



UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

ETHIOPIA

Formative assessment places student learning at the heart of teaching

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In Ethiopia, while access to education has [quadrupled](#) over the last two decades, the learning crisis remains a sombre reality: [4 out of 10 students](#) cannot read at the end of grade 3. In 2017, the Government set a national goal to prioritise children's learning. One key tool being used to achieve this goal is formative assessment, a range of [formal and informal assessment procedures](#) conducted by teachers during the learning process and used to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student achievement. The Ministry of Education, supported by UNICEF, led a formative assessment initiative called [Assessment for Learning \(AfL\)](#), which equips teachers with skills, resources and a supportive environment to shift their teaching to become more engaging for students, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes. To ensure user-friendliness of the AfL package, UNICEF supported the translation of all AfL training materials and posters into 15 local languages used across seven regions.

Through this initiative, which started in 2013, teachers spend more time actively assessing students, as opposed to lecturing, managing the classroom or on tasks unrelated to learning. AfL places real-time information gathering at the forefront, leading to more informed teaching, better prepared lesson planning and more tailored support to learners. AfL ensures flexible, quality school-based assessment practices and engages parents, making it sustainable and efficient. Even more, [refugee and national teachers both participate](#) in the training programme, generating new feelings of collegiality compared to before AfL trainings, when these teachers never interacted professionally. In 2020, AfL became embedded nationally in primary schools, through UNICEF support, and pre-primary schools, through World Bank support, as well as in all refugee camps. The Government has now fully taken over AfL operations in all regions.

With recent COVID-19-related school closures, the need for continuous assessment and recording of student progress has become all the more prominent when students switched to blended learning, building from the vast progress achieved through the AfL initiative. Evaluations in 2020, 2017 and 2015 revealed that children had greater enthusiasm for and participation in their learning, leading to increased attendance and reduced drop-out rates. Communication between teachers and parents increased, and there were substantial positive impacts on learning in mother tongue and Mathematics. Overall, teaching and assessment styles have improved, specifically by better monitoring student progress, which enabled teachers to tailor instruction to individual learners' needs, including for those who were lagging behind.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

- As of March 2019, AfL in Ethiopia impacted 361,880 children (48.5 *per cent* girls) from 676 schools whose reading in mother tongue and Mathematics showed improvements.
- UNICEF helped train 6,938 teachers in AfL approaches, including through training modules, lesson planning tips and other teacher resources.
- UNICEF helped introduce AfL training programmes to all 37 Colleges of Teacher Education (CTE), where primary school teachers in Ethiopia are educated. Implementation is at different stages across the various CTEs.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Learning must remain at the heart of teaching.** With AfL, teachers rethink how they teach by placing the learner's progress at the heart of everything they do. This ultimately shifts classroom culture, where traditional teacher-student roles are replaced with more collaborative relationships so that both students

and teachers team up in making learning visible, dynamic and relevant.

- **Teaching strategies tailored to learners' unique needs yield stronger outcomes.** Through the AfL approach, teachers can better understand the learning gaps of children and respond accordingly. In Ethiopia, where the COVID-19 pandemic as well as protracted and overlapping humanitarian emergencies have widened learning gaps particularly for the most vulnerable, teachers will face students at different points in their learning journey. In response to these challenges and to accelerate recovery, it is essential for teachers to understand students' performance level and group them accordingly in order to design lesson plans tailored to current needs and to ensure that learning is achieved.
- **Teaching that incorporates formative assessment adds value beyond academic outcomes.** Evidence shows that students may benefit in non-academic areas such as increased self-confidence and school engagement.
- **Engagement of local communities has wide-ranging benefits.** Parents and caregivers are receiving real-time information on their children's learning progress, leading to heightened engagement.

NEXT STEPS

AfL expansion is possible through Ethiopia's 37 CTEs, and since 2018, UNICEF has been scaling up the programme in the CTEs of all other regions. Currently, the Ministry of Education is reviewing the Teacher Education Curriculum, which represents a good opportunity to further incorporate AfL into CTE modules. The process includes forming teams of experts to review, update and revise the CTE modules as well as integrating AfL content into pre-service teacher training.

Cost effectiveness: UNICEF leveraged the national expansion of the AfL initiative through its inclusion within the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP) and provided up to US \$57.5 million for its successful implementation by the Ministry of Education. The support through GEQIP benefitted 27 *per cent* of schools in Ethiopia.

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