



Ushirika wa Maendeleo ya Elimu Barani Afrika
الرابطة لأجل تطوير التربية في إفريقيا
Association for the Development of Education in Africa
Association pour le développement de l'éducation en Afrique
Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Educação em África

**EDUCATION FINANCE
NETWORK**



Equipping Teachers to Improve Foundational Learning Across Africa

May 2023

Equipping teachers to improve foundational learning across Africa

Authors: Albert Nsengiyumva, ADEA Executive Secretary, and Education Finance Network

Low rates of primary school enrolment and completion, and low levels of learning among those who are in school, mean that only one in five primary school-age children in Sub-Saharan Africa achieves the minimum proficiency level in reading.¹ Children who cannot read and understand a simple text will struggle to learn anything else in school. They are more likely to repeat a grade and more likely to drop out of school, and they are less likely to benefit from further training and skills programs. At a national level, this will lead to worse health outcomes, greater youth unemployment, and deeper levels of poverty.²

Capable and qualified teachers are critical for improving learning outcomes in Africa.³ However, assessments in recent years suggest that the majority of teachers in Africa lack sufficient competencies to teach basic literacy and numeracy skills effectively. Too few teachers are trained to impart foundational skills, and the duration and quality of the practicum (teaching experience within a classroom setting) in teacher training is often insufficient. As a result, inefficient teaching methods are still used in many classrooms.⁴

The ADEA 2022 Triennale, an African high-level forum for policy dialogue and sharing of knowledge and experiences on education, concluded in a ministerial recommendation on foundational learning, and introduced the [foundational learning coalition](#) comprising Ministers of Education from 11 African countries⁵. As part of the ministerial recommendation, policymakers endorsed increased support for teachers, especially in applying the principles of structured pedagogy as a pathway to achieving foundational learning goals.

What makes teacher professional development effective in improving learning outcomes for students?

Evidence shows that one of the most important elements of any education intervention is the capacity of its teachers.⁶ Continuous teacher professional development can be a powerful tool to improve learning outcomes, but programs are not always effective.

The [Non-State Actors in Education: Evidence Gap Map](#) produced by the Education Finance Network compiles approximately 200 studies on the role of non-state actors in education, of which 30 studies specifically examine teacher training and learning outcomes. An analysis of these studies found that the following conditions are necessary for teacher training programs to result in improved learning outcomes for children.

Allow for practical applications of training content

Research indicates that teacher training programs are most effective when they allow teachers to see, trial, and apply new teaching practices in the context of their own classroom.⁸ Linking training content to specific in-class activities, and providing accompanying step-by-step teacher guides, instructional materials, and tools for lesson planning can help teachers better understand how to use the new techniques they are trained in.⁹

“We have recruited 40 percent [additional] teachers than we had before the pandemic. Having new teachers means we have to build their capacity. The increased availability of teaching and learning materials is highly needed [...] to facilitate teaching and learning activities.”

Honourable Valentine Uwamariya, Minister of Education, Rwanda, 2022 ADEA Triennale

¹UNESCO Global Education Monitoring report, (2022). Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa. <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/2022-spotlight-africa>

²UNICEF, (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty, 2022 update. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-global-learning-poverty-2022>

³Kika, J. et al, (2022). Early Grade Reading in South Africa: Policy Research Paper. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/5106a1e8-3d08-5a0a-824f-8b8c257ff1b4>

⁴UNESCO, (2022). Born to learn. Spotlight on basic education completion and foundational learning in Africa <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383207>

⁵Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, South Africa, The Gambia, Uganda, and Zambia

⁶Piper, B. et al, (2018). Scaling up successfully: Lessons from Kenya's Tusome national literacy program. *Journal of Educational Change*, 19(3), 293-321. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326330954>

⁷Fleisch, B. et al, (2019). Identifying mechanisms of change in the Early Grade Reading Study in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(3), 1-12. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/18982>

⁸Allier-Gagneur, Z. et al, (2020). Characteristics of Effective Teacher Education in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. What Are They and What Role Can EdTech Play? (EdTech Hub Helpdesk Response No. 10B). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4762301>

⁹Haßler, B. et al, (2020). Teacher professional development in sub-Saharan Africa: Equity and scale. Pre-print. <https://docs.opendeved.net/lib/WMYNLNVK>

Train teachers in teaching to student learning levels

Studies have found that effective teacher training are those that focus on understanding student learning and tailoring content to students' learning levels. This includes training programs focused on Teaching at the Right Level¹⁰, student-centered teaching¹¹, teaching students in a language that they understand¹², and creating inclusive environments¹³. Training teachers in how to implement these student-centered pedagogies is essential, as teachers must know how to assess and understand how their students learn in order to target instruction and tailor content to their educational needs.^{14 15}

"We expect teachers to be prepared to teach foundational subjects from day 1, but most teachers need additional support to instruct effectively. Teachers need extra classroom practice time in their formal training. It is common for a practicum to take up only a few months of a 3-year teacher diploma programme."

Albert Nsengiyumva, ADEA Executive Secretary

Use teacher peer-to-peer approaches

Evidence shows that teacher peer-to-peer approaches are essential for teachers to share new techniques and ideas, support one another on challenges to improve morale, develop common goals, and build a culture of shared commitment and motivation.¹⁶ Often referred to as cluster-based professional development or professional learning communities (PLCs), peer-based training can also be more cost-effective than one-on-one coaching and is easier to scale for long-term impacts.¹⁷

Implemented by VVOB – education for development, [Strengthening blended learning approaches with teachers and school leaders](#) looked at a combination (or "blend") of in-person and remote professional development trajectories as a way to strengthen the capacity of school leaders and teachers to provide responsive and engaging learning experiences to their learners through play-based learning approaches. In South Africa, 1,000 educators from 250 schools were targeted through a pilot project that tested two modalities for professional development in the teaching of foundation phase mathematics, which both included building professional learning communities (PLCs) among teachers and school leaders.

"Teachers in PLCs can deepen their understanding of their own practice, learn new strategies and approaches, and develop a shared vision for their school or district. Effective PLCs are grounded in evidence-based practices and are continually evaluated for effectiveness and sustainability. The newly released [Blend ON! Guide](#) describes how to effectively use PLCs as part of blended teacher professional development."

Zanele Sibisi, Education Advisor, VVOB South Africa

Investing in teacher professional development for the future of our children and communities

Sub-Saharan Africa has a tremendous human capital potential that could be unleashed if young people are given the opportunity to apply their skills and contribute to the development of their communities and the region as a whole. By investing in teacher training and support, we can ensure that students receive the best education possible and are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in life. Providing effective, evidence-based teacher professional development is not only an investment in the future of our children, but also in the development and prosperity of our communities and nations.

¹⁰Angrist, H. et al, (2020). How to Improve Education Outcomes Most Efficiently? A Comparison of 150 Interventions Using the New Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling Metric. Policy Research Working Paper, No. 9450. World Bank. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/1813-9450-9450>

¹¹Ulla, M. (2017). Teacher Training in Myanmar: Teachers' Perceptions and Implications. International Journal of Instruction, 10, 103-118. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315753530_Teacher_Training_in_Myanmar_Teachers'_Perception_s_and_Implications

¹²Benson, C. (2022). An innovative 'simultaneous' bilingual approach in Senegal: promoting interlinguistic transfer while contributing to policy change. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 25(4), 1399-1416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1765968>

¹³Sharma, U. et al, (2013). Reforming teacher education for inclusion in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Asian Journal of Inclusive Education, 1(1), 3 - 16.

¹⁴Angrist, H. et al, (2020). How to Improve Education Outcomes Most Efficiently? A Comparison of 150 Interventions Using the New Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling Metric. Policy Research Working Paper, No. 9450. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/2a873f3a-1bd1-577f-ae0f-bc7c386d0fb5>

¹⁵Allier-Gagneur, Z. et al, (2020). Characteristics of effective teacher education in low- and middle-income countries: What are they and what role can EdTech play? (Helpdesk Response No. 10B). EdTech Hub. <https://doi.org/10.53832/edtechhub.0007>

¹⁶Cimini, T. et al, (2020). Fostering Learning: Driving Improvements in learning Outcomes for Children in Low- resources Communities. Toronto: Opportunity International. <https://edufinance.org/publications/research-and-learning/fostering-learning-driving-improvements-in-learning-outcomes/>

¹⁷Ding, E. et al, (2022). What works for effective school- and cluster-based teacher professional development? Five key design decisions. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/what-works-effective-school-and-cluster-based-teacher-professional-development-five-key>