Adolescent Education and Skills; Multiple Learning Pathways; Innovation –

Improving adolescents’ learning in violence-affected areas through blended in-person and online learning opportunities in Mexico: Communities in Harmony for Children and Adolescents

**Problem**

Dropout accelerates in Mexico during secondary. While the national enrollment rate in primary school is 98.6%, at the lower secondary level, it drops to 84.4% at lower secondary, and further to 63.9% in upper secondary.\(^1\) The wave of increasing violence in Mexico is one of the key drivers.

States like Guerrero and Chihuahua, known for a strong presence of organized crime, have some of the largest numbers of out-of-school adolescents. On average, three out of every ten students in Mexico drop out before completing secondary school.

**Solution**

To address this challenge, UNICEF Mexico has launched a project in 14 secondary schools in Guerrero and Chihuahua called, “Communities in Harmony for Children and Adolescents,” that aims keep adolescents learning and safe. It does this through innovative teaching methodologies that blend in-person and online learning opportunities.

The project has three components:
1. innovation in education (Education),
2. training for teachers and child protection authorities on prevention and referral of cases of violence (Protection), and
3. creation of safe spaces for adolescents in schools in the community (Protection).

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Innovation in education

UNICEF Mexico delivered tablets to students in 14 secondary schools in violence-prone areas (6 in Chihuahua and 8 in Guerrero). The tablets came loaded with Quipper, a learning software that contains the secondary school level curriculum. Teachers were trained in a blended teaching strategy that combines traditional face-to-face teaching with technology to maximize learning. The goal of this innovation is twofold: to promote better learning and prevent dropout among adolescents.

Teachers can plan their lecture and assign tasks using the audiovisual materials loaded on the platform and can monitor the students individual progress which allows them to intervene in real time whenever a student needs further assistance.

This 10-month pilot, which will run until May 2020, has reached 4,500 adolescents (2,250 female) and 247 teachers.

Preliminary results, lessons learnt, and next steps

A midterm evaluation from July 2019 revealed promising preliminary results regarding learning achievements. Within only 3 months of implementation, students in Chihuahua have shown a 2% improvement in their learning outcomes in Communication/Language as well as Math, and students in Guerrero have shown a 9% improvement.

One of the key lessons learnt is the need to explore offline versions of the software. Poor internet connectivity has been a major implementation challenge. As a result, advocacy efforts with schools will focus on improving internet connection, ensuring secure storage spaces for the tablets, as well as adequate connections to charge the tablets to maximize results.

The next steps are to continue monitoring the learning outcomes of the students. If results are positive, UNICEF Mexico will propose scale up at the state level as an official alternative learning pathway for out of school adolescents affected by violence.

Cost effectiveness

This education innovation will cost US $600,000 over 10 months, reaching 4,500 students. The cost per student is US $133.33.

The positive preliminary results reveal the potential scalability of the pilot as an official alternative learning pathway for adolescents living in violence-prone areas.