



LEARN Plus

ACCELERATED SCHOOL READINESS/ PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Location: Lao PDR, Cambodia, Tanzania

Funder: GPE KIX, International Development Research Centre

Partners: Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia; Ministry of Education and the President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government, Tanzania, Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV), American Institutes of Research

Sector/Category: Early Childhood Education/ Pre-primary education



A boy is writing on chalkboard in Tanzania



Da, 6, and her father
reading book in Laos

Table of Contents

Description	3
The Problem	4
The Innovation	5
Impact of the Program	7
Progress to Date	8
Strengths and Lessons	9
Gaps/Next Steps	9



Children in pre-primary education program in Tanzania

Description

The accelerated school readiness/pre-primary education program is 8–12-week intensive program that helps disadvantaged children without access to early childhood education services to better prepare for grade 1 entry and success.

The concept was originally developed by the Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV) based in Turkey to serve disadvantaged Turkish and Syrian refugee children. It is a holistic program that aims to develop the physical, language, cognitive and socio-emotional skills of children. It includes 200–350 hours of active learning, play-based indoor and outdoor activities, spread over 8–12-weeks. It incorporates gender responsive and inclusive approaches, promotes healthy eating and good hygiene, as well as parental engagement. The program is delivered by trained

teachers or community facilitators during the school break preceding the start of the new school year. Results from evaluations conducted in Turkey and Laos indicate that the program improves school readiness, on-time enrollment, and retention in grade 1 as well as resilience of children exposed to early life adversities. As a result, it was expanded in more countries and was included by the Government of Laos as an innovative strategy to reach disadvantaged children in its 2021–2025 Education and Sports Development Plan.

The Problem

The inclusion of universal access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education in the sustainable development goals recognizes the enormous benefits of quality preprimary education to children, families, education systems and societies at large. Children who receive PPE perform consistently better in school¹, are more likely to enter school on-time, less likely to drop out to repeat grades and more likely to complete primary and secondary school, making education systems effective and efficient². Quality PPE likewise narrows early achievement gaps for children from disadvantaged households and places them on a more equal footing with their well-off peers³ and is crucial for children in violent and unstable contexts who may otherwise lack stable, nurturing, and enriching environments⁴.

Despite global commitments and irrefutable evidence, progress in universalizing PPE has been slow and uneven. Recent research has found that

Globally, access to PPE has reached 50% leaving over 175 million pre-primary age children with no access.

more than half of all pre-primary aged children in conflict and emergency-affected countries have no access to the lifeline of a quality education⁵. Mirroring this global trend, access to ECE has increased in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Tanzania in recent years, but many children (30% in Laos, 65% in Cambodia, and 23% in Tanzania) still miss out on PPE. Those who are most affected are typically poorer, from rural areas, displaced, or from minority groups. The situation is expected to worsen due to the COVID-19 crisis, which has led to reduced funding for education, with pre-primary education receiving the least funding. Globally, donors spend just 1.2% of their education aid on early childhood education, leaving behind some of the world's most vulnerable children.

1. OECD (2014). "Does pre-primary education reach those who need it most?". PISA in focus 40. OECD Paris.
2. UNICEF (2019). A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education. UNICEF, NY, USA.
3. Ibid, p. 12
4. UNESCO (2018). Global Education Monitoring Report, 2019: Migration, displacement, and education: building bridges not walls. UNESCO, Paris, France.
5. <https://theirworld.org/news/118m-under-fives-out-of-school-in-crisis-affected-countries/>



The Innovation

To address these challenges in access, equity, in quality early childhood education, the LEARN Plus project is working in partnership with the governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Tanzania to adapt, pilot, and test an accelerated school readiness/pre-primary education program that aims to improve the school readiness of 5–6-year-old disadvantaged children who are about to enter grade 1 with no PPE experience. Its goal is to prepare

children for school to compensate for the effects of non-optimal environmental conditions and to increase children’s level of school readiness. The program runs for 8-12-weeks during the school break before the start of the new school year and aims to support the holistic development of children and focuses on four developmental domains:

The Daily Routine



8:00-8:15	Arrival time (15 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា ចូលមក ឬ ចេញ ពី បណ្ណាល័យ	
8:15-8:35	Movement time (20 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀនប្រតិបត្តិ	
8:35-8:55	Circle time (20 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន រួម គ្នា	
8:55-9:20	Cognitive Training Program (CTP) (25 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន ប្រតិបត្តិ កម្មវិធី បណ្តុះបណ្តាល	
9:20-9:50	Outdoor time (including free play) (30 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន ក្នុង បរិវេណ ខាង ក្រៅ	
9:50-10:10	Handwashing and snack time (20 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា លាង ម្ហូប អាហារ និង ផឹក ទឹក	
10:10-10:20	Planning time (10 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន ប្រតិបត្តិ កម្មវិធី	
10:20-11:10	Corner play time (50 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន ប្រតិបត្តិ កម្មវិធី ក្នុង មុខ ជម្រើស	
11:10-11:20	Review time (10 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន ប្រតិបត្តិ កម្មវិធី	
11:20-11:40	Reading time (20 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា រៀន ប្រតិបត្តិ កម្មវិធី អាន ក្រាប	
11:40-11:50	Handwashing time (10 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា លាង ម្ហូប អាហារ	
11:50-12:15	Lunch and brush teeth (25 min) សិស្សានុសិស្សា ផឹក ទឹក និង ប្រតិបត្តិ កម្មវិធី ផឹក ទឹក	
12:15	Departure time សិស្សានុសិស្សា ចេញ ពី បណ្ណាល័យ	

LEARN Plus Project’s 8–12-weeks daily routine

1

Physical: promotes the development of self-care skills, encourages movement, physical activity, and healthy eating.

2

Language: promotes reading readiness and oral communications.

3

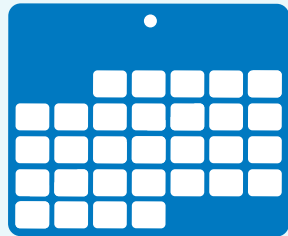
Cognitive: stimulates conceptual development, acquisition of pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills;

4

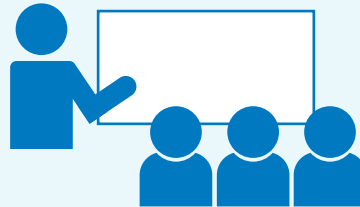
Socio-emotional: promotes ability to recognize and communicate emotions and establish positive relationships with peers and adults.

The above aims are distributed over the different parts of the daily routine.

ACCELERATED SR/PPE PROGRAM

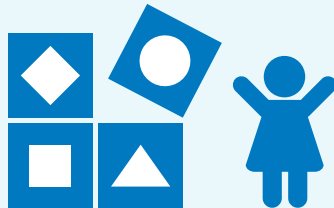


8-12 week Program

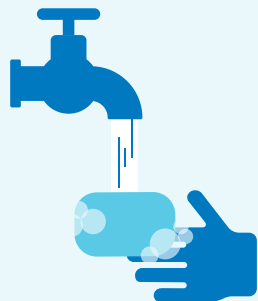


Delivered by teachers or community facilitators

Supporting holistic development of children based on national standards



Outreach effort and parent education sessions



Access to clean water and facilities and good hygien practices



Access to healthy and nutritious meals

The program is taught by grade 1 or pre-primary education teachers supported by school heads and District education staff in Laos and Cambodia, and by community facilitators in Tanzania. The program follows a daily routine of play-based, active learning indoor and outdoor activities divided into blocks of time. Each block of time incorporate activities that aim to develop a set of development goals. It uses teacher's guidebooks, children's workbooks and teaching-learning materials aligned with national PPE standards. The program typically runs between 3-6 hours per day, depending on country context, 4-6 days/week a week. Classes are held in grade 1 classrooms or any safe spaces with access to clean water and toilet facilities. The program promotes gender-responsive and inclusive teaching and learning approaches, good hygiene through handwashing and tooth brushing, and good nutrition through healthy meals. It also educates parents on gender-responsive parenting skills and in supporting children's learning at home.

Impact of the Program



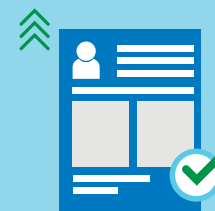
An impact study was conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) using a randomized controlled trial in Laos. This compared accelerated SR/PPE program participants, 9-month government pre-primary education program participants and those who received no ECE intervention and found that the accelerated program increased on-time grade 1 enrolment and improved school readiness skills for children and

led to an increased number of children retained to the end of grade 1. The findings related to on-time grade 1 enrolment were particularly striking, with a 37 percentage points higher rate of transition for SPP children than those with no intervention, and an 18 percentage points higher transition rate compared to children in the government 9-month PPE program.

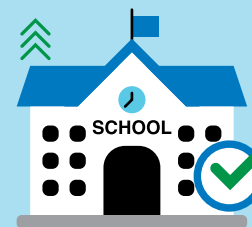
With regards school readiness, program participants improved most in numeracy and familiarity with print when compared to children who received no intervention at middle of grade 1; similarly, program children had greater gains in all the above areas plus receptive vocabulary, compared to those in the 9-month pre-primary education (PPE). Although trends continued to be higher for program participants compared to children with no intervention, the program did not lead to statistically significant differences in learning outcomes in comparison to the 9-month PPE by the end of grade 1, a finding that is consistent with other similar school readiness interventions in low-income contexts.

Does the Program Work?

Lao PDR, Impact Evaluation by American Institutes for Research, 2016–2018



Increased on-time Grade 1 enrollment



Increased school readiness at the start of Grade 1



Convergence of learning outcomes at end of Grade 1



Increased number of children completing Grade 1

Progress to Date



	LAOS	CAMBODIA	TANZANIA
Duration	<p>10-week program (implemented in Laos since 2014)</p>	<p>8-week program (contextualized align with national ECE policies and standards and school year)</p>	<p>12-week program (built on built on an existing school readiness program)</p>
Reach	<p>16,215 children (8,331 girls, 7,824 boys) from 500 sites in 6 disadvantaged districts.</p>	<p>466 children (247 girls, 219 boys) from 30 communities in Steung Treng province</p>	<p>754 children (365 girls, 389 boys) from 29 communities in Kisarawe District</p>
Project Information	<p>It has been included as an innovative strategy in the 2021–2025 Education and Sport Sector Plan for reaching disadvantaged children.</p>	<p>An implementation research and impact evaluation are currently being undertaken by Royal University of Phnom Penh and the American Institutes for Research, respectively to inform policy advocacy.</p>	<p>An implementation research conducted by the University of Dar Es Salaam found it is relevant and enjoys the support of families and communities. An impact evaluation by AIR in progress to inform advocacy for scale-up.</p>

Strengths and Lessons

- The program leverages existing resources of the Ministry of Education and communities (i.e., teachers, head teachers, community volunteers, classrooms) which makes replication less costly
- The adaptation and implementation of the program in each country was led by the Ministry of Education, increasing government ownership of the innovation
- The iterative process of program adaptation ensured alignment with government policies and standards and evolved a model that is contextually relevant, appropriate, feasible and affordable for government to take to scale
- Evidence generated on the impact of program helped advocate for its recognition and acceptance as an alternative mode of delivering PPE to unreached population
- Knowledge generation must be demand-driven and knowledge mobilization intentional and calculated
- Building a cadre of program champions is critical in successful advocacy
- Intensive capacity building is key to effective knowledge transfer and program sustainability
- Need to leverage other funding streams if public financing is constrained

- Evidence generated from implementation research, cost analyses and impact studies will be used to advocate for the recognition and inclusion of the program as an innovative strategy to reach disadvantaged children in Cambodia and Tanzania
- Evidence generated from research and studies in Laos will inform advocacy for government to operationalize the Education Sector Plan and finance the scale up of the program in 40 districts
- Expand and strengthen coalition of program champions to support advocacy and scale up
- Mobilize funds to support further adapt and implement the program in Cambodia and Tanzania and other countries in East Africa. (Scale-up funding)
- Adapting to a humanitarian / nexus context: Given the accelerated nature of this model, it would work well in humanitarian or nexus context. As such, we see huge potential in adapting the model to pilot it in conflict-affected areas in Sahel, West Africa and in refugee hosting districts in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. (Innovation funding)

Gaps and Next Steps



Learn more and get involved at plancanada.ca



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