

**POLICY BRIEF:**

**The State of Effectiveness  
Research to Identify What  
Works to Support Children's  
Education in Conflict and  
Protracted Crisis**

## The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world – ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children – through building a global hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

ERICC seeks to identify the most effective approaches for improving access, quality, and continuity of education to support sustainable and coherent education systems and holistic learning and development of children in conflict and crisis. ERICC aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge – at local, national, regional, and global levels – through co-construction of research and collaborative partnerships.

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with academic lead IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners that include the Centre for Lebanese Studies, the Common Heritage Foundation, Forcier Consulting, ODI, Osman Consulting, Oxford Policy Management, and the Queen Rania Foundation. During ERICC's inception period, NYU-TIES provided research leadership, developed the original ERICC Conceptual Framework, and contributed to early research agenda development. ERICC is supported by UK Aid.

Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Syria.

### Disclaimer

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## Executive Summary

This policy brief synthesises findings from a forthcoming review of effectiveness research on education interventions in conflict and protracted crisis settings. It outlines the types of effectiveness research available, the populations targeted, and the learning drivers and outcomes pursued. It shows that evidence of impact for education interventions remains limited in strength and scope and is virtually missing for interventions targeting youth. A case study presented then illustrates best practice in this research area, demonstrating the need for rigorous and disaggregated evidence to drive education impact that is (cost-)effective and equitable. The brief concludes with recommended actions to address the limitations identified in the current research landscape, including expansion of research on the impact of early childhood and youth education interventions, remote delivery methods, and strategies to maintain educational continuity during disruptions. Key recommendations also include mainstreaming the collection and analysis of costing data to assess cost-effectiveness, disaggregating data to support equitable interventions, and investing in robust causal research methodologies.

## A. Introduction

Globally, conflict and protracted crisis (CPC) settings affect about 224 million school-aged children and leave a third of them, 72 million, out of school.<sup>1</sup> These settings encompass a wide range of devastating situations, from wars, poverty, and economic shocks to forced displacement and climate, environmental, and health disasters.<sup>2</sup> Such settings can cause inhibitions of long-term negative impact on children's mental, intellectual, social, and behavioural development.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, CPC settings pose many practical, methodological, and ethical challenges to researching<sup>4</sup> which interventions work, how, for whom, under what conditions, and at what cost to address those inhibitions.

To help address this knowledge gap, the Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) programme identified, reviewed, and synthesised evidence from 582 high-quality qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in CPC settings over the past 25 years. Of these studies, the great majority were aimed at identifying needs and describing problems and associated factors (56%). Figure (1) shows that far fewer studies were conducted on the design (12%), implementation (20%), impact (10%) and cost of interventions (6%) and on the process of implementing and assessing impact at scale (1%).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Education Cannot Wait. (2023, 7 June). *Number of crisis-impacted children in need of education support rises significantly. Education Cannot Wait issues new global estimates study*. Education Cannot Wait.

<sup>2</sup> Falk, D., Pherali, T., & Diazgranados, S. (2024). *Context matters: ERICC's dimensions of conflict and crisis*. ERICC.

<sup>3</sup> Masten, A. S., & Narayan, A. J. (2012). *Child development in the context of disaster, war, and terrorism: Pathways of risk and resilience. Annual Review of Psychology* 63, 227-57.

Rubenstein, B. L., & Stark, L. (2017). *The impact of humanitarian emergencies on the prevalence of violence against children: An evidence-based ecological framework. Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 22(sup1): 58-66.

Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., ... & Wood, D. L. (2012). *The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. Pediatrics*, 129(1), e232-e246.

<sup>4</sup> Puri, J., Aladysheva, A., Iversen, V., Ghorpade, Y., & Brück, T. (2017). *Can rigorous impact evaluations improve humanitarian assistance? Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 9(4), 519-42.

<sup>5</sup> The sum exceeds 100% as some studies were coded in more than one category. Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.

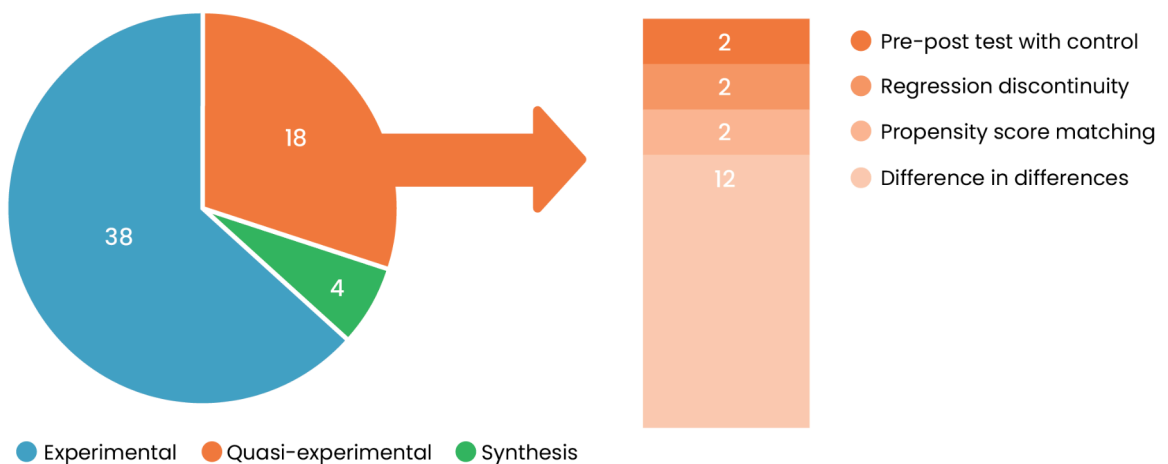


**Figure 1. Number of Identified Effectiveness Research Studies According to Purpose**

This policy brief, the first in a series of two, summarises findings from the forthcoming ERICC review (hereafter the ERICC review).<sup>6</sup> The review focuses specifically on effectiveness research, referring to studies that use experimental or quasi-experimental design, systematic review, or meta-analysis to determine the impact of education interventions. The following section highlights what types of effectiveness research exist and which populations are targeted by interventions and in which settings.

## B. Types of Effectiveness Research

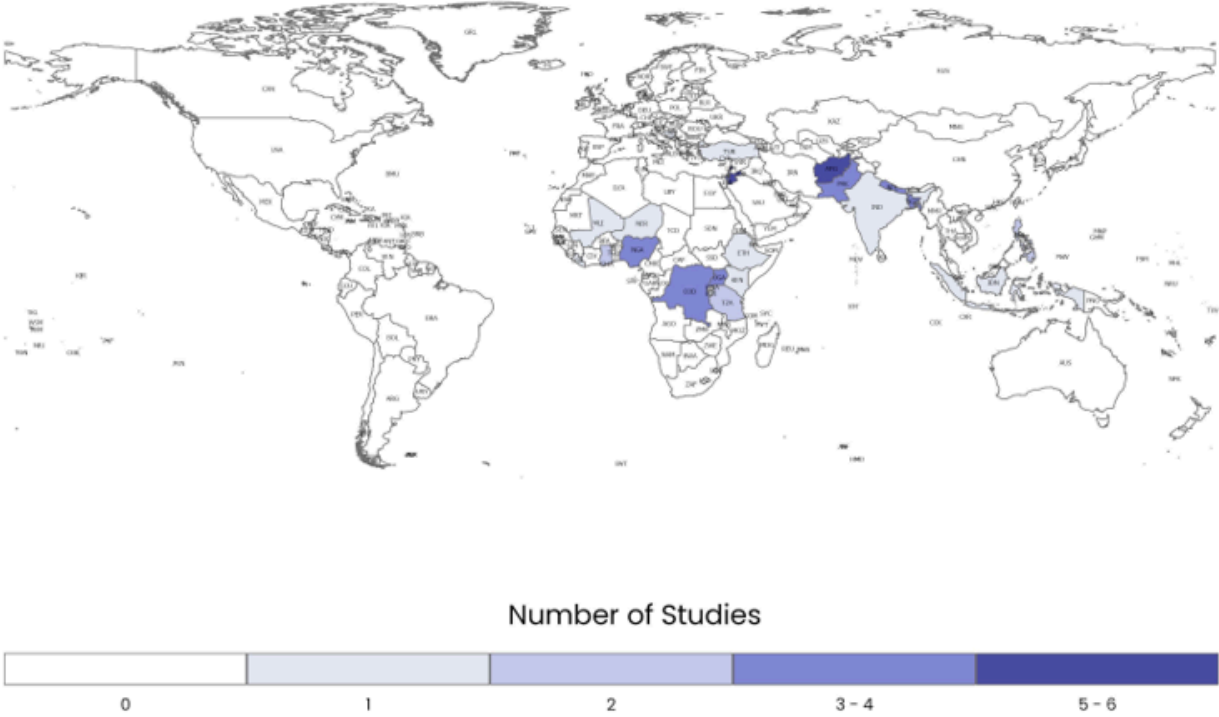
Of the 582 studies reviewed, 60 (10%) focused on assessing the impact of education interventions: 38 randomised control trials, 18 quasi-experimental studies, and 4 systematic reviews (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Types of Effectiveness Research Studies**

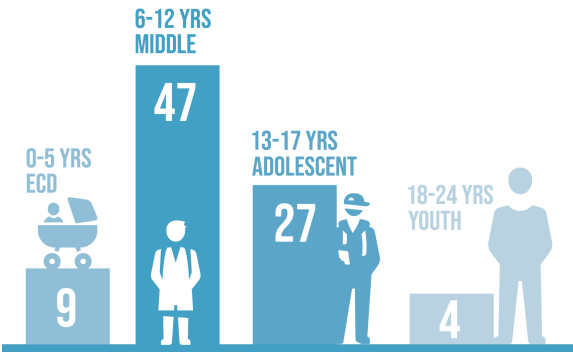
<sup>6</sup> Diazgranados, S., Sloane, P., Thuo, B. (in preparation). *What Works to Improve Education Outcomes for Children in Conflict-Affected Settings? A Review of 60 Rigorous Impact Evaluations in Conflict and Protracted Crisis Settings*. ERICC.

The 60 studies were implemented in 26 conflict and crisis-affected countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East (See Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Number of Effectiveness Research Studies by Country**

Most of the reviewed effectiveness studies focused on school-age children, with comparatively very few on interventions targeting younger children or youth (Figure 4). By displacement status of target groups, far more effectiveness studies focused on interventions targeting host communities than on those targeting refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), or a mixed population (Figure 5).



**Figure 4. Number of Effectiveness Research Studies by Age Group**



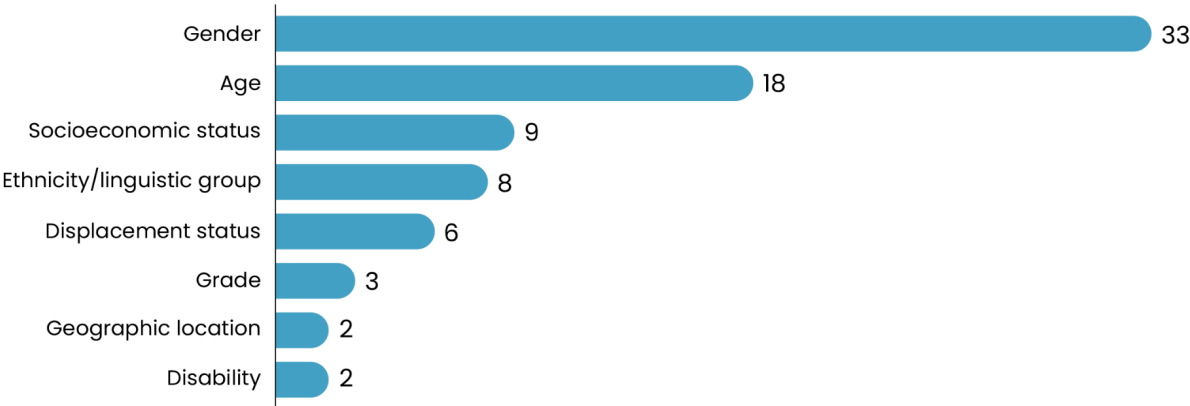
**Figure 5. Number of Effectiveness Research Studies by Displacement Status of Target Groups**

By setting, interventions delivered in formal and non-formal spaces received the largest attention, exceeding the sum of research effort on effectiveness of interventions delivered in communities, homes, and remotely (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Number of Effectiveness Research Studies by Setting of Intervention Delivery**

In terms of data disaggregation, 64% of the reviewed effectiveness studies disaggregated interventions impact for different groups—mostly by gender and, to a lesser extent, by age. Few studies disaggregated impact by other demographic or socioeconomic categories (Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Number of Effectiveness Research Studies Disaggregating Impact**

**C. Scope of Assessment in Effectiveness Research**

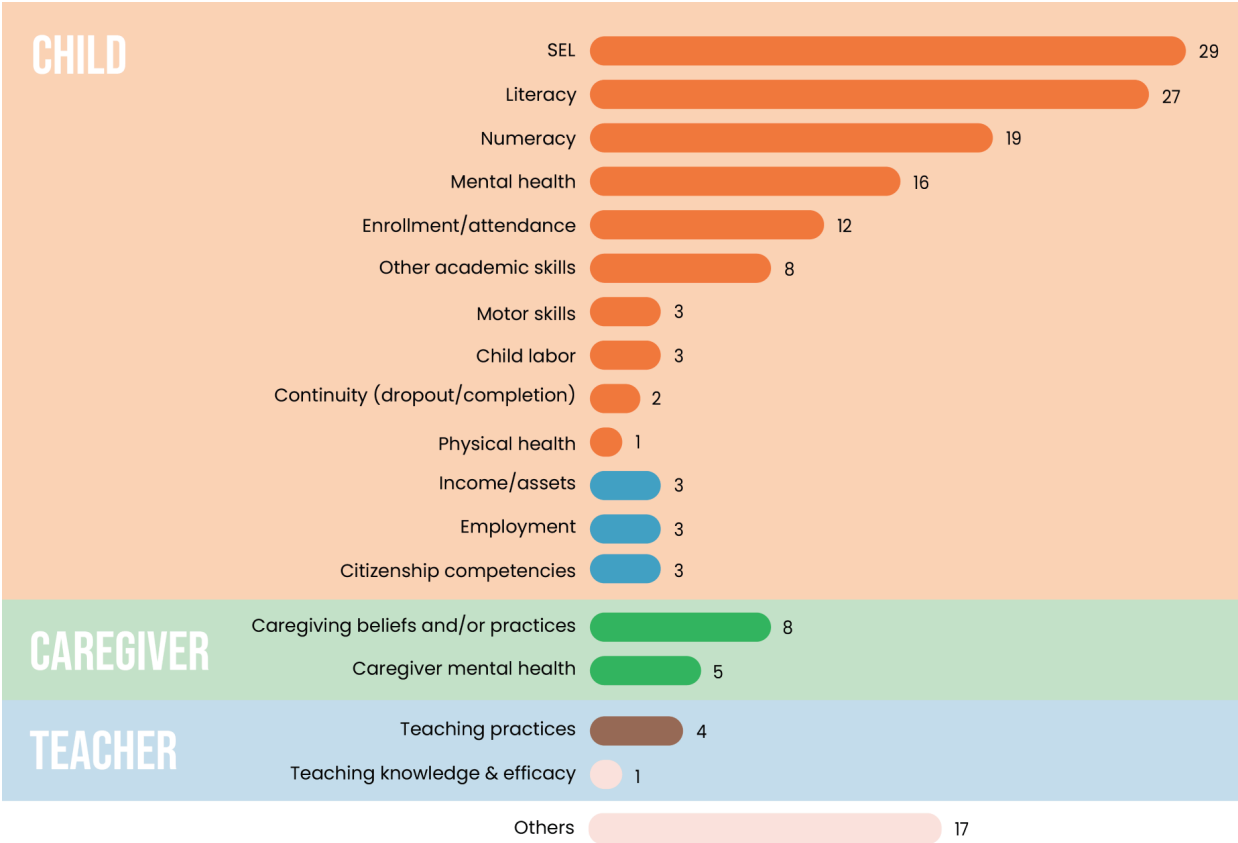
In ERICC’s Conceptual Framework,<sup>7,8</sup> learning is recognised to have four drivers: educational access, quality, continuity, and coherence. The ERICC review shows that most of the existing effectiveness research focuses on interventions that aim to enhance two of these drivers: access and/or quality.

<sup>7</sup> Kim, H. Y., Tubbs Dolan, C., & Aber, J. L. (October 2022). *A conceptual framework for education research in conflict and protracted crisis (ERICC)*. ERICC Working Paper No. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Kim, H. Y., Tubbs Dolan, C., Aber, J. L. Diazgranados, S., Pherali, T., and the ERICC Consortium. (September 2024) A Conceptual Framework for Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC): Systematic, holistic approaches to Education Research, Policy and Practice. ERICC Technical Brief.

Fewer studies focus on interventions that aim to improve continuity (continuous participation in education that enables progression in learning and grade or level transitions) or coherence (alignment of incentives, procedures, and capacities across and between the policy and local systems levels to achieve access, quality, and continuity of education).<sup>9</sup>

Review of the child-, caregiver-, and teacher-level outcomes targeted in researched interventions reveals that most studies focused on assessing impact on academic skills (e.g. literacy and numeracy) and social-emotional learning (e.g. empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution), followed by mental health and educational access (e.g. enrolment and/or attendance) (Figure 8).



**Figure 8. Range of Outcomes Measured in Impact Evaluations of Education Interventions in CPC Settings**

**D. Interventions, Impact, and Evidence Strength**

The ERICC review mapped the evidence for each type of intervention against key outcomes and identified the strength of evidence. Tables 1-3 organise the evidence for different age groups (early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence, and youth), listing interventions along the number of impact evaluations (IEs) that exist for each. The strength of the evidence is represented by the size of the circles in the three tables and is interpreted as follows: ‘emergent’ if there is at least one IE

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

demonstrating impact; ‘moderate’ if there is at least one systematic review, literature review with predominantly IE-based evidence, or two or more IEs demonstrating impact; or ‘strong’ if there are two or more systematic reviews demonstrating impact—where ‘impact’ can be positive, negative, uncertain, or null.

We found evidence of impact of six early childhood interventions (Table 1), with emergent evidence, i.e., at least one impact evaluation, for most of them. Of these six interventions, three have emergent evidence of impact on children’s literacy, numeracy, other academic outcomes, and along with two more interventions, on their SEL outcomes. Two of the six interventions have emergent evidence of impact on mental health outcomes, with a third intervention having moderate evidence of impact thereon.

		CHILD OUTCOMES (ECD)							TEACHER OUTCOMES	CAREGIVER OUTCOMES
Intervention category	Intervention	Access (enrolment, attendance)	Continuity (progression, completion, dropout)	Literacy	Numeracy	Other academic outcomes (test scores, grades)	SEL	Mental Health	Teaching knowledge, practices or wellbeing	Caregiver knowledge, attitudes, practices, mental health, household income
Parent- directed ECD stimulation programs	Group training and & PSS for caregivers			1 IE	1 IE	1 IE	1 IE	3 IEs		3 IEs
	Caregiving 1:1 Phone calls					1 IE	1 IE	1 IE	1 IE	1 IE
Edtech - Remote Pre-Primary Education	Edtech - Remote Pre-school			1 IE	1 IE	1 IE	1 IE			1 IE
	Edtech - Remote Pre-school + Remote parenting support program			1 IE	1 IE	1 IE	1 IE			1 IE
Media	Mass Media - TV Shows					1 IE	1 IE			
PSS for children	PSS for children							1 IE		

**Table 1. Strength of Impact Evidence for Early Childhood Interventions**

For middle childhood and adolescence (Table 2), we found evidence of impact for 33 education interventions. Of these interventions, 55% have evidence of impact on children’s literacy and numeracy outcomes, 34% on their access and SEL, and 20% on their mental health. We observe that 10 interventions (34%) have moderate evidence of impact on at least one outcome. Twenty interventions (60%) have emergent evidence of impact, i.e., a single impact evaluation.



**Table 2. Strength of Impact Evidence for Middle Childhood and Adolescence Interventions**

INTERVENTIONS		CHILD OUTCOMES						
Category	Intervention	Access (enrolment, attendance)	Continuity (progression, completion, dropout)	Literacy	Numeracy	Other academic or developmental outcomes (cognitive, motor skills, etc.)	SEL	Mental Health
Cash	Cash transfers			4 IE				
Scholarships	Scholarships				1 IE		1 IE	
Feeding and nutrition	School feeding and general food distribution			1 IE	1 IE			
Building schools	Building schools - Building disaster resistant schools			1 IE	1 IE			
Learning materials	Corner libraries				1 IE	1 IE		
	Incentives to use textbooks at home				1 IE	1 IE		
TPD	Face to face training			2 IE	1 IE			1 IE
	Remote training EdTech			1 IE	1 IE			
	Coaching		2 IE	1 IE		1 IE		1 IE
	Peer groups			1 IE				
Policy	School and community-based management			1 IE				
Tutoring	1:1 automated phone calls EdTech (IVR)			1 IE	2 IE		1 IE	
	Group			6 IE	6 IE		5 IE	3 IE

● Impact Evaluations    ● Review

INTERVENTIONS		CHILD OUTCOMES						
Category	Intervention	Access (enrolment, attendance)	Continuity (progression, completion, dropout)	Literacy	Numeracy	Other academic or developmental outcomes (cognitive, motor skills, etc.)	SEL	Mental Health
EdTech	Software with academic games			7 IE	4 IE	2 IE	1 IE	1 IE
	Remote TARL			1 IE	1 IE			
	Online student assessments			1 IE	1 IE			
	Remote TARL, online student assessments & remote teacher training			1 IE	1 IE			
	SMS messages to children				5 IE	5 IE		
	Tutoring - 1:1 phone call + SMS to children				5 IE	5 IE		
	SMS and behavioral nudges for caregivers			1 IE				
PSS - SEL	PSS - group	1 IE					6 IE	6 IE
	SEL - group			2 IE	2 IE	3 IE	4 IE	1 IE
	Peace education						1 IE	
	Group life skills	1 IE						1 IE
ALP	Accelerated learning programs				3 IE	3 IE		
	+ economic/livelihoods assistance + child protection awareness sessions			1 IE				

**Table 2 (continued). Strength of Impact Evidence for Middle Childhood and Adolescence Interventions**

Finally, for youth we found evidence of three types of education interventions, which focus on citizenship competencies, job and employment skills, and economic activity, rather than on educational access or academic outcomes measured for younger age groups (Table 3).

Intervention Category	Intervention	CHILD OUTCOMES						TEACHER OUTCOMES	CAREGIVER OUTCOMES
		Access (enrolment, attendance)	Continuity (progression, completion, dropout)	Literacy	Numeracy	Other academic outcomes (test score, grades)	SEL		
Scholarships	Scholarships (university)						1 IE 51		
TVET	TVET						3 IEs 19,52,53	2 IEs 52,53	
Cash transfers	Cash transfers						1 IE 52	1 IE 52	

**Table 3. Strength of Impact Evidence for Youth Interventions**

This scope of evidence strength shows significant persisting<sup>10</sup> lack of research assessing the impact of education interventions in CPC settings, especially for the youngest children and more so for youth.

**Box 1: Case Study of an impact evaluation in a conflict affected setting**

In a 2022 study,<sup>11</sup> a mixed-methods randomised control trial was used to determine the impact of an accelerated learning programme on education outcomes of conflict-affected out-of-school children (9–14 years) in northeast Nigeria. Given the lack of teachers in the area, the programme provided continuous professional development opportunities for community members to serve as learning facilitators. They then provided one group of out-of-school children with literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning (SEL) lessons for three hours a day, five days a week, for seven months.

<sup>10</sup> Murphy, K., Yoshikawa, H., & Wuerml, A. (2018). Implementation research for early childhood development programming in humanitarian contexts: ECD implementation research–humanitarian settings. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1419(1), 90–101.

Burde, D., Guven, O., Kelcey, J., Lahmann, H., & Al-Abadi, K. (2015). What Works to Promote Children’s Educational Access, Quality of Learning, and Wellbeing in Crisis-Affected Contexts. *Education Rigorous Literature Review*. DFID.

<sup>11</sup> Diazgranados, S., Lee, J., Ohanyido, C., Hoyer, K., & Miheretu, A. (2022). The cost-effectiveness of an accelerated learning program on the literacy, numeracy and social-emotional learning outcomes of out-of-school children in Northeast Nigeria: Evidence from a mixed methods randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 15(4), 655–86.

Comparing the literacy, numeracy, and SEL outcomes of the group of children participating in the programme with those of a group of peers (who were waitlisted for the programme) revealed that the intervention had positive and statistically significant effects on the participants' literacy and numeracy but not SEL skills. By integrating qualitative data, the study generated deeper insights about the programme, including the children's motivations for and experiences through it and the learning facilitators' perceptions of impact. The qualitative data also suggested that the programme failed to impact SEL skills potentially due to the lack of localised SEL materials, which resulted in low levels of quality and fidelity in implementing this component of the programme.

The study showed that the programme achieved this impact at an average cost of £66 per child (2018 GBP), which the authors predicted would decrease to £50 as continued implementation would not require start-up costs. Notably, the study identified baseline equity gaps and endline differential effects by gender, displacement status, and mother tongue. It showed that the intervention had similar effects on boys and girls in literacy, numeracy, and the great majority of SEL outcomes, and that children from the host community were better able to benefit from the intervention than displaced children.

This case study exemplifies effectiveness research that is rigorous in its design and thorough in its relevance to practice. Thanks to its mixed-method experimental design, it determined the positive impact of the accelerated learning programme on literacy and numeracy, and it identified potential issues that, if addressed in future interventions, may extend the programme's impact (in this case to SEL outcomes). With costing data collected and analysed, the study generated evidence to gauge cost-effectiveness, which can be useful for design of similar interventions. By disaggregating data and results, the study further ensured that the resulting evidence can help inform decisions on which groups to target, why, and how, in future similar interventions.

## E. Recommendations

This policy brief has highlighted the state of effectiveness research and the scope of impact evidence of interventions supporting children's education in settings of conflict and protracted crisis. It has outlined key limitations in this body of research and evidence, relating to the populations and settings researched as well as to the scope of evaluation and research studies. To address these limitations, stakeholders should:

1. **Invest in effectiveness research** that uses causal inference methods, including experimental and quasi-experimental designs, to ensure rigour in both evaluating the efficacy of interventions and identifying contingencies and any group differentials in observed impact.
2. **Strategise conducting impact evaluations** so that they occur after:
  - Interventions have been properly localised through design research, i.e., crafted to meet local needs in a feasible, desirable, and culturally appropriate manner; and
  - The quality and fidelity of implementation has been properly evaluated through implementation research.

3. **Expand effectiveness research** of interventions for which there is little evidence, such as:
  - Early childhood and youth interventions aiming to improve holistic learning outcomes,
  - Interventions delivered remotely, at home or in the community; and
  - Interventions focused on advancing continuity, quality, and coherence of education, including education policies and other interventions that aim to improve system-level coherence for access, quality, and continuity of education.
4. **Mainstream collection and analysis of costing data** to determine cost-efficiency and -effectiveness of interventions and, where possible, to estimate any multiplier effect of education interventions on host economies.
5. **Systemise disaggregation** of collected data and analysis results, to identify differential effects that interventions may have on subgroups of children, by age, gender, disability, and displacement status.

By addressing these research needs, stakeholders can significantly improve the evidence base for (cost-)effective, equitable interventions that enhance access to and quality, continuity, and coherence of education for conflict and crisis-affected children and youth. The forthcoming policy brief that accompanies this one will present substantive findings from the ERICC review, on specific interventions of evidenced impact and others for which more effectiveness research is needed.

