

Researchers

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Timeline

2012-2014

Sample Size

2,700 children in 77 villages

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

Speed School for Out-of-School Children in Mali

Key Finding Lead Phrase

Accelerated learning can help out of school children catch up

Key Finding Summary

An accelerated learning program for out-of-school children in southern Mali, “Speed Schools” impacted students’ educational achievement, home life, and continuation with schooling. The evaluation results suggest that the program is an effective way for out-of-school children to catch up with their in-school peers and be integrated back into the school system.

Abstract

Almost a quarter of all primary school age children are not attending school in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this study in southern Mali, researchers evaluated the impact of an accelerated learning program for out-of-school children on the students’ educational achievement, home life, and continuation with schooling. This research aimed to contribute to cost-efficient policies for improved access to, and quality of, education in Mali and beyond.

Policy Issue

Sixty-seven million children were out of school across the globe in 2009, and nine of the 17 countries with the highest numbers of out-of-school children are located in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ While remarkable progress has been made in expanding access to primary schooling

in Sub-Saharan Africa—the number of out-of-school children decreased from about 43 million to 30 million between 1999 and 2009—23 percent of all primary school-age children still remain out of school across the region.² One way to address this problem may be accelerated learning programs for out-of-school children that aim to quickly bring them up to grade level and enrolled, or re-enrolled, in the government school system. This study evaluates the impact of such a program.

Context of the Evaluation

Roughly 3 million school-aged children in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are not enrolled in school. National survey data from Mali reports that only 47 percent of rural eligible children were enrolled in the first level of schooling in 2006. This underscores the urgent educational policy problem of how to effectively engage out-of-school children.

The Strømme Foundation, a Norwegian development organization, created a Speed School program to respond to the high percentage of out-of-school children in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The educational program was developed by education curriculum experts and aims to provide out-of-school children ages 8-12 with an accelerated nine-month curriculum, and to transfer them into the government primary school system afterwards.

Details of the Intervention

To evaluate the impact of the Speed School program on the students' educational achievement, home life, and continuation with schooling, researchers carried out a randomized evaluation over the course of the 2012-2014 school years in the Koulikoro and Sikasso regions of southern Mali. Seventy-seven randomly-selected villages participated in the study, with 46 receiving the program and 31 serving as the comparison group. IPA collected data on children and households in villages participating in the program and in comparison villages for two years, between mid-2012 and mid-2014.

The Speed School program started with the creation of local Speed Schools Management Committees, consisting of women and men. The committee's role was to advocate for the importance of education, encourage children to attend Speed School regularly, and closely collaborate with parents and teachers, forming a locally-owned education network. Children were taught to read and write in their mother tongue during the first two months, and then continued with an accelerated curriculum in French. The pedagogical approach was designed to encourage children to actively participate. Teachers offered intensified learning support. At the end of the program, students could enter grades 3, 4 or 5 in the government primary school system, depending on their test scores.

Results and Policy Lessons

A large majority of out-of-school children completed the nine-month program - 89 percent. On average, the Speed School graduates saw significant gains in math and language skills, putting them on track with their peers, and most of the graduates entered back into the

school system.

Educational achievement: In French language learning, children in the Speed School program improved by 42 percent relative to the comparison group, allowing them to almost catch up with their peers. In math, they improved by 25 percent, which enabled them to completely catch up with their peers.

The educational effects were different for boys and girls, particularly in math. Girls' test scores in math were lower than boys' before the program began, and boys saw larger increases in math abilities during the program. This effect is detected both in Speed School centers and in public schools.

Continuation with schooling: Two-thirds of the Speed School graduates re-entered the school system after the program ended. Among them, three out of four successfully completed their first year back in school.

Cost-effectiveness: The average cost per student for the nine-month program in Mali was US\$172.

In addition, among children who successfully complete the program, the study shows a drop-out rate of the first year in school of about one in four students. It would be important to conduct additional research to identify the causes of this phenomenon. While unfortunate, this phenomenon is in line with other remedial education programs implemented in rural areas.

Sources

[1] UNESCO Institute of Statistics. "Out-of-School Children: New Data Reveal Persistent Challenges." June 2011. Available at: http://www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Documents/FS12_2011_OOSC_EN.pdf

[2] Ibid.

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