



Advancing Learning Outcomes and Leadership Skills



Introduction

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025 (African Union Commission, 2017), to which Kenya is a signatory, rightly emphasizes the establishment of a holistic, inclusive and equitable education system as the core of sustainable development. A holistic approach to learning focuses on the development of the whole child to the fullest extent possible; actualizes the idea of a child-centered perspective in education; and emphasizes how a student learns beyond the confines of a classroom (Hare, 2010). This type of education aims to motivate individuals to reach their potential and achieve their goals, and prepares learners to lead productive and fulfilling lives while managing their personal growth and development through exposure to life skills (Hare, 2010). In Kenya, a national life skills curriculum has not been successfully adopted because life skills remains an non-examinable subject under the current 8.4.4 (eight years of primary school, four years of high school, and four years of university) curriculum.

Integration of life skills into the public school curriculum currently under reform by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) is integral to the national effort to shift away from an exam-oriented education system to one that is competency-based and learner-focused. The new 2.6.6.3 (two years of pre-primary school, six years of middle school, six years of senior school, and three years of tertiary and university education) curriculum, whose pilot phase was rolled out in early 2018 across the country, emphasizes continuous assessment and focuses less on summative evaluation. Self-reliance, character development, individual agency, patriotism, civic responsibility, and the ability to cooperate with others are now emphasized in schools to help mitigate societal issues including tribal strife, crime and corruption, under- and unemployment, and substance abuse (Kabita & Ji, 2017).

After-school support programs are a vehicle through which life skills can be transferred to

learners, according to evidence generated by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) through a series of community-based interventions. These programs have contributed to improvements in academic achievement, improved educational aspirations, greater interest in schooling, enhanced resistance to negative peer pressure, and increased parental involvement (Abuya et al., 2015; Lauer et al., 2006). Also encouraging is the finding that those children who are at greater risk of dropping out of school are more likely to be positively affected by the after-school programming. This in itself is a demonstration of the value of a holistic approach to education that goes beyond the classroom. To make the after-school programming most effective organizers must run time-bound programs systematically, inclusively and with clearly defined goals (Arthur Jr., Bennet Jr., Stanush, & McNelly, 1998; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

The A LOT-Change Intervention

APHRC initiated an expansive research agenda in 2013 to understand the gaps and bottlenecks in learning for young people. A three-year pilot for adolescent girls, the Advancing Learning Outcomes and Leadership Skills among Children in Nairobi’s Informal Settlements through Community Participation (ALOT-Change) Project, that sought to identify solutions to reach vulnerable and marginalized young people who are often ignored by formal education systems, was launched in 2013. The second phase, initiated in 2016, aims to culminate with the foundation of an effective and scalable model to enhance learning outcomes, improve transition to secondary school, and inculcate leadership skills and positive behavior for children living in resource-limited settings.

At the midline, the five-part intervention includes 686 girls and boys aged 11-17 years and living in two of Nairobi’s urban informal settlements, Korogocho and Viwandani.

The five-part intervention includes:



The project is implemented by Miss Koch-Kenya and U-Tena Youth Organization, two community-based organizations in Korogocho and Viwandani,

respectively. An impact evaluation of the project is currently underway.

The objectives of the impact evaluation are to:

Establish whether the intervention has a differential effect on learning outcomes and transition to secondary school between boys and girls;

Examine whether mentoring in life skills fosters positive behavior, aspirations, interest in schooling, and self-confidence among girls and boys;

Establish the impact of leadership skills training on various outcomes (learning outcomes, role modeling, and leadership development) among student participants;

Establish whether parents are more likely to support their children's education after guidance and counselling sessions.

The intervention has proven to be a sustainable community-based model that can be adopted into policy and practice nationally.

Step-by-Step Approach

The intervention incorporated twice-weekly, hour-long after-school support sessions in literacy and numeracy, three times in a month. Textbooks approved by the KICD are used for homework support and revision. Monthly life skills sessions are also offered.

Pupils with identified leadership potential are given the opportunity to develop, refine, and practice their skills through six in-house sessions conducted by community mentors: role models drawn from the same community who have excelled in and out of school.

Accomplished community leaders speak to participants every quarter, and the children go on an annual 'exposure' visit to see the real world of work. Students who score 250 marks and above in

the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination in the final year of primary school will from early 2019 receive a subsidy to help them make the transition into high school. Hour-long parental counseling sessions are conducted once every quarter, and then will occur monthly over the last quarter of the project.

The intervention package piloted in Phase 1 is being implemented in Korogocho; the additional component of leadership and role modeling was randomly allocated to Viwandani.

There are three data collection points for testing of the leadership component:

- A baseline survey completed in 2016 to collect information on background characteristics of the individuals, assess their numeracy and literacy skills as well as their knowledge and involvement in leadership and their aspirations;
- A midline assessment with similar data points in April and May 2017; and
- A final collection of impact-oriented data in July 2018.

Key Findings at Midline

1 Study Respondents

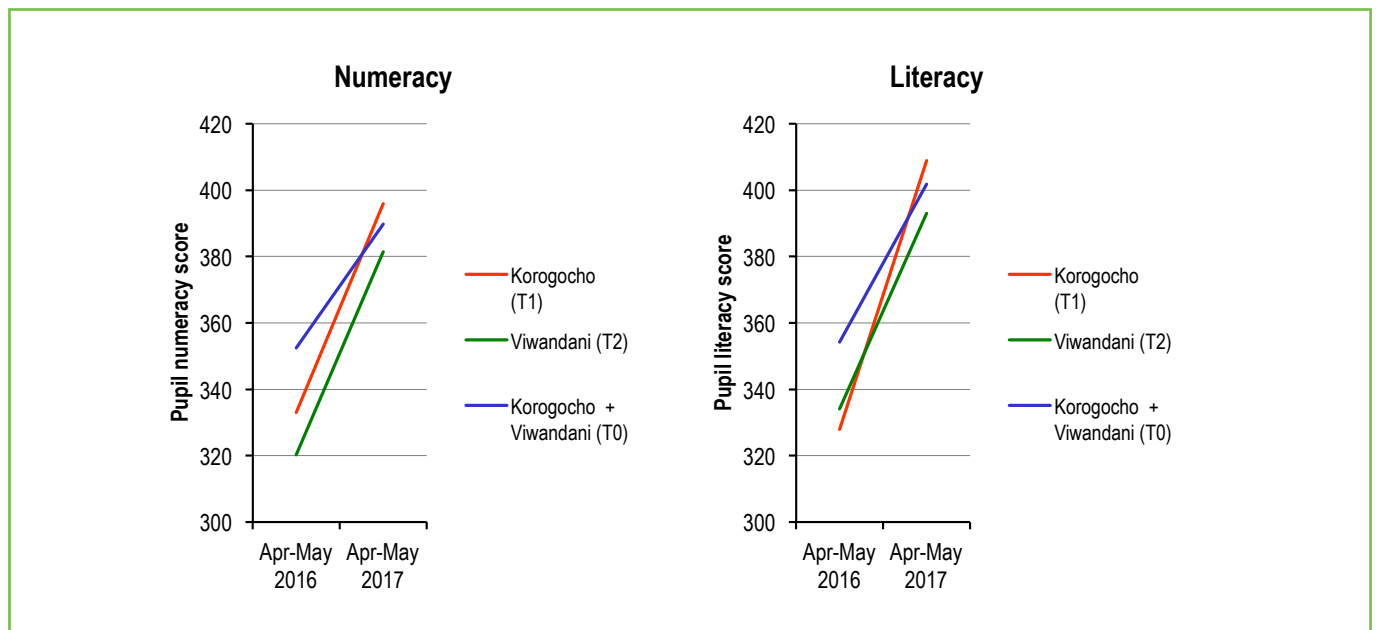
The A LOT-Change study involves 686 boys and girls aged between 11 and 17 years (mean age of 12.5 years) at baseline and living in Viwandani (47.7%) and Korogocho (52.3%) study sites. Two thirds of the sample came from households that were male-headed. Of the household heads, 58% and 51% in Korogocho and Viwandani, respectively, were educated to the primary level only.

At baseline, all the students were enrolled in school; by grade six, 27% had repeated at least one grade. At midline, grade repetition reduced

slightly in Viwandani compared to Korogocho. However, the reduction was not statistically significant.

The intervention demonstrated significant impact on parental aspirations for their children's educational attainment. The proportion of parents in Viwandani who reported an interest in their children pursuing university education increased significantly, from 40% at baseline to 69.7% at midline (an increase of almost 30%). This was 25% percentage points higher than what was observed in Korogocho.

Figure 1: The impact of the intervention on pupils' scores'



The intervention was implemented in two packages with the first package (T1) being implemented in Korogocho and the second package (T2) in Viwandani; T0 involves data collected from the pilot phase of the study from girls in the control groups in Korogocho and Viwandani. In other words the combined Korogocho + Viwandani (T0) data is drawn from an independent sample of girls from the GEC pilot study. Thus, these Korogocho + Viwandani (T0) data are not Korogocho (T1) and Viwandani (T2) combined.

2 Achievement in Numeracy and Literacy

During the design phase of the study, it was deemed unethical to include a pure control group because the intervention components had already

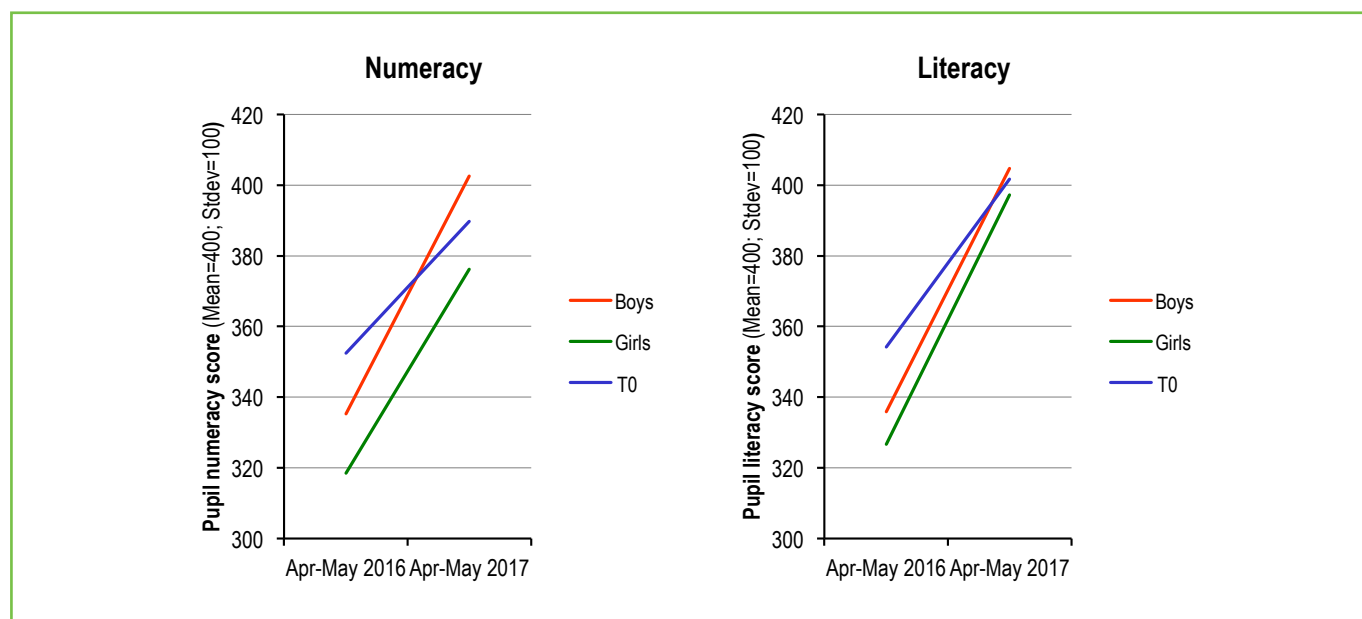
been shown to work during the pilot phase. For the purposes of the midline, however, to estimate the impact of the intervention on literacy and numeracy scores, we used a test based on the curriculum for upper grades that was developed during the pilot phase. The control group from

the pilot phase (to be also referred to as the “T0” group) is compared with the two treatment groups of interest: the Korogocho group, or T1, and the Viwandani group, or T2. Only the T2 group received the leadership intervention.

Figure 1 depicts the impact of the intervention packages on numeracy and literacy performance. The literacy and numeracy scores for pupils in

Korogocho showed a slightly higher improvement than for pupils in Viwandani. This finding suggests that the leadership component had little impact on numeracy or literacy scores. In general, when the data of the two sites were combined (i.e. T1 and T2 data combined), boys were seen to have better numeracy scores than girls; literacy scores were comparable (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: The impact of the intervention by pupil sex



The mean score on the standardized Rasch scale that was developed during the pilot phase was 400, with a standard deviation of 100. The lines below 400 suggest that the learners were performing below the set mean level.

3 Outcomes Related to Life Skills

The proportion of pupils that expressed positive aspirations for their educational and employment future increased from baseline to midline, with slightly higher proportions in Viwandani compared to Korogocho.

Across both sites, self confidence levels, measured by the number of pupils who strongly agreed or agreed with a question about ‘feeling good about themselves,’ were high at midline, with an 8.3% gain Viwandani from baseline. However, there was no gain in Korogocho, which could be attributed to the fact that at baseline, the proportion was already quite high, at 95%.

At baseline, pupils preferred to discuss puberty and sexuality issues with their parents rather than with other trusted adults or their peers. The same was true at midline, with 44% of pupils from both sites confirming this preference (compared to 47% at baseline). The proportion was higher, at 56%, among girls than boys, at 32%. At midline, there was a 12% decrease from baseline in the number of pupils who felt comfortable discussing the same with their teachers. There was an increase in the number of pupils who felt comfortable having these types of conversations with their siblings and peers at midline (12% increase over baseline).

4 Leadership

Overall, there were no significant differences observed in scores for leadership between the intervention and comparison groups. The greatest improvement from baseline to midline was in self-efficacy, or an individual's perceived ability to stand up for his or her rights. There was a remarkable increase (from 55% to 69%) in the proportion of pupils who reported that they 'sometimes' or 'always' had adults who they could depend on for help when needed, or whom they could turn to for guidance in times of stress and were able to count on in case of an emergency or talk to about important life decisions. This suggests that the adults engaged in the program – including the after-school mentors – are being seen as part of the young people's support networks, and resources to help manage personal difficulties.

5 Narratives on the Perceptions of the Community, Parents, and Pupils

Qualitative narratives were collected at midline from both intervention groups. Students saw the literacy interventions as beneficial for all subjects taught in English, the primary language of instruction in the Kenyan curriculum.

The students also expressed favorable opinions about the mentorship component of the intervention, saying that the mentors were more approachable and better able to connect with them than teachers.

Communication between the youth and their parents was perceived to have improved as a function of the parental counseling sessions. Parents hailed more openness from their children about their needs, feelings, challenges and school work and also reported changes in their own behaviors and willingness to engage in conversation with their children, rather than resorting to corporal punishment.

Pupils also expressed improved agency and willingness to take up positions of leadership, whether in student government or at home. There was improved understanding of ethical leadership among those already holding leadership positions in school. Pupils enrolled in the project reported that their planning skills had improved as they were better organized at school and at home. This was not an intended outcome but could be attributed to the fact that within the day, learners were now able to allocate blocks of time to the different activities related to school, to home and to the intervention.

The narratives from the community leaders suggested that one year into the intervention, they saw a shift in their own roles. Rather than just ensuring parents take their children to school, they saw a responsibility for ensuring that parents played an active role in their children's education. This shift has also helped to support parents in resolving outstanding issues that were being dealt with at the Department of Children's Services which is mandated to safeguard and protect the rights and welfare of children in Kenya.

Conclusion

Halfway through the project, the intervention has shown a modest positive impact. Improved numeracy and literacy scores, enhanced communication between parents and children, and the emergence of community champions to advocate for the program suggest that the intervention is on the right track. Support for and sustainability of the program has increased over the years, as the community has become more appreciative of the value of education.

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