Meeting the Academic and Social-Emotional Needs of Nigeria’s Out-of-School Children

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**Location** | Northeast Nigeria: Borno and Yobe states  
**Teacher Profiles** | Host community teachers and national teachers working in insecure settings  
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### DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

More children are out-of-school (OOS) in Nigeria than any other country (UNICEF 2019). This educational crisis is particularly intense in the regions hardest hit by the Boko Haram insurgency, which has displaced 1.9 million Nigerians and destroyed or forced the closure of nearly 3,000 schools (OCHA 2017). 10.5 million OOS children across Nigeria have been denied their human right to an education and approach adulthood without the literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills they need to thrive and lead stable, independent lives.

As part of their response to this crisis, with the support from UK Aid, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Creative Associates International developed the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) model in Nigeria. ALPs are flexible, age-appropriate educational programs which aim to address the needs of OOS children and youth by preparing them for entry or re-entry into the mainstream educational system. By enrolling these students, ALPs strive to make up for lost time and shore up the essential skills these students may have never developed or lost after their educations were derailed.

### BRIEF OVERVIEW

These ALPs currently serve 35,500 children aged nine to 14 years old in the Yobe and Borno states of Northeast Nigeria. An estimated 75% of all children in Yobe and Borno are OOS. These programs prioritize the development of essential academic and social-emotional skills of children who have been OOS for more than two years or never attended school at all. ALP support is provided at 400 non-formal learning centers (NFLCs) across this region.

Since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency, more than 2,295 teachers have been killed and an estimated 19,000 have been displaced (EiE WG Nigeria 2017). This has worsened the broader educational crisis in Nigeria and exacerbates school access issues. In response to this shortage of certified teachers in Northeast Nigeria, these ALPs recruit local community members to work as learning facilitators (LFs).

ALP administrators equip these LFs with the content knowledge and pedagogical skills they need to effectively teach OOS children foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. LFs are provided professional development opportunities that include face-to-face training, on-site coaching visits by officials from local ministries of education and monthly Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs).

ALPs provide class sessions that run for three hours per day, three times a week over the course of nine consecutive months. The organizing objective of these ALPs is that, upon their conclusion, enrolled students will have developed the literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills necessary to transition into the formal school system. By identifying the best practices for meeting these essential needs of children in Yobe and Borno states, the ALPs in that region hold the promise of offering useful strategies for the broader crisis facing OOS children across Nigeria.

### EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

The IRC conducted an impact evaluation based on a mixed-methods, longitudinal randomized controlled trial with two treatment arms receiving either ALP or ALP plus coaching support, and one wait control group of students, all enrolled at NFLCs in Northeast Nigeria.

This impact evaluation focused on several considerations: the cost-effectiveness of the basic ALP approach on OOS children’s academic and social-emotional skills; the added value and standalone effect of providing on-site coaching to LFs; and the experiences of children, LFs, and coaches involved with
the ALP. The evaluation also examined how the effects of the ALP vary for different subgroups of children differentiated by sex, socio-economic status (SES), home literacy environments, displacement (IDP), and disability status.

The quantitative sample of this assessment worked with a research sample of 2,244 OOS children attending 80 NFLCs across the Yobe and Borno states. It focused on student learning outcomes. These children were selected through a two-stage process, which randomized 80 NFLCs to the two treatment conditions (basic ALP and ALP plus coaching) and then randomized children to treatment and wait control groups within each NFLC.

This quantitative assessment was complemented by a qualitative assessment involving 79 participants in the broader study: 48 children, 15 LFs, eight coaches, and eight community members, all drawn from 15 NLFCs across Yobe and Borno. This sample was selected to include NFLCs where high, average, and low levels of program impact had been observed.

The evaluation found that the basic ALP treatment is a cost-effective approach with a positive impact on learning outcomes. At a cost of £66 per child, the basic ALP treatment led to statistically significant improvements in language fluency and reading comprehension, statistically significant improvements in seven of eight Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA) subtasks, and a statistically significant reduction in children’s orientation toward the use of aggressive conflict resolution strategies.

Adding coaching increased costs by £42 per child. Results from the impact evaluation show that over and above ALP alone, coaching produced small, negative, and statistically significant impacts on letter identification skills, five of eight EGMA outcomes, a decrease in children’s self-reported levels of anger dysregulation, and an increase in their orientation toward the use of aggressive conflict resolution strategies.

LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Learners, LFs and coaches reported that social-emotional learning (SEL) is valuable and has improved students’ behavior and LFs’ ability to manage behavior in the classroom. However, the gap between established curricula for SEL as a formal concept and indigenous understandings of the skills SEL entails has been a challenge. Because the formal idea of SEL is unfamiliar, participants find it difficult to master. Learners, LFs, and coaches reported that it was the hardest subject to teach and learn, and requested additional training and teaching and learning materials to support SEL. Perhaps, as a result, the ALPs have yet to make meaningful progress in reaching numerous key SEL outcomes.

Professional development supports were found to be useful and valuable. However, as noted above, the impact evaluation showed that students in schools where learning facilitators who only received face-to-face trainings and TLCs were able to learn more than students in schools where learning facilitators also received on-site coaching. In fact, coaching produced small, negative, and statistically significant impacts on literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. This suggests the current coaching model is not cost-effective and should be overhauled, a dynamic with potential ramifications for the humanitarian and education sectors in and beyond Northeast Nigeria.

The qualitative assessment explored LF and coach experiences with different elements of teacher professional development. LFs reported that trainings were useful, but insufficient, and found TLCs to be the most helpful professional development support, as they provided LFs with an ongoing opportunity to learn, exchange and provide support to peers, and share best practices. Coaches struggled to provide effective support to LFs given their limited training, lack of expertise in subject matter areas, and workload. LFs reported that coaches established friendly and respectful relationships, but did not visit consistently. While some LFs considered coaching useful, others indicated that coaches lacked the experience and ability needed to be effective.

Based on these findings, the IRC has adapted its programming, reduced coaching, and pursued opportunities to improve and evaluate its teacher professional development approach. The IRC is also undertaking a new project to localize SEL content and resources through a rigorous testing process, in collaboration with Nigerian stakeholders.

The IRC created a research steering committee that involved policy makers in the process of building
evidence about what works. From the early stages of the research design, policy makers provided input and feedback on the research process. The IRC also organized a research findings dissemination event in Abuja on July 30th, 2019 to share the learning from the research to key government stakeholders and policymakers from State and Federal education ministries, INGOs, and the donor community. Key recommendations presented include:

- Invest in education programs in crisis and conflict contexts designed to achieve outcomes, not simply outputs, and require grantees to monitor progress towards these outcomes.
- Invest in complimentary, quality ALP programs with pathways to the formal system for OOS children in crisis contexts to support learning and transition outcomes.
- Invest in the design and contextualization of teaching and learning materials of SEL as well as the identification of indigenous practices to promote SEL skills, and conduct implementation research to understand acceptance, relevance, and engagement of both teachers and students.
- Invest in high-quality research to better understand what works, for whom, at what cost, and under what conditions in conflict and crisis contexts by funding impact evaluations coupled with costing data, implementation data from monitoring systems, and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups.
- Ensure resources for education in crisis contexts are directed to girls and boys equally, and prioritize children displaced by violence, living in poverty, and with a physical disability.

**TEACHER PROFILE**

**Musa Abdullahi** is a learning facilitator (LF) from Maiduguri in Borno State. He has been an LF for more than a year and works as a teacher at a secondary school. He has engaged in professional development activities that include face-to-face trainings, teacher learning circles (TLCs), and coaching. He believes he has benefited greatly from learning about SEL through the coaching he receives and the experience gained teaching children from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds.

Abdullahi likes the ways that serving as an LF has burnished his abilities as a teacher and specifically cited how the concept of SEL, which is new to him and many in the region, has furthered his professional development. An expression of gratitude for the opportunity to enhance one’s professional skill set and learning to understand SEL were common themes during interviews with other LFs.

At the same time, Abdullahi struggles with a variety of challenges cited by numerous LFs. These include teaching through a language barrier, as many students and LFs are still learning how to speak Hausa. He also believes his students would be well-served by the provision of more exercise books and other instructional materials, and he would like to see more learning centers opened, as his students live across a dispersed area and many have trouble reaching school.

**Hassana Imam** serves as an LF in Potiskum in Yobe state. Working as an LF is her first professional role. Like all other LFs, she has participated in face to face trainings, teacher learning circles and coaching. Like Abdullahi, Imam believes she has benefited professionally from learning more about SEL and claims this knowledge helps her maintain composure while teaching and managing a classroom. She also likes the respect and stature in the community that teaching children has afforded her.

Similar to most LFs, Imam also grapples with a lack of essential supplies and warns that without instructional materials, it becomes much harder to engage and educate the children. The challenge of educating children who have experienced severe adversity also weighs on Imam and she believes further training in SEL could help address that.

In addition to access to additional instructional materials, Imam would like to see program administrators spend more time researching the barriers that stop children from attending formal schools in the first place. She believes this understanding could help motivate students and LFs. She would also like to see a transportation stipend provided to those traveling to monthly teacher learning circles, a suggestion offered by numerous LFs who described the cost of traveling as a barrier to professional development.
REFERENCES

