Class Size

Flexibility of Timetabling

Beneficiaries

Teacher Selection

Teacher Training

Teaching and learning materials

Conflict Sensitivity

Gender-Related Programming

Costs Associated with Learning

Sustainability Planning

Class Size: Almost half of the reports reviewed did not mention class size. On average, those that did claimed to have a class size of 25:1 through 30:1. This average is lower than the estimates made by key informants interviewed for this report. Some programs that mirror formal curriculum had class sizes around or greater than 40:1, with at least one program that recorded 65:1. For an experienced teacher to incorporate interactive techniques, however, even 30:1 is large class. Some programs attempted to get around this by increasing the number of teachers in each class.

Flexibility of Timetabling: AEPs that have flexibility of timetabling should provide learning at times that best suit the learner. These times may change by day, month, or season, depending on needs. It appears that the smaller the program, the more flexible the timetabling can be. Very large programs tended to mimic the timetable of formal school systems, though scheduling parallel classes to formal school programs detracts from the real flexibility of the schedule. In some cases, teachers were recruited from the formal system and the school operated split shifts, double-shifting teachers and classrooms. In these cases, any “flexibility” was to suit the teacher and the venue rather than the learner.

Beneficiaries: Every program reviewed noted access to education as a pre-condition of program implementation, targeting learners who were over-age for the formal school system and were denied education. Other denied groups included disadvantaged or marginalized learners and, specifically, girls. Theoretically, learner recruitment in AEPs is based on greatest need first—prioritizing over-age learners who have missed most schooling (but who are not adults). Unfortunately, there was little documentation on how learners were selected for AEPs. Key informant interviews suggested that in reality, enrollment occurs on a first-come, first-served basis. In some programs, reports indicated that children were tested prior to entry, but there was much more evidence (particularly in older programs) where children who were school age (and younger) simply attended AEPs instead of formal schools, especially where classes were free and materials were provided. This mixed attendance is disadvantageous to both target beneficiaries and school-age or younger students.

Teacher Selection: Ideally, AEPs have a teacher selection plan based on community input but with ministry involvement and validation. It was unclear from the review how many programs had selection criteria. While several programs did recruit teachers from the formal education system, who were asked to teach a second shift after their regular teaching post, others recruited teachers from the community; oftentimes, they were volunteers. Several programs had teachers who were selected directly by the community and from the community. Some programs also documented explicitly giving female teachers preference in selection; however, the prevalence of minority group representation was less clear.

In terms of teacher qualifications and equivalence of service, we found few programs that required teachers to be formally certified or required that teachers received formal teaching prior to being recruited to teach. Programs required potential teachers to have completed at least secondary school, up through Grade 8 to Grade 12. We found no examples of programs that did assessments of teachers in literacy or numeracy.

Teacher Training. Many programs involved teachers recruited directly from the community with no prior teaching experience. Ideally, when programs state that the teacher is chosen from the community (particularly remote area programs) and that the teacher must have

achieved a certain grade level, then subject mastery must be a priority in the teacher training. Unfortunately, very little documentation outlined the training provided to teachers, especially the content of the curriculum. Where accredited teachers were trained, trainings appeared to have two major objectives: subject mastery and child-centered methodology, although without more thorough documentation and reporting of training content it is difficult to pinpoint the content and quality of these trainings. Some reports did document the length of teacher trainings and how often refresher courses were provided. Several courses provided trainings that ranged from three to four weeks, although others provided training for just a few days. Most programs, especially those in emergency contexts, had trainings administered by NGOs. Training ranged from elective units in a pre-service course to the more usual in-service courses. At least two of the programs reviewed did sustained teacher training, such that teachers could move into a teacher-training institute. Most reports did not document the quality of teacher training, but those that did stated that the training was insufficient or ineffective. However, in an emergency response (such as in crisis and conflict-affected environments) teacher training has a low priority in comparison with provision of access and teaching/learning materials. Teacher training takes time to develop, and expertise to implement, both of which may be in short supply in an emergency.

Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM): There was little said in the reviewed material about TLM. Programs which essentially ran a parallel curriculum developed TLM to match what was taught in government schools. Many programs (particularly those aiming to have students transition into formal education) used the formal education materials to ensure continuity but some did not provide the necessary guidance on consolidation of material for a condensed curriculum.

Conflict Sensitivity: USAID's education team within the E3 Bureau developed the *Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs* to enable organizations implementing these programs to identify whether they are designed and implemented in a manner that is conflict sensitive. Our team used this checklist to better understand conflict sensitive aspects of the programs. Some programs explicitly incorporated elements of "Do No Harm" into the fabric of their programs; for example, these programs were aware of ongoing conflict between different ethnic communities and recruited teachers with the same cultural and linguistic background as their students. Learning and teaching materials were also developed in different languages. Some programs identified potential exclusions and responded to them by obtaining buy-in via community mobilization techniques. Several programs actively promoted peace and social cohesion, but it was unclear how widespread this practice was. These findings do not necessarily confirm that programs lacked conflict-sensitive elements in their curriculum; it could be due to a lack of documentation of these elements.

Gender-Related Programming: We found three general approaches to gender-related programming reflected. The most comprehensive, but the least common, was that of modeling behavior and awareness. This was a constructive, inclusive approach in class where girls were called upon equally, teachers responded positively to girls' questions and comments, lessons included messages about equal rights, and community mobilizers sensitized local leaders to the importance of educating their girls. Several programs specifically targeted women and girls by making the program available exclusively to females or recruiting female teachers. Finally, some programs mandated quotas or specific percentages of beneficiaries that must be female. Interestingly, we found no documentation

on whether gender-sensitive programming in the classes was designed to mitigate gender stereotyped roles.

Costs Associated with Learning: Our review found limited evidence of fees or donations required from communities or individual learners. Only four programs required some type of community support for the program, typically through in-kind donations. There was not enough information on budgets and breakdowns of cost among the programs reviewed to comment on how AEPs spent funding.

Sustainability Planning: When a program is designed (even by default) to be a transitional program, it usually has a very simple exit strategy— when external support is no longer required to meet the need or when the objectives are fulfilled the program ceases. In the case of more complex transitional and foundational programs, the lack of a defined handover strategy and sustainability planning is more difficult to explain. Some of the literature was mid-term reporting and so the handover strategy was not a priority. In other cases it was either not part of the initial planning, not defined as a strategy, or not reported as such.

MEASURING OUTCOMES

A limited number of descriptive reports collected and reported data on access to education (including enrollment, completion, and dropout), select learning outcomes, and transition to school or work. In the 44 programs on which we reviewed documentation, only eight report some or all of the above data. Even then, several reference weak M&E systems or recommend that data on outcomes be collected on a more regular basis.

Enrollment, Completion, and Dropout: To measure access, we documented enrollment figures reported by various programs. Some programs only report out one figure (how many students were cumulatively enrolled); others provide a snapshot in time, or data points over various years. However, the applicability of these raw figures, while useful for day-to-day operations, does not necessarily provide context on the magnitude of access and enrollment relative to the out-of-school population.

When reports reported the percentage of students who completed an AEP out of their cohort, the definition of completion was not clear. Some programs reported an exit exam, where a passing grade signified that a student successfully completed the program, while others recorded completion as someone who passed through the program.

Learning Outcomes: Discussions on learning outcomes primarily a) reported average test scores in programs and b) compared these average scores against those in government schools. Most programs that did report learning outcome scores indicated AEP students outperformed students in government schools. However, it was difficult to understand what the reported metric conveyed about an AEP's success. While government schools may be the appropriate comparison in some situations (e.g. when students in AEPs have the choice of attending a government school versus an AEP), they are not always the right comparison given stark differences between populations in formal schools versus AEPs. Even when government schools provide an appropriate counterfactual, standard indicators are not always collected across government and AEP schools (e.g. students in AEPs and

government schools do not necessarily sit for the same test), making it difficult to compare learning assessments and test score outcomes.

A quasi-experimental study that employed propensity score matching to identify statistically similar students in government schools to an AEP in Ethiopia⁶ found students who attended AEPs outperformed similar students in government schools. However, the study circumvent the possibility of unobservable differences amongst students in government and AEP schools that could drive these higher scores. While students in AEPs appear to outperform government schools, more rigorous studies are needed to isolate the specific impact that AEPs have on learning outcomes as opposed to other types of school programs by overcoming selection issues.

Transition to School or Work: Three reports attempted to track the performance of students after they left the program and mainstreamed back into formal schools. These studies note that without independent tracking, it is difficult to piece together data from AEPs due to: poor government school records that cannot be linked to AEP data, lack of unique identifiers used in government schools, lack of tracking of dropouts or absenteeism, high teacher and administrator absenteeism, and the potential that government school records are exposed to the alteration of data by school officials. These studies reported mixed results in the medium-term (absenteeism and dropout rates were high for AEP students who transitioned to and attended secondary formal school but in some cases still out-performed regular students who transitioned to formal secondary schools).

LIMITATIONS

One of the greatest challenges to this review is the issue of moving goalposts. Because so many AEPs are initiated in response to an emergency, objectives are not necessarily articulated and change with the situation. There is a lack of reporting on how programs change and develop and what factors drive this change. These factors greatly shape any understanding about what AEPs are responding to and what aspects of AEPs are effective in meeting these goals.

The search for available documentation on the design and implementation of AEPs exposed a lack of documentation on education in crisis and conflict and, more specifically, on AEPs. Available documentation lacked transparency on limitations in implementation. We struggled to find evaluations that commented on the quality of components of the program.

There is likely a significant publication bias in this review, where programs with the funding, ability, and time to put together a report or hire an external evaluator are overly represented. Programs that were replicated across multiple countries have a heavier representation in the documented literature than other programs.

TOWARDS EVIDENCE BUILDING AND LEARNING

The contexts in which AEPs are administered pose challenges to conducting rigorous data collection. AEPs often serve as an emergency measure; the ability to establish reliable systems for collecting monitoring and evaluation data depends on the level of funding for the program, existing infrastructure, and the level of stability and fragility of the country. In cases

where M&E data has been collected on AEPs, the focus has been on accountability and reporting and less so on measuring effects of the program. These issues, it seems, have led to less documentation, both around the mechanics of AEPs themselves in practice, as well as monitoring and evaluation data and analysis reported around AEPs. While complex, these challenges are not insurmountable and are essential to overcome if we aspire to discuss results, learn what works, and understand how to ultimately improve programming. Below we provide guidelines on the relevant research design, metrics, and data that can be used to answer research questions policymakers and practitioners may have about AEPs, sensitive to the context and purpose of the programs.

Provide standard program guidance: The AEWG should develop guidelines for program implementers around the following issues:

- Curriculum modification; core subjects and partial curriculum vs. condensed subjects and integration; complementary subjects (multiple intelligences), needs-based subjects (e.g. health and sanitation, peace and human rights)
- Interactive methodology (as per Smith’s model); use of group work, discovery learning, child-centered programming, and activity-based learning
- Teacher selection; level of formal education; qualifications; specific training for interactive methodology); endorsement by the community; and motivation
- Teacher training; subject mastery; pedagogy for interactive learning, constructive classroom management
- Programmatic planning including access, teacher training, curriculum modification, teacher selection, ensuring community buy-in
- Sustainability planning

Improve Documentation of AEP Implementation: Our review highlighted several gaps in documentation around program design and implementation of AEPs; addressing these information gaps could enhance our understanding of how AEPs are implemented in practice. Descriptive research, both qualitative and quantitative in nature, can contribute to our broader understanding of how AEPs are currently structured and programmed and what we may want to improve upon and investigate further. Examples of types of studies and data collection include, but are not limited to, performance monitoring, performance evaluations, process evaluations, and qualitative techniques such as case studies.

Handout 1 outlines a series of questions around how AEPs are designed, structured, and implemented. One option for improving this documentation is to have independent evaluators gather this information through process evaluations or observational studies. The answers to questions in **Handout 1** could also be solicited and addressed better in solicitations, proposals, monitoring data, and evaluation designs from implementers.

Standardize outcomes and reporting: As the donor community provides more guidance on standardizing the concept, approach, and implementation of AEPs through inter-agency working groups such as the AEWG, it would be beneficial to develop a homogenized set of metrics that programs can collect themselves; it would be beneficial to provide guidance to programs and implementing partners on what metrics to collect and how to measure them. Guidance on underlying instruments, data collection processes, and standards would greatly increase the quality, and likely the availability, of such data, especially during the program

monitoring process—this data can be used both by donors and implementers to better understand progress towards goals and how to improve programming.

EVALUATING AEP EFFECTIVENESS:

Define the Research Question: Evaluations can help us better answer the following research questions:

1. **Is a particular AEP successful in meeting the goals it has set out to achieve?**
While the goals of each AEP can differ depending on context and target population, we could evaluate AEPs along the following general objectives: increased access to education; helping students achieve a certain level of knowledge in an accelerated fashion; improving the psycho-social wellbeing of students; reintegrating students into formal education upon completion of AEPs; and improving employment opportunities in the longer term.
2. **Is an AEP the right policy option? How does it compare to the alternatives?** We could extend the above question to better understand whether an AEP is the right programmatic option for the problem at hand. For example, policymakers may want to compare the effectiveness of the AEP against a bridging program or catch-up program or may want to understand how effective the acceleration aspect of the program is in improving learning outcomes. In the select cases where attending government school is a viable alternative, we could also compare the effectiveness of AEPs to government schools.
3. **What components of an AEP are essential in bringing about these outcomes? What is the effectiveness of these components?** AEPs, in practice, tend to include multiple components, including smaller class sizes, teacher support, active learning and interactive methodologies, compressed curricula, higher quality infrastructure and supplies than formal schools, and more community involvement. We can use evaluations to better understand which of these components are necessary for producing outcomes and what the contribution of a particular component might be.

Define the Counterfactual: We define an “effect” as a change attributable to or caused by a particular intervention. We measure effects by comparing what happened when an individual participated in a program against what would have happened had the individual hypothetically not participated in the program. We call the conceptual individual or group that did not receive the intervention the **counterfactual**. While this hypothetical analog is impossible to reenact, we can approximate the counterfactual using various approaches that allow us to identify a valid comparison group to mimic this counterfactual. An important consideration in selecting a comparison group is understanding how this comparison group may be different from the group receiving the intervention, and the context of available options that you are trying to weigh/assess an AEP against. Below are three examples of contexts and how a researcher may decide to employ a comparison group or counterfactual to better understand the effectiveness of AEPs:

1. **Context: targeted beneficiaries do not have an available alternative to your AEP.** If an AEP is the only option available to out-of-school, over-age students in a particular setting, then, by definition, AEPs will improve access. Examples of situations where this may be true include schooling for nomadic groups where there

are no alternatives available, situations where over-age learners are barred from attending formal school and can only attend the AEP or some sort of alternative programming, or a war-torn region where there is no other schooling option available to children other than the AEP. In these situations, students' only alternative to the AEP is to not attend school.

In the absence of any other available option, to understand whether students have attained a certain level of knowledge or have graduated from the program, measuring these shorter-term outcomes for the AEP alone can tell us what the effect of the AEP is on its enrolled population.

For measuring longer-term outcomes, such as employment opportunities or marriage age, we should measure outcomes for students that attended an AEP against those of a similar profile who do not attend an AEP, employing a quasi-experimental design that can overcome selection problems.

2. ***Context: targeted beneficiaries (out-of-school, over-age children and youth) have other options of schooling; we want to compare AEPs to one of these alternative options.*** If there are other alternatives available to these students, then we can compare outcomes across these options to understand how the AEP performs relative to these alternatives towards the same objective or goal.

In limited contexts, formal schooling may be a viable alternative for out-of-school, over-age children and youth. In cases where formal schooling is an alternative, because different types of students select into formal schools than AEPs (across socio-economic status, psycho-social trauma, etc.), we must be careful about a straight comparison between average scores across different types of schools or education programs. Selection bias occurs if learners are not allocated randomly into the AEP or the formal school; in this case, formal schools and AEPs are not proper counterfactuals of each other.

In addition to formal schools, other alternatives to AEPs could

fulfill the same objectives as their AEP counterpart. Examples include bridging programs, emergency response programs such as the Teacher Education Package (TEP) that employ a partial curriculum, remedial programs, or adult literacy programs. In these cases, the comparison group would be context-specific, depending on the aims of the AEP and target beneficiary of a given AEP.

To understand the effectiveness of a given AEP relative to another education option, we would need to carefully design a study that avoids selection bias. In these cases, we might employ a randomized allocation of students to AEPs and an alternative, tracking the progress of these students in each option. By randomly assigning students to each option, we avoid any issues of selection that might occur with out-of-school, over-age children and youth that have a particular characteristic systematically selecting into one type of education program over another. In situations where this assignment is not feasible, quasi-experimental evaluations can also be employed.

3. ***Context: We are interested in understanding what components of AEPs work—and how to improve them.***

Impact evaluations can help us understand what components or modalities of AEPs are most successful at achieving certain goals. A research design interested in these questions could involve swapping out a certain aspect of an AEP, testing a certain aspect (e.g. the level of acceleration, interactive methodology, teacher training, etc.), or adding an additional aspect to understand whether it enhances performance and improves outcomes in

general. In these cases, identifying a counterfactual allows us to isolate the impact of the change in programming or the value-added of the additional component.

Why not compare test scores (and other outcomes) against formal schools?

There is a strong tendency to compare outcomes of AEPs against outcomes in formal schools to gauge their relative performance. However, depending on the context an AEP is implemented in, while comparing scores against formal schools may be used as a very rough guide, it rarely serves as a proper counterfactual.

Students who do not attend formal school (e.g. over-aged students, victims of conflict) often face drastically different circumstances than those who do attend formal school. Furthermore, among those excluded from formal schools, students who enroll in AEPs are different than those who do not. These characteristics could heavily influence the student's attendance, academic performance, and longer-term outcomes, clouding our assessment of whether or not resulting outcomes are a function of the AEP itself or other issues; as a result, we cannot directly compare outcomes across these groups to determine the impact of an AEP. Determining the effectiveness of an AEP necessitates an understanding of the difference between the types of students that "select" into a particular AEP.

To learn about the importance of different AEP components, more than one type of AEP could be offered. The population of out-of-school, over-age learners can be randomly assigned to different variations of AEPs to compare them in order to measure the contribution of the particular component.

Define Outcomes: Below we provide definitions and methods for measuring outcomes associated with AEPs; however, depending on the objectives and research questions

associated with a particular AEP, not all of these outcomes may be applicable, and there may be more project-specific outcomes that are of interest to track.

Access: Measures of access can include, but are not limited to, enrollment, retention, and completion. Out-of-school enrollment rates can be calculated as a percentage of the out-of-school, age-appropriate population enrolled in an AEP over the estimated out-of-school population in an area. Completion rates can be calculated as the percentage of students that successfully complete the AEP, although the criteria for “completion” should be clearly defined. Dropout rates can also be determined using a clear definition for dropout from an attendance roster (e.g. students who have not attended school for the last two weeks).

This data can be captured through administrative data, mainly attendance rosters in the school and collated by the program. While challenges can arise when capturing this data in the field, the proliferation of mobile technology can aid in capturing this data in a more systematic and cleaner process.

Knowledge attainment: Test scores measure student ability in reading, writing, comprehension, mathematics, etc. Many AEPs already administer examinations to gauge the progress of students in attaining certain levels of knowledge in math, reading, writing, etc. Simple knowledge assessments calibrated at a student level can help us understand whether a student has achieved a certain competency level in a subject. However, it is important to remember that to make comparisons across groups instruments should be standardized.

Longer-term outcomes: An important component of assessing AEPs is understanding what happens to students after the program. Different programs have different goals and terminal points; some endeavor to transition students back into secondary school or technical/vocational education (TVET), others are only meant to provide a terminal primary school education. Ultimately, all programs aim to provide an education that improves long-term outcomes for their students, including employment, wages, quality of life, as well as many other intangible benefits. In the medium-term, these outcomes can include the percentage of students that transferred to formal education and the percentage of former AEP students that drop out of secondary school.

Longitudinal studies and panels that follow students during and after their participation in an AEP can help answer these questions on transitions.

Psycho-social outcomes: Often times, AEPs service students who experienced trauma that disrupted their childhood development. Whether implicitly or explicitly, AEPs aim to improve their students’ mental health as measured by psychological distress levels, depression, and/or behavioral problems among others.

While they have yet to be commonly employed to measure the performance or effectiveness of AEPs, context appropriate tools such as the Child Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Scale (CPSS), Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA), Child Psychosocial Distress Screener (CPDS), or Childhood War Trauma Questionnaire (CWTQ) can help gauge distress levels of students attending an AEP.

Designing the Research Project: The context, research question, counterfactual, and outcomes determine the research design and methodology of the evaluation. In **Handout 2**, we provide guidelines of the type of research design and outcomes to measure based on the context and research assumptions associated with a specific research question.

Collecting data in conflict and post-conflict environments: Given that AEPs are often implemented as a response to a crisis or conflict, not every AEP is a candidate for evaluation. This is especially true in contexts where AEPs are implemented in emergency or war zone environments—where the safety situation is not stable, the AEP is not necessarily implemented in full force or is constantly evolving, and resources are directed towards other needs. However, AEPs are implemented in a spectrum of contexts, including more stable situations. This is the case, for example, in countries surrounding conflict-afflicted areas with displaced refugees or in post-conflict countries where the environment is conducive to collecting systematic data and conducting an evaluation.

In addition, options exist in less stable contexts for collecting simple monitoring data or training teachers to administer simple assessment tools to better understand the performance of a program. These data can also be employed for evaluations. The use of technology and mobile data collection tools that employ smart-phones or simple texting or tablets systems connected to servers can enable implementing partners on the ground. Teachers themselves may be able to report data to a central repository for analysis. These techniques do not require the mobilization of fieldworker teams, and can generate structured data accessible anywhere in the world. These approaches have been used in the health sector to track treatment compliance and vaccination, for example, and are very incipient in the education sector, where they can be used to track metrics such as student attendance. They are usually affordable, easy to set up and manage, and reliable. While there is an initial investment setting up the system that requires visiting the program location, once set up the system is accessed and managed remotely.

CONCLUSION

With the ever-increasing intensity of crisis and conflict globally, the role of providing access to education for out-of-school, over-aged children and youth cannot be overstated. As we continue to utilize AEPs to help bring those who did not have education opportunities during the formative years of their life due to crisis and conflict back into the educational fold, we must clarify our understanding of what works well within AEPs; what should be modified, adapted, and changed; and ultimately how to improve the effectiveness of these programs. It is our sincere hope that this review propels policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in that direction.

HANDOUT 1: REPORTING INFORMATION TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AEP IMPLEMENTATION

Design and Structure of AEPs

Program objectives:

For a given program, what are the objectives of the program, specific to the context of the program?

Curriculum and Learning Time:

Are curricula adapted for AEPs, especially with an increased degree of acceleration? If so, how? For example:

- Is the curriculum compressed?
- Is the curriculum pared to essentials?
- Is repetition and revision eliminated?

Is enhanced learning time and multiple (non-academic) intelligences utilized in the development of the program? Specifically:

- Is the learning period (daily/weekly) increased?
- What elements are put in place to respond to the concept of multiple intelligences?
- For a given AEP, is extra learning time included in the curriculum relative to the normal school schedule?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a compressed curriculum, a partial curriculum, and a curriculum that is compressed and partial?

Duration of Programs:

What constitutes a cycle of the program?

How many cycles were implemented/have been implemented?

If the program ceases mid-cycle, what happened to learners who were enrolled in the program?

Class Size:

What class size was intended as part of the program? What was the average class size during implementation?

What was the intended age-range of the class? What age-range enrolled in the class? What proportion of those enrolled are considered over-age learners?

Flexibility of Timetabling:

What form does the flexibility of timetabling take?

Does the learning timetable change according to the seasons?

Beneficiaries of AEPs

- Given the target beneficiaries of a particular AEP, what are the objectives of the program, specific to the context of the program?
- Are learners selected to participate in AEPs? If so, how?
- Do programs employ a screening process (e.g. testing prior to entry, age determination)?
- Are beneficiaries allocated to needs-specific classes according to previous background, abilities, life experience?

Teacher Selection, Training, and Retention

Teacher selection

- How were teachers selected for the program?
- Are teachers certified? If so, by what party?
- Are the teachers volunteers?
- If they are paid, who is paying teachers?

Teacher training and retention:

- What training models are used to train AEP teachers? What are the contents of the training? Is the training tailored to the specific education level and experience of the teachers? How is this achieved?
- Is the training tailored to the specific pedagogy of accelerated learning?
 - Are teachers trained to employ interactive teaching techniques?
 - Are teachers trained in activity-based learning? Group work?
- What is the quality of instruction?
- Do teachers leave the training feeling equipped to teach?

Teacher retention

- What are the rates of teacher absenteeism?
- What are the rates of teacher retention?
- What steps did the AEP take to minimize absenteeism and optimize retention?

Teacher/Learning Materials

- Are there especially developed teaching/learning materials for the program?
- If general textbooks are used (as per the formal curriculum) in what way are they modified in their use for the AEP?
- What is the learner/learning material ratio?
- Are all subjects being taught have equivalent learning materials?
- Are teaching/learning materials developed locally?
- Are teaching/learning materials developed that replace textbooks?

Conflict Sensitivity

Does the AEP purport to have an element of conflict sensitivity?

Is there a principle of “Do No Harm”?” How is it implemented (or described)?

Is there a specific curriculum component that responds to the conflict-sensitive context? (e.g. Human Rights, Tolerance, Peace, Inclusion, Conflict Resolution)

Does the pedagogy and classroom ambience reflect the principles of a conflict-sensitive approach?

Gender Sensitivity

If an AEP describes its programming as gender-sensitive:

How does it aim to be gender-sensitive? For example, could we classify the component as systemic (e.g. AEP targets only girls) or programmatic (curriculum asks teachers to discuss gender in class, reflect principles of inclusion in teaching)?

Do teaching practices in the classroom reflect a gender equity approach?

Is programming exploitative, accommodating or transformative?

Are teaching and learning materials gender-neutral/sensitive?

Are the teachers trained in the principles of gender inclusion? What form does the training take?

What percent of the learning day is focused on issues of gender?

Are the subjects offered gender-specific? In what ways?

Costs Associated with Learning

Does the AEP agency charge school fees (in order to be aligned with formal education)?

What do AEPs do with funds, and where are funds directed?

Is there an opportunity cost associated with attending the AEP? How are these costs overcome or minimized?

Are there other costs associated with attending the AEP (uniforms, learning materials, food, transportation)?

HANDOUT 2: RESEARCH AGENDA MATRIX

What is the effect of AEPs on access, completion, learning, and longer-term employment outcomes?

Assumption: There are no available school alternatives to AEPs for the targeted beneficiaries (over-age learners that are barred from attending formal school, nomadic groups with no formal education access, etc.)

Topic	Research or Evaluation Question	Outcome(s)	Method(s)	Measurement/ Instruments
<i>Access and retention</i>	What is the impact of the AEP on out-of-school enrollment?	Percentage of out-of-school, age-appropriate population that enrolls in the AEP	Estimate out-of-school population in area Calculate % of take-up based on AEP enrollment	Administrative data Area survey
	What is the rate of completion of the AEP?	Percentage of the student cohort that successfully complete the AEP (Note: make sure completion is clearly defined. Is it passing a grade standard? Measured by passing an exam? Gaining certification?)	Simple estimation of the proportion of students completing the program	Administrative data
	What is the rate of dropout in the AEP? Why are students dropping out?	Dropout rates	Calculate dropout rates annually	Administrative data Short student follow-up survey after dropout

Topic	Research or Evaluation Question	Outcome(s)	Method(s)	Measurement/ Instruments
<i>Quality</i>	What is the effect of the AEP on student learning outcomes?	Student ability in reading, writing, comprehension, mathematics, etc.	Simple knowledge assessment calibrated at student level. (Note: can be compared with formal school but only for guideline.)	Externally conducted tests such as EGRA, EGMA, PIRLS, TIMSS, National Tests, etc.
	How successful is the AEP in integrating students into formal education?	Rate of transfers to formal education	Estimates of crude rate of transfers to formal education, and rates taking into account level/age dropout rates in the area.	Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students
	What is the effect of AEP on student employment?	Probability of finding employment Type of job; wage; job conditions	Estimate the rate of employment X months after AEP graduation, and that for out-of-school youth. (Can be compared with formal school graduates but only for guideline) Impact evaluation (quasi-experimental study) that follows students who either were enrolled or completed AEP and follows a group of out-of-school, over-age children and youth who did not participate in AEP.	Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students (tracer study)

What is the effect of AEPs on access, completion, learning, and longer-term employment outcomes relative to another education program/alternative?

Assumption: We are attempting to weigh the effect of the AEP relative to another available alternative. This could be formal schooling or another non-traditional schooling option, such as an emergency response program, bridging program, remedial program, etc.

Topic	Research or Evaluation Question	Outcome(s)	Method(s)	Measurement/ Instruments
Quality & Retention	What is the effect of the AEP on student learning outcomes as compared with another educational option, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Student’s ability in reading, writing, comprehension, mathematics, etc.? ■ Absenteeism? ■ Completion? ■ Dropout? 	Student performance in reading, writing, comprehension, mathematics, etc. Absenteeism rates Completion rates Dropout rates	Impact Evaluation, randomized allocation of students to AEP and other educational option (e.g. bridging program, formal school) Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design	Externally conducted tests such as EGRA, EGMA, PIRLS, TIMSS, National Tests, etc. Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students
	How successful is the AEP in integrating students into formal education compared to another educational option? (Only applicable if transfer option exists)	Rate of transfers to formal education	Impact Evaluation, randomized allocation of students to AEP and other educational option (e.g. bridging program, formal school) or quasi-experimental approach Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design	Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students
	What is the effect of AEP on student psychosocial wellbeing and mental health?	Student mental health: Psychological distress levels Depression Behavioral problems Etc. as appropriate	Impact Evaluation, randomized allocation of students to AEP and other educational option (e.g. bridging program, formal school) or quasi-experimental approach Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design	Context appropriate tools, for example Child Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Scale (CPSS) Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA) Child Psychosocial Distress Screener (CPDS) Childhood

Topic	Research or Evaluation Question	Outcome(s)	Method(s)	Measurement/ Instruments
				War Trauma Questionnaire (CWTQ), etc.

What is the most effective combination of AEP components and how does that vary by context? What components work best for specific student groups/contexts?

Assumption: more than one type of AEP is available or can be programmed

Topic	Research or Evaluation Question	Outcome(s)	Method(s)	Measurement/ Instruments
<i>Teacher profile, selection, training, and support</i>	What is the impact and cost-effectiveness of AEPs that use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ paid teachers vs. volunteer teachers ■ MoE-certified teachers vs. uncertified teachers ■ intensive teacher training vs. those that use short teacher training on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ teaching quality? ■ learning outcomes? 	Learning Outcomes: Student performance in reading, writing, comprehension, mathematics, etc. Rates of retention, Rates of transfer to formal education if applicable	Impact Evaluation with two treatment arms or quasi-experimental approach. Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design.	Externally conducted tests such as EGRA, EGMA, PIRLS, TIMSS, Teacher survey Classroom observations National Tests, etc. Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students
<i>Pedagogy</i>	What is the impact and cost effectiveness of AEPs that use child-centered approaches vs. more traditional methodologies?	Student performance Rates of retention, Rates of transfers to formal education if applicable	Impact Evaluation with two or more treatment arms or quasi-experimental approach Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design.	Externally conducted tests such as EGRA, EGMA, PIRLS, TIMSS, National Tests, etc. Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students

Topic	Research or Evaluation Question	Outcome(s)	Method(s)	Measurement/ Instruments
<i>Curriculum Design</i>	What is the impact of 1) a compressed curriculum, 2) a partial curriculum, and 3) a curriculum that is both compressed and partial on learning outcomes?	Student performance Rates of retention, Rates of transfers to formal or TVET education if applicable	Impact Evaluation with two or more treatment arms or quasi-experimental approach Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design.	Externally conducted tests such as EGRA, EGMA, PIRLS, TIMSS, National Tests, etc. Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students
<i>Added component</i>	What is the added value and cost-effectiveness of introducing a bridging program prior to enrollment in an AEP?	Student performance Rates of retention, Rates of transfers to formal education if applicable	Impact Evaluation with two or more treatment arms or quasi-experimental approach Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design.	Externally conducted tests such as EGRA, EGMA, PIRLS, TIMSS, National Tests, etc. Administrative data and short survey follow-up of students
<i>Mental Health</i>	What is the impact of psychosocial support components of AEPs?	Student mental health: Psychological distress levels Depression Behavioral problems Etc. as appropriate	Impact Evaluation with two or more treatment arms or quasi-experimental approach. Cost effectiveness/ cost-benefit analysis to be included in evaluation design.	Context appropriate tools, for example Child Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Scale (CPSS) Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA) Child Psychosocial Distress Screener (CPDS) Childhood War Trauma Questionnaire (CWTQ)

¹ INEE Term Bank. http://toolkit.ineesite.org/term-bank/en/terms/accelerated_education_program

² The AEWG is an inter-agency working group made up of education partners working in Accelerated Education. The AEWG is currently led by UNHCR with representation from UNICEF, USAID, NRC, Plan, IRC, Save the Children, INEE, ECCN and War Child Holland.

³ Smith, A. (2003). *Accelerated Learning: A User's Guide*. Network Continuum Education.

⁴ Baxter, P., & Bethke, L. (2009). *Alternative education: Filling the gap in emergency and post-conflict situations*.

⁵ Buckland, P. (2006). *Post-Conflict Education: Time for a Reality Check? FMR Education Supplement*.

⁶ Akyeampong, K., Sabates, R., & Zeitlyn, B. (2012). *Evaluation of Speed School Project Impact Report*.