



Background Paper 2:

**From Schooling to Learning for
All: Reorienting Curriculum
and Targeting Instruction**

#SaveOurFuture

www.saveourfuture.world

About the campaign

Save Our Future is a global coalition of diverse voices - from CSOs to the private sector, youth to researchers, media to multilaterals, foundations to influencers and more - all uniting to deliver a simple, yet powerful message amidst the COVID-19 crisis: **Save Our Future**.

This campaign, supported by hundreds of organizations worldwide, is driving awareness and emphasizing the connection between education and advancing the other UN Sustainable Development goals; showcasing education solutions and innovations backed by evidence-based research; bringing together communities and diverse stakeholders to promote collaboration; and engaging people around the world in a dialogue around education to ensure all children can learn.

As part of the Save Our Future campaign, the Save Our Future white paper *Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children* was developed and launched on October 22, with key actions and recommendations for global decisionmakers on protecting and prioritizing education amidst COVID-19.

For further information, please contact campaign@saveourfuture.world. To learn more about the Save Our Future campaign, please visit www.saveourfuture.world.

Background paper prepared for the Save Our Future white paper *Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children*

From Schooling to Learning for All: Reorienting Curriculum and Targeting Instruction

Authors:

Devyani Pershad, Pratham Education Foundation
Renaud Comba, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti
Jessica Bergmann, the Education Commission

With key contributions from:

Charles Fadel, Center for Curriculum Redesign
Michelle Kaffenberger, Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE)
Heidi Linz, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)
Radhika Bhula, Pratham Education Foundation
Goretti Mary Nakabugo, Uwezo Uganda
Moitshepi Matsheng, Young 1ove
Noam Angrist, Young 1ove

This paper was written to provide background information to assist in drafting the Save Our Future white paper *Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children*. It has been edited for clarity and to maintain consistent style and branding in line with the Save Our Future campaign. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and contributors and should not be solely attributed to the organizations representing the Save Our Future campaign. Contributors and their respective organizations have expressed broad agreement on the priorities and evidence supporting these priorities set out in this paper. However, this text should not be considered as the formal policy position of any organization and some organizations may have differing views.

The paper can be cited with the following reference:

Pershad, D., Comba, R., & Bergmann, J. (2020). *From schooling to learning for all: Reorienting curriculum and targeting instruction*. Background paper prepared for the Save Our Future white paper *Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children*. Save Our Future.
<https://saveourfuture.world/white-paper/>

Available under [Creative Commons Attribution](#).

To view other background papers, please visit <https://saveourfuture.world/white-paper/>

Introduction

As education systems across the globe continue creating, adapting, and strengthening strategies to tackle the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an opportunity is emerging to reorient education systems and practices to ensure all children learn. By taking meaningful actions, systems can tackle the learning crisis that already existed before the pandemic hit and curtail the inevitable learning losses that will arise as a result of school closures.

As a global community of practitioners, educators, policymakers, officials and supporters, we call on education stakeholders to:

- Create simple and actionable mechanisms to measure children’s learning levels upon their return to school and throughout their schooling
- Adopt targeted instruction approaches, such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)¹ for remedial learning and reorient curriculum to focus on foundational skills for all
- Strengthen stakeholder engagement at all levels to prioritize student learning outcomes

Most children are not learning even when in school

While nearly 90 percent of children worldwide are enrolled in primary school ([World Bank, 2019](#)), for many students, access to school has not translated to learning. Nearly 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries were living in ‘learning poverty’, unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 ([World Bank, 2019](#)). In Ghana and Malawi, over 80 percent of grade 2 children could not read a simple word and over 60 percent of students in India, Uganda, Ghana, and Nicaragua could not perform 2-digit subtraction ([World Bank, 2018](#)). Learning levels for adolescents are equally alarming; the PISA for Development Assessment (adapted for developing countries) shows that only 6 percent of all 15 year olds across seven developing countries demonstrated proficiency in mathematics ([Ward, 2018](#)). Not only are learning levels around the world low; they are nearly entirely stagnant. Data from 164 countries used for the World Bank Human Capital Index show almost no increases in learning outcomes in low- and middle-income over the last two decades ([Angrist et al., 2019](#)), with significant impacts on students’ abilities to successfully transition to the labor market and live fulfilling, productive lives.

COVID-19 threatens to exacerbate the already deeply rooted learning crisis

COVID-19 has severely impacted education systems globally, with more than 180 countries closing their schools, affecting **1.6 billion students** ([UNESCO, 2020a](#)). This is in contrast to an estimated 258 million

¹ For the purpose of this paper the term Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) encompasses both the Pratham pioneered TaRL approach but also other various TaRL-inspired targeted instruction approaches. We acknowledge the diverse range of targeted instruction approaches and while we wish to avoid generalizations, acknowledge that such approaches often implicitly share a common set of design principles.

children who were already out of school even before COVID-19 ([UIS, 2019](#)). As a result of school closures across the globe, learners will lose more than 0.6 years of schooling, bringing down the effective years of basic schooling that children achieve during their schooling life from 7.9 years to 7.3 years ([Azevedo et al., 2020](#)). The potential long-term learning losses after three months of school closures show that current grade 3 students, by the time they reach grade 10, will be one full year behind or more ([Kaffenberger, 2020](#)).

Parental engagement and availability of learning materials in the household play an important role for continued learning and mitigating learning losses amidst school closures. Access to reading and learning materials in the home supports children’s learning outcomes ([Dowd et al., 2017](#); [Knauer et al., 2020](#)), but more than 90 percent of the poorest children in Punjab (Pakistan), Iraq, Madagascar, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe live in households with not even one child-oriented book ([Brossard et al., 2020](#)). Additionally, less than 42 percent of children in Madagascar receive help with their homework from parents. The situation is even worse for the poorest children ([Brossard et al., 2020](#)).

In some environments, access to technology has helped learning continue, but in 71 countries worldwide, less than 50 percent of the population has access to internet; in 28 countries with available data, only 65 percent of households from the poorest quintile have electricity, compared to 98 percent of households from the wealthiest quintile ([UNICEF, 2020](#)). While such inequalities across countries will be exacerbated by COVID-19, the pandemic also threatens to deepen existing inequalities within countries and even within schools and classrooms, making student learning levels even more varied ([UNICEF, 2020](#)). See Save Our Future background paper [EdTech and COVID-19 Response](#) and Save Our Future background paper [Unlock Education for All: Focus on the Furthest Behind](#) for more on EdTech and the potential risk of exacerbating, rather than mitigating, inequities.

Mismatch between curricular expectations and student learning levels increases gaps in outcomes over time

Before COVID-19, the majority of students, especially in resource constrained environments, had learning levels far below what the curriculum expected. Across many of the world’s education systems, curriculum remains overly ambitious, both in terms of the content coverage and the pace in which students are expected to master skills (Piper, 2009; Crouch & Korda, 2009; Korda & Piper, 2011; World Bank, 2005; Bhattacharjea, Wadhwa, & Banerji, 2011; Dubeck, Jukes, & Okello, 2012; as cited in [Pritchett & Beatty, 2012](#)). In many countries, curriculum review and reform is undertaken at the national level every 7-10 years; yet, the content included in curriculum has remained relatively unchanged since education institutions were first established ([Fadel, Bialik, & Trilling, 2015](#)).

Furthermore, teachers are often under pressure to cover the curriculum and syllabus, rather than focusing on helping students master the foundational skills in literacy and numeracy necessary to continue learning. This mismatch between curricular expectations and student learning is evident across a variety of contexts, including Pakistan, where students are typically three to four grade levels below the curriculum ([Beatty & Pritchett, 2015](#)), and India, where students were between two to five grade levels below curricular standards in numeracy. In Uganda, most children have not reached the level of

reading comprehension expected for a grade 2 student until they reach grade 6 ([Uwezo Uganda, 2019](#)). A study of the national curriculum in Uganda found that very little attention is given to students' mastery of foundational English language skills before they are expected to master higher order skills ([Atuhurra & Alinda, 2018](#)), indicating that it may not be the students who are falling behind, but rather the curriculum advancing beyond students' current skills. Curriculum can serve as a central means by which countries can foster inclusion for all learners ([UNESCO, 2020b](#)), but rebalancing and reprioritization is needed to ensure alignment between curriculum pacing and student learning.

Remediation and reorientation are urgently needed to meet all students where they are

As schools look towards opening, the effects of COVID-19 will create a substantial setback to the goal of halving the percentage of learning poor by 2030 ([World Bank, 2019](#)). Focused remedial actions and streamlining curriculum to prioritize foundational learning will be critical to ensuring that long-term, cumulative learning losses are mitigated ([Das et al., 2020](#); [Kaffenberger, 2020](#)) and that students are able to attain higher levels of education, improve their employment prospects, and go on to lead healthy, productive lives. Without action, learning loss could result in approximately USD \$10 trillion of earnings lost for this cohort of learners ([Azevedo et al., 2020](#)).²

Targeted instruction as an immediate and long-term solution

Classroom instruction is most effective when it is aligned with children's current learning levels. This principle is supported by a wide range of evidence across academic disciplines and education systems. For example, cognitive science research demonstrates that the human brain incorporates new knowledge on the basis of prior knowledge ([Kirschner et al., 2006](#); [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018](#)). Additionally, research in education and pedagogy has long emphasized the importance of aligning instruction with students' developmental needs, whether under the banner of scaffolding (e.g. [Wood et al., 1976](#)), differentiation (e.g. [Tomlinson et al., 2003](#)), mastery learning (e.g. [Kulik et al., 1990](#)), or the zone of proximal development ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)).

Pioneered by Indian NGO Pratham, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is a holistic approach that supports children, generally in grades 3 and above, to master foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. The approach begins by assessing children's learning levels using a simple tool and grouping children for a fixed amount of time during the school day based on their learning level, rather than their age or grade. Trained instructors or classroom teachers focus on building and strengthening foundational skills through engaging teaching and learning activities and continually track children's progress through simple formative assessments (such as ASER, ICAN, and Uwezo). Pratham's TaRL

² All financing figures and estimates used in this paper are calculated and/or provided in US Dollars

approach has inspired contextualized targeted instruction programs around the world.^{3 4} Some countries are already looking at TaRL as an approach to support children as they return to school for remedial instruction (Nugroho et al., 2020), but targeting instruction to the level of the child could also be adopted as a longer-term pedagogical approach that teachers can use to facilitate learning for all children within the classroom.

Figure 1: Key principles of Teaching at the Right Level approach

	'Business as usual'	Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)
Goal	Goal is to complete the grade level textbook or curriculum.	Goal is to ensure basic foundational skills for all, with clearly articulated goals for basic literacy and numeracy.
Training and Mentoring	Minimal continuous professional development or targeted coaching for teachers; traditionally external trainers.	Intentional training of leaders & instructors on the approach with practice periods of at least 20-25 days.
Grouping	Full class assembled together by grade level.	Children grouped by learning level rather than by grade. Children move quickly from one group to the next as their learning progresses.
Teaching and Activities	Teachers might focus only on whole-class instruction ('Chalk and Talk' or textbook-driven), or groups students ad-hoc for learning activities. Teaching to the learning level expected by the curriculum.	Teachers use simple and engaging daily learning activities that can be adapted as children progress. Students engage in activities in large groups, small groups, and individually. Teaching at the right level of the learner.
Assessment, Measurement, and Data Review	Pen and paper assessment done at the beginning and end of a learning unit. Minimal data analysis to understand student learning or adjust teaching before moving to the next learning unit.	Simple one-on-one assessment of every student used for grouping. Similar assessment used periodically to track student progress, review data, and make decisions on child progress and program design.

Source: Adapted from [Pratham Education Foundation \(2020\)](#)

³ See <https://www.pratham.org/about/teaching-at-the-right-level/>

⁴ See <https://www.teachingattherightlevel.org/tarl-in-action/>

TaRL can be contextualized and adapted to meet the needs of diverse countries and learners

The TaRL approach is flexible and can be modified to suit the needs of education systems while leveraging existing resources. Some country-level examples of the contextualization and experimentation are provided below.

India

From the outset, Pratham's TaRL approach was designed with scalability in mind. Consequently, it has been implemented in a variety of models across India. Over the years, community volunteers, Pratham staff, and government frontline workers and teachers have implemented the TaRL approach. Programs have been run in communities and in schools, after school hours, or during summer holidays. The various models implemented by Pratham have been rigorously evaluated in collaboration with the Abdul Latif Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at MIT, showing consistent results and generating applicable lessons ([Banerjee et al., 2016](#)).

In recent years, particularly after the increasing spotlight on learning outcomes, TaRL has been adopted by numerous state governments across India. In this manner, through interventions implemented by Pratham teams, as well as through partnerships with governments, the TaRL approach reaches about 5 million children each year ([Pratham, 2020](#)).

Ghana

In Ghana, TaRL has implemented and robustly tested various modalities, including in-school remedial lessons with an assistant, after-school remedial lessons with an assistant, and teacher-led targeted instruction during school. For each of the delivery methods, the guiding principles of TaRL were followed: (1) conducting simple learning assessments for all students at the beginning of each term; (2) grouping students by their learning level instead of by grade or age level for a fixed amount of time during the day; (3) teaching short, simple, and engaging remedial reading and math classes for 2 periods per day (1 hour) ([Duflo et al., 2020](#)). The Ghana Ministry of Education and its various agencies led the implementation of this program. The teacher-led targeted instruction during school hours is currently being scaled across the country to reach more than 10,000 schools and an estimated 1.8 million primary school learners ([World Bank, 2019](#)).

Botswana

The approach in Botswana is a dual delivery model with direct delivery through NGO-hired facilitators, as well as a government-led delivery model including both teachers and youth from the government's National Service Program (*a government initiative which deploys over 15,000 youth in schools and clinics throughout the country*). Pilots implemented in schools during or after school hours have shown significant improvement in children's numeracy skills in short periods of time. Amidst school closures, simple phone-based approaches to facilitate student learning assessments in line with TaRL principles have been piloted ([Angrist et al. 2020](#)). The program is being led by the Ministry of Basic Education and supported by Young Love, one of the largest NGOs in the country, UNICEF and USAID. To date, TaRL has

reached 20 percent of all primary schools in Botswana, with a goal to scale nationally to all primary schools in Botswana by 2024 ([Young Love, 2020](#)).

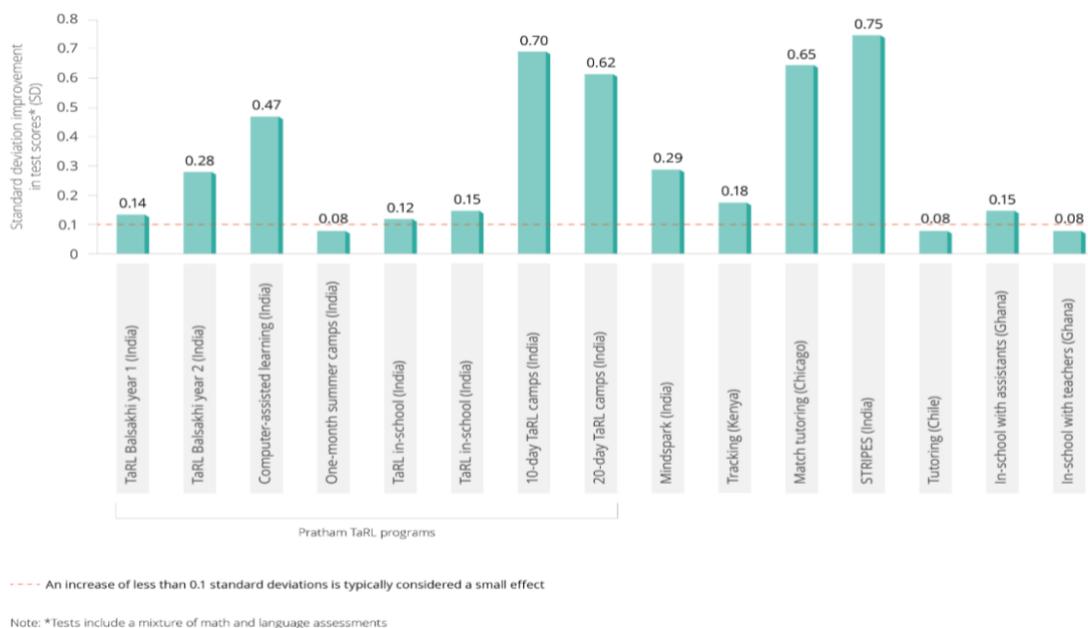
Advancing learning for all requires intentional action and improved pedagogical approaches

As schools begin planning for and/or reopening, immediate actions must be taken to mitigate learning loss for students. Targeting instruction to students' learning levels, rather than by their age or grade, helps students master essential skills, especially foundational literacy and numeracy. Effective targeted instruction approaches have been delivered through a variety of models, which may be particularly relevant in contexts where children are learning below grade-level, where there is large variation in learning levels within the same classroom, or where incentive or accountability structures make it difficult for teachers to break free of the prescribed curriculum to support students who are lagging behind.

These challenges to accelerate student learning will likely be exacerbated when schools reopen in the post COVID-19 era, making the need for implementation of approaches like TaRL and curriculum re-prioritization more urgent. There is a growing body of evidence from various countries showing the effectiveness of such programs and considerations for successful implementation and delivery.

Targeted instruction approaches improve foundational literacy and numeracy skills

Regardless of the modality of implementation, targeted instruction approaches have consistently been shown to positively impact students' acquisition of foundational skills ([Banerjee et al., 2007](#); [Banerjee et al., 2010](#); [Banerjee et al., 2017](#); [Cabezas et al., 2011](#); [Cook et al., 2014](#); [Cook et al., 2015](#); [Duflo et al., 2011](#); [Duflo et al., 2015](#); [Duflo et al., 2020](#); [Lakshminarayana et al., 2013](#); [Muralidharan et al., 2019](#); [Saavedra et al., 2017](#)). Figure 2 summarizes the available robust evidence from various countries showing that TaRL and other similar approaches increase students' foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

Figure 2: Impact of programs targeting instruction to the level of the child

Source: [Teaching at the Right Level](#)

In the COVID-19 context, TaRL can be used as an effective remediation approach, helping learners to catch up on learning in short periods of time. For example, in India, the number of children who could read a simple paragraph doubled in just 50 days ([Banerjee et al. 2017](#)). Similar results from Botswana show that the percentage of innumerate students dropped from 30 percent to 4 percent and nearly 90 percent of students improved at least one numerical skill level in just a single school term ([Young Love, 2019](#)). In northern Nigeria, students benefiting from the program received an average of 180 hours of targeted instruction and achieved impressive results ([Nugroho et al., 2020](#)), with a 31 percent increase in the number of students able to read a full paragraph and a 48 percent increase in the number of students proficient in subtraction ([UNICEF, 2019](#)). Evidence from TaRL in Zambia also shows notable improvements in students' learning outcomes, with a 21-percentage point increase in students reading with basic proficiency (from 35 percent at baseline to 56 percent at endline) and a 24 percentage point increase in students with basic proficiency in subtraction (from 27 percent at baseline to 51 percent at endline) ([Vromant et al., forthcoming](#)).

While these evaluations largely focus on the evidence around physical learning occurring in classrooms between teachers and students, TaRL methodologies should also be considered for remote learning and through digital learning platforms. In India, an adaptive software called Mindspark customizes content based on the learning level and rate of progress of each student. Through regular digital assessment, the platform determines whether students are ready to move on to more complex skills or need to strengthen the skills they just learned. Mindspark combined digital learning with instructor-led sessions,

both adopting key principles of TaRL. After 4.5 months, children who participated in Mindspark made twice as much progress in math and 2.5 times as much progress in Hindi ([Muralidharan et al. 2019](#)). A review of more than 29 evaluations from around the world found that educational software (computer-assisted learning) that supported children in progressing at their own rate improved learning, particularly in numeracy ([Escueta et al., 2017](#)). While TaRL can be used for short-term remediation, it could also be adopted as a pedagogical practice utilized by teachers in the long-term.

TaRL can leverage existing government structures to achieve cost-effective implementation at scale

TaRL approaches are estimated to have reached over 60 million students across India and several African countries. In recent years, several Ministries of Education, including Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, and certain regions of India, have directly embedded TaRL within their national education systems. Government-led and teacher-implemented TaRL have been positive, are often less expensive, and have higher fidelity of implementation ([Duflo et al., 2020](#); [Beg et al., 2020](#); [Berry et al., 2020](#)).

In Ghana, the Ministry of Education and associated agencies contextualized the TaRL approach so that it leverages already existing systems (district-level planning officers, network of inspectors, locally-adapted literacy and numeracy exercises) ([Duflo et al., 2020](#)). In Botswana, TaRL was designed with the government and leveraged already existing structures. Nimble robust testing revealed that a simple grouping of students of similar ability *within* a class as well as *across* classes improved learning by nearly 0.2 standard deviations for almost no cost, suggesting an ability to scale 'teaching at the right level' principles cost-effectively. The approach will be scaled up to reach all primary schools in Botswana by 2024 ([Young Love, 2020](#)).

TaRL interventions are most effective when reinforced by mentoring and monitoring at the school-level

For TaRL to be most impactful, head-teachers and teachers at the school level need to be supported and encouraged from the start to ensure fidelity of implementation is high. An evaluation of a teacher-led model of TaRL in India that provided a dedicated hour for instruction along with ongoing monitoring and mentoring visits from government supervisors showed positive impacts on student learning. In contrast, when intended to be delivered by government teachers during the regular school day and without additional mentoring and monitoring support, TaRL did not improve learning because teachers continued to teach the regular curriculum rather than use the new methodology. Locally-recruited volunteers worked in school (rather than after school) and became absorbed as regular teachers who were unable to deviate from the curriculum and teach using the TaRL approach ([Banerjee et al. 2017](#)). It should be noted that volunteer teachers are not intended to replace the education workforce, but rather support wider Learning Teams that support the whole child. See the Save Our Future background paper [Strengthening the Education Workforce and Creating Learning Teams](#) for policies to strengthen the education workforce to support student learning.

Lessons from those two studies show that mentoring and monitoring as they implement the new TaRL approach is critical to ensure that teachers feel supported by their managers when deviating from the regular curriculum to teach foundational skills ([Banerjee et al. 2017](#)). The body of evidence shows that mentoring TaRL implementers matters as, through mentoring and monitoring, fidelity of implementation of the program increases, positively impacting students' foundational skills. In Ghana, the Ministry of Education aimed to increase fidelity of implementation by combining teacher-led TaRL with regular mentoring for teachers. Findings show that when fidelity of implementation by teachers increases to 60 percent, student's learning outcomes increase by around a third of a school year or 0.11SD ([Beg et al., 2020](#)).

Targeted instruction must be designed locally and implemented carefully to ensure it drives equity does not stigmatize marginalized children, especially those with disabilities

It is crucial that targeted instruction approaches are implemented in a way that reduce, rather than exacerbate, inequality. Streaming children into ability groups permanently can have negative impacts on equity and goes against the principles of inclusive education. Targeted instruction should be carried out with the primary goal of helping children who are behind the level of instruction to achieve foundational skills. However, more evidence and disaggregated data is needed on TaRL and targeted instruction interventions to understand their impacts on marginalized children. See the Save Our Future background paper [Unlock Education for All: Focus on the Furthest Behind](#) for considerations on supporting marginalized students to return to school and learn.

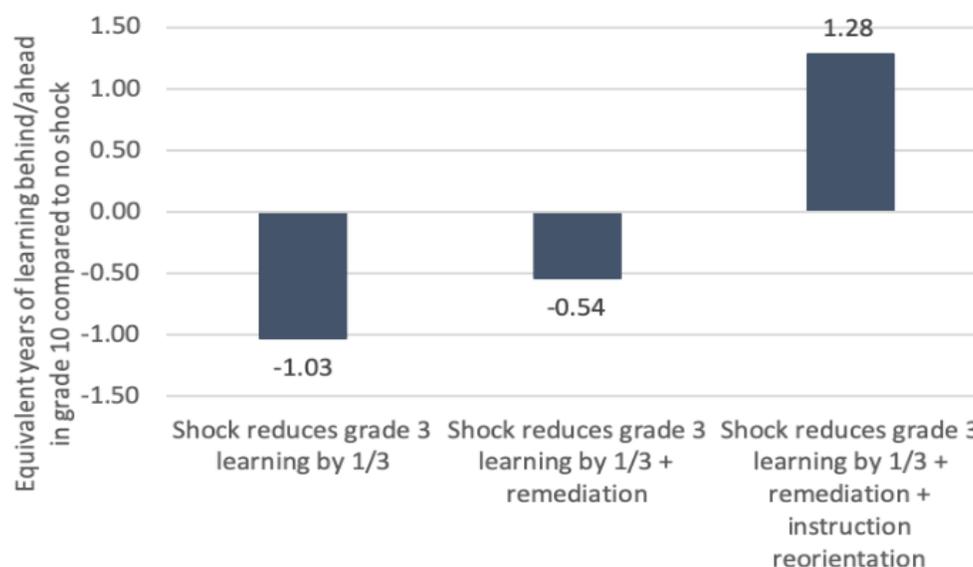
Reorientation of curricula and learning goals to focus on foundational skills is essential for long-term learning gains

Using effective remediation efforts, such as TaRL, upon students' return to school could reduce long-term learning loss for students by half ([Kaffenberger, 2020](#)). But combining short-term remediation efforts with longer-term efforts, like reorienting curriculum to match the pace of student learning at the national level, could not only fully mitigate the long-term learning loss of the COVID-related school closures, but would support students in achieving more than a year's worth of learning outcomes than they would have without COVID-19 closures.

While there is limited empirical evidence on the impact of national curriculum reform, simulation models show that simply slowing down the pace of curriculum to align with the pace of student learning can lead to learning gains ([Kaffenberger & Pritchett, 2020](#)). Early results from an analysis of a 2015 curriculum reform in Tanzania suggests that simplifying curriculum can increase student learning ([Mbiti & Rodriguez-Segura, forthcoming](#)). Tanzania's curriculum reform radically simplified the primary 1 and 2 curriculum, which previously included topics such as "vocational education" and "information and communication technology" for children who are typically six to eight years old. The reformed curriculum allocated 80 percent of instructional time on literacy and numeracy, and students of all characteristics (urban/rural, girls, etc.) demonstrated improved learning outcomes in these foundational

skills. Investments in curriculum reform can be cost-effective and should be enhanced through teaching and learning materials and teacher training that maximize impact on student learning ([Mbiti & Rodriguez-Segura, forthcoming](#)).

Figure 3: Long-term learning loss from the COVID-19 school closures and mitigation strategies for the grade 3 cohort



Source: [Kaffenberger \(2020\)](#)

Condensing the curriculum, even in the short-term, can help alleviate pressure teachers face to cover the curriculum and syllabus in preparation for national exams, and instead focus on helping students to master the foundational skills critical to continuing their learning. A condensed curriculum should center around priority learning objectives and key knowledge and skills that students need to achieve grade-level proficiency, rather than teaching all subject areas faster ([Accelerated Education Working Group, 2020](#)). As learners return to school, national governments must support the education workforce to adapt existing curriculum to prioritize foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, while also embedding social-emotional learning that supports students to develop skills for collaboration, communication, and coping, especially with possible traumas resulting from schooling disruptions.

Translating evidence to action: Actions to support learning for all

Worldwide, more than 90 percent of students have been out of school for months, with varying levels of access to opportunities to continue learning. As students return to school, their learning levels will be even more varied than before, with many falling even further behind. Governments, donors, and civil society organizations must act now with proven solutions to mitigate this unprecedented learning loss by teaching children at their level and accelerating learning progress for all children, including students with disabilities, students with diverse language backgrounds, and students living in poverty. We call on all education decision-makers to incorporate the following principles into their reopening plans and embed them in their education systems in the long-term.

1 | Create simple and actionable mechanisms to measure children's learning, both upon their immediate return to school and more regularly while in school

Long-term goal:

- Realign measurement practices and data systems to focus on learning outcomes for all students, especially the most marginalized.⁵

Immediate asks:

- National and local governments to support schools to execute simple, rapid assessments of all students' learning levels upon their return to school and as regular practice, through tools like ASER, ICAN, or UWEZO, or other contextually relevant assessments and explore alternate modalities, such as phone-based adaptations during school closures.
- CSOs and multilaterals working with school systems to support capacity building on administering learning assessments and analyzing data for decision-making, with a focus on disaggregated data for marginalized children.
- International donors to prioritize investments in simple measurement practices over high-cost specialized evaluations.

⁵ This paper refers broadly to marginalized children, which is inclusive of but not intended to be limited to children in poverty, children with disabilities, refugee, migrant, and displaced children, children associated with armed forces or groups, children from ethnic and linguistic minority groups, previously out of school children, and girls; we acknowledge that these identifying factors often intersect to create compounding circumstances of marginalization.

2 | Adopt targeted instruction approaches and reorient curriculum to focus on foundational skills

Long-term goal:

- National curricula should clearly define competencies and foundational skills that learners should acquire during various stages of schooling and provide flexible pathways for teachers to support learners to achieve these; national assessments are re-aligned to reflect learning goals, rather than curriculum coverage.

Immediate asks: We call on

- National and local governments to prioritize foundational skills in literacy and numeracy by setting simple, measurable learning goals and allocating time in the school timetable to focus on achieving these learning goals.
- National and local government agencies, with support from multilaterals and CSOs operating within schools or teacher training institutions, to provide training and continuous professional development and mentoring to teachers to support implementation of TaRL approaches.
- School leaders, teachers, and other members of the education workforce to implement grouping students by learning levels rather than by age or grade level to support classroom instruction for literacy and numeracy.
- School leaders, teachers, and other members of the education workforce to use engaging learning activities and leverage locally relevant learning resources to enable students to acquire foundational skills in an accelerated manner.

3 | Strengthen stakeholder engagement and align objectives to support learning

Long-term goal:

- Strengthen capacity across the entire system, including the community, to respond to children's diverse learning needs through support and feedback mechanisms at all levels (national, local, school, community, and household).

Immediate asks: We call on

- National governments, multilateral organizations, CSOs, and donor institutions to support implementation of TaRL programs that focus on remediation and acceleration of learning.
- National Ministries of Education to lead development, coordination, and implementation of TaRL approach.
- National governments, with the support of multilaterals and CSOS, to regularly analyze data to understand progress towards achieving learning outcomes and identify and mitigate challenges.
- Multilaterals and CSOs to work alongside national governments to co-create and contextualize TaRL design and implementation to ensure long-term sustainability at scale.

- Brossard, M., Cardoso, M., Kamei, A., Mishra, S., Mizunoya, S., & Reuge, N. (2020). *Parental engagement in children's learning*. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-09%20CL.pdf>
- Cabezas, V., Cuesta, J. I., & Gallego, F. A. (2011). *Effects of short-term tutoring on cognitive and non-cognitive skills: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Chile*. J-PAL. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/493%20-%20short-term%20tutoring%20May2011.pdf>
- Cook, P. J., Dodge, K., Farkas, G., Fryer, R. G., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mayer, S., Pollack, H., & Steinberg, L. (2014). The (surprising) efficacy of academic and behavioral intervention with disadvantaged youth: Results from a randomized experiment in Chicago. *National Bureau of Economic Research* 19862. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w19862>
- Cook, P. J., Dodge, K., Farkas, G., Fryer, R. G., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mayer, S., Pollack, H., & Steinberg, L. (2015). *Not too late: Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged youth*. Institute for Policy Research Northwestern University. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/not_too_late_improving_academic_outcomes_for_disadvantaged_youth_2015.pdf
- Das, J., Daniels, B. & Andrabi, T. (2020). *We have to protect the kids*. RISE Insight Note No. 2020/016. RISE Programme. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2020/016
- Dowd, A.J., Friedlander, E., Jonason, C., Leer, J., Xook Sorenson, L., Guajardo, J., D'Sa, N., Pava, C., & Pisani, L. (2017). Lifewide learning for early reading development. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, (155), 31-49. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20193>
- Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2011). Peer effects, teacher incentives, and the impact of tracking: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Kenya. *American Economic Review*, 101(5), 1739-1774. [10.1257/aer.101.5.1739](https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.101.5.1739)
- Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2015). School governance, teacher incentives, and pupil-teacher ratios: Experimental evidence from Kenyan primary schools. *Journal of Public Economics*, 123, 92-110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2014.11.008>
- Duflo, A., Kiessel, J., & Lucas, A. M. (2020). *External validity: Four models of improving student achievement*. Innovations for Poverty Action. <https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/publications/duflo-kiessel-lucas-2020.05-external-validity.pdf>
- Escueta, M., Quan, V., Nikow, A. J., & Oreopoulos, P. (2017). *Education technology: An evidence-based review*. NBER Working Paper No. 23744. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23744>
- Fadel, C., Bialik, M., & Trilling, B. (2015). *Four-dimension education: The competencies learners need to succeed*. Boston, MA: Center for Curriculum Redesign.
- Kaffenberger, M. (2020). *Modeling the long-run learning impact of the COVID-19 learning shock: Actions to (more than) mitigate loss*. RISE Insight Note No. 2020/017. RISE Programme. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2020/017
- Kaffenberger, M. & Pritchett, L. (2020). *Failing to plan? Estimating the impact of achieving schooling goals on cohort learning*. RISE Working Paper Series No. 20/038. RISE Programme. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISEWP_2020/038
- Kirschner, P., Sweller, P., & Clark, R. E. (2006). Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work: An analysis of the failure of constructivist, discovery, problem-based, experiential, and inquiry-based teaching. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(2), 75-86, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15326985sep4102_1

Knauer, H.A., Jakiela, P., Ozier, O., Aboud, F., & Fernald, L.C.H. (2020). Enhancing young children's language acquisition through parent-child book-sharing: A randomized trial in rural Kenya. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 50, 179–190.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.01.002>

Kulik, C.-L. C., Kulik, J. A., & Bangert-Drowns, R. L. (1990). Effectiveness of mastery learning programs: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 60(2), 265–299.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543060002265>

Lakshminarayana, R., Eble, A., Bhakta, P., Frost, C., Boone, P. (2013). The Support to Rural India's Public Education System (STRIPES) trial: A cluster randomized controlled trial of supplementary teaching, learning material and material support. *PLOS ONE*, 9(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1371/annotation/75418564-edc5-465e-b94b-1ee3b8cf39e5>

Mbiti, I., & Rodriguez-Segura, D. (forthcoming). *Evaluating curriculum reforms in developing countries: Evidence from Tanzania*. RISE Working Paper.

Muralidharan, K., Singh, A., & Ganimian, A. J. (2019). Disrupting education? Experimental evidence on technology-aided instruction in India. *American Economic Review*, 109(4), 1426–60.

<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20171112>

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *How people learn II: Learners, contexts, and cultures*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24783>

Nugroho, D., Pasquini, C., Reuge, N., & Amaro, D. (2020). *COVID-19: How are countries preparing to mitigate the learning loss as schools reopen? Trends and emerging good practices to support the most vulnerable children*. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1119-covid-19-how-are->

[countries-preparing-to-mitigate-the-learning-loss-as-they-reopen.html](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1119-covid-19-how-are-countries-preparing-to-mitigate-the-learning-loss-as-they-reopen.html)

Pratham. (2020). *Teaching at the Right Level : From concern with exclusion to challenges of implementation*. Background paper prepared for UNESCO 2020 GEM Report.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373668>

Pritchett, L., & Beatty, A. (2012). *Negative consequences of overambitious curricula in developing countries*. Center for International Development Working Paper No. 243. Harvard University.

https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/cid/files/publications/faculty-working-papers/243_Pritchett.pdf

Saavedra, J., Naslund-Hadley, E., & Alfonso, M. (2017). *Targeted remedial education: Experimental evidence from Peru*. NBER Working Paper No. 23050. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23050>

Tomlinson, C. A., Brighton, C., Hertberg, H., Callahan, C. M., Moon, T. R., Brimijoin, K., Conover, L. A., & Reynolds, T. (2003). Differentiating instruction in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile in academically diverse classrooms: A review of literature. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 27(2–3), 119–145.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/016235320302700203>

UNESCO. (2020a). *Education: From disruption to recovery*.

<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

UNESCO. (2020b). *Inclusion and education: All means all*. Global Education Monitoring Report 2020. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>

UNESCO Institute of Statistics, UIS. (2019). *New methodology shows that 258 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school*. Fact Sheet No. 56. UNESCO.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/new-methodology-shows-258-million-children-adolescents-and-youth-are-out-school.pdf>

UNICEF. (2019). *Every child learns: UNICEF education strategy 2019-2030 (Nigeria)*.

<https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/EdStrategy-2019-2030-CountrySolutions-Nigeria.pdf>

UNICEF. (2020). *COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures? A global analysis of the potential reach of remote learning policies*. Factsheet.

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/>

UNICEF. (2020, August 30). *Unequal access to remote schooling amid COVID-19 threatens to deepen global learning crisis* [Press release].

Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unequal-access-remote-schooling-amid-covid-19-threatens-deepen-global-learning>

Uwezo. (2019). *Are our children learning? Uwezo Uganda eighth learning assessment report 2019*.

Twaweza East Africa.

<https://twaweza.org/uploads/files/UWEZO%20REPORT%202019%20FINAL-8.pdf>

Vromant, N., Kuppens, L., Hazemba, M., Kyulabantua, F., & Cupito, E. (forthcoming). *Scaling teaching at the right level: Insights from the catch-up literacy and numeracy intervention in Zambia*. In *Ensuring All Children Learn: Lessons from the South on What Works in Equity and Inclusion*. Lexington Publishers.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ward, M. (2018). PISA for development: Results in focus. *PISA in Focus*, No. 91. OECD.

<https://doi.org/10.1787/c094b186-en>

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17, 89-100.

[10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x)

World Bank. (2018a). *World development report 2018: learning to realize education's promise*.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/28340/211096ov.pdf>

World Bank. (2019). *Ending learning poverty: What will it take?*

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32553>

World Bank. (2019). *Ghana - Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project*.

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/415871570586470453/Ghana-Ghana-Accountability-for-Learning-Outcomes-Project>

World Bank. (2019). *School enrollment, primary (net %)*.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.NENR?end=2019&start=2010>

Young 1ove. (2019). *Young 1ove TARL results*.

Tableau Public.

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/young1ove#!/viz/home/TaRLAllTermsMSGSLlevellingResults/FullDashboardStory>

Young1ove. (2020). *Teaching at the Right Level*.

www.young1ove.org/tarl