

ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMMES:

An Evidence Synthesis
for Policy Leaders



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This synthesis report has been developed in support of Education.org's mission to advance evidence and improve education for every learner. We aim to amplify existing evidence in greater need of visibility and uptake, to build resources for education leaders by synthesising and translating an inclusive range of evidence, and to enable these resources to be used by those who make education happen by building bridges between knowledge actors, policymakers, and practitioners. Established in 2019 and registered in Zurich, Switzerland, Education.org is hosted by Insights for Education, a foundation working with a visionary co-investor collective and growing partnerships across governments, agencies, NGOs, universities, businesses, and foundations in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. This document (only when officially released) is for general distribution. All rights reserved. Reproductions and translations are authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

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List of Acronyms

ACCESS	Accelerating Change for Children's and Youths' Education through Systems Strengthening
AE	Accelerated Education
AEP	Accelerated Education Programme
AENN	Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria
AEWG	Accelerated Education Working Group
BRICE	Building Resilience in Crises through Education
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CREPS	Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Civil protection and Humanitarian aid Operations
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GIRL Center	Girl Innovation, Research, and Learning Center
GPIA	Gender Parity Index (Adjusted)
INCLUDE	Innovative and inclusive accelerated education programme for refugee and host community children
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
OOSCY	Out-of-School Children and Youth
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SfL	School for Life programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented global education crisis. It has closed schools around the world, resulting in about 1.5 billion out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) in spring 2020, from pre-primary through tertiary age (UNESCO, 2020a). The pandemic exacerbated global out-of-school numbers and drastically impacted student learning, with some research estimating more than a year of learning loss after only a three-month school closure (Kaffenberger, 2021).

Today, the dialogue is evolving beyond schools reopening to focus on learning recovery, with countries implementing a variety of approaches for catch-up, remedial, or accelerated learning (Nugroho et al., 2020; USAID, 2020). Education leaders are facing calls to improve guidelines and/or policies in the face of highly varying curricula, pedagogy, certification, and promotion. This is the context to which this evidence synthesis responds.

In using a novel approach to rapidly crowdsource a wide range of published and unpublished evidence related to accelerated education programmes (AEPs), and then synthesising this evidence, our aim is to build on existing critical AEP evidence by offering practical, contextually relevant points of guidance for those shaping policies and guidelines for AEPs.

Complementing [the policy brief](#) high-level lessons for senior policy makers, this evidence synthesis serves decision-makers with technical backgrounds, providing more detailed analysis and discussion which will aid in the implementation of policy decisions.

As decision-makers decide whether to embark on AEPs, strengthen existing AEPs, or exercise greater oversight over AEPs, this evidence synthesis offers six major insights to help guide policy actions and guidance as well as implementation:

1. Effective accelerated education programmes share key features across design and implementation. These features can be supported meaningfully by government engagement, including through national policy actions.
2. AEPs have emerged as an alternative route to access education and learning for OOSCY learners who have not been reached effectively by the formal system. New or revised government AEP policies can improve OOSCY access and learning, especially among the most marginalised.

3. Amidst growing calls for the alignment of accelerated education with national education systems, it is important to recognise that alignment is not a one-size-fits-all solution but takes many forms in different contexts. A one-size-fits-all-approach could leave out more children and youth unintentionally.
4. Learning from country experiences points to a tactical, staged path to strengthening AEP alignment with national systems based on starting points of need and readiness.
5. Countries with effective AEPs prioritise alignment with goals, equity and inclusion, curriculum, assessment, and certification, with other dimensions being defined by programme implementers.
6. AEPs are designed to offer accelerated education for OOSCY. However, the lessons hold implications for broader COVID-19-related learning recovery and support measures in the formal school system.

During the course of this work, and with the collaboration of critical partners already deeply invested in AEPs, the topmost additional knowledge needs for education leaders are raised, including cost-effectiveness, effective promotion and transition, financial sustainability, and integration within national education data systems and cycles. It is hoped that the insights offered, and the future opportunities described, will help prioritise AEP funding and future AEP research and data collection.

While this report focuses on AEPs, bringing in deep insights from East and West Africa, its insights can be applied globally.

Introduction:

Context and Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its lost learning opportunities, has caused an unprecedented global education crisis, further challenging efforts to meet SDG 4 targets. Even as classrooms have reopened, millions of children have not returned to school in low-income countries, with up to one in five children missing out on an education as of 2021 (Save the Children, 2021). Many of these students are at risk of dropping out for good, with potentially devastating consequences for their future, and further obstructing progress towards achieving SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2020b).

Sierra Leonean government minister David Sengeh and UNESCO Institute for Statistics Board Chair Dankert Vedeler underscore the opportunity we have in this moment:

“The ambitions we set in the 2030 Agenda may look different when we finally get to our deadline. The havoc wreaked by COVID-19 as well as multiple other unforeseen challenges have rocked the boat along the way. But facing up to reality at this point is an important step. It paves the way for an honest partnership between those in leadership roles and those wanting to support them. It maps out a realistic agenda for accelerated progress between now and 2030, something we can all get behind.”

(UNESCO, 2021, p. 6).

In response to the cumulative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning, countries are implementing a variety of approaches for catch-up, remedial, or accelerated learning (Nugroho et al., 2020; USAID, 2020). AEPs, sometimes referred to as accelerated learning programmes, are one option that is being explored to help students who have missed schooling to get back into classrooms and regain the learning time lost. AEPs are defined as flexible, age-appropriate programmes run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) (Myers et al., 2017). The increased attention on accelerated education stems from the recognised need to expand learning opportunities for marginalised children and youth, particularly given the high numbers of OOSCY and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning. Importantly, education leaders nationally, regionally, and globally are facing calls to improve guidelines and/or policies in the face of highly varying curricula, pedagogy, certification, and promotion.

Education.org exists to advance evidence and improve education for every learner. This evidence synthesis is intended to make it easier for leaders to access and use the wealth of data on AEPs. It complements the existing work of the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), its partner organisations, and other practitioners and researchers by adding value in several ways. It draws on an expanded evidence base, including published and unpublished sources. This goes beyond programme evaluations that were the basis of the latest evidence review (Shah and Choo, 2020) and includes many sources written since 2019 and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps most importantly, this synthesis addresses the needs of education decision-makers, particularly in government, as they consider whether to embark on AEPs, strengthen existing AEPs, or exercise greater oversight over AEPs. We offer insights to help guide policy actions and guidance, and contribute to shaping priorities for further development.

This work brings deep insights from eight countries in East and West Africa and points to many examples in these countries which can serve as examples or templates for decision-makers. These insights can be applied globally. The synthesis neither promotes AEPs nor reviews the technical programming aspects of AEPs. Rather, our focus is on providing accessible and contextually relevant guidance for policy and enabling policy actions related to AEPs.

While the framing of the issues and insights is for education decision-makers, it is hoped that funders, practitioners, and researchers also find value in this work. The discussion about data and research needs is intended to help prioritise AEP funding and future AEP research.



Approach to sources and analysis

History of AEPs

A series of literature reviews, meta-evaluations, and evidence reviews of AEPs were conducted in the last 15 years, commissioned by INEE (Nicholson, 2006), the Norwegian Refugee Council (Shah, 2015), USAID (Menendez et al., 2016; USAID, 2020), MasterCard Foundation (Ngware et al., 2018), AEWG with UNICEF (Shah and Choo, 2020), and EdTech Hub (Damani, 2020). The earliest reviews summarise the science behind accelerated learning and highlight the historic features of AEPs.

AEPs were established to provide education opportunity in a shorter time due to lost learning opportunities. In some countries, such as Ethiopia and South Sudan, AEPs historically focused on nomadic populations. However, most AEPs in low-income countries began in post-conflict settings, providing in-person delivery to refugees, internally displaced children and youth, or ex-combatants, such as in South Sudan. Consequently, early AEP reviews focus on refugees and crisis-affected settings, often including an analysis of gender participation differences (Nicholson, 2006; Shah, 2015; Menendez et al., 2016). Early AEPs used condensed curriculum but found challenges with teaching and learning methods due to resource and infrastructure constraints. This changed over time, with interactive and learner-centred pedagogy becoming a common feature today.

Many AEPs were, and still are, initiated as donor-funded projects and implemented by local and international NGOs. This has resulted in high variability within countries, with teachers often having lower academic qualifications and/or little training, and many AEPs being of small scale and limited duration.

Approach to the Sourcing of Evidence

The mission of Education.org is to build resources for education leaders by synthesising and translating an inclusive range of evidence, and to enable these resources to be used by those who make education happen by building bridges across knowledge actors, policymakers, and practitioners. In developing this first evidence synthesis, it has been important to define what is meant by an “inclusive range of evidence”.

To ensure a wider range of voices in evidence, the process must begin with identifying questions of critical importance to end users, remaining open to a wide range of analytical approaches, and including both published and grey literature.

In seeking sources and analysing the evolution of AEPs to the present day, we were guided initially by several questions aimed at understanding issues from an education leader’s perspective. These included:

- Are AEPs effective in serving a wide range of marginalised learners?
- Do effective AEPs share common features of design or implementation that are important for policy leaders to understand?
- What can policymakers do to help AEPs become more effective? What are the barriers that can be addressed through policy actions or policy guidance?
- Considering the impact of COVID-19 impact on the numbers of OOSCY, what can be done to scale up or increase the impact of AEPs? Is this possible with widespread teacher shortages?
- What has been learned from AEPs that might be applicable in the formal school system, for example, in tackling learning recovery?



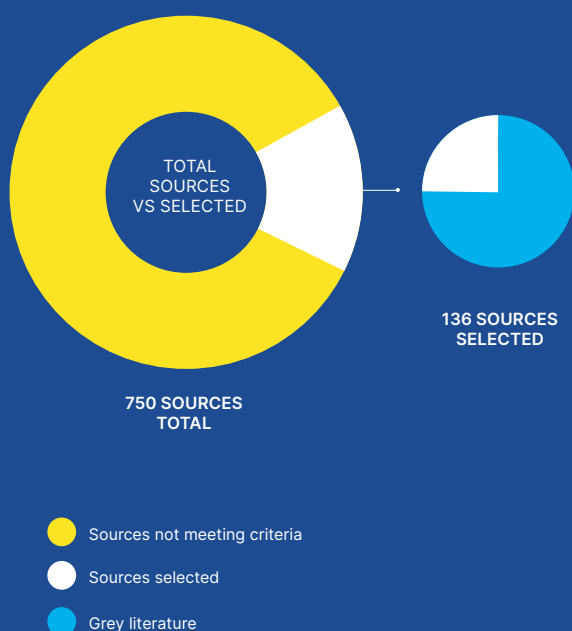
Multiple strategies helped identify authors, issues, and sources. In a social listening exercise, online discussions were monitored, confirming a truly global discussion with interactions monitored across 92 countries.¹ The widespread interest in AEPs was reflected with more than 236,000 social media reactions across a 90-day period, reaching an audience of 34 million individuals. A rapid crowdsourcing call brought forward new actors and a wide range of published and unpublished evidence related to AEPs. Outreach to international agencies, funders, and non-governmental organisations proved helpful in accessing programme documents. This was complemented by searches of organisations’ websites and academic databases. A geographical focus on sub-Saharan Africa was chosen, as discussed further below. Therefore, a search for government policy documents for the focus countries was conducted.

Grey literature was specifically sought to capture valuable, often practical, evidence that is relevant to decision-makers, provides different perspectives from formally published evidence, and is often available sooner than sources from traditional publication processes. We

define grey literature as “materials and research published specifically outside of the traditional commercial, academic publishing, and distribution channels” (Paperpile, 2020). Grey literature can enhance understanding, in a timely fashion, of contextual realities and their implications for policy and planning choices and implementation challenges. Grey literature sources include programme design, implementation and evaluation reports, government policies, strategies and plans, case studies, manuals, media reports and press releases, and research theses. These sources revealed information not previously considered in the broader education ecosystem.

This evidence synthesis also drew from published programme evaluations, previous evidence reviews and meta-evaluations, journal articles, book chapters, and other published works. The AEWG was generous in sharing a wide set of resources, including evaluations, policy documents, and qualitative data analysis, which avoided a repetition of their sourcing effort.

Figure 1. Seventy-Six Percent of Selected Sources Came from Grey Literature



Selection and Analysis of Sources

In total, 750 sources were collected. These were then screened for relevance to the topic and the initial questions, as well as their contribution to providing a range of voices, contextual variation, and quality. The analysis of each source was guided by the question, “What does this mean for a decision-maker?”

As Figure 1 indicates, 136 sources were selected for deeper review and 76% of these were grey literature. That large percentage also helped ensure we drew on recent sources. Over 54% of the materials collected and reviewed were from 2019 onwards, including 60 sources from 2020 or later. Only English language sources were selected, due to the need to limit the scope of this first synthesis. See Annex 2 for more details on sources and names of AEPs included.

The analysis of sources identified numerous key issues on which governments could act. A further analysis identified patterns across multiple programmes and countries as well as concrete examples and exemplars. A set of insights and ways to frame issues emerged.

¹ Results from brandmentions.com real-time monitoring social media and web traffic for 90 days analysis to February 2022.

Deeper Analysis for Eight Selected Countries

The magnitude of the OOSCY challenge in sub-Saharan Africa demanded this first regional focus, although further updates could extend geographical coverage to other regions. An additional reason for focusing on sub-Saharan Africa is that projected numbers of at-risk students and the percentage increase of students at risk of not returning to school post-COVID-19 are highest in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2020b). The selection of the eight focus countries was informed by language restrictions, the AEWG mapping exercise and its subsequent evidence review (Shah & Choo, 2020, p. 11). This review concentrated on 20 AEPs around the world, with 12 in Africa, reflecting the fact that AEPs are more common in this region than elsewhere. For this evidence synthesis, six of the seven English-speaking African countries on the 2020 list were included as focus countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Uganda) along with Ghana and Nigeria, which have recent robust AEP evaluations.

These eight countries vary along several dimensions: the **pace of improvement** in out-of-school rates; **variation in OOSCY** along gender and wealth; and the **amount of experience with AEPs**, including length of history and extent of government involvement. Furthermore, ample evidence was available for all eight countries.

Figure 2 demonstrates variation in OOSCY rates for primary school age groups, using the latest available household survey data for each country.² Given that some country data are considerably older (South Sudan, 2010) than others (Nigeria, 2018), it is inadvisable to make detailed cross-country comparisons and, instead, to look at the breakdown within countries. South Sudan has both the oldest data and the highest out-of-school rate for children of primary school age, at more than 70%, compared with more recent data from Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, all with primary out-of-school rates below 20%. Most of the focus countries have reduced the percentage of OOSCY of primary (and lower and upper secondary) age, but at variable rates. Ethiopia, for instance, has cut its out-of-school rate for primary school age children in half, from 64% in 2000 to 32% in 2016 (WIDE database). On the other hand, Nigeria has shown little change, with about one-third of children of primary school age out of school over several surveys between 2003 and 2018.

Gender parity around the world and in the eight focus countries has improved over the years and tends to be better at the primary and lower secondary levels than

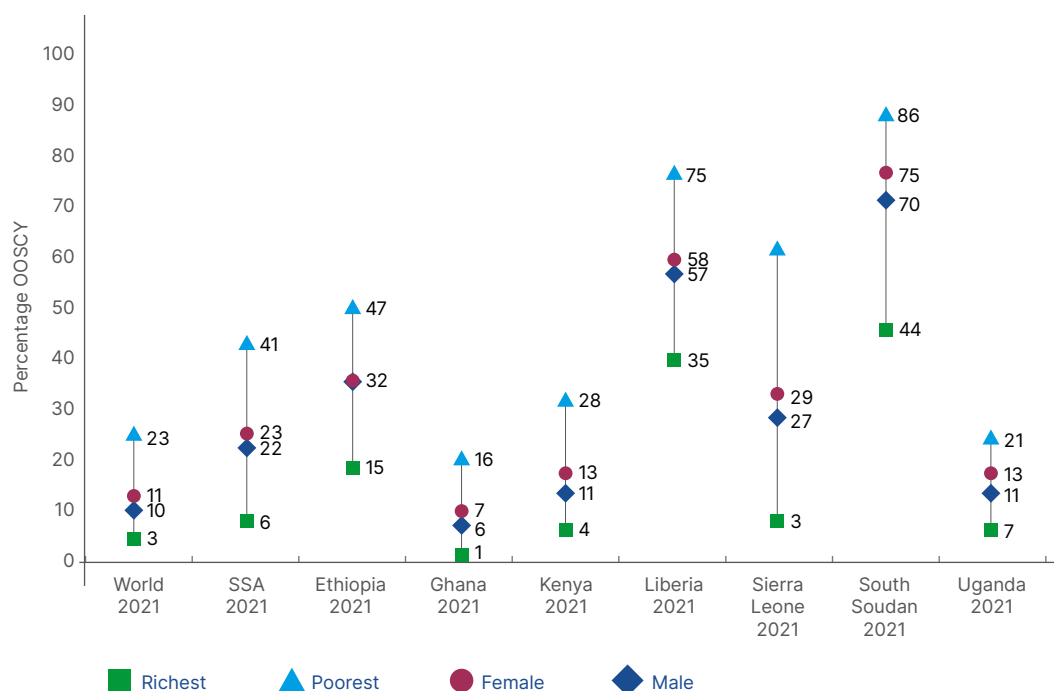
at upper secondary (see Annex 1). While girls are less likely than boys to enrol in school, concern has been raised recently about stagnating and even increasing numbers of out-of-school boys, due to higher dropout rates (UNESCO, 2022). At the primary level in these eight countries, there are no substantial differences in OOSCY rates by sex.

There are, however, striking differences in OOSCY rates between children in the wealthiest and poorest households (see Figure 2)³. In Ethiopia, while there is no meaningful gender difference, primary school age children from households in the poorest quintile were more than three times as likely to be out of school than their peers in the wealthiest quintile (47% versus 15%). In Nigeria, while the gender gap was only two percentage points, the wealth gap was monumental, with only 3% of primary school age children in the wealthiest households out of school, compared with 64% of those in the poorest households. Across the focus countries, at the primary level, children in the poorest quintile were at least twice as likely as those in the wealthiest quintile to be out of school. Beyond an analysis of OOSCY statistics in the countries, a deep dive analysis for these eight countries included an analysis of AEP documents and a policy review. In a few cases, key informant interviews were conducted.

2 All estimates are from household surveys, not administrative sources. World, SSA, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone estimates from: UNICEF dashboard; data from latest Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS): <https://data.unicef.org/resources/dataset/education-data/> Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Uganda estimates from: WIDE database; see https://www.education-inequalities.org/indicators/eduout_prim#ageGroup=%22eduout_prim%22

3 Household survey data can be disaggregated by characteristics that most administrative data cannot be, including household wealth. Note that generally some categories of disadvantage have insufficient sample sizes to allow for disaggregation.

Figure 2. Wealth Disparities Exceed Gender Inequalities for Primary School Age OOSCY



Insights

The high volume and broad range of evidence gathered through this effort provided a basis for interrogating programme features and outcomes, as well as for understanding any enabling or inhibiting national policies or guidelines. Furthermore, countries' journeys to mature AEPs and policies are highly instructive, offering lessons that may be useful in other contexts. The analysis of evidence, especially from the eight focus countries, reveals in quite practical terms the importance of government policy and support mechanisms to support the learning needs of OOSCY, such as through AEPs.

Insight 1: Effective accelerated education programmes share key features across design and implementation. These features can be supported meaningfully by government engagement, including through national policy actions.

Supporting Information:

This insight is anchored in programme analysis. In considering AEPs as a strategy for addressing OOSCY, it is critical that decision-makers, and not only programme implementers, are aware of what makes AEPs most likely to be effective. This understanding is also valuable if a decision-maker is aiming to improve existing AEPs or to

introduce regulations or coordinating mechanisms. Given sufficient intensity and duration, AEPs can target a range of outcomes. Lower primary level AEPs focus on literacy and numeracy and may target social and emotional learning (SEL), wellbeing, and/or life skills. They aim to provide critical reading and mathematical skills sufficient for learners to transition into the formal system upon completion and provide certification of learning competencies. There is substantial evidence that AEPs produce robust learning outcomes in reading and mathematics, based on pre-test and post-test data, and they do so at levels comparable with formal education students (IRC & UKAID, 2019, p. 24; Shah & Choo, 2020). It is important to note, however, that AEP and formal school learners differ in age and background characteristics, and programmes may not be comparable in curricula and learning objectives.

The key characteristics of effective AEPs that support OOSCY enrolment, retention, completion, and learning outcomes are captured in Figure 3 and are described in more detail below. The distillation of these nine key features draws on the AEWG's 10 Principles for Effective Practice (AEWG, 2017a), but reconfigures them for decision-makers considering policy actions rather than programme design and programme implementation. See Annex 3 for a mapping of the following features across the AEWG Principles.

Figure 3. Features of Effective AEPs are an Important Basis for Policy Actions



1. AEP Goal

Programme goals focus on achieving fundamental competencies in an accelerated timeframe and on accessing future pathways of formal schooling, further training, or employment for OOSCY. The goal of AEPs is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match learners’ level of cognitive maturity.

2. Equity & Inclusion

This involves the deliberate choice of strategies to remove barriers to enrolment and completion, which may be different across marginalised groups. It involves a recognition and commitment to girls, refugees, those with special needs or learning differences, etc. This commitment is evidenced by the existence of strategies, the allocation of financial, human, and physical resources, and the monitoring of access, retention, learning outcomes, and transitions to track progress in meeting commitments.

To enhance inclusion, effective AEPs incorporate families and communities throughout to ensure the AEP is a workable learning option for OOSCY in the community. Communities can identify barriers to education enrolment and persistence, support learner safety on the way to/from and at the centres, and provide oversight for teacher and learner attendance, learning outcomes, and other outcomes such as transitions to other learning opportunities. An example of this is NRC’s AEP in Uganda. Additionally, teachers often come from the communities and being from the same cultural and linguistic background as the learners encourages enrolment and bolsters community involvement and ownership. This is the case in the Ghana’s School for Life. The language of instruction is a key part of making education accessible. The AEWG recommends that AEP teachers teach in the mother tongue or home language of learners to help learners gain durable literacy and master content more easily. This is consistent with overwhelming evidence that learning to read first in the mother tongue improves students’ literacy in other languages later (Carter et al., 2020).

3. Curriculum & Calendar

AEPs use a condensed curriculum – aligned with the national curriculum – focused on foundational skills in key subjects, notably literacy and numeracy, and, increasingly, SEL, such as the RET programme in Kenya. AEPs provide essential content, as agreed by curriculum experts, and minimise repetition. This approach allows learners with sufficient cognitive maturity (age 10–18) to master foundational skills on a compressed schedule. Depending on the number of subjects, the curriculum, and the instructional time (number of hours per day/week), AEPs can cover between 1.25 and three years of schooling in one year (Myers et al., 2017). Across the eight focus countries, AEPs most often cover the equivalent of two grades in one year.

Community consultation helps ensure schedules are responsive to local conditions. Aligning the AEP instructional calendar to the formal school calendar allows efficient access to pathways after certification. Learners wanting to transition to the formal system can join the next appropriate class without a long lag after completing the AEP programme.

4. Assessment & Certification

Learner assessment approaches promote flexibility of progression. Programme completion is marked by certification sanctioned by the national Ministry of Education (MoE), and enables the transition to formal school, additional

training, or employment. In countries in which AEP students sit for national examinations, AEP calendars and national examination dates should match up. This is the case with AEPs in Sierra Leone, which use exams administered by the school, with AEP students sitting for the NPSE exam at the end of primary school (Boisvert, 2017b).

5. M&E & EMIS

Programme data is collected and integrated systematically into the MoE's Education Management Information System (EMIS). Programme effectiveness is regularly monitored. The data is used to assess and improve the programme, and ultimately the pertinent policies. The measurement indicators of AEPs may be largely independent of government systems, partially integrated, or fully integrated into EMIS for either formal or non-formal education systems. Generally, the degree of integration is consistent with the level of AEP integration with the system, with programmes overseen or managed by government being far more likely to capture data within government information systems.

6. Teacher Sourcing & Development

Recruitment of teachers from the local community carries benefits, including closer family and community engagement. Ongoing teacher support is a central tenet of effective AEPs, whether teachers are community volunteers with little or no teaching experience, or certified formal school teachers who also serve as AEP learning facilitators. Teacher/facilitator training is not a one-time thing, or even just an annual event, especially where teachers are being introduced to a new way of teaching or to new, condensed curriculum. Specialised AEP orientation and ongoing training, mentorship, and professional development help teachers understand the student-centred pedagogy and its application in the classroom, address real-world examples, and problem solve with an experienced coach or mentor. This is practiced in "Speed" and "Second Chance" schools across many countries. Without regular training and support, teachers may revert to "chalk and talk" or other traditional teaching practices. Ongoing training and support may be delivered weekly or monthly during meetings with supervisors and may involve classroom observation. Alternatively, it may be conducted through teacher working groups or teacher circles, where teachers can work together and share their challenges or ideas with their peers. This is the case in Nigeria's Teaching Learning Circles. Supportive training can help increase teacher commitment by providing space for teachers to feel heard and understood and to increase investment in the AEP shared enterprise.

7. Pedagogy

Effective AEPs employ learner-friendly pedagogical approaches to make classrooms welcoming, encourage enrolment and attendance, and improve learning. Effective pedagogy teaches at the right level, with recognition that many AEP students are over-age. These techniques support the development of social and emotional skills, as they encourage learners to take responsibility for, and become more invested in, their own learning. They help build self-confidence in the classroom and beyond. Many AEPs include SEL and soft skills explicitly in their programmes, whether integrated into academic lessons or as separate subjects. Less commonly, AEPs target teacher wellbeing as well, primarily in conflict or post-conflict settings, as in Liberia's Second Chance schools.

In part to increase effectiveness, generally, AEPs have class sizes of no more than 40 learners. In the AEPs from the eight focus countries, class sizes range from 25 (Speed School Ethiopia, Second Chance Liberia, and School for Life Ghana) to 40 (IRC AEP Nigeria) and 50 (ALP South Sudan).

8. Teacher Compensation

Pay rates vary by funding source and local or national regulations. Timely and fair compensation reduces teacher turnover. It is critical to promote recruitment and retention of teachers and to reach a feasible and reasonably fair compensation approach. Finally, compensating teachers appropriately and in a timely fashion contributes to teacher retention and quality.

9. Funding & Budgeting

Although many AEPs are funded by outside donors, even after many years of operation, there is a critical government role in ensuring program quality and that ongoing funding is in line with country priorities and plans. Inclusion of AEPs in the national budget, even if the source is non-governmental, will advance the sustainability of programmes.

Recommendations:

While AEPs vary in design and purpose, they share key characteristics that support OOSCY enrolment, retention, completion, and learning outcomes. The nine key features detailed within Insight 1 are essential to AEP success, but also form the basis for policy actions. Subsequent Insights will help guide the translation of these features into policy decisions and guidance. Two transversal issues bear repeating: Communities' direct engagement facilitates several effective features, as does a laser focus on the goal of serving the learning needs of OOSCY who are among the most marginalised children and youth.

Insight 2: AEPs have emerged as an alternative route to access education and learning for OOSCY learners who have not been reached effectively by the formal system. New or revised government AEP policies can improve OOSCY access and learning, especially among the most marginalised.

Supporting Information:

OOSCY are marginalised, as they are unserved or underserved by the formal education system. They may have never attended school or attended and since left school. AEPs may target OOSCY who are: over-aged for their grade; out of school for at least two years; female; from poor families; living in hard-to-reach and/or rural areas; or forcibly displaced. While some AEPs target disabled and differently-abled OOSCY (AENN, 2020), most do not cater for learners with disabilities or those with learning differences. While AEPs target marginalised learners, it is often difficult to determine differential outcomes, apart from differences by sex, because AEPs often do not collect or use data for characteristics such as household socio-economic status and learner disability status (AENN, 2020).

Although AEPs have been used in various contexts to address the needs of OOSCY, often their importance and relevance is not fully captured in national education policies or inclusive education plans or strategies. In some instances, AEPs serve only a small fraction of the OOSCY population and an even smaller proportion of learners at the basic education level. Thus, it is not surprising that AEPs are not front and centre in policy and implementation documents. However, in other countries with larger AEP programmes, this paucity of references to AEPs in education policy documents may reflect a lack of appreciation of the role AEPs can play in reaching OOSCY and in meeting SDG 4 through alternative approaches. In some countries with more mature accelerated education programming, AEPs function as an integral part of the education system and are embedded in national education policy and strategy documents. South Sudan, with three AEPs, has a Directorate for Alternative Education Systems (AES) within the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology. It has a Policy for Alternative Education Systems (MoEST, 2014) that includes a robust section on AEPs, and the role of AES in increasing primary school completion is addressed in the General Education Strategic Plan 2017–2022 (MoGEI, 2017). The South Sudan National Inclusive Education Policy (2014) applies at all levels and in all types of education, including alternative education.

In other countries where AEPs are less fully integrated into national systems, but where they play a growing role, such as in Ghana and Ethiopia, policies and strategies reference accelerated education, albeit briefly. Ghana's Education Strategic Plan 2018–2030 makes one mention of Complementary Basic Education (CBE), an AEP, as one means to “increase provision of CBE as an interim measure to deliver education to hard-to-reach children” (MoE Ghana, 2017, p. 26). Similarly, Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Plan 2020/21–2024/25 makes one reference to the plan to expand the role of AEPs: “Adopt and introduce the Speed School accelerated learning classrooms, instructional methods and holistic teacher training model to cater for out-of-school primary school-age children...” (Federal MoE Ethiopia, 2021, p. 89).

Elsewhere, among countries with inclusive education policies, some do not mention AEPs at all. Other countries, such as Sierra Leone, mention AEPs, but do not delve into the different role accelerated education plays compared with other education options — for instance, the extent to which AEPs are expected to serve the hardest-to-reach learners, including those with a range of disabilities affecting learning. Sierra Leone's Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (MoBSSE, 2021) includes one mention of accelerated education in the context of catering for the needs of the poor in rural and underserved areas by “promot[ing] flexible learning pathways in both formal and non-formal settings including learning materials that support accelerated or remedial learning for students” (p. 45). Apart from these mentions of alternative and accelerated education pathways, there is no elaboration on the role of AEPs in addressing inclusion.

Recommendations:

Policies provide a framework in which a range of strategies, including AEPs, can be proposed to serve the most marginalised. An analysis of current policies affecting OOSCY may be needed. Addressing the learning needs of OOSCY should be included in equity and inclusion policies and plans. Beyond policy documents, a commitment to equity and inclusion is evidenced by translation into strategies and plans, dedication of human and other resources, and in monitoring access, retention, learning outcomes, and learner transition to determine progress toward commitments. An analysis of OOSCY, with access and outcomes data disaggregated by categories of exclusion (sex, age, wealth, disability, displacement status, etc.) will inform policies, strategies, and plans. As AEPs gain traction in a country and are internalised as part of the formal/non-formal education system, the more pressing it is for policy, strategy, and implementation plans to specify the role and function of AEPs, and for programme monitoring and evaluation.

Insight 3: Amidst growing calls for the alignment of accelerated education with national education systems, it is important to recognise that alignment is not a one-size-fits-all solution but takes many forms in different contexts. A one-size-fits-all-approach could leave out more children and youth unintentionally.

Supporting Information:

Historically, many AEPs have existed separately from government systems and, thus, have had varying levels of success in integrating students in formal school or producing sustainable access to education. AEWG Accelerated Education Principle 10 advises that AEPs should be “aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture” (Myers et al., 2017, p. 66). Such alignment with national MoEs is recommended to ensure successful student transition from AEPs to formal schools, help improve quality and effectiveness, scale AEPs to reach more children, and increase the long-term sustainability of AEPs. Within MoEs, AEPs often fall under non-formal education (NFE) or alternative education and have varying levels of government recognition or oversight. The level of MoE involvement in AEPs and AEP alignment with national policies and practices varies by programme and country, depending on country need and readiness for alignment.

What Do We Mean by Alignment and Why Is It important?

AEP alignment with government refers to the ways AEPs operate within a policy framework, which supports effective AEP operations and outcomes and, in turn, supports larger national priorities. Alignment is not a destination but exists along a continuum, as Figure 4 indicates.

Neither extreme is necessarily desirable, nor are these poles reflected in practice. If there is no interface between

AEPs and government, it is difficult for students to get certification or transition into formal schools, further training, or employment, which further marginalises OOSCY. On the other hand, if the government fully integrates AEPs, AEP effectiveness may be diminished. AEPs have thrived as targeted, nimble services tailored to OOSCY needs in each community, focused on essential content, using learner-centred approaches in small classes, offered on schedules and timetables that meet learners’ needs, and taught by community-based facilitators who speak the local language. If AEPs become part of “the system”, and many key characteristics change, AEPs may be less appealing to OOSCY, affecting enrolment and persistence, and teaching and learning may be less effective, imperilling results, completion, and transition. AEPs are not a replacement for formal schools, nor do they target the same population. Government support or alignment should not take away from what sets AEPs apart and what makes them effective.

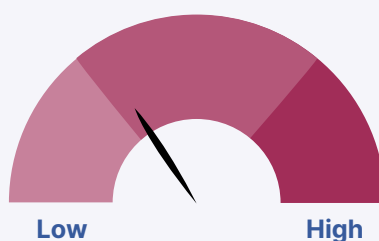
To better understand low, medium, and high positions on the alignment continuum, the analysis identified what alignment looks like in various contexts and how each level of alignment can help support and strengthen AEPs. Countries tend to show patterns of alignment. These patterns may serve as useful considerations for others, as Table 1 indicates.

Recommendations:

Just as this evidence synthesis does not recommend AEPs, it also does not recommend a particular position on the alignment continuum. Rather, aligning certain elements of AEPs with national education systems clarifies the role of AEPs within the system and establishes a framework and structure for AEPs. Attempts to strengthen alignment should be considered and planned carefully to avoid any unintended negative consequences for OOSCY participation, persistence, and learning. Key considerations are described in Insight 4 below.

Figure 4. Government Engagement in AEPs Varies From Low to High

At the lowest extreme, AEPs operate with no interface with government policy, without any policy guidance or oversight, and without feeding into national goals.



At the highest extreme is the full integration of AEPs into the education system, with AEPs structured and directly implemented by government on a national scale.

Table 1. Nine Dimensions of AEP Alignment Can Guide Government Actions

LOW ALIGNMENT	MEDIUM ALIGNMENT	HIGH ALIGNMENT
1. AEP GOALS		
<p>Each AEP determines goals; no consistency across AEPs or with national education system. No reference to AEPs as OOSCY strategy in national education sector plan or strategy.</p>	<p>AEPs recognised as alternative education strategy for OOSCY, but no recognition of pathways to formal education, further training, or employment. No government direction around targeting specific groups for enrolment.</p>	<p>Goals of AEPs broadly standardised to be consistent with national priorities for OOSCY. Specific groups identified for targeting through AEPs. Pathways recognised and linkage of NFE to formal education made.</p>
2. EQUITY & INCLUSION		
<p>No equity and inclusion strategy and low awareness of existing AEPs and their focus.</p>	<p>Beginning to recognise need for inclusion policy and development of AEP policies, guidelines, or standards. Policies may recognise right to education for the hardest to reach, but not translated into government education programmes.</p>	<p>Ministry recognises AEPs as part of overall government strategy to reach marginalised groups. Government proactively supports AEPs. Government supports specific efforts to address and remove barriers, for example: pregnancy, transport, financial hardship, lack of school materials.</p>
3. CURRICULUM & CALENDAR		
<p>Determined by programme, pace may be set by donors. Might not use government learning indicators to help identify level.</p>	<p>Government calendar and learning indicators are used as reference, but pace is often determined by organisation, infrequently in consultation with government. Strong focus on literacy and numeracy, may include social and emotional learning.</p>	<p>AEP curriculum is consistent with national basic education curriculum, government priorities, and linked with formal system. Strong focus on literacy and numeracy with socio-emotional learning are common. Degree of acceleration and pace agreed with ministry. Close links established to national learning indicators for each grade.</p>
4. ASSESSMENT & CERTIFICATION		
<p>Determined by programme; not linked to country assessment systems, benchmarking standards, or grade-level equivalencies. No learner certification by government. Promotion not linked to government standards. Perhaps no monitoring of achievement of AEP.</p>	<p>Some congruence with national assessment tools, processes, and standards, perhaps not formalised. Certification not seamless. Programme-driven reporting over life of AEP cycle not fully consistent with ministry's approach/standards.</p>	<p>Approaches are consistent with ministry's standards and benchmarks. Summative and formative assessments conducted. Certification and promotion requirements are formalised to allow for completion certificates and transition to formal system or other post-completion education options.</p>
5. MONITORING, EVALUATION & DATA COLLECTION (M&E & EMIS)		
<p>M&E determined by programme and/or donors, tied to donor reporting needs and indicators, not linked to Education Management Information System (EMIS). Key data often missing. Little or no consultation with ministry or EMIS staff.</p>	<p>Consultation between AEP programmes/donors/ implementers and MoE EMIS staff and structures, but no architecture for capturing AEP data in MoE systems. Data maintained in separate programme databases; little consultation on evaluation and learning agenda.</p>	<p>M&E design, priorities, and results feed into EMIS, other government systems, and OOSCY monitoring. Data on standard indicators such as enrolment, dropout, learning outcomes, are measured using EMIS definitions. Strong collaboration with government on learning agenda. Reflected in sector plans and reviews with AEP milestones part of overall national education plans.</p>
6. TEACHER SOURCING & DEVELOPMENT		
<p>Teachers are volunteers from the community, with little to no prior experience, trained by AEP programme.</p>	<p>Teachers may be nationally certified teachers or community members from the targeted community. Training content and schedule has some involvement or input from MoE, but no direct policy or oversight.</p>	<p>Teachers may be partly paid by government. Efforts to define path to teacher certification under consideration. Ministry has guidelines for training facilitators or teachers, which may differ from formal schools.</p>
7. PEDAGOGY		
<p>Home language. Learner-centred pedagogy and active learning techniques.</p>	<p>Home language. Learner-centred pedagogy and active learning techniques follow recommendations of the Accelerated Education Working Group.</p>	<p>Instruction is in home language with plan to transition to national language to allow transition back to formal system. Lessons from learner-centred pedagogy and active learning techniques in small classes feed into formal system.</p>
8. TEACHER COMPENSATION		
<p>Teachers are paid by the implementing or funding organisation based on implementer or donor guidelines.</p>	<p>Teachers may be at least partly paid by government. Efforts to define path to becoming certified are established or under consideration.</p>	<p>Teachers may be at least partly paid by government. Efforts to define path to becoming certified are established or under consideration.</p>
9. FUNDING & BUDGETING		
<p>Funded by donors and implementing organisations without ongoing commitment.</p>	<p>Government commits to ongoing direct or in-kind funding. Supplemental private funding may be provided on a programme basis.</p>	<p>Clear plans for project continuation exist, along with donor commitment or government assumption of costs, and roles of implementing partners.</p>

Insight 4: Learning from country experiences points to a tactical, staged path to strengthening AEP alignment with national systems based on starting points of need and readiness.

Supporting Information:

Amid calls for greater alignment, countries must assess where they are regarding AEPs, and their readiness and need for AEP alignment. Rather than aligning everything all at once, prioritising alignment options along a staged path can support greater AEP effectiveness. The prioritisation of alignment options in Insight 5 supports countries introducing changes in phases based on need and readiness. In pursuing alignment, countries would do well to attend to the INEE Minimum Standards (2010) for use in conflict-affected environments given the sensitivity surrounding curriculum, finance, and compensation, among other issues.

Assessing Need and Readiness for Alignment

The need for AEP alignment may be most pressing where there are multiple AEP programmes operated by various implementing partners or donors, with little unifying guidance or policies to standardise or align programmes. When there are multiple AEPs operating in different locales, with different goals, and varying levels of alignment, it can be difficult to ensure learning outcomes or programme goals of transition into the formal system are met and sustained.

The need for AEP alignment can be evidenced in circumstances where AEP programmes have been operating over the long term in a certain context, have proven to be effective, and now are interested in scaling the programme to reach more OOSCY. This was the case with accelerated education and, specifically, the Speed

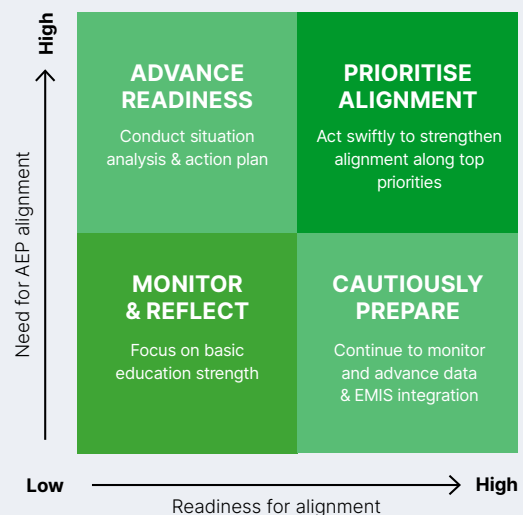
School programme in Ethiopia. In 2021, the MoE created a Speed School Unit to help scale the programme to reach more of the two million out-of-school children in Ethiopia (Muskin, 2021).

Readiness for alignment considers the capacity within a national MoE or within a programme to align, as well as the political, social, and economic context that makes action on alignment feasible or even desirable. This capacity can come when there is recognition of the value and relevance of AEPs in reaching many of the most vulnerable populations. Alternatively, it may be when national systems determine how to include AEPs as part of their national policy response to OOSCY. For example, the South Sudan MoE was ready to align with AEPs as part of the national system because AEPs had long been used in the country to help address OOSCY. It made sense to incorporate AEPs within national policies as the nation was organising after independence in 2011 (Nicholson, 2018).

Figure 5 proposes an **AEP Alignment Action Matrix** for assessing both need and readiness for AEP alignment, indicating how quickly national systems should move ahead. A country with high need and high readiness, in terms of capacity and contextual factors, can move right away to “Prioritise Alignment”. If need and readiness are low, a country would be advised to “Monitor and Reflect” until either need or readiness changes. The other two cells suggest countries either “Advance Readiness” for change to meet high need or use their high readiness to “Cautiously Prepare” as need increases.

To determine where a country sits in this schematic, it may be helpful to form a task force to investigate the country AEP experience to date, including the effectiveness of AEPs, the number and distribution of OOSCY, possible role of AEPs, the policy frameworks needed, and so on. That review and planning process may move a country to another degree of need and/or readiness or lead to the conclusion that AEP alignment is not a priority at this time.

Figure 5. Actions for Strengthening National Sector Alignment with AEPs Can Be Tailored to a Country's Need and Readiness.



Staging an Alignment Pathway

While achieving stronger alignment of AEPs with national education objectives can seem like a significant challenge, evidence shows that countries with demonstrable progress in accelerated education have taken a staged approach based on tactical prioritisation. For example, Ethiopia and South Sudan increased the alignment of AEPs with government over two decades, as Figure 6 illustrates.

When Ethiopia's Speed School programme was introduced, clear links to the public education system were made, using national curriculum and textbooks, school facilities, and district examinations. After six years, several regional governments began providing funding, and teacher education colleges collaborated with implementing partners to train facilitators. The formal integration of the programme in the sector plan and the MoE's institutional structure occurred more recently.

In South Sudan, alternative education was a deliberate response to the needs of demobilised soldiers and out-of-school children. Following independence, the government moved quickly in 2012 to recognise alternative education in its first Education Act. Practical guidance, policy and plans then followed. Recently, South Sudan started offering accelerated education at the secondary level.

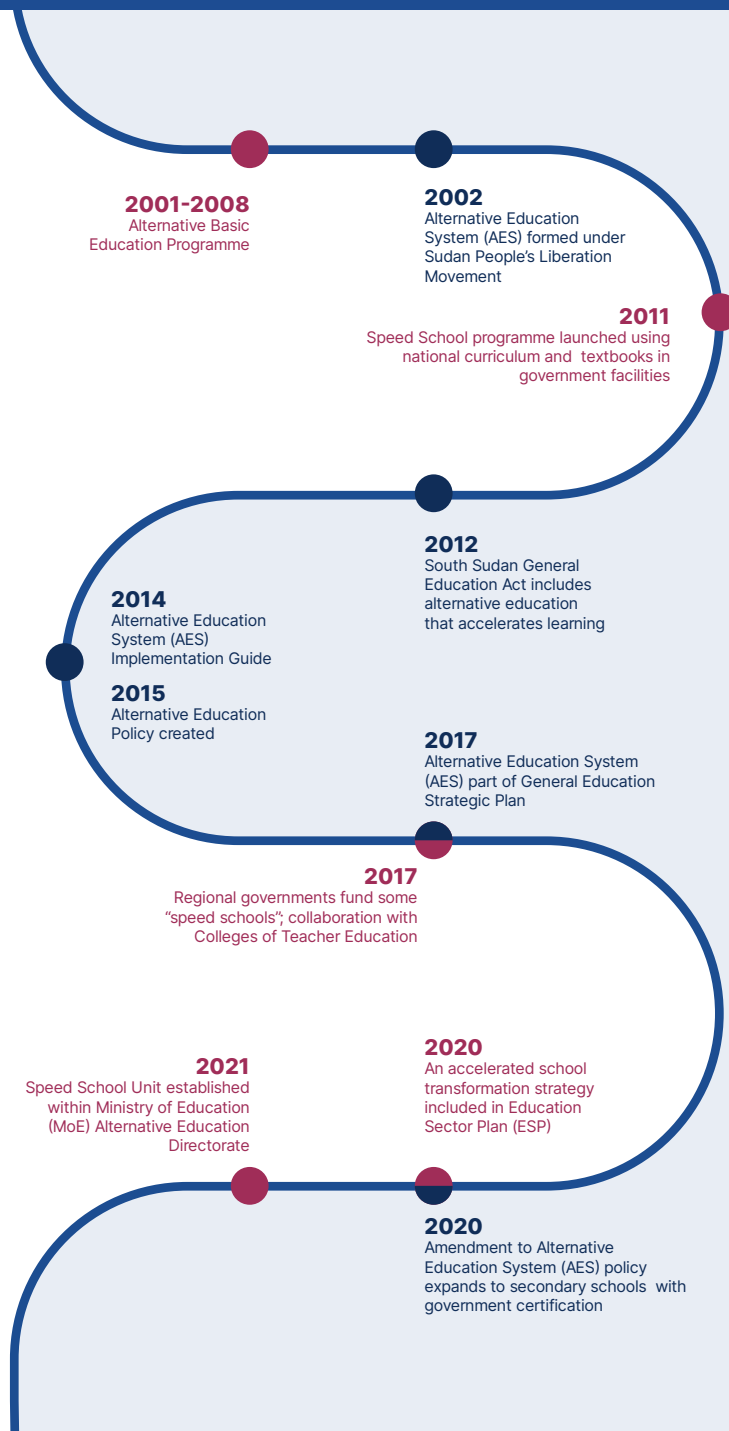
Recommendations:

Countries are advised to assess their need and readiness for alignment using the AEP Alignment Action Matrix. A task force may help prepare for this exercise by conducting a policy review related to OOSCY and collecting information on OOSCY and the state of AEPs in the country. Governments can take comfort in knowing that countries with demonstrable progress took a staged approach based on tactical prioritisation.

Figure 6. National Context Drives Government Staging of AEP Alignment: Examples from Ethiopia and South Sudan

Ethiopia

South Sudan



Insight 5: Countries with effective AEPs prioritise alignment with goals, equity and inclusion, curriculum, assessment, and certification, with other dimensions being defined by programme implementers.

Figure 7. Country Experiences Spotlight Priority Alignment Options



Supporting Information:

Tactically Prioritise Specific Components of Alignment

Figure 7 maps three levels of priority for alignment. Experiences suggest that policies supporting AEP alignment in AEP goals, equity and inclusion, curriculum and calendar, and assessment and certification can be more effective than full integration and are critical for helping students transition to formal schools or other pathways. These areas are listed as top priorities. Alignment policies in M&E and EMIS, teacher sourcing and development, and pedagogy are the next priority. A third set of options, while also important, is related less directly to transition outcomes and can be more difficult to achieve. Consequently, they are seen as lower priority options to be pursued as opportunities arise to align teacher compensation and funding and budgeting, as countries work toward longer-term sustainability in which AEPs are not guided solely by donor or external funding cycles.

Priorities: Focus on Goals and Outcomes

AEP Goals

When considering alignment, it is important first to consider AEP goals (see area 1 in Table 2). A common goal of AEPs is to help learners gain the necessary skills and education credentials to transition into formal schools, employment, tertiary education, or vocational training. However, many AEP policies and programmes stop short of clearly outlining a path for transitions, perhaps because these transitions require policies, or at least agreed practices, involving government on what is required for transition, alongside specified roles and relationships. A common hallmark of effective policies is the inclusion of transition support and tracking within AEP-related policies and in basic education policies to help accommodate AEP completers.

Equity & Inclusion

Another high priority policy area is including AEPs in a country's equity and inclusion policies (see area 2 in Table 2 and Insight 2 for fuller discussion). Government specification of the role of accelerated and alternative education programmes in its overall education strategy, and in its policies for inclusion and addressing equity for OOSCY, can be part of the country commitment to SDG 4 and to serving the most marginalised groups. Implementation plans based on these policies then codify country commitment to plans and set milestones for progress.

Curriculum & Calendar

Often, the national curriculum, both formal and non-formal, is used as a reference point for AEPs because it helps provide continuity from AEP programmes to formal school. According to Nwokeocha (2021), AEP curricula should be aligned with national education standards and lead to qualifications.

Responsibility for accelerating the curriculum may rest with the national MoE, the AEP programme, or both in partnership. A number of good practices exist. For example, the RET AEP in Kenya and Ethiopia's Speed School programme break the curriculum down into a clear schedule that helps teachers know what to focus on day to day and for how long (Boisvert, 2017a, p. 13; Akyeamong et al., 2016). The Speed School programme also uses national textbooks and minimum learning competencies to help prioritise the curriculum and determine learning outcomes (The Lumino Fund, 2017).

In aligning curriculum, countries may want to consider the overall instructional time by grade or level to determine both the extent to which the curriculum is condensed and any requirements for certification. An examination of AEPs in several countries, all covering part or all of lower

primary level, found considerable variation in instructional time per week and total instructional time per grade. The programmes required about three months to cover each grade, but required between nine and 40 hours per week of class time, and a total of between 108 (Nigeria) and 533 (Ethiopia) hours of class time for completion of a grade. Some countries set minimum thresholds for exposure, consistent with policies in the formal education sector. Other countries rely instead on assessments of content mastery rather than specifying minimum contact hours. Linkage to the calendar is another priority – aligning the formal school and AEP calendars to ensure that learners are able to certify programme completion and transition into formal schooling or other learning options at the start of the next school year.

Assessment & Certification

Alignment on AEP student assessment and certification is essential to ensure students have the correct credentials for future opportunities, be it transition into the formal system, further training, or employment. Usually, these assessments and certifications measure learning outcomes in reading and/or mathematics, and take many different forms depending on the programme and context, including national examinations, EGRA/EGMA, programme-specific assessments, or teacher or student self-reports (Shah & Choo, 2020). AEPs also measure non-cognitive learning outcomes, including SEL and wellbeing, educational aspirations, confidence and female empowerment, employability, and work readiness (Shah & Choo, 2020).

The outcomes measured are linked to the grades covered and populations targeted by each programme. For example, the Speed School programme in Ethiopia uses a placement examination to place graduates of the programme into the appropriate grade in the national school system (Akyeampong et al., 2016). For the RET AEP programme in Kenya, the goal was to have students complete secondary school certification (KCSE) so they can then go onto higher education or work (Boisvert, 2017a). This programme aligned very closely with the national NFE curriculum. As discussed above, aligning on assessments and certifications also may mean aligning the academic calendars, so that national exam dates match up with when students finish AEPs.

Next Priorities: Focus on Effectiveness and Quality

M&E & EMIS

The measurement indicators of AEPs may range from largely independent of government systems to fully integrated into EMIS for either formal or non-formal education systems. Data integration depends on the data

the government collects on NFE programmes overall, and the degree of overlap with the formal system.

There is considerable variation in the data AEPs collect. Our updated analysis confirmed the AEWG Evidence Review (Shah & Choo, 2020) finding that all 26 of the AEPs it examined kept close track of enrolment numbers and many estimated dropout and survival rates for the non-formal level attended. Only one AEP, ECHO INCLUDE in Uganda, estimated advancement rates from one level to another as a percentage of the original cohort group (ECHO et al., 2018).

The AEWG Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit (AEWG, 2020) is a guide for AEPs to plan for and implement a practical M&E plan. The toolkit includes suggestions for developing a theory of change, appropriate indicators (many consistent with various donor standard indicators and priorities), a logical framework, and an M&E plan. The AEWG toolkit underscores the need to develop the M&E plan collaboratively with stakeholders (including policymakers, donors, communities, and others) for the given programme and context, and revising it as needed over time to ensure that learning and results are captured.

Teacher Sourcing & Professional Development

AEP teachers and facilitators are often recruited from the community. Recruiting volunteer teachers from the community (whether qualified as teachers or not) can help provide contextual understanding that teachers from outside the community may not have and promote community investment in the programme. Based on the availability of trained teachers, teachers may be required to have full teaching certification (Boisvert, 2017a; School for Life (SfL), 2020) or they may be required only to have completed primary or secondary school (Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Pryor, 2020; University of Sussex, 2015).

Given that many AEP teachers (also called facilitators) are not formally trained, or nationally certified, ongoing training and professional development is crucial for AEP effectiveness and quality. Teacher professional development is usually a policy question and requires coordination with the MoE. For example, with Ghana School for Life, there was an agreement between the MoE and the programme to allow unqualified teachers to enrol in a distance learning programme to achieve certification (Hartwell, 2006). Additionally, Uganda and Ethiopia have both been working with teacher education colleges to help introduce Speed School methods in teacher pre-service training (personal communication with Joshua Muskin).

⁴ Ethiopia Speed Schools cover a grade in an average of 533 contact hours (University of Sussex, 2015); Liberia Second Chance covers a grade in 480 contact hours (Westbrook & Higgins, 2019); Ghana School for Life in 180 contact hours (Hartwell, 2006); and IRC ALP (and other similar lower primary equivalent programmes in Nigeria) cover a grade in 108 hours (IRC & UKAID, 2019).

Pedagogy

As discussed within Insight 1, the main AEP pedagogical approaches require smaller class sizes and use student-centred pedagogy and active learning. Local languages are used to increase accessibility and comprehension (Myers et al., 2017). These classroom practices and pedagogies promote enrolment and retention, give students more power and control over their learning, and can boost students' confidence in their ability to learn.

Ultimately, the success of the pedagogy depends largely on whether teachers understand and apply it. This is linked inextricably to ongoing teacher training and professional development to help teachers understand how to translate student-centred pedagogy and active learning into the classroom and with students. Without ongoing support, teachers have been known to revert to more familiar and traditional lecture-based teaching practices (Myers et al., 2017).

As Opportunity Arises: Focus on Teacher Compensation and Funding

Teacher compensation

Across AEP programmes, low salaries or erratic payments were cited as top reasons for high teacher turnover, along with poor teaching conditions. There is a range of options for teacher compensation depending on the funding source and teacher pay rates based on qualifications, as negotiated with the MoE and other actors. In the AEPs we examined most closely, AEP teachers were paid less than government teacher salaries and, in some cases, substantially less (Boisvert, 2017b). Additionally, in contexts where AEP teachers are refugees, teachers may only be eligible to receive incentivised pay, depending on refugee employment policies (Flemming, 2017).

Although AEP teachers may be paid less, they may be required to work longer hours or have a higher workload than national teachers. For example, Speed School facilitators all expressed dissatisfaction with their salary, particularly when they realised that, compared to government teachers, their workload was higher: putting in eight-hour days, five days a week for a lower salary (Akyeampong et al., 2016). In other instances, AEP teachers work far fewer hours per week than formal school teachers (IRC & UKAID, 2019). It is critical to promote recruitment and retention of teachers and to reach a feasible and reasonably fair compensation approach. Ensuring appropriate and timely compensation for AEP teachers can help retain teachers and improve quality and AEP sustainability.

Funding & Budgeting

At the start, most AEPs are funded by external donors on a pilot or project basis. All interventions, however, also involve costs to government, at the very least in terms of labour, opportunity costs, and in-kind contributions. Unfortunately, we confirm the finding of Shah & Choo (2020) that there is not much evidence on costing, funding, and budgeting, and what evidence there is suffers from incompleteness and inconsistency. The recent Ghana analysis is an exception (Associates for Change, 2021). Without well-specified and complete data on cost per learner per year, cost per completer, and cost to produce minimum learning outcomes, the overall costs of AEPs — and relative to formal school systems — will remain unclear.

Consistently, the sources we reviewed mentioned that more robust and reliable funding was needed to continue AEP programmes. According to the AEWG Guide to Accelerated Education Principles, "AEPs should be anchored in national budgets" (Myers et al., 2017, p. 50). However, research points to the need for a combination of government funds and international aid to help reach areas with children the formal system cannot reach (Lee & Ferrans, 2020).

Research on costs is part of the AEWG learning agenda (AEWG, 2017b) and, hopefully, more and better cost data will become routine for AEPs. It is notable that USAID is supporting an improved costing evidence base through its guidance to implementing partners for collecting and maintaining extensive information for both monetary and in-kind costs (Walls, 2021).

Recommendations:

Specific policy actions can be taken for each of the nine areas of alignment, starting with the top priority areas, as indicated in Table 2 below. Numerous country examples are provided which may serve as models or guides.

Table 2. Alignment Priorities and Country Examples Guide Policy Actions to Strengthen AEPs

TOP PRIORITY	<p>1. AEP GOALS Example: South Sudan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with programme implementers to agree on goals, including target groups and expected pathways post-completion. • Agree who holds AEPs accountable and where accountability is reflected in national policies. • Develop AEP framework and implementation guidelines.
	<p>2. EQUITY & INCLUSION Example: South Sudan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current policies affecting out of school children and youth (OOSCY). • Develop/refine equity and inclusion policies with a clear role for alternative education, including AEPs. • Ensure OOSCY policy is included in the education strategic plan, with milestones for progress and data disaggregated by categories of exclusion (gender, age, wealth, disability, etc.).
	<p>3. CURRICULUM & CALENDAR Examples: South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design clear national learning competencies for level/cycle for formal and non-formal education. • Work with AEP providers to align with national curriculum and learning competencies focusing on literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning. • Optimise alignment by ensuring the curriculum reflects AEP best practices in pedagogy and language of instruction. • Work with AEP providers to align the curriculum with attention to the national calendar, so that AEP students can sit for national examinations. The pace is typically two years covered in one year.
	<p>4. ASSESSMENT & CERTIFICATION Examples: Liberia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, South Sudan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form technical working group to review AEP assessment practices alongside national assessment system, standards, benchmarks, tools, etc. • Work with AEP providers to develop and implement a certification system for learners to gain qualifications and certifications. • Embed in formal and non-formal education policy and practice, including a concrete, functional path and responsibilities for implementation. • Develop guidance for learner transition from AEPs to other learning opportunities and employment.
NEXT PRIORITY	<p>5. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND DATA COLLECTION (M&E AND EMIS) Ex: South Sudan, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Uganda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene technical working group to familiarise both AEPs and EMIS with respective current measurement approaches. • Plan for alignment and data architecture to support the inclusion of AEP data in EMIS; implement plan. • Continue to work together to build and progress a learning agenda, including evaluation. • Ensure education sector analysis includes a situation assessment to identify OOSCY and AEP needs.
	<p>6. TEACHER SOURCING & DEVELOPMENT Examples: Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With AEP implementers and funders, determine minimum qualifications for AEP teachers, considering the needs and capacities in various contexts and especially when teachers are recruited from the community. • Develop guidelines for training and mentoring AEP teachers, considering adaptations needed for teachers in non-formal education. • Work with AEPs to develop pre-service and in-service training manual and programme for AEP teachers and facilitators. • Work with AEPs on parameters for teacher qualifications and teacher career development pathways, e.g., certification.
	<p>7. PEDAGOGY Examples: Nigeria, Liberia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align curriculum to AEP best practices in pedagogy: student-centred and active pedagogy taught in the home language, at least in the early stages. • Develop guidelines on student-to-teacher ratios. • Ensure teacher training policies encourage teachers to learn student-centred pedagogy.
AS OPPORTUNITY ARISES	<p>8. TEACHER COMPENSATION Examples: South Sudan, Sierra Leone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider guidelines on fair and adequate compensation for AEP teachers based on skill, workload, and context. • Consider paths toward the financial feasibility of government funding of AEP teachers.
	<p>9. FUNDING & BUDGETING Examples: Ethiopia, Sierra Leone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a technical working group to establish a process for funding AEPs for the life of a given project and beyond. Include in discussions local partners and all donors funding AEPs. • Consider a memorandum of understanding to specify roles and responsibilities. • Integrate the funding arrangement in national budgeting and planning exercises. • Ensure AEPs have an institutional home within government in formal or non-formal education departments.

Insight 6: AEPs are designed to offer accelerated education for OOSCY. However, the lessons hold implications for broader COVID-19-related learning recovery and support measures in the formal school system.

Supporting Information:

This evidence synthesis and resulting insights highlight features of AEPs that may be useful as countries struggle to recover or catch up from one or two years of learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These lessons come with the caution that learners in AEPs and formal schools differ in age and background characteristics, meaning a direct transfer of approaches may not be appropriate.

First, a national or local school system may be able to use an AEP's condensed curricular approach, keeping in mind the lessons of focusing on essential competencies within key subjects, matching instructional hours and pedagogy to developmental level, and eliminating repetition typically embedded in annual school calendars. Supporting student social and emotional wellbeing is critical for this condensed approach, including adapting teaching and learning materials and assessment tools as part of a catch-up strategy. Responsive pedagogy in AEPs includes recognising the maturity and knowledge level of the students. More attention to "Teaching at the Right Level" is applicable in both AEPs and formal schools (ZiziAfrique Foundation, 2022).

Second, depending on the context, the use of local teachers, including aides and those not certified, may advance a catch-up strategy, if carefully supported. Local teachers are familiar with community needs and share pandemic experiences. They speak the local language and may be more effective than externally sourced teachers.

Third, the experiences of some AEPs in very effectively training and coaching local teachers in learner-centred

pedagogy could be applied in the formal system. These initiatives help improve learning and support the development of social and emotional skills.

Fourth, the experiences of AEPs reinforce the lesson that the successful transformation of pedagogy depends largely on teachers' ability to understand and apply it. Teachers need continuous professional development and support if pedagogical change is to succeed.

Recommendations:

Because accelerated education, catch-up learning, and remedial programmes can vary widely across contexts, making uniform recommendations on the adaptability of these findings to the COVID-19 recovery is not feasible. However, many of the above findings can be adapted to different situations. Furthermore, it will be important to follow recent efforts to apply AEP approaches to the formal school system. Such cases include Uganda (Jolly, 2021) which is borrowing from AEPs to introduce a compressed curriculum to help lower primary learners (P1-3) and Senior 1 and Senior 5 cohorts catch-up. In India, the Language and Learning Foundation is offering bridging programmes using an accelerated curriculum which focuses on key skills, regularly tracks learning levels, and integrates SEL (Jhingran et al., 2022). These and many other initiatives not yet known deserve documenting and elevating for the education community.

Opportunities for Future Steps

The analysis identified a number of areas requiring greater attention, prioritising what education leaders need to move forward. Several of these are long-standing gaps, identified in earlier evidence reviews, but addressing them is critical to improving learning opportunities for OOSCY, per national and international commitments in SDG 4.

Opportunities to Meet Data Needs

There is considerable variation in the data that AEPs collect and report, making it difficult to compare across programmes and understand findings. Furthermore, a lack of clarity may impede government support.

1. AEPs track data on dropout, retention, enrolment, and transition rates differently, and the data are frequently not disaggregated by age, wealth, disability, and displacement status. Often, basic information on AEP design, including instructional time, is missing. All such data are key for monitoring inclusion policies as well as evaluating the effectiveness and impact for OOSCY. The application of a common template, as modelled and promoted in the AEWG Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit (2020), would greatly assist.
2. There is a need for more systematic and robust data to assess AEP effects on SEL. In the wake of the pandemic, this is particularly relevant for the formal school system as it tries to address the stress and trauma experienced by school personnel and learners.
3. As discussed earlier, costing data from AEPs are very limited and incomplete, yet cost is key for decision-makers and for assessing cost-effectiveness, such as in Ghana (Associates for Change, 2021).
4. Financing data are similarly scarce. Public and private funders are encouraged to be transparent on financing. This can feed into the development of a better funding model.

Applied Research Areas

This evidence synthesis identifies several areas of need for better evidence. The following are recommended as high priority:

1. Study how COVID-19 shifted AEP operations and with

what, if any, effect on outcomes. How did delivery methods change? Were ICT tools employed and in what kinds of contexts? Answers to these questions would provide decision-makers with further insights for the crisis readiness of AEPs and formal schools.

2. Conduct external efficiency and tracer studies to better understand transitions from AEPs to formal school, further training, and to work in formal and informal contexts. What mechanisms or supports prove instrumental in successful transitions?
3. Document the introduction of AEP features in the formal school system, generally, as part of a COVID-19 recovery plan. What is the experience with introducing a condensed curriculum and changing assessments to measure only key competencies for a given level? What is the experience with a shift toward learner-centred pedagogy or other AEP approaches?

Multiple exciting research projects are underway to address at least partially some of these gaps. In recent years, the AEWG Learning Agenda (2017b) has stimulated several of these studies, but it is also notable to see a wider range of organisations undertaking this work. This indicates expanding interest in understanding how to address the learning needs of OOSCY. Several ongoing research efforts have an explicit gender focus, and all are worth watching out for.

1. Project [ACCESS](#) political economy analyses and barriers to institutionalisation of AEPs in Nigeria, Uganda, Jordan, Colombia, and Pakistan.
2. Study of impact of AEPs on [adolescent trajectories in Northeast Nigeria](#).
3. [AEWG](#) BRICE education situation analysis from South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and Democratic Republic of Congo.
4. [UNICEF/AEWG](#) study of the state of accelerated education (and other alternative education pathways) post-COVID.
5. [EGER](#) with [Population Council Kenya](#) mapping of gender and education initiatives in Kenya, and reviews of policies on girls' education.
6. [Associates for Change](#) comparative study of the cost effectiveness of accelerated education and girls' programmes in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.
7. The [Back2School Project](#) generating evidence to support scaling up accelerated learning models to facilitate the reintegration of out-of-school rural girls in Tanzania, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

Conclusions

This evidence synthesis does not advocate for AEPs, but it rather serves to respond to increased demand for contextually relevant guidance on AEPs for decision-makers. Increased interest in AEPs reflects high OOSCY numbers, which may be further increasing due to the pandemic. As decision-makers choose whether to embark on AEPs, strengthen existing AEPs, or exercise greater oversight or coordination of AEPs, this evidence synthesis offers six major insights to guide policy actions and guidance as well as inform implementation.

First, any government or other stakeholder engagement with AEPs is advised to consider AEP features that contribute to access, retention, and learning. This understanding can help governments support these key features of effectiveness and avoid actions which might undermine the very elements that make AEPs effective. A key message is to always place learners' needs first in making policy choices.

Second, government policies and plans are important signals of commitment to expanding OOSCY access to learning opportunities, which is so key in meeting national SDG 4 pledges. Beyond these signals, policies provide a critical framework within which AEPs operate and contribute to national education goals. For governments, this may mean recognising that serving OOSCY learning needs is part of a country's educational equity and inclusion policy and strategies. Governments are urged to use country sector analyses to determine the niche and role of AEPs, and then ensure that these are integrated in the education sector plan, strategies, and operational plan.

The third through fifth insights relate to options for aligning AEPs with government policy and practices. Two key take-aways from the synthesis are that alignment can take many forms and it can be undertaken in stages. Particular attention should focus on a seamless transition to post-AEP education, training, or employment because transition pathways are top outcomes.

To assist countries in selecting options appropriate for their contexts, two forms of guidance are presented. The first involves assessing where a country is on the alignment continuum by assessing need and readiness and exploring policy options for low, medium, and high alignment. The second guidance prioritises nine areas of alignment to best support the greater effectiveness of AEPs. This prioritisation of areas of alignment and the specific actions and examples for each priority may be particularly helpful as countries introduce alignment mechanisms in stages.

The sixth insight indicates that several lessons can be learned from AEPs for the formal education system struggling to recover from learning lost during the pandemic. A condensed curriculum, accompanied by training and continuous professional development in learner-centred pedagogy, can lead to strong retention and learning. The use of local teachers, who share common culture and pandemic experiences, can be explored as well.

This synthesis provides several directions for filling knowledge gaps and improving data on AEPs. It is hoped that governments, implementing partners, donors, and researchers alike will help to advance this work.

Finally, reflecting on the process of developing this evidence synthesis, we see that more needs to be done to advance the democratisation of evidence. The inclusion of grey literature introduced voices not often heard from, especially regarding the hardest-to-reach children and youth, and it was critical to the insights that emerged from the analysis. However, it remains a difficult and time-intensive process to identify and source grey literature. Many reports are not freely available due to funder rules and a tight research funding environment disincentivising researchers from sharing their work. More effort is needed to help funders and researchers recognise that open access is necessary so that work of such high relevance to decision-makers can be elevated and amplified.

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Note : The full bibliography of sources and a list of contributors is published on [Education.org](https://www.education.org)

Annex 1. Out-of-school Rates for World, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Selected Countries, by Age Group for Level, Sex, and Wealth Quintile

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY AGE						
Region/Country	Out-of-school rate (%)					
	Total	Female	Male	GPIA	Poorest quintile	Richest quintile
World	11	11	10	1.10	23	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	22	23	22	1.05	41	6
Ethiopia (DHS 2016)	32	32	32	1.00	47	15
Ghana (MICS 2017-2018)	7	6	7	0.86	16	1
Kenya (DHS 2014)	12	11	13	0.85	28	4
Liberia (DHS 2013)	57	57	58	0.98	75	35
Nigeria (DHS 2018)	28	29	27	1.07	64	3
Sierra Leone (MICS 2017)	17	15	20	0.75	34	6
South Sudan (MICS 2010)	72	75	70	1.07	86	44
Uganda (DHS 2016)	13	13	13	1.00	21	7
OUT-OF-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS OF LOWER SECONDARY AGE						
Region/Country	Out-of-school rate (%)					
	Total	Female	Male	GPIA	Poorest quintile	Richest quintile
World	14	14	13	1.08	28	7
Sub-Saharan Africa	28	29	26	1.16	47	13
Ethiopia (DHS 2016)	26	25	27	0.93	43	14
Ghana (MICS 2017-2018)	7	6	8	0.75	15	3
Kenya (DHS 2014)	4	4	3	1.33	10	2
Liberia (DHS 2013)	20	19	21	0.90	38	10
Nigeria (DHS 2018)	27	29	25	1.16	68	5
Sierra Leone (MICS 2017)	19	18	20	0.90	39	7
South Sudan (MICS 2010)	64	68	60	1.13	85	34
Uganda (DHS 2016)	27	28	26	1.08	32	30
OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH OF UPPER SECONDARY AGE						
Region/Country	Out-of-school rate (%)					
	Total	Female	Male	GPIA	Poorest quintile	Richest quintile
World	29	30	27	1.11	50	15
Sub-Saharan Africa	44	48	39	1.23	65	26
Ethiopia (DHS 2016)	49	53	44	1.20	64	37
Ghana (MICS 2017-2018)	25	29	21	1.38	31	20
Kenya (DHS 2014)	20	24	17	1.41	26	26
Liberia (DHS 2013)	28	35	20	1.75	49	14
Nigeria (DHS 2018)	33	34	31	1.10	75	6
Sierra Leone (MICS 2017)	36	40	31	1.29	66	15
South Sudan (MICS 2010)	60	68	51	1.33	82	38
Uganda (DHS 2016)	65	72	56	1.29	77	60

Notes: All estimates from household survey estimates, not administrative sources.

*WIDE database (black font); see https://www.education-inequalities.org/indicators/eduout_prim#ageGroup=%22eduout_

*UNICEF dashboard (blue font); data from latest Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/>

*GPIA = gender parity index (adjusted); (female/male out-of-school rate).

Annex 2. Information on Sources

Types of sources used in the analysis

Type	Number	%	Grey literature w/% of total	
Report: Implementation, etc.	35	25.7%	35	25.7%
Program Evaluation	21	15.4%	15	11%
Policy Document	22	16.2%	22	16.2%
Periodical Article/ Professional Journal	14	10.3%	0	0%
Website Content	9	6.6%	9	6.6%
Case Study	8	5.9%	5	3.7%
Press Release	6	4.4%	6	4.4%
Evidence Review	6	4.4%	2	1.5%
Blog Article	5	3.7%	5	3.7%
Book	4	2.9%	0	0%
Manuals	3	2.2%	2	1.5%
Research Thesis/ Monographs	2	1.5%	2	1.5%
Meta Evaluation	1	0.7%	1	0.7%
	136	100%	104	76%

The majority (76%) of the sources used in the analysis are grey literature, which is defined as “materials and research published specifically outside of the traditional commercial, academic publishing, and distribution channels” (Paperpile, 2020).

Evidence Received and Reviewed by Country

	Country	Pieces of Evidence Received and Reviewed
1	Afghanistan	2
2	Bangladesh	2
3	Burkina Faso	2
4	Cote d'Ivoire	1
5	DRC	2
6	Ethiopia	21
7	Ghana	20
8	Global	15
9	Guyana	1
10	Iraq	1
11	Jordan	1
12	Kenya	11
13	Lebanon	2
14	Liberia	11
15	Madagascar	1
16	Malawi	1
17	Mali	1
18	Nepal	2
19	Niger	1
20	Nigeria	10
21	Republic of Congo	1
22	Republic of Yemen	1
23	Sierra Leone	15
24	South Africa	1
25	South Sudan	18
26	Syrian Arab Republic	2
27	Tanzania	2
28	Turkey	1
29	Uganda	10

Note: Several sources cover more than one country. Sources total 136.

Accelerated Education Programmes by Country Included in Analysis

	Country	AEP Name
1	Afghanistan	Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES)
2	Afghanistan	Multi Year Resilience Programme (MYTO)
3	Bangladesh	Ready to Start School Programme (Pre-Primary Education Programme)
4	Bangladesh	ABAL Programme
5	Bangladesh	ALP Programme
6	Burkina Faso	Speed Schools
7	DRC	VAS-Y Fille! Congo
8	DRC	AEP for Out of School Children and Youth in DRC
9	Ethiopia	Speed School Ethiopia
10	Ghana	Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Programme Ghana
11	Ghana	School for Life Ghana
12	Iraq	ALP Iraq
13	Kenya	AEP Kenya
14	Kenya	Refugee Education Trust (RET) Accelerated Secondary Education Programme for Refugees Kenya
15	Lebanon	ALP Lebanon
16	Liberia	Second Chance Liberia
17	Liberia	Advancing Youth Liberia
18	Liberia	Accelerated Quality Education (AQE) for Liberian Children
19	Liberia	CODE Girls' Accelerated Learning Initiative
20	Malawi	Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Programme in the Basic Directorate
21	Malawi	Out of School Youth and functional literacy under Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture
22	Mali	Education Recovery Support Activity (ERSA). In French: Projet d'Accès à l'Éducation pour Tous les enfants au Mali (PACETEM)
23	Myanmar	NFMSE Myanmar
24	Mali	Speed Schools Mali
25	Nepal	Gate Programme Nepal
26	Nepal	No More Project Nepal
27	Niger	Speed Schools Niger
28	Nigeria	ALP Nigeria
29	Nigeria	IRC ELP Education Crisis Response Project in Northeast Nigeria
30	Nigeria	Addressing Education in NorthEast Nigeria (AENN)
31	Nigeria	Education in Emergencies (EiE) Nonformal Learning Centers project (NFLC) project in Yobe and Borno
32	Sierra Leone	Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS)
33	Sierra Leone	ALP Sierra Leone
34	Sierra Leone	AEP Sierra Leone
35	Somalia	SOMGEP-T Somalia
36	Somalia	Accelerated Education Programme (in Kenya, Uganda and Somalia)
37	South Sudan	Accelerated Education Programme in Greater Ganyiel
38	South Sudan	AEP South Sudan
39	South Sudan	Accelerated Secondary Education Program (ASEP)
40	Syrian Arab Republic	Curriculum B
41	Syrian Arab Republic	The Second Chance Programme
42	Tanzania	Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET)
43	Uganda	Speed Schools Uganda
44	Uganda	AEP Uganda
45	Uganda	Innovative and inclusive accelerated education programme for refugee and host community children (INCLUDE)

Annex 3. How the Education.org Key Features Line Up Against the AEWG 10 Principles for Effective Practice

Education.org Features	AEWG 10 Principles for Effective Practice
1. AEP Goals	#1. AEP is flexible and for over-age learners #6. Goals, monitoring and funding align
2. Equity & Inclusion	#1. AEP is flexible and for over-age learners #3. AE learning environment is inclusive, safe and learning-ready #8. Community is engaged and accountable
3. Curriculum & Calendar	#2. Curriculum, materials and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable and use relevant language of instruction
4. Assessment & Certification	#3. AE learning environment is inclusive, safe and learning-ready #9. AEP is a legitimate, credible education option that results in learner certification in primary education
5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Collection (M&E & EMIS)	#6. Goals, monitoring and funding align
6. Teacher Sourcing & Development	#4. Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated #5. Teachers participate in continuous professional development #8. Community is engaged and accountable
7. Pedagogy	#1. AEP is flexible and for over-age learners #2. Curriculum, materials and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable and use relevant language of instruction #8. Community is engaged and accountable
8. Teacher Compensation	#4. Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated
9. Funding & Budgeting	#6. Goals, monitoring and funding align

Note: AEWG Principle 10, “AEP is aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture”, is an overarching principle in the Education.org list. AEWG Principle 7, “AE centre is effectively managed”, is viewed as outside the scope of features key for policy action.