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Assisting teachers to support learning recovery: understanding learning loss and learning gains during school closure



Education Development Trust

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We improve national learning outcomes by informing education policy and putting our knowledge into action in our programmes and consultancy work. We work in varied contexts all over the world, in education systems as diverse as those in Brunei, Kenya, England, Rwanda and Dubai. This often includes challenging environments, hard-to-reach localities and marginalised communities where the need is greatest. In all these locations, we use evidence-based methods to raise education standards, deliver innovation in schools, help teachers to improve their teaching quality, empower educators to effect sustainable and cost-effective transformation in their schools, and reduce disparities in educational outcomes.

We are a trusted partner of governments, academics and multilateral agencies across the globe. Our work helps to drive global understanding of education solutions, and we support global dialogues among international policymakers on education system improvement.

Our expert knowledge, programme design and implementation expertise are also deployed in delivering Ofsted-rated outstanding careers services in England, and in owning and managing a family of independent schools, in which we put our knowledge about excellent teaching and learning into practice.

To achieve all this, we draw on our programme of public domain research that highlights 'what works' in education reform, and invest in research and development to create globally leading and innovative methodologies, helping to make government ambitions for better education systems a reality.

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Teachers are in the spotlight for the recovery of learning

Education Development Trust and UNESCO: a collaborative research programme

Covid-19 has caused considerable disruption to education around the world. Disadvantaged and marginalised learners are being particularly hard-hit. Naturally, earlier in the pandemic, the focus of much attention was on how to safely reopen schools, often featuring a preoccupation with hygiene and social distancing considerations. A shift is now noticeable and welcome. With schools in many jurisdictions reopening partially or fully, there is now a growing interest in the immensely important area of recovering the learning lost while pupils have been away from face-to-face education.

Teachers were already in the education spotlight before the pandemic, with a focus on the learning crisis¹ and learning poverty², but the return to face-to-face learning will see this increase. Globally, our teachers will be charged with the heavy lifting when it comes to leading learning recovery. As school systems continue to reopen, teachers will need to respond not only to students' deepened academic losses (and possibly some gains), but also to their socio-emotional wellbeing. To assist teachers to support learning recovery, it is necessary to:

- Understand the extent of learning loss (and learning gains) resulting from protracted school closures;

- Understand how the suddenness and uncertainty around the health crisis and school closures have impacted students' social-emotional wellbeing – and how this may be affecting learning; and
 - Investigate the responses of governments, schools and teachers to support learning recovery.
- Education Development Trust and UNESCO are collaborating on a research initiative to explore these themes, with a focus on the most marginalised students. Our work will provide information to help teachers, schools and governments renew learning and:
- Tackle a range of issues – from ensuring learners are brought back to the same level to the transformation that education systems must undergo to make this possible;
 - Understand and respond to the impact of crises and interruptions in the most challenging educational pathways (for example, from poverty and marginalisation) that lead to learning loss; and
 - To assist teachers to support students as they return to school.

This document summarises the key findings from two larger reports conducted as part of the first phase of this research collaboration. These two reports are a review of policy and grey literature³ and a rapid evidence assessment (REA).⁴

Figure 1 shows the overarching design of the planned programme of work.

¹ UNESCO, (2021) ² UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, (2020) ³ educationdevelopmenttrust.com/research/learninglosslearninggains
⁴ educationdevelopmenttrust.com/research/learninglosslearninggains

FIGURE 1:

Anticipated phases of research



What are the implications for teachers?

When schools were forced to close by the Covid-19 pandemic, the international research community acted swiftly. As a result, a clear picture emerged about the scale of school closure and how this affected opportunities to learn, and in more recent months, projections and later evidence have emerged about the extent of learning loss. There is agreement that wellbeing and mental health – for both students and teachers – is a concern as school systems reopen. And there is consensus that the marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable will be hardest hit on both counts, with both their learning and wellbeing significantly impacted.

With teachers charged with much of the work for recovery in our schools and classrooms, we should reflect on what we are asking them to do. The evidence is clear, the ask is great. Both the REA and policy/grey literature analyses agree. Teachers will be required to help students using a range of methods, including catch-up programmes, accelerated education programmes, remedial learning programmes and condensed curricula. They will also need to combine this new and complex response to individual learning needs with support for the mental health and wellbeing recovery of learners – and there will be an urgent need to tailor all of this to meet the complex needs of a range of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners.

Has enough been done and is enough being done to support and enable teachers to make this a success? Given the importance of this question, our chief concern in the next phase of our research is how we, as the global education community, can support teachers to do all that we ask of them. What do teachers need to get this right in their classrooms?

The REA and policy analyses showed that accelerated programmes, catch-up programmes, tutoring and condensed curricula are popular options to support learning recovery. (Figure 2)

Other sources of evidence suggest complementary initiatives, such as continuing with tactics employed with great effect during remote learning. These include formal and complementary education initiatives delivered in the community, the use of technology and recognition of the importance of alternative pathways. We must ask whether teachers are adequately prepared to support these initiatives. (Figure 3).

The evidence also points to the need for mental health-focused initiatives, as well as supporting teachers themselves back into classroom work. We do not currently know a great deal about how such initiatives might work, as evidence is limited. (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 2:
WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS ARE THE KEY
MECHANISMS FOR SUPPORTING LEARNING
RECOVERY**

Accelerated programmes

Flexible, age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, or out-of-school children and youth. This may include those who are marginalised, or who have had their education interrupted by poverty, climate disaster, conflict or other crisis.

Catch-up programmes

A short-term transitional education programme for children and youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption, which provides students with the opportunity to learn content missed because of the disruption and supports their re-entry to the formal system.

Condensed curriculum

A condensed curriculum supports learners' acquisition of key knowledge and skills in a compressed timeframe that may include discontinuous face-to-face instruction.

Tutoring schemes

Additional targeted support, concurrent with regular classes, for students who require short-term content or skills support to succeed in regular formal programming.

**FIGURE 3:
OTHER INITIATIVES THAT CAN
SUPPORT LEARNING RECOVERY**

**Complementary community education
integrated with school**

Extended school days (including before and after school provision), as well as holiday clubs or camp provision to promote children's engagement in physical activities, educational and cultural activities, and help to ensure children's and parents' wellbeing.

Low-tech – solutions

Innovative interventions to tackle uneven access to technology and internet, equity-focused approaches to building back better, delivering learning materials through radio, television, and SMS (which are shown to reach communities with limited internet access).

Alternative pathways

Fast-track, second-chance opportunities to complete formal education, enabling disadvantaged children and youth to catch up with other students.

**FIGURE 4:
ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDED IN SCHOOLS**

Mental health/wellbeing-focused initiatives

Promotion of positive school climate, in-school counselling and mental health services, online therapeutic courses, use of creative writing, activities focussing on expressing and sharing experiences and feelings, and other preventative measures (such as disaster education).

**Supporting teachers back into the classroom
and through recovery**

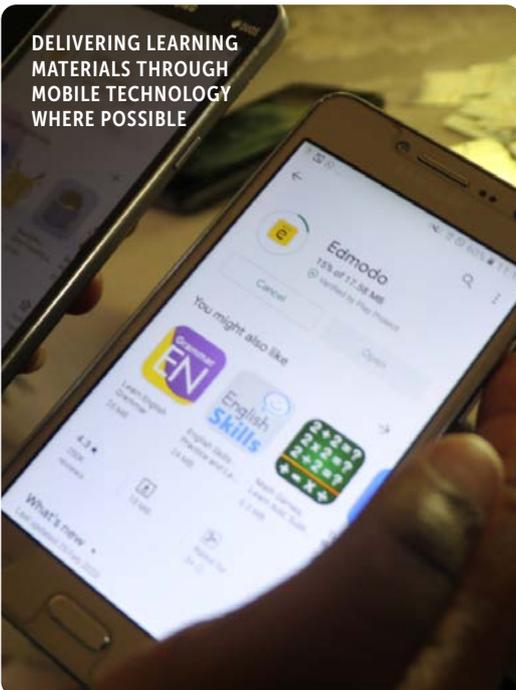
Investment in education leadership and management, teacher development and effective monitoring of learning outcomes, alongside the development of an effective Education Management Information System system which can improve planning and management, as well as provision of peer-to-peer support and bonding social capital development.



TEACHERS
SUPPORTED BACK
TO WORK



DELIVERING LEARNING
MATERIALS THROUGH
MOBILE TECHNOLOGY
WHERE POSSIBLE



PREPARATION OF
REMOTE LEARNING
CONTENT IN
INNOVATIVE WAYS



LEARNING MATERIALS DELIVERED
THROUGH RADIO REACHES
COMMUNITIES WITH LIMITED
INTERNET ACCESS



How can we support teachers to make learning recovery and school reopening a success?

The reviews identify gaps in knowledge on learning recovery and school reopening.⁵ Specifically, there is little evidence about:

- Innovative programmes that support teachers at a fast pace;
- What teachers need to know about areas such as digital curriculum design, effective digital delivery and engagement and online/offline learning assessment tools;
- How we can best prepare teachers to respond to the rising challenges of school closure and re-opening;
- The effectiveness of training in specific classroom or instructional techniques and how these might assist teachers in helping children in their classrooms;
- How schools, local or national governments can support teachers back into classrooms and prevent workforce attrition, as well as teacher anxiety and trauma caused by Covid-19 and working conditions; and
- What the most effective catch-up approaches are in a range of contexts.

During the next phase of our research, Education Development Trust and UNESCO will explore how teachers can be supported back into their usual roles. The main focus will be on gaining a deeper understanding of:

- 1. School reopening and learning catch-up plans:** we will seek to further our understanding of governments' plans for learning recovery in selected countries and the expectations from schools and teachers. We will also conduct comparisons of definitions of catch-up programmes – from policy perspectives to scientific and academic definitions – to identify (mis)alignment.
- 2. Tools and mechanisms to ensure teachers are prepared for successful recovery:** we will seek to further our understanding of what (if any) support teachers have already received, and what (if any) instruction, re-orientation or upskilling teachers have received prior to going back to school, as well as assessing teachers' needs in terms of support and training to ensure impactful catch-up programme implementation and social and emotional wellbeing.
- 3. Role of intermediaries:** we will seek to gain an understanding of the roles of in-service and pre-service education providers in delivering support for teachers to better enable them to face the challenges of school reopening, learning catch-up and assessment, as well as promoting teachers' social and emotional wellbeing.

⁵ educationdevelopmenttrust.com/research/learninglosslearninggains

The full report is available free online.

To access the report visit: educationdevelopmenttrust.com/research/learninglosslearninggains

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