

INSIGHT

Strategic Ways to Boost Learning Outcomes of Basic Education



The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of education technology in curriculum delivery and student assessment.

Photo credit: ADB.

Develop e-learning resources, curricula that include 'soft skills,' and education infrastructure to improve learning in Asia and the Pacific.

Published: 12 April 2021

Introduction

More than 600 million children in school are not learning the basic skills, knowledge, and values they need. Asia and the Pacific has the highest number of children and young people affected by low learning outcomes. Overall, 9 out of 10 children in the region today are enrolled in primary school. However, learning outcomes are not satisfactory and inequalities persist. Boys have more access to education than girls in some countries. Children with disabilities are disproportionately excluded from education. Internally displaced and refugee children often miss out on educational opportunities across the region.

Challenges to education development in the region include lack of qualified teachers, good learning materials and facilities, and relevant curricula. Addressing these challenges will be crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal No. 4—ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic further heightened

these challenges and has made it more difficult to improve learning outcomes. Many countries were ill-prepared to shift to online distance learning, and the lack of continuity in formative assessment has prevented teachers from monitoring students' progress.

In response to the need to expand and improve education at all levels of basic education, Asian Development Bank (ADB) has funded projects that addressed three priorities essential to high-quality education: quality and relevance, systems and governance, and equitable access. These projects covered teacher pre-service and in-service education, school leadership programs, and development of critical education infrastructure.

This article is based on the publication *ADB Support for School Education (K-12) in Asia and the Pacific*.

Solutions to Basic Education Challenges

ADB recognizes that high-quality universal basic education results from the expansion of post-primary education, teacher education, and skills training, all of which rest on a strong primary-school foundation. Since 1970, it has funded education projects amounting to \$7.4 billion in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education; and \$1.6 billion in general education sector development. Around \$2.2 billion of the \$5.5 billion in ADB funding for 61 ongoing education projects is for school education in 12 developing member countries, as of October 2020.

Improve teacher training and education

Teacher education is essential to good teaching and student learning. However, teachers are in short supply, isolated, and not given enough support to provide effective teaching and learning in many countries. There is a need to increase the number of well-trained and motivated teachers.

The teaching capacity of teachers can be improved through teacher training modules, classroom training and in-class mentoring using information and communication technology (ICT). Online learning modules can help improve access to high quality in- and pre-service teacher education and training programs.

Develop relevant curriculum

High-quality education requires a curriculum that provides depth of learning. It is also necessary to bridge the gap between what the curriculum teachers deliver and what students actually learn.

Developing relevant curricula involves highlighting 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and communication. This can be done by integrating “soft skills” into the curriculum and adding grade 12 to secondary education to meet the international standard. Curriculum reforms can also be achieved by focusing on secondary education curriculum, pedagogy, and student assessment to meet the country's labor force needs.

Enhance collaboration with stakeholders

Meeting the goals and targets of SDG 4 does not rest solely on teachers. While they play a critical role in providing high-quality instruction, high-performing school systems need collaboration between effective school leadership and local communities, local governments, education authorities, parents, and other stakeholders.

Strengthening the secondary education sector management includes implementing reforms in the education department's public financial management and creating school governance councils in secondary schools. Knowledge exchange through partnerships between government and civil society organizations to improve teacher quality and effectiveness can also boost collaboration among stakeholders.

Develop resilient infrastructure

Natural disasters can restrict access to education. Thus, there should be a focus on the development of critical education infrastructure and disaster-preparedness. Electricity network, internet connection, and school buildings damaged by cyclones need to be reconstructed. At the same time, these school facilities need to be rebuilt to make them more resilient to disasters and climate change risks.

Expanding access to education also involves improving the overall school environment. This can include upgrading dormitories and training dormitory staff to enhance the school experience and encourage families in remote areas to send their children to school.

Emerging Priority Areas

Learning can further be improved by focusing on these emerging priority areas:

Curriculum update. Reduce curriculum load, give emphasis on 21st century skills, and shift to more formative and continuous assessment. The entire learning process, not just final examinations, should be assessed. Learning disruptions due to COVID-19 have highlighted the urgent need for formative assessment in curriculum delivery using education technology or EdTech. This would allow teachers to focus instruction on lagging students and for students to move toward personalized learning.

Teacher quality. Get the best secondary school graduates into pre-service teacher education managed by universities and retain them as teachers. Teacher education programs should match the rigor of university education and include the development of basic research skills. In-service teacher training must also be prioritized.

School principals and education management quality. A motivated principal and support from education management will help teachers and students achieve better results and outcomes.

Education technology. Promote technology for online learning. The COVID-19 crisis has shown the importance of EdTech as it helps teachers effectively deliver the curriculum, monitor learning levels of students, and give students the necessary support.

Financial resources mobilization. Find or develop innovative ways to finance education programs to improve learning outcomes, such as results-based lending, public–private partnerships, and partnerships with high-quality universities and centers of excellence. Normal education sector lending to widen access alone will not improve learning outcomes. This requires raising the quality of teachers, school principals, and other members of the education workforce, and changing the mindset of key stakeholders.

Resources

List

Asian Development Bank (ADB). ADB's Work in the Education Sector.

ADB. Armenia: Seismic Safety Improvement Program.

ADB. Bangladesh: Supporting Fourth Primary Education Development Program.

ADB. Education Issues in Asia and the Pacific.

ADB. Kyrgyz Republic: Strengthening Education System Sector Development Program.

ADB. Lao People's Democratic Republic: Secondary Education Sector Development Program (formerly Basic Education Sector Development Program II).

ADB. Mongolia: Improving School Dormitory Environment for Primary Students in Western Region Project.

ADB. Myanmar: Equipping Youth for Employment Project.

ADB. Nepal: Disaster Resilience of Schools Project.

ADB. Pakistan: Sindh Secondary Education Improvement Project.

ADB. Philippines: Secondary Education Support Program.

ADB. Regional: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in the North Pacific.

ADB. Regional: Strengthening Human Resources and Leadership for Education.

ADB. Tonga: Cyclone Ian Recovery Project.

ADB. Vanuatu: Cyclone Pam School Reconstruction Project.

Education Commission. 2019. Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation. New York: Education Commission.

The Great Schools Partnership. 2014. 21st Century Skills. The Glossary of Education Reform.

J. Tulivuori. 2021. ADB Support for School Education (K-12) in Asia and the Pacific. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2015. *Asia-Pacific regional Education for All report: a synthesis of the national EFA reports.* Bangkok: UNESCO.

World Bank. 2019. *The Education Crisis: Being in School Is Not the Same as Learning.* Washington, DC: World Bank.



Jukka Tulivuori

Social Sector Specialist, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department, Asian Development Bank

As part of the Education Sector Group, Jukka Tulivuori is improving teaching and learning outcomes in school education in Asia and the Pacific and producing knowledge in education. He was a Counselor of Education in the Finnish National Agency for Education. He has education and development working experience from Eritrea, Greece, and Ukraine. He holds master's degrees in Education and Geography from the University of Turku, Finland.

Follow Jukka Tulivuori on



Asian Development Bank (ADB)

The Asian Development Bank is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

Follow Asian Development Bank (ADB) on

