unicef | for every child



Learning Pioneers Programme

Shaping the Future of Learning:
From Innovation to Impact at Scale

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The problem we are working to solve:

Digital education has been promised as a transformative enabler for 25 years.

Countries face overlapping learning crises and digital education initiatives remain **fragmented**, pilot-bound, and disconnected from national systems.

The unsolved question is scale and sustainability.

How can countries move from initiatives to system-led digital education transformation that impacts learner outcomes at scale?

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The opportunity:

By applying innovation and systems approaches, the Learning Pioneers Programme supports countries to:

1. Move beyond fragmented digital education initiatives
2. Develop pathways to scale for digital education initiatives
3. Go beyond digital as usual
4. Future-proof digital education strategies/plans and initiatives
5. Showcase country work as global and regional leaders in digital education

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The Programme so far:

Cohort 1
Proof of concept
2024-25

Approach:
Matching countries with EdTech tools and supporting modeling for scale accompanied by research. Small-scale pilots with support for expanded implementation depending on evidence.

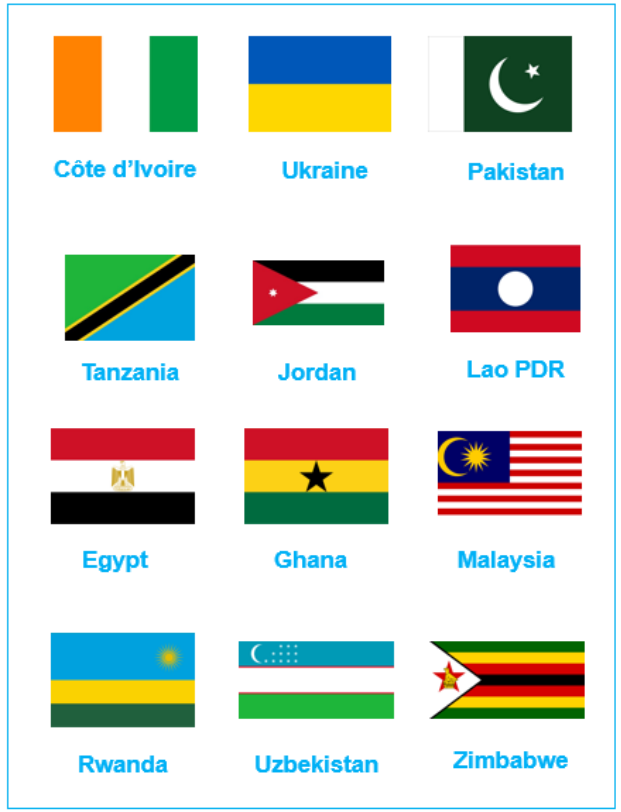
Cohort 2
Strategic Expansion
2025-26

Approach:
Modeling for scale of EdTech tools accompanied by evidence generation, with stronger focus on linkages to broader education sector priorities and system strengthening.

Cohort 3
Scale and Impact
2026-27

Moving Beyond Pilots to System-Wide Impact

Designed based on the lessons from Cohorts 1 and 2 with an emphasis on **impact and scale** in digital education.



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12 countries across Cohort 1 and 2

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How will the Learning Pioneers Programme support countries go beyond digital as usual to scale and sustain impactful digital education programming?

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The country Education Sector Plan and digital education strategy sets the direction

Ensure digital education initiatives are aligned with national vision and goals.

How can ongoing digital education initiatives further shape the education system and support its transformation?

How can the strategy, initiatives and institutional capacity adapt as context and technologies such as AI evolve?



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The Learning Pioneers Programme helps countries pick an anchor digital education initiative to scale strategically, and scale it for impact.

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Defining an anchor initiative

Each country scales one initiative and builds the capacity to strengthen its education system.

Anchor Initiative

Reaches learners
Strategy-aligned
Ready to scale
Strengthens the system

The anchor initiative is a government-recognized digital education initiative, supported by UNICEF that the country takes to national scale.

- It already reaches learners or teachers.
- It is part of the Education Sector Plan and digital education strategy.
- It has the strongest realistic pathway to national scale.
- It connects with other digital education work and can attract further investment in education.

Countries arrive with an anchor initiative and refine it as they learn from each other.

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Qualifying the anchor initiative

Five questions each country uses to test its choice of anchor initiative.

01

Reach and digital learning

Does it reach learners or teachers today? Is learning the focus, with technology as the enabler?

02

Format

Is it one programme or a package of two or three projects, with one scaling pathway?

03

Alignment

Is it a priority in the Education Sector Plan and digital education strategy? Does the government lead it?

04

Scale

Does it have a realistic pathway to national scale? Which partners can support scaling?

05

Systemic influence

Does it connect with other digital education work? Will scaling it strengthen shared infrastructure, standards and skills?

What it goes beyond:

- Beyond pilot or implementation of one project
- Beyond connecting schools and towards changing what happens in classes, while influencing national policies/strategies
- Focused on improving learning outcomes and strengthening systems

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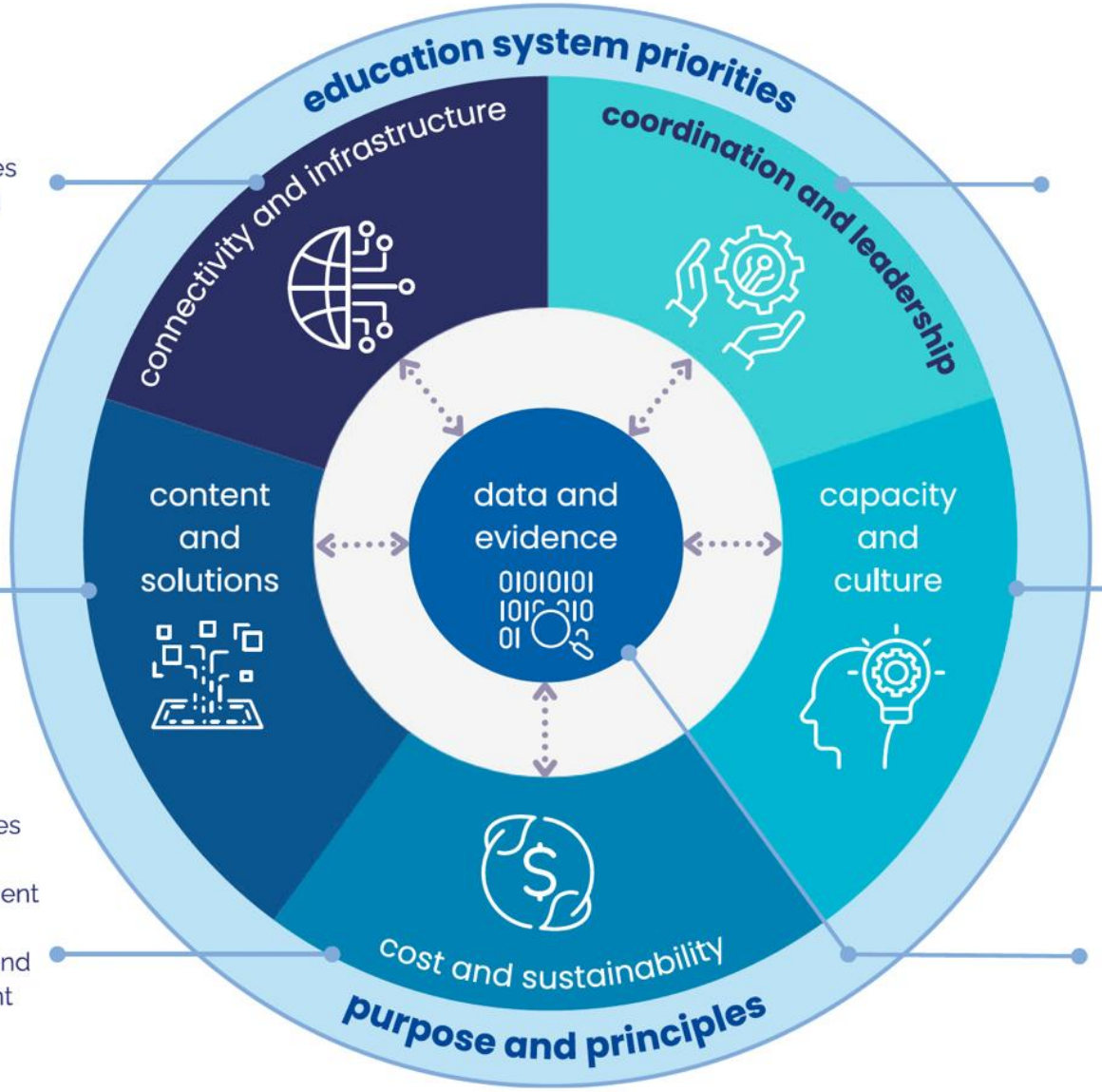
Adopting a systems approach to reduce fragmentation, bolster complementarities, identify opportunities to scale and sustain digital education programming

DTC Framework

Six Pillars for the Digital Transformation of Education

Reference for landscape analysis to identify gaps, strategic alignment, opportunities

Digital Transformation Collaborative



- Electricity
- Internet access
- Hardware and devices
- System software and services
- Learning spaces

- Vision and goals
- Governance and regulation
- Participative change management
- Evidence-informed decision making
- Monitoring and evaluation

- Learning platforms
- Content quality and openness
- Curricular alignment
- Pedagogical models
- Assessment and certification
- Learning pathways

- Future-ready skills
- Competencies and mindsets of teachers and leaders
- Role of parents and guardians
- Relationships with local communities
- Culture of innovation and knowledge generation

- Sustainable funding models
- Alignment to outcomes and priorities
- Ecosystem development and maintenance
- Operation expenses and resource management
- Green solutions

- Actionable insights
- System integration
- Quality and coverage
- Security and privacy
- Artificial intelligence

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The Learning Pioneers Programme Journey

A structured journey to engage with emerging approaches to impact and scale in education and build the institutional capacity to keep adapting.

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Programme timeline

Foundation | **Direction** | **Delivery** | **Ecosystem**

Community of practice, peer-to-peer learning, comms and visibility.

We are here

August 2026

Selected on readiness to scale

Five to six countries chosen, each with a candidate anchor initiative.

Aug- Sept 2026

Confirm the anchor, map the gaps

Evidence built through landscape mapping and user research.

5 to 9 Oct 2026

Innovation Camp, Helsinki

The cohort convenes and shapes a future-proof scaling plan.

Oct to Dec 2026

Scaling plans grounded in country realities

Camp outputs become concrete plans with technical support.

Early 2027

Scaling plan implementation

Plans implemented with support on governance and capacity.

Mid 2027 to 2028

Scaling review and decisions

Progress reviewed and lessons feed into scaling plan iteration, and where possible the Digital Education Strategy, Education Sector Plan

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LPP3: Pathways to Scale

From pilots and scattered initiatives to a country-owned scaling plan.

WHERE COUNTRIES ARE NOW

Supporting fragmented digital initiatives

Countries are implementing different digital education initiatives, some at pilot stage, others ongoing for a few years but have limited pathways for scale

WHAT THE DIGITAL EDUCATION AND LEARNING INNOVATION TEAM BRINGS

1. **Diagnostic tools:** to build a shared baseline from existing data.
2. **Technical inputs:** across financing, systems integration, and future-proofing.
3. **Facilitation and Human-Centred Design methods:** for the 1-2 day Strategic Alignment and Pathways to Scale Workshop.
4. **Continued technical guidance:** to support implementation

WHERE COUNTRIES NEED TO GO

An endorsed scaling pathway plan

A country-owned plan for national reach, financing, and sustainability.

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Country Cohort composition

A diverse cohort that generates learning across contexts.

Scale leaders

Countries ready to move beyond piloting to national scale now, showing what is possible. Political window of opportunity.

High-potential systems

Strong strategy and appetite, building the readiness to scale. There are opportunities that can be leveraged to scale and sustain digital education transformation, including system integration.

Regional and strategi global influence

Potential to influence regional peers and contribute to global learning.

Diverse contexts and operating environments

As a cohort, countries represent different regions, focus areas based on the UNICEF Digital Education Strategy to generate learning across contexts, that can serve as model for other countries.

Reaching the furthest behind, including fragile and emergency settings.

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What happens next after the Camp

Leveraging learnings and momentum to finalize and implement scaling pathway plan

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Camp outputs become concrete plans with technical support. A check-in call with country offices in Dec. to share progress.

Early 2027

Scaling plan implementation

Plans implemented with support on governance and capacity.

Mid 2027 to 2028

Scaling review and decisions

Progress reviewed and lessons feed into scaling plan iteration, and where possible the Digital Education Strategy, Education Sector Plan

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Grounded in the **UNICEF Digital Education Strategy**, the Learning Pioneers Programme supports countries scale and sustain digital education initiatives.

At the core is system integration and capacity upskilling on innovation and digital education transformation.

