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UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Region

Investing in Communication for Development to enhance quality education and learning outcomes

About this brief

This programme brief sets out key principles in applying C4D approaches to promote quality education and improve learning outcomes. It also presents findings from research on the application of C4D principles and processes to meet the goal of quality Education for All. Finally, the brief recommends actions for policy makers and programmers working towards the 2030 targets.

Background

The learning crisis

East and Southern African countries have made significant progress in access to education, with most children now in school. A new priority, however, has emerged: addressing the quality of education. If the education is of poor quality, little learning takes place.

In 2007, The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) III data indicated that after six years of school, only 62 per cent of students met the standard for reading and 33 per cent met the standard for mathematics. Not much changed in 2012 as the Africa Barometer report by the Centre for Universal Education at Brookings estimated that of the 97 million children who enter school on time in sub-Saharan Africa, 37 million will not learn basic skills. This means about one third of all children attending school will reach adolescence unable to read, write or perform basic numeracy tasks.

Factors both inside and outside the classroom have an impact on the quality of education and consequently on the quality of learning. Inside the classroom, some of the major challenges include: large classes; lack of educational materials for students and teachers; lack of trained teachers; violence in schools; and poor sanitation facilities. Outside the classroom, attitudes, beliefs and norms can influence the quality of education in different ways, including community and parent involvement in the running of school, and parental support for children's learning at home.
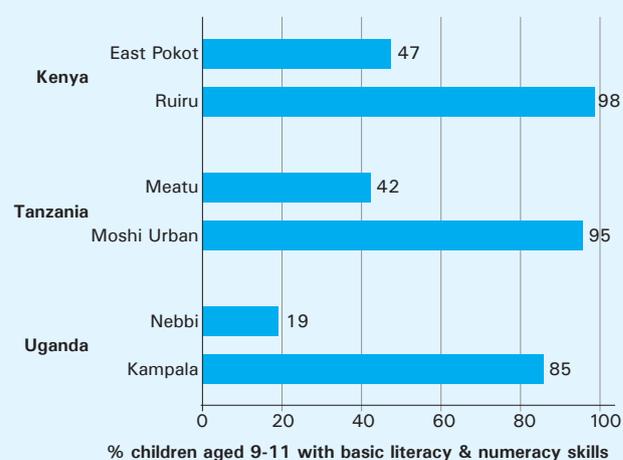
Inequality

Another educational priority is reaching all children, including those living in hard to reach communities. UWEZO – the citizen-based household assessments conducted across East Africa – show that attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills in Kenya is 85 per cent, while in Tanzania and Uganda it is 65 per cent and 48 per cent respectively. This highlights wide disparities between the best and worst scoring districts in each of the three countries (see figure below). Not surprisingly, children from the most marginalized communities are most likely to fall behind in learning.

Thus, policy makers and programmers need to focus on providing quality education in all areas, but particularly in communities with large numbers of children who are not even learning the basics.

Basic literacy and numeracy skills, by best and worst district in each country

% children aged 9-11 with basic literacy & numeracy skills

Source:https://theconversation.com/many-east-african-kids-attend-school-but-not-enough-are-actually-learning-48529

SDG 4 and Framework for Action

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action aim to ensure "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all". This goal aims to complete the unfinished work of earlier global targets and commitments for education, such as the Education for All initiative and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) relating to education. Thus, the SDG 4 takes a more holistic approach to education, ensuring that *learning* is the critical outcome.

The fact that previous goals were not fully met suggests that different approaches to address gaps in education are needed. Communication for Development (C4D), an approach that has received little prior attention in the education sector, has exciting potential to address this challenge in innovative ways.

Communication for Development

C4D is an approach that uses research and consultation to promote human rights, mobilize leadership and societies, influence attitudes and social norms, and transform behaviours.

Behavioural and social factors are widely acknowledged as critical to the success of development programmes. For example, the World Bank's World Development Report (2015) highlights the importance of identifying and designing programmes to address psychological and social influences on behaviour.

Conceptual approach

Studies have demonstrated that C4D approaches have a positive impact on changing attitudes and norms relating to education. They can positively shift knowledge and attitudes of caregivers, learners and educators in order to support inclusive, equitable and quality education. Communication programming has also been linked to early cognitive skills and school retention (Mares, 2013, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015).

Promoting quality education in the context of C4D approaches

There are a number of ways in which C4D approaches can improve the quality of education and directly and indirectly contribute to improved learning outcomes. These include:

Direct learning using 'edutainment' (content designed to educate and entertain) and community learning approaches that complement the formal curriculum. The following are examples of how C4D can be applied:

a. **Literacy and communication:** C4D is used to support media literacy and participatory media to improve child and adolescent communication skills. In this situation, children and adolescents are consumers of information and agents of change.
b. **Learning approaches and cognition; numeracy and mathematics; science and technology:** C4D uses new media to support learning.
c. **Culture and the arts:** C4D facilitates learning through Arts for Development by supporting partnerships and capacity development.
d. **Social and emotional:** C4D facilitates a participatory process to define values and skills in this domain and then cultivates these values and skills.

e. **Physical well-being:** C4D is used to promote healthy choices, habits and advocacy for healthier learning environments.

Enhancing capacity of parents and primary caregivers to improve their children's physical, social and cognitive development. This should begin before a child is even conceived and continue through their school life to adulthood. Parents/caregivers play perhaps the most critical role in the holistic development of children.

Improving the quality of teaching by using C4D methods to engage teachers in new pedagogic ideas and tools. This deepens teachers' understanding of the underlying challenges they face and how to overcome them.

Improving accountability of and partnership with schools and education providers by ensuring parents, caregivers and the wider community have information about schooling, know their rights and know how to support schools to achieve quality education. Community members are given the space and opportunity to come together, empowering them to demand changes or, depending on their circumstances, work collaboratively with schools.

What works: a summary of the evidence

Direct learning: Sesame Street – a long-running television series designed for pre-schoolers – is one of the best examples of direct learning. Evidence shows that the series has an impressive impact on educational attainment, particularly in preparing children for pre-school and also in keeping them in school. Moreover, the show has helped children socially, especially those from disadvantaged areas in the United States and other developed countries. Studies suggest that the series improved learning in various areas, including cognitive outcomes; learning about the world; social reasoning; and attitudes toward out-groups (Mares and Pan, 2013, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015). Other studies found that the show was positively associated with early cognitive skills, literacy, mathematics, health and safety knowledge, social development, environmental awareness, cultural awareness, and parental knowledge of the best childrearing practices (Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015; see also Lemish and Kolucki, 2013).

Enhancing attitudes and perceptions of parents and primary caregivers to improve children's learning: Retention in school can be influenced by encouraging positive attitudes towards education among children, parents and relatives, as well as raising awareness about educational options. This is particularly the case for marginalized children. Families with negative attitudes are less likely to be supportive, particularly of education for marginalized groups, for example girls, children with disabilities, and migrant and displaced children. In Kenya, research shows that family decisions to matriculate and keep girls in school are related to available social support and attitudes towards the value of education (Warrington and Kiragu, 2012, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015). Likewise, a community's positive beliefs about the inclusion of learners with disabilities in South Africa are deemed critical for the success of inclusive education policies (Stofile, 2008, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015).

Fostering positive attitudes towards education can be achieved through community dialogue sessions where members of the community discuss and address their perceptions of education. In Zambia, for example, facilitators assisted community members to come together to discuss the schooling of their children, creating opportunities for communities to listen to each other and voice their concerns.

Improving the quality of teaching: Studies have shown that teachers become more sensitive to their community's needs by engaging with the community and using teaching methods that promote child participation and learning of all groups, including marginalized children.

For example, evaluations have assessed the effectiveness of sensitizing teachers to the needs of marginalized children and also training them on interpersonal competencies. This includes addressing the concerns of children and families

and being attentive to the special situations of children and families. In some cases, raising awareness has contributed to teachers acting in ways that reduce community violence and provide safer spaces for students (Diazgranado and Noonan, 2015, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015). Teachers can be trained in "participatory teaching" to address needs of certain groups, and to empower marginalized children. In Zambia, teachers successfully developed a participatory problem-based approach to include children with disabilities in education as part of their commitment to child rights (Milesa, 2009, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015).

Using C4D to provide training to teachers to improve their skills: C4D tools, such as radio and digital platforms, are a valuable alternative to on-site training, particularly when classroom learning is difficult or impossible. They can reach large numbers of teachers in a wide area and on a regular basis. Moreover, they can train teachers in hard-to-reach areas which will in turn benefit students in these areas, for example radio in Zambia (Kangulu, 2012, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015). A multi-method impact study of e-learning for teachers in Cameroon concluded that digital-based programmes effectively contributed to professional development (Kibinkiri, 2014, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015).

Accountability of and partnership with schools and education providers: Encouraging communities to participate in school decision-making helps to improve school outcomes, especially learning. This process should include community members who are disadvantaged, such as the poor and those with disabilities. Notably, Malawi's Participatory Action for School Improvement (PASI) project, designed after the failure of other education projects to engage communities, has improved school performance by engaging local communities in a range of activities (Kendall, Kaunda and Friedson-Rideneur, 2015). This included promoting dialogue in communities to understand their concerns with the aim of achieving accountability and inclusiveness. After the project had been running for two years, the school had achieved better infrastructure, better teaching methods and improved academic performance.

Community-led interventions to improve the quality of education: Parents need to participate in the discussion of issues affecting their children's education, such as school budgets and the curriculum. Also, household surveys that include information about education and ratings on school management should be made public for communities to access.

A good example is the Vidya Chaitanyam project in rural Andhra Pradesh, India. It used community mobilization to pressure local primary schools to improve accountability and education quality. The project mobilized networks of illiterate and semi-illiterate women to monitor school quality by filling a relatively simple scorecard and discussing observations in group meetings and school management committees (Galab, Jones, Latham and Churches, 2013, cited in Waisbord and Ahmed, 2015).

Similarly, a study in Malawi and Kenya concluded that the participation of young people in a community scorecard programme was an effective way of achieving results. It encouraged responsiveness from the education system. Furthermore, the young people involved in the programme offered a more realistic view and assessment of themselves as citizens (Porter, 2014).

Recommendations for action

1. Ensure that education activities include C4D activities to empower children and their communities, or that they take place where C4D activities are already happening. This will be particularly important for fragile and stressed environments and areas affected by conflict.

2. Ensure that C4D education activities are mainstreamed and rooted in a broader education programme. They need to relate to community concerns about education as well as policy and programmatic directions, such as Education Sector reform.

3. Use C4D to teach children, parents and teachers specific topics and use technology wherever possible.

4. Support social mobilization to promote increased participation of community members from marginalized groups in school decision-making, such as parent-teacher associations and school-community committees.

5. Undertake consultations with and research on marginalized groups to understand how they frame educational quality, identifying both perceived barriers and opportunities to make improvements. Use findings to design 'quality with equity' strategies.

6. Build interventions backed by quality evidence – for example, through assessments such as UWEZO – to create debate, encourage accountability and put pressure on the service providers to provide quality education.

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