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# Accelerated Learning Programmes:

# What can we learn from them about curriculum reform?

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to present a cross-country analysis of the content and implementation of successful Accelerated Learning Programmes, ALPs. A literature search was conducted to find information on as many ALPs, as possible. This resulted in a matrix displaying key features of ALPs. Using the information from fifteen ALPs where almost complete data was available, an analysis was undertaken to discern the nature of these programmes in terms of providing improved access to learning. Five ALPs covering a range of types were selected for more detailed study. Finally, the lessons learned from ALPs were highlighted; potential implications for reform in the formal system were discussed with particular emphasis on the curriculum and teacher education.

## List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ABC | Assessment of Basic Competencies |
| ABE | Alternative Basic Education |
| AIDS | Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| AL | Accelerated Learning |
| ALP | Accelerated Learning Programme |
| APEP | Afghanistan Primary Education Program |
| BEUPA | Basic Education for the Urban Poor Areas |
| BRAC | Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee |
| BPS | BRAC Primary School |
| CAII | Creative Associates International Inc |
| CBE | Complementary Basic Education |
| CERT | Centre for Educational Research and Training |
| CHANCE | Child-Centred Alternative Non-Formal Community Based Education |
| CIDA | Canadian International Development Agency |
| COBET | Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania |
| COPE | Complementary Opportunities for Primary Education |
| DANIDA | Danish International Development Agency |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| EEPCT | Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition |
| EFA | Education for All |
| ELSE | Empowering Lifelong Skills Education |
| EQUIP | Education Quality Improvement Program |
| FSP | Flexible Schooling Programme |
| GIZ | Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| GTZ | German Technical Cooperation |
| GMR | Global Monitoring Report |
| GPS | Government Primary School |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| IGV | Integrated General and Vocational |
| IRC | International Red Cross |

| ITTDI | Iraqi Teacher Training and Development Institute |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------|
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| MOEST | Ministry of Education, Science and Technology |
| NFE | Non-Formal Education |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NIETD | National Institute for Educational Training and Development |
| OSP | Out of School Programme |
| PHARE | Programme Haitien d'Appui à la Réforme de l'Education |
| NRC | Norwegian Refugee Council |
| SCOPE | Strengthening Community Government Partnership for Education |
| SDC | Swiss Agency for Development |
| SFL | School for Life |
| SPARK | Skills, Participation and Access to Relevant Information |
| TEACH | Transforming Education for Adults and Children |
| UCEP | Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WEI | World Education Inc |

## Introduction

For almost three decades, substantial alternative schooling programmes have been meeting the needs for basic education of under-reached children[1]. More recently, it has been increasingly recognized that the goals of Education for All cannot be achieved unless more attention is paid to educating out-of-school children (UNESCO, Global Monitoring Report, 2008). Indeed, the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2010 'Reaching the Marginalized' focused on this issue.

Alternative schooling has been analysed by some from the perspective on non-state provision (Rose, 2007)[2]. Others have considered it in terms of non-formal education (Hoppers, 2006; Hoppers 2008)[3]. Yet others have examined those alternative schooling programmes that are complementary education systems (DeStefano et al, 2007). This paper will consider alternative schooling from the viewpoint of accelerated learning.

An internet search on 'accelerated learning' produces many links to sites promoting techniques to improve individual learning such as speed-reading, quicker study skills and ways of more rapidly assimilating information. However, accelerated learning is not just about faster learning but learning which is deeper and more effective (Charlick, 2004).

Accelerated Learning Programmes, ALPs, focus on completing learning in a shorter period of time. ALPs are a form of complementary education[4]. As opposed to alternative education[5], they have the same end-point as a formal education system but reach it in less time. The ALP is complementary both in providing an alternative route and in matching its curriculum to the 'official' curriculum, thus allowing learners to return to formal schooling at some stage.

Both governments and non-state providers have initiated ALPs in many countries. They address overage children in different circumstances: some without access to

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[1] One of the best known is the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee Primary Schools.

[2] while at the same time recognizing that the some states takes a more direct role in alternative schooling provision.

[3] Recognizing that alternative schooling is better described as para-formal as it usually retains some features of a formal system, most often with regard to curriculum issues.

[4] Some complementary programmes are not accelerated. They have the same number of grades/levels as the matched school. Of 9 complementary education programmes studies by the EQUIP2 team, 3 were not accelerated at all; 1 was not accelerated although learners could work at their own pace; 2 were initially accelerated but reverted, leaving only 3 accelerated programmes (BRAC, Ghana and Honduras) which are included in this study. (See DeStefano J et al 2007 Reaching the Underserved: Complementary Models of Effective Schooling, EQUIP2 Washington DC)

[5] Alternative education programmes are used for groups with distinctive ways of life or particularly strong cultural identities. 'Alternative' is used in the literature in two senses. Broadly, it implies a different route to the same end while, narrowly, it also implies a different end.

schooling because of crises or because of where they live or who they are, some who have started school but have dropped out for various reasons. This paper shows that some ALPs have demonstrated considerable success in meeting the needs of these underserved populations, not only in terms of access and equity but also in completion and return to schooling and, most importantly in learning outcomes.

That accelerated learning in developing countries is possible is in no doubt. Less attention has, however, been paid to the detail of the curriculum adjustments for ALPs that may have facilitated the more rapid progress. This review seeks to analyse developing country ALPs from a curriculum perspective, focusing on contents, methods, teacher education and assessment. The second section of the paper gives five portraits of differently designed ALPs to highlight some of the features and lessons outlined in the previous section. The final section seeks also to draw lessons with implications for the formal sector with which ALPs seek equivalence.

## Section A: Comparative Analysis of Programmes Supporting Accelerated Learning in Developing Countries

This analysis focuses on twelve ALPs for which complete or almost complete information was found and for which there was some evidence of outcomes[6]. The methodology for the ALP survey is described in appendix I. A full matrix of 42 ALPs against key features is given in appendix II; a selected matrix of 28 ALPs with detailed information is at appendix III. The ALP sample is based on available information and therefore this may not be representative of all ALPs[7]. In particular, small-scale, time-bound ALPs are likely to be under-represented. Nevertheless, there do appear to be some features shared by many ALPs. The general features of ALPs are examined first before considering the design, content and delivery of the curriculum.

### General Features of Accelerated Learning Programmes
Most ALPs focus on primary education. The rate of acceleration was calculated by dividing the number of years of the ALP course by the equivalent years in the formal system. The rates of acceleration range from 1.25 for Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee Primary Schools, BPS, to 3 for School for Life in Ghana. The most common rate of acceleration is for two grades of primary school to be covered by one year of the ALP. A faster rate than this occurs where the correspondence is to the first three grades of primary. The rate may be less than two where a particular

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[6] APEP, BRAC, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Ghana, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Speed Schools (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Ethiopia).

[7] Rose (2007: p26) reports that USAID's EQUIP2 team had discovered 154 complementary education programmes in 39 countries of sub-Saharan Africa alone. While not all these are ALPs, on this base, there could be many more ALPs that this survey has not detected. In addition, new programmes are being formulated. The author recently heard that Botswana has commenced the design of a programme to cover all ten years of Basic Education with coordinated interventions from different Ministries.

primary year needs consolidation such as grade 5 in Malawi which is the transition to learning in English.

ALP classes are relatively small with a typical number of 25-30 learners for one facilitator. The maximum number of any ALP is 40 in a class[8].

In two-thirds of the ALPs, the facilitators are community-based volunteers who have received a short induction and on-the-job training and support. The exceptions to this are Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia and Tanzania[9] where selected primary school teachers were used, usually with additional incentives.

Classes usually last 3-4 hours per day. Thus the amount of curriculum time may not be greater than that in formal schools. However, time on task may be greater as the absence levels of AFL facilitators are less than for primary school teachers as reported in the case of Malawi (Moleni and Chiuye,2007a and 2007b; Chiuye and Nampota, 2007).

Most ALPs focus on particular areas of a country or particular population groups which are marginalised in different ways. There are, however, a number of programmes with much greater reach. The Afghanistan Primary Education Program, APEP, covered half the provinces in Afghanistan, BRAC covers the whole of Bangladesh, Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania, COBET, all of Tanzania, while DFID is planning to roll out the School for Life model to all of Ghana, and the Malawi government, Complementary Basic Education to all districts.

Three-quarters of the ALPs are time-bound. This is particularly the case where the response was to a crisis, usually a conflict, as in Afghanistan, Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Relatively few programmes are on-going initiatives like those in Bangladesh, Ghana and Malawi.

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[8] Cambodia started with 25 in a class but later moved to the national norm of 50.

[9] In Burundi, originally secondary school leavers were to be used but in two of the threes districts, unemployed teachers were found and engaged. In Tanzania, the original programme supported by UNICEF used community-based facilitators engaged by an NGO; when the programme was taken on by Government, COBET classes were taught in the afternoon in primary schools by one of the teachers, supported by a community volunteer for each class.

**Targeted Groups and ALP Design**

Some ALPs cover part of the primary cycle while others cover the whole cycle. Some are one-year[10] courses while others run for three to four years. ALPs also target different out-of-school groups. For some, it is primarily the unreached. For example, Uganda's explicit policy for NFE was for groups that had no access to school. Other ALPs target dropouts or those who are overage in class. ALPs can therefore be classified in terms of these two dimensions: the extent of coverage of the primary cycle and the targeted group.

Table 1: Classification of Accelerated Learning Programmes

| Target group<br><br><br>Cycle equivalence | Unreached learners | Both unreached learners and dropouts/overage in class | Dropouts/overage in class |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ALP equivalent to full primary cycle** | Afghanistan APEP<br>Bangladesh BRAC<br>Liberia PERP<br>Sierra Leone CREPS | Cambodia ALTP | Brazil ALP<br>Honduras Educatodos |
| **ALP of more than one year equivalent to part primary cycle** | (Uganda)[11] | Tanzania COBET | Malawi CBE[12] |
| **One-year ALP equivalent to part primary cycle** | Ghana SfL<br>SPEED schools | Burundi TEP | |

A second way of classifying ALPs is in terms of the target group. The Venn diagram shown in appendix IV uses the typology of marginalized groups developed by Day et al (2011). ALPs are used for all forms of marginalization: relational (who the people are), locational (where the people are) and situational (people's conditions). In all cases, it can be seen that ALP learners are older than the grade equivalent primary school age and often considerably so. Typical ages are 8 to 14 which puts the starting age two years ahead of a typical starting age of 6 for primary schools.

Some programmes cover all the years of a primary cycle while others are designed so that children can pass an early years' bottleneck in the system. This might be a bottleneck in terms of access or in terms of effectiveness. Nicholson's (2007) discussion of 'Accelerated Learning in Post Conflict Settings' suggested that higher

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[10] Some courses emphasise part years eg SfL Ghana is given as a 9 month course; APEP is 2 years and 9 months. This is valid when calculating cost-effectiveness but not when comparing curriculum equivalence. In effect, taken with holidays, the course is a whole year.

[11] Not one of the 12 ALPs analysed but included to indicate that this cell in the table has an entry.

[12] There are some unreached children but the substantial majority are dropouts.

completion and integration for lower primary grades was indicative of a relatively high demand where there were no alternatives. Although some programmes such as APEP and BRAC do seem to have sustained this demand over the whole primary cycle, it seems harder to maintain it in situations where the main issue is dropout.

A third way of looking at ALP design is in terms of their management arrangements. This depends on the mode of engagement between state and non-state actors. Since ALPs are complementary programmes, there must be a minimum engagement with government about the point of equivalence so that ALP graduates can transfer to public schools. There is a need to ensure that government policy recognizes this diversity in provision of primary education. Government may take a more direct role by incorporating ALPs in national education plans. It may go further to fund NGOs as ALP service providers within a sector-wide approach as in the case of Malawi. The highest level of state involvement is when it implements the ALP directly without non-state providers as in Brazil and Tanzania. Whatever the relationship between government and non-state actors, all ALPs put a strong emphasis on the third member of this partnership: the community.

**Accelerated Learning Programmes and Curriculum Issues**
Three ALPs used the full national curriculum; for one the linkage with the national curriculum was unclear. The remainder used a modified curriculum. It was often not possible to find precise information on the modifications made.

It seems that, in most cases, acceleration was not achieved by cutting subjects. Indeed, it could be argued that there was an additional curriculum load, either through the various life skills initiatives or by some forms of livelihoods orientation. For example, in Tanzania, the conventional communication skills (Kiswahili or English), Math and General Knowledge were supplemented by Work Skills and Personal Development. Programmes in post-conflict situations also contained elements of peace building and psychosocial support. All in all, what all the programmes have in common is a focus on basic competences in early numeracy and literacy, usually in the locally spoken language coupled with subjects, more practically oriented to the lives of learners. In other words, there was a foundation of basic skills linked to heightened curriculum relevance.

Three programmes, APEP, RISE Iraq and Brazil, used explicit accelerated learning methods as part of the teaching approach. The methods of all programmes can be characterized as 'active learning', 'learner–centred ', 'learning by doing' and 'participatory'. There is thus a strong emphasis on the facilitator engaging with learners personally and building their self-esteem. Another salient feature of ALP learning centres is a welcoming atmosphere with an absence of physical punishment[13].

It is difficult to get a complete picture of the resources that were available for each ALP. Where a full national curriculum was in use, learners could make use of the

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[13] See the five ALP portraits later in this paper

books and guides for that curriculum. Where the curriculum has been modified, some programmes produced full sets of alternative materials. This was the case for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Tanzania and Malawi. Other programmes focused more on teacher support through manuals with detailed lesson plans (Liberia) with kits of materials for each learning centre (Liberia, Burundi). Some programmes were also supplemented with radio support (Afghanistan, Brazil, Ghana). It is also important to recognise that some programmes such as that in Ghana have been evolving over a period of time. They are likely to have started with less defined materials "based on the needs of the community" moving to a standard template (http://www.schoolforlifegh.org).

**ALP achievements, including learning outcomes**
The achievements of learners in different ALPs have been registered in terms of enrolment, completion, learning and return to formal schooling. The data is not always robust and definitive data on learning is often missing. Most data comes from self-reporting for programme improvement. Learners in ALPs do not necessarily undertake the same assessments as in primary school and, where they do, these are not usually standardized tests. There is therefore a shortage of comparative data with the formal system within the same country. Long-term longitudinal studies of ALP learners have not been undertaken[14].

The attendance rate in BRAC primary schools at 96% is significantly higher than the 61% for government primary schools. Both APEP and BRAC report greater inclusion of girls within the programme than in government schools. These were specific targets within both programmes so that both community sensitization and facilitator training focused on gender as an issue. Completion rates range from about 70% for Honduras and Malawi, with APEP and Liberia higher at around 80% and BRAC above 90% (and almost 20 percentage points above rural government primary schools). In Ghana, while 91% were reported as completing the Speed School/SfL programme, only 66% proceeded into grade 4 in government schools. This is similar to the 67% of ALP graduates in Burundi who integrated into primary schools. The measures used for the Brazil ALP were different since the aim of the programme was to accelerate the learning of the overage learners in class. It succeeded in reducing the age gap from 37% to 15% over a period of 6 years. Some of the difficulties in going to scale are apparent in the Tanzania data where, despite enrolling 600,000 only 36% were registered one year later and a GMR background report of 2007 could not locate completion rates or learning achievements (MacPherson, 2007).

Three of the programmes in this review – BRAC, Ghana and Honduras – were included in the EQUIP2 study of complementary education (DeStefano et al, 2006). Learning measures for BPS (70% compared to 27%[15]) compared favourably with the corresponding public schools while those for Honduras's Educatodos were similar

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[14] DFID's new support to Complementary Basic Education in Ghana from 2012-15 has an extensive evaluation component with a longitudinal study.

[15] on a test of basic competencies used in the Bangladesh education system.

(63% compared to 62%[16]). The results for Ghana are difficult to interpret because ALP and school learners took different tests in different languages at different stages. The EQUIP2 study concluded that 'the complementary education models studies are effective at reaching underserved populations and are more cost-effective in terms of the amounts of completion and learning achieved for the resources spent' (DeStefano et al, 2006:p5). Two other programmes were able to show learner progress against external measures. 71% of Liberia's PERP completers sat the West African Examinations Council exams with a 95% pass rate; 91% of Sierra Leone's CREP learners sat a national primary exam in 2004 and passed with levels comparable to government schools. In Brazil, the closing age gap reduction is evidence of successful learning. Similarly, in Malawi, a majority of learners were able to perform at the appropriate grade level in a local language and math. Although there was no direct comparison with formal schools on the same test, other studies[17] have shown children in formal school performing well below the grade level of the class they are in. In APEP, internal measures of learning also showed satisfactory performance at the grade level[18]. For Burundi, Cambodia and Tanzania, learning assessments were not found.

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[16] Direct comparison with public school learner results but subjects not specified.

[17] Early Grade Math Assessment, 2010; Early Grade Reading Assessment 2010 and 2011

[18] More details are given in the section on APEP in the ALP portraits.

## Section B: ALP Portraits

Five large-scale ALPs were selected for elaboration of the curriculum, assessment and teacher education aspects of their design. These ALPs are representative of five different ALP structures:
1. On-going alternative schooling full-cycle ALP – BRAC Primary Schools
2. Time-bound full-cycle ALP – Afghanistan Primary Education Program
3. Catch-up ALP for overage children in class – Brazil Accelerated Learning Program
4. Multi-year part-cycle ALP – Malawi Complementary Basic Education
5. Single-year part-cycle ALP – Ghana Complementary Basic Education Using the School for Life Model

The ALP illustrations are based on the sources detailed in the matrix. The sources are indicated the start of each portrait; where several sources are involved, references are included in the text.


**Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee Primary Schools, BPS**

The main source for this portrait is the EQUIP2 study by Chabbott & Schuh Moore, 2006 supplemented by information from the CREATE study by Sabur and Ahmed, 2010.

Starting in the mid-1980s, BRAC Primary Schools have provided a model of alternative schooling for underserved groups that programmes in other countries sought to emulate.  Originally it covered the first three grades but it was extended to cover all five years of primary education. The schools remain outside the Government system.

BPSs are one teacher-one class schools with the same teacher supporting the same class of learners over four years. If sufficient demand exists after the four years, the teacher may continue with another class. Otherwise, another BPS is set up elsewhere. BPSs target underprivileged groups and dropouts, mainly in rural areas and especially girls. BPS class size is 25-33 students compared with an average of 61 for Government Primary Schools, GPS. Contact hours at 4,094 are similar to those of the GPSs which are 4,046[19]. It appears that most of the acceleration - five grades covered in four years – is achieved by shortening holiday times. BPSs thus constitute a full alternative to the GPSs. The learners are overage – 8-14 years compared to the 6-10 primary ages – reducing competition between the two systems. There is clearly a strong demand as unpunctual or frequently absent students may be replaced during the first three months of year one.

BPS is a very large programme with almost one million learners in some years. Nevertheless, it is important to realise that it only accounted for 8% of total enrolment of almost 18 million in 2004, for example.

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[19] Classes lasted 3 to 4 hours for six days a week.

The government curriculum[20] has been followed so that BPS graduates can sit for the secondary entrance exam just like students from the GPSs. The curriculum has, however, been enriched with social values and financial information. It thus has greater relevance to the lives of learners and also recognises the importance of empowerment. Textbooks and other materials have been developed for the first three years while government books are used for grades 4 and 5. Materials are supplied prior to the start of each new grade. Instruction and materials are in the learners' own language up to grade 2. Storybooks in these languages are also supplied.

Teachers receive an initial 12-day training followed by monthly, subject-based refreshers courses. Despite having less training, the teachers took on responsibilities often ignored by GPS teachers such as continuously assessing learner progress and using more active learning approaches. There is no formal assessment and learners are not allowed to repeat grades.

The level of supervision is very high with each BPS being seen twice a week for lesson observation, lesson plan review and record checking. Independent teams verify whether field staff reports are accurate. Parents' meetings are held once per month.

BPS attendance and completion rates are generally higher than for GPS as shown in the table below:

|                        | BPSs | Rural GPSs |
|------------------------|------|------------|
| Attendance rate % 2001 | 96   | 61         |
| Completion rate % 2000 | 93   | 75         |

BPS attributes these rates to the close location of the school and the sound relationship between teacher and learners. Neither physical punishment nor shaming are supposed to be used in BPSs.

Interestingly, in the early years of the programme, GPS student performed better than BPS students. As a result, BRAC developed an internal measure called the Assessment of Basic Competencies, ABC, which covered reading, writing, numeracy and life skills. These were given to a sample of both BPSs and GPSs. Unsurprisingly, BPS students did significantly better in life skills since this was part of the enriched curriculum but they also did slightly better in writing and numeracy. The overall results of the four competency areas for two years are shown in the table below:

|                 | BPSs | GPSs |
|-----------------|------|------|
| ABC score % 1992 | 53   | 39   |
| ABC score % 1999 | 69   | 27   |

A more rigorous comparison is obtained by examining the results of the secondary school entrance examinations taken in grade 5. According to a BRAC, an average of 10% of GPS students passed in 1999-2004 while 13% of BPS students passed in

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[20] There are 53 terminal competencies covering both subjects and domains of knowledge.

2004[21]. However, since the mean number of competencies achieved by grade 5 students in 2008 was 20 out of 27 tested for BPS compared to 19 for GPS, learning outcomes remain a cause for concern in both systems.

EQUIP2 analysed the cost-effectiveness of BPS and discovered that the cost per student reaching a level of learning was almost 8 times higher in GPS. The greater cost-effectiveness of BPS was attributed to three factors:
- Lower per student costs
- The accelerated learning – four years instead of five
- Higher completion rates

It appears that BPS would not be so cost-effective in isolated communities because of the resultant high cost of supervision.

The intention of BPS is not to develop a self-sustaining school but to educate underprivileged groups until more permanent schools are provided. Nevertheless, it currently remains a key component of Bangladesh's primary education provision.


**Afghanistan Primary Education Program, APEP**

The information in this ALP portrait is drawn from two sources: Intili, Kissam, and St. George, 2006 and Nicholson, 2007.

Three kinds of ALP design have operated in Afghanistan:
- Three-month catch-up programmes covering one grade in school holidays
- Programmes covering the first three grades in eighteen months, focusing on literacy
- Programmes covering two grades in one year, up to and beyond grade 4

APEP follows the third structure.

APEP reached relatively large numbers of 10-18 year-old youth (170,000) but only lasted for a short period of time, 2003-6, allowing this group to go through one complete primary cycle. It functioned in a post-crisis situation targeting an underserved population with a particular emphasis on females excluded from education. Half of Afghanistan's 34 provinces were covered with 400 one-class schools in each province. Existing buildings were used for the classes which, at 4 hours a day on average, involved more learning time than the 2-3 hours of government schools.

The class size in APEP schools was 25 compared to average class sizes in formal schools of 60.

The full national curriculum was followed with learners covering, on average, two grades in one year[22]. There was no integration of content between grades with one

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[21] BPS only expanded to grades 4 and 5 in 2002 and so it would be important to see if this performance had been maintained.

[22] Each of the first three grades was covered in four months.

grade completed before the next one started. The learners' books used were the same as in state schools. The national curriculum has 7 subjects in the early grades and 11 in the higher but it appears that additional life skills related content was added by means of the mentors' manuals specifically devised for the programme.

There is a sharp contrast in the national curriculum between the first three grades and the last three which cover more subjects in a much more academic way. The explicit application of accelerated learning techniques[23] enabled learners to cope with this heavy curriculum demand. Training supported mentors in helping students become self-directed learners. A total of 312 hours of training was provided, all of it done in the holiday prior to teaching that particular grade level. One innovative pedagogical idea was that of peer-to-peer classroom networks; these were mostly initiated by teachers though females were more disposed than males to initiating collaborative work.

Evaluation of APEP was based on self-reporting by the organizations involved, reinforced by site visits as well as a longitudinal study of 560 learners and a community case study. The skills, particularly in community sensitisation, and commitment of the five implementing agencies were thought to contribute highly to the success of APEP[24].

In 16 out of the 17 provinces, APEP enrolled significantly more females than the formal schools. The shortage of female teachers was the biggest obstacle to female enrolment. Nevertheless, engaging 34-41% female mentors was a considerable success as was a female enrolment of 56%, one and a half greater than the rate in state schools.

As well as equity, similar success was achieved in enrolment and completion with benchmarks on these indicators attained. The success in retention was attributed to four factors: community sensitisation, the application of interesting and useful classwork, suitable school location and the monitoring and supervision process. Convincing communities of the value of female participation was not straightforward and did not always succeed. However, it appears that once communities were persuaded, their commitment encouraged learners to keep attending. The provision of student kits to individuals may have also been a motivating factor in retention. The reported drop out was only 2% for both females and males compared to an average, annual rate of 15% for females and 11% for males in grades 1-4 of formal schools. These very low dropout figures are not consistent with the reported completion rate of 82%. Since some learners returned to state schools after grade 3, it may be that these leavers were replaced by others.

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[23] In the early grades, the emphasis in mentor training was on encouraging management through positive feedback rather than punishment as well as effective methods for language and maths learning; in grades 4-6, the findings of brain research were linked to application of methods. The techniques were drawn from Alistair Smith's *Accelerated Learning in Practice. Brain-based methods for accelerating motivation and achievement.*

[24] Negotiations with communities were often protracted but agreements were sealed with contracts; once the commitment was there, communities fulfilled their roles effectively.

Student achievement was assessed in Maths, Reading, Writing and General Knowledge/Thinking Skills. The test items were matched to the grade levels of the formal curriculum. The main purpose seemed to be to compare female and male performance rather than make comparisons with government schools. Females generally performed as well as males and outperforming them at grade 2 Reading and Writing. Overall, achievements were highest in Reading and Maths and more moderate in Writing. Older learners tended to achieve higher scores.

Many individuals gained from this programme but 90% of overage youth remain unreached. An agreement about equivalence was only reached at the very last stage of the programme. The shortage of available, nearby secondary places meant that only half the completers could continue with their education.

**Brazil Accelerated Learning Program, ALP**

The source for this ALP portrait is the paper by Lück and Parente, 2007 which summarises the study undertaken by the Institute of Research in Applied Economics in partnership with the National Council of State Secretaries. The paper gives a national overview followed by a more detailed description of the Parana State intervention.

Most ALPs address underserved populations not in school. In contrast, Brazil's Accelerated Learning Program operating from 1996-2001 attempted to address the high percentage of overage learners in elementary schools. It was a Government programme operating in 25 out of 27 Brazilian federal education units. The programme was thus large-scale and involved large numbers of students. In Parana alone, 344,257 students enrolled over the three-year period, 1997-2000. It was initially targeted at the second cycle of elementary education, grades 5-8 where the proportions of overage learners were greatest. However, in some cases, it was later extended to grades 1-4.

The programme arose from a concern with the costs of repetition which were leading to 44.5% of primary school learners in 1995 being at least two age grades behind where they should be. Learners were supported through supplementary classes to fast-track more than one grade level in a school year. Classes were small with an aimed average of 25 and a maximum of 30. Year-on-year data showed an overall reduction of the percentage of students with this age grade gap from 46.2% in 1998 to 30.3% in 2003. In Parana, the reduction was from 36.6% in 1995 to 15% in 2001. It appears that once ALP students were restored to the right grade for their age, they were able to maintain this performance. Thus the promotion rates of ALP students in secondary school were not significantly different from the regular group.

Repetition itself, however, only reduced in the higher grades but not in the three earliest grades. Thus early years' learning difficulties presumably remained. While accelerated learning was successful in the supplementary classes undertaken by

overage learners, regular classes continued to produce repeaters, necessitating more supplementary classes. What had been envisaged as a time-bound project to address a limited issue would have needed to become an on-going programme until such a time that early repetition had also been addressed. In effect, considering the endemic nature of the issue, it needed to become a policy with long-term provision.

Like APEP, this is an example of an ALP which made explicit use of accelerated learning principles[25]. These principles included an emphasis on students and their success at the centre of the programme, on building self-esteem and social inclusion and on the process of learning to learn which involved co-operative learning and active construction of knowledge. The learning content was linked to the students' context. In other words, as has been argued in the previous section, curriculum relevance is a component of accelerated learning.

Unlike most ALPs which use community-based facilitators trained on the job, the Brazil ALP used committed, qualified teachers of the regular classes who had volunteered for this additional work. It appears that, in most cases, the teachers were sufficiently motivated by the additional training opportunities; in four states, additional payments were made. The programme required a new role for the teacher as a facilitator of learning more than an instructor. According to the source, Lück and Parente (2007), training was found to be successful as it was pragmatic, focusing on the specific tasks to be performed by teachers in classrooms. Insufficient attention, however, was paid to behavioural aspects.

The curriculum was substantially modified using interdisciplinary teaching to allow the fast-tracking of learning. Three different sets of materials were produced for grades 5-8 with one set of materials for grades 1-4. The emphasis seems to be on materials for teachers. The first set were five teaching guides in Portugese, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography. Other materials guided the teachers to tackle different subjects within the same lesson.

Key aspects of the programme in all states were the specific methodology, the special materials and the training of teachers. The materials were the factor with the highest correlation with programme results (Lück and Parente, 2007). Of all aspects of the program, materials were the most often cited by Interviewed teachers and students. The activities they contained were motivating for both.

The assessment of students was also innovative with students' developing portfolios of work with any teacher evaluation discussed with the student.

Some lessons about national roll-out of an innovation can be learned from this programme. After some initial resistance from administrators, the programme gained momentum and attained its maximum enrolment in the second year. At the same time, it began to lose impetus. In part, it shows the difficulty of using the same teachers for the ALP. The evaluators report that motivation and sufficient time on

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[25] It was based on a programme devised in 1992 by Henry Levin of Stanford University.

task were lacking in the regular classes. The programme might have engaged the most committed teachers but even they were tempted to revert to prior practice, once the novelty wore off. In the end, different priorities meant that the ALP was no longer sustained. While many individuals no doubt benefitted as evidenced by the age grade gap reduction, a lasting solution to overage children was not applied. This is a pity as the programme had been innovative and successful in reducing the degree by which learners were overage. Since overage children may be at risk of dropping out, it is better to address their situation before they actually do so.

**Malawi Complementary Basic Education, CBE**

The main sources for this ALP portrait are the internal programme papers listed in the references together with Jere, 2012.

The Malawi Government's response to Education For All included an initiative to develop a programme for the estimated 600,000 school-aged children that were out of school. The resultant Complementary Basic Education, CBE, is thus fully incorporated in four-year Education Sector Implementation Plans and has been funded from the 2011-12 financial year onwards through the annual Programme of Work which reflects the Sector-Wide Approach. Major cost items are procurement and distribution of goods to districts implementing CBE as well as procurement of services from locally-based non-state providers. 600 CBE learning centres were established in 10 of Malawi's 34 education districts in 2012-13 and another 1,200 are planned for 2013-14 in 20 districts.

CBE was developed from 2005-11 with the support of the Centre for Educational Research and Training, CERT, applying action research to feedback into programme development. CERT conducted a number of studies, defining a baseline, conducting regular evaluations, implementing tracer and learning achievement studies and supporting a final evaluation of the development phase. They also spearheaded the design of a programme monitoring and evaluation system.

Malawi's primary schools suffer a bottleneck in the early years where class sizes are very large because of inequitable teacher distribution across standards and high rates of repetition[26]. Children struggle to learn and are vulnerable to dropping out, particularly those in less advantaged groups[27]. CBE was designed to provide out-of-school children with a second chance of attaining a basic education Records of the first phase show a greater proportion of orphans and other vulnerable children in CBE classes than in primary schools (Moleni and Nampota, 2006). Five years of primary education is covered in three years by one-class, one-teacher groups of no more than 40. Since it is difficult to predict which learners would return to school, CBE both provides a basic education in its own right as well as an opportunity to

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[26] According to preliminary figures of the 2013 Public Expenditure Review, The PTR ranges from 124 to 1 at standard 1 to 24 to 1 at standard 8 (based on EMIS 2011). EMIS 2011 gives an average repetition of 18.8%.
[27] EMIS 2011 gives an average drop-out rate of 10.2%.

return to more formal schools at standard 6. With classes of 3 hours a day for 5 days a week in 12-week terms, the total course time is 1,620 hours.

60% of the CBE curriculum is devoted to literacy and numeracy. The literacy focus in the first year is on the local language with three times as much time spent on this as on English. The proportion of English increases in the second and third year, as this becomes the language of instruction in Malawi's primary schools from standard 5. The remaining time covers the same content as in primary schools but reorganized to more strongly reflect the realities of everyday life. Thus Agriculture and Environment, Citizenship, Healthy Living and Livelihoods are studied rather than Expressive Arts, Life Skills, Agriculture, Science and Technology and Social and Environmental Science. These learning areas were derived from community consultations (Moleni et al, 2005). An innovation in the CBE curriculum is the structuring of each three weeks' of work by a life situation. These were drawn from the four content-based learning areas, with one life situation from each of the four areas each term. The life situations provided content, in particular, for literacy, both in the local language and English.

A full set of teaching and learning materials has been developed to match this curriculum with 18 Learners' Books, 12 Supplementary Readers and 63 Facilitators' Guides. These materials use the local language, transitioning into more English use in Year 3.

The facilitators are community-based secondary school leavers, selected by service providers in conjunction with communities and district officers. One of the distinctive features of CBE is the degree of support provided to facilitators. They undertake 330 hours of pre-term preparation and, in addition, meet in groups for 3 hours of review and preparation every week. Over the three years, this provides another 324, making a total of 654 hours of in-service preparation overall. It is possible to do this cost-effectively in Malawi because of the high population density which means that learning centres can be grouped in 15s, all within reach of an hour or so of a training point[28]. In addition to training, facilitators are supported by fully-scripted lesson plans, promoting active learning approaches, in the Facilitators' Guides and are visited twice monthly by a supervisor of the service provider. The reported attendance levels of facilitators were high during the development phase, averaging at 95%.

The service provider is accountable to the district for the delivery of CBE and provides it with monthly reports. The district monitors the performance of the service provider and reports on this termly. Officers from the central Ministry conduct district monitoring.

Sporadic attendance has been an issue for some learners; service providers have devised strategies to improve attendance including door-to-door follow-up,

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[28] The training points usually involve Malawi's network of over 300 Teacher Development Centres.

community sensitisation campaigns, centre open days, increasing the prominence of sports and even small non-financial rewards for good attendance. Nevertheless, completion rates which include early returners to school rose from 53% for the first cohort to 70% for the third cohort; of the latter, 47% were female[29]. 57% of those who started the third cohort course were reported to have returned to school[30].

There has been no direct comparison of CBE learning and school learning performance. However, during the production of a baseline, benchmarks were established, matching CBE years to expected performance at standards 1, 3 and 5. There was a lack of equivalency between pre- and post-test groups. Yet by the middle of year 3, the majority of older learners were competent at level 2 in Chichewa and Numeracy with a significant proportion at the appropriate level 3 benchmark (Jere, 2012). By looking at other measures used for assessing the performance of learners in primary school, Jere C M (2012, p11) was able to conclude that 'Learner outcomes from CBE appear to compare favourably with those from formal primary schooling.'

Other important gains in attitude have been reported to CBE action researchers. These include increased self-esteem and diminished behavioural issues within the community. This is evidence perhaps of the positive attitudes of facilitators to learners. Indeed, there are anecdotal reports of CBE school returners coping well with the academic demands of primary schools but not so well with the relatively harsh treatment compared to CBE learning centres.

It remains to be seen whether the relative success reported above can be maintained as the programme rolls out nationally. It certainly takes time for identified service providers to understand the programme and not to treat it as one of the short-term projects they often also undertake.

**Ghana Complementary Basic Education, CBE, Using the School for Life Model**

Like BPS, this is a long-standing initiative; it has been in operation as School for Life, SfL, since 1995. It has been gradually expanded until in 2012, the British Government approved a three-year programme to make Complementary Basic Education, CBE, available in educationally disadvantaged districts throughout the country reaching 120,000 learners through 15-20 non-state implementing partners and applying the School for Life model (DFID Ghana, 2012). SfL itself has reached 110,000 learners in a seventeen-year period. Of an estimated 652,000 out-of-school children, 70% are in the ten poorest districts which tend to be in Northern Ghana (UNESCO UIS, 2008; Ghana Demographic Health Survey 2009, Ghana EMIS, 2010).

The SfL model provides 8-14 year olds with a basic education equivalent to the first three primary grades. It does this over a period of a year with nine months' tuition

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[29] Data compiled from service provider reports.
[30] Unfortunately, these were not followed up to see if they were retained in school.

and a long holiday during the planting season when children would be expected to help their families[31]. Classes last for three hours a day, five days a week.

SfL graduates should be able to transfer to public schools at grade 4 although assessment done in conjunction with local schools leads to a more appropriate placement of some in grade 3. In effect, SfL could be described as a short bridging course for overage learners to catch up with younger in-school peers.

Like most other ALPs, SfL operates as a one-class, one-teacher school. The class size is limited to 25 compared to 40+ in a typical Northern Region early years class (Hartwell, 2006).

The national curriculum has been adapted to local circumstances with each lesson based on a familiar issue related, for example, to agriculture, hygiene or the environment; cultural activities such as stories, games and songs are interwoven in the active learning approaches adopted. The three subjects of language, numeracy and environmental studies are integrated into each lesson (Hartwell, 2006). It appears from the new CBE design that issues of relevance from the learners' environment are used to structure the language course (personal communication from DFID Education Adviser).  The materials have been redesigned to provide two language primers, two numeracy workbooks and a facilitators' manual. These are in the form of English templates which require reconstruction into particular local languages. One of the most distinctive features of CBE in the Ghanaian context is the use of mother tongue instruction; public schools use English as the medium of instruction The Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, Assessment Services Unit Report (2012) indicates significantly better performance in English of grade 6 learners who had attended National Literacy Acceleration Program schools where students learn to read and write their own language before starting English in grade 3.

Facilitators are community-based volunteers who appear to be more motivated by professional gains with the potential for opportunities for becoming a teacher than the meagre financial rewards. Facilitators are trained by the Ghana Education Service, both for the initial 3-week induction and for the refresher courses every three months. They are supervised at least once per month. Classroom observation appears to show that facilitator-learner relationships are open, leading to a higher rate of participation than for public schools (Hartwell, 2006).

SfL has been analysed for completion, learning, transition and cost-effectiveness. Learner attendance rates of 90% compared with an estimated 75% in public schools might be attributed to a school location closer to the community as well as strong community ownership (Hartwell, 2006). Completion rates are high although figures in the sources seem to range from 65% to 95% with those at the higher end in later

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[31] The rate of acceleration has been calculated as 3 since children do not re-enter school until the year is complete although some might argue for a rate of 4 since 3 years have been covered in nine months. Also not all SfL graduates reintegrate in standard 4.

years of the programme. High rates of completion are thought to result from the short course duration (Hartwell, 2006). It should be noted, however, that primary completion rates in Ghana are also high with a figure of 87% from EMIS 2011. Therefore a rate of 95% for a one-year course is only remarkable in that it is coming from a marginalized group. Transition rates to public schools have increased from 47% in 1996-7 to 91% in 2008-10 (DFID Ghana, 2012) showing perhaps an increased credibility of the programme in the eyes of the learners and the community.

Earlier studies of learning in SfL were hampered by the lack of a grade 3 comparative measure in public schools. Grade 3 performance has now been introduced in the Ghana National Education Assessment but unfortunately SfL is not included in the assessment. However, a comparative study in 2003 did indicate 81% of SfL graduates meeting minimum literacy and numeracy standards (Hartwell, 2006). Similarly, the performance of SfL graduates in the NEA grade 6 English and Mathematics was reported as being in the upper 50 percentile substantiating the claim that focusing first on literacy in one's own language is a solid base for literacy in English (Hartwell, 2006).

The annual recurrent per-learner cost of SfL was calculated on 2003 figures as $39 compared to $27 in public schools but the higher rate of completion at that time and shorter course duration made SfL more than three times cost-effective (Hartwell, 2006). A calculation of comparative cost per learner meeting minimum standards is less convincing as the SfL learning measures were at a different grade (3 not 6) and for a different language (mother tongue not English) than for public schools.

Although it is clear that individuals have benefitted from SfL with some beneficiaries proceeding to secondary school and taking up professional careers, the extent to which those transitioning to public schools complete is not known. It appears that the reasons for students not attending school in the first place are socio-economic (CREATE, 2010). Since these causes are not removed by SfL, it can only be assumed that the programme motivates the learners sufficiently to raise their ambitions for schooling, allowing them to transition to public schools. If these schools retain demotivating features, then it is needs to be determined the extent to which the increased demand sustains through 3 years of non-accelerated formal schooling.

CBE is a priority in the Government's Education Strategic Plan 2010-12, but the Government has not as yet financed it and it remains a non-state provision through donor support[32]. It is the intention that by 2015, donor support for CBE may be channelled directly through Government but it remains to be seen whether finances can be found for this from a budget, a very high proportion of which is devoted to teacher salaries.

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[32] Previous attempts to embed CBE within policies were stymied by disagreements about ownership between basic education and non-formal education units. It has now been decided that CBE falls under basic education. Similar difficulties existed between three different Ministries in the early stages of development of CBE in Malawi.

## Section C: Lessons from ALPs for sustainable curriculum-related reforms in developing countries to support equitable learning

**A. General Lessons**

**Lesson 1: Even in the absence of explicit accelerated learning techniques, the small size of classes in ALPs predisposes them to faster, deeper and more sustained learning.**
Relatively few ALPs in developing countries explicitly make use of rapid learning techniques. However, further reflection shows that ALPs are inherently disposed to faster, deeper and more effective learning. The most striking feature of ALPs enabling this is the relatively small class size, in all cases 40 or less and for most programmes only 25-30 learners. Classes are almost invariably multi-age and sometimes multi-grade, but the numbers are always substantially less than would be found in the corresponding formal system.

It is this feature which is the key to ALP's successes in completion and learning. A small class enables a degree of interaction between facilitator and learner which stimulates deeper learning. While the methods advocated by ALPs, 'hands on', 'participatory' and 'active learning'(see Appendix II) are perhaps not dissimilar to what would be found in the equivalent, school curricula, the opportunities for the methods to be applied are much greater in a smaller class. This may well be one of the root causes of the learning gains identified in many of the ALPs reviewed. The learner is able to experience a degree of attention that was not possible in the primary school.

**Policy recommendation**:
1.0 Early grade classes should not exceed 40 in all schools, whether formal or non-formal.

**Lesson 2: Maintaining high levels of attendance is crucial for learning**
Communities in APEP were instrumental in promoting high rates of attendance. Attendance was also recognized as an important issue in BPS with irregular attenders or even latecomers at risk of being replaced by others wanting the place. Sporadic attendance has been linked to dropout (CREATE, 2010a).

**Policy recommendation**:
2.0 Strategies for promoting regular attendance should be designed and implemented.

**B. Lessons related to teachers and teacher education**

**Lesson 3: Community-based facilitators[33] with little initial training can foster successful learning.**

As demonstrated in sections A and B, learners in several ALPs are learning effectively despite having less qualified teachers. Instead of up-front initial training, community-based facilitators receive on-the-job support and frequent in-service training. Many countries are struggling to access the financial flows necessary to sustain teachers who have already been certified through a training course of at least two years. Community-based facilitators can be hired at lower cost. The lesson from this is that countries can renew their efforts to reduce class size by using ancillary teachers and other personnel with less initial training. Sustained, on-going support such as that in Malawi's Complementary Basic Education, CBE, can be as powerful a means of improving teaching as pre-service teacher education.

**Policy recommendation:**

3.0 In countries where early grade classes are endemically overcrowded, the use of an AL/complementary system for early grades should be considered with transfer to government primary schools for completion. Alternatively, community-based facilitators receiving frequent, targeted in-service training, might be engaged as ancillary teachers.

**Lesson 4 Using the same teacher over several years of a programme deepens access to learning.**

For ALPs that last longer than one year, facilitators continue with learners into the next year of the course. The same facilitator is usually with the same group of learners for the three or four year duration of the course. The facilitator is thereby more aware of the prior learning of each child and able to build on this knowledge in structuring appropriate learning experiences. This element of continuity also helps promote the child-friendly aspects apparent in ALPs. It facilitates the application psychosocial support in those programmes addressing crisis and post-crisis situations. In programmes addressing dropouts, communities report on how the improved self-esteem of learners is intimately connected with their learning to read and write (Chiuye and Nampota, 2007).

**Policy recommendation:**

4.0 Greater efforts need to be made to make schools more affirming for children, assisting them to become self-directed learners. Self-esteem and self-direction are key aspects of learning. One component of this would be to have early grade teachers follow their classes from grade 1 to 3.

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[33] Almost all ALPs use a term like 'facilitator' or 'mentor' to describe the person teaching a class. In one sense, this reinforces the notion of someone who supports the learning of another. In other words, it is indicative of a change of emphasis from teaching to learning.

**Lesson 5: ALPs strongly support the teaching of facilitators by providing detailed guides to teaching.**

Since ALP facilitators have a short time, typically 15 days, of preparation for their work, ALPs tend to have much more detailed teaching manuals than those provided for teachers in formal schools. In schools, teachers are expected to prepare their own schemes of work and lesson plans. Much time in initial teacher education courses is spent on this topic, sometimes with different formats expected for different subjects. The presentation of a teaching file with schemes and plans is usually an important aspect of the assessment of teaching practice. Teachers' guides therefore provide broad outlines and not lesson plans.

In contrast, ALP facilitators are often provided with lesson plans; in some cases, these may provide a full script for the lesson. These templates provide support both in lesson preparation and during lesson delivery. As facilitators gain experience, they become more confident in adapting the plan. Qualified teachers may also benefit from such plans; they have often been used for new reading and numeracy interventions[34]. Similarly, student teachers on conventional initial teacher education courses may also benefit from having lesson plans which they could try out in classrooms. This would make such courses more practical than they currently appear to be.

**Policy recommendations**:
5.1 Teachers' guides should give more explicit plans for conducting lessons.

5.2 Initial teacher education courses should be reviewed in terms of the practical support they provide for intending teachers.

**C. Lessons related to the curriculum**

**Lesson 6: A focus on foundational numeracy and literacy skills, particularly in the learners' own languages and a heightened curriculum relevance are key features of ALP curricula.**

It is tempting to see successful learning in ALPs as evidence that school curricula are overloaded and that ALPs succeed by streamlining what is taught. Such claims must be treated with caution for two reasons. Firstly, one of the main reasons why children in ALPs learn faster is that they are older than those in schools. In fact, ALPs have been explicitly designed for overage children. It would not be expected that children of the right age for their grade would be able to proceed at the ALP pace. Some evidence in support of this is the fact that the programme with the smallest age gap, BRAC, is the one with the least degree of acceleration. Strictly, to make inferences about the school curriculum would require a matched-age comparison of ALP and school learners. Secondly, assessment at the primary level is often not

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[34] for example, with those devised in connection with Early Grade Reading Assessments and Early Grade Mathematics Assessments.

based on the full range of subjects taught. For example, CREPS Sierra Leone focused on the subjects essential in passing the National Primary School Examination. Similarly, international comparisons tend to focus on literacy (sometimes in a second language) and numeracy. Some curricula are clearly condensed therefore by dropping non-core and non-examinable subjects.

It may, of course, well be that primary education curricula are overambitious (Pritchett and Beatty 2012). Curricula expectations are beyond what learners can realistically achieve[35]. Certainly, over the past two decades, there have been strong advocates for the inclusion of 'emerging issues' – population education, environmental education, HIV and AIDs, human rights, peace education, entrepreneurship – while the voices for removal from the curriculum have been less vocal[36]. Unfortunately, curricula have been arrived at by accretion rather than de novo thinking about what are the basic ideas, skills and attitudes needed for life. The recent emphasis on basic education as a number of years of schooling has not helped. There is a need to go back to what is 'fit for life'.

Nevertheless, there are two pointers in the ALP data to meaningful curriculum reform. The first supported by the work of van der Gaag and Putcha (2013) is the importance of focusing on foundational skills, ensuring that early reading and numeracy are well grounded. In particular, many programmes have demonstrated that local language materials are the basis of sound literacy development.

The experience of ALPs supports the contention supported by many studies (Alidou, Boly et al. 2006; Ball 2011; Trudell, Dowd et al. 2012; van der Gaag and Putcha 2013) that it is best for children to become literate in the language they speak and understand before moving on to speak, understand read and write other national or international languages. It appears that performance in the second language can be as good as for those who started learning in the second language. In other words, literacy in a known language serves as a firm foundation for literacy in a less familiar one. There is often strong pressure from communities and educational authorities to start an international language like English early. But the evidence indicates that it would be better to wait until initial literacy in the known language is soundly established.

The second pointer is that ALPs tend to focus more than formal curricula on curriculum relevance. One might argue that older children are less tolerant of curriculum content that is not related to their lives. However, it may also be that heightened curriculum relevance leads to deeper and more sustained learning – accelerated learning in its fullest sense – and that this may equally well apply to the right-aged children in schools as well as the overage learners of ALPs.

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[35] although, in other respects, teachers tend to underestimate what children are capable of.
[36] A full study of this issue would involve detailed curriculum analysis.

**Policy recommendations**:
6.1 Basic education curricula should be re-examined in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for life[37].

6.2 The focus in the early years, in particular, should be on foundational skills in literacy and numeracy which enable continued learning.

6.3 A familiar language should be used as the medium of instruction in the early years and learners should become literate in that familiar language. The transition to learning other languages should be carefully planned and implemented.

**Lesson 7: Some ALPs structure their courses, especially the literacy components, on the situations in which learners find themselves.**
There has been much emphasis in recent years on life skills in the primary curriculum. It has usually been introduced as an additional school subject. However, the success of such interventions has not always matched up to expectations. A Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality study in 2007 showed 36% of standard six learners with a minimum basic knowledge level of HIV and AIDs and only 7% with the desirable level[38].

Another approach has been used by several ALPs including those from Ghana, Malawi and Uganda. In these programmes, life skills is not a stand-alone subject but it has been integrated across either in the content areas of direct relevance to learners' lives or within the literacy component or in both. Life situations give these subjects more direct meaning as learners can see how they relate to their own lives. For literacy, it gives immediacy to the learning, making the literacy functional.

**Policy recommendations**:
7.1 Curriculum designers might consider using life skills as a strand in other courses rather than a separate subject.

7.2 Literacy courses can meaningfully be structured by defining a series of life situations, progressing according to the ages of learners.

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[37] It is the author's view that while definitions of basic education in terms of years of schooling may assist in resource mobilization, they do not help us to come to terms by what is really meant by basic. The work of the Learning Metrics Task Force (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Center for Universal Education at Brookings. 2013) has advocated the use of seven 'learning domains' in analysing what every child should learn. Although this is supposed to be a prescription for assessment rather than the curriculum, the title of the paper speaks otherwise. What is advocated here is not a top-down analysis from domains but the more painstaking process of finding out what parents and children actually need to know, do and believe.
[38] UNESCO IIEP, 2010. Newsletter. Vol XXVIII, No.3, pp10-11

## Conclusion

The beneficiaries of ALPs differ in what has caused them to be excluded from school systems but what they have in common is that they are in underserved populations and that they are overage. As a result, the purposes and consequent design of ALPs differ but they all share certain features: small class sizes, teachers receiving on-going support, active learning approaches, a regular supply of materials and a curriculum of heightened relevance that focuses on foundational skills in the early years. Thirdly, ALPs also differ in their management systems, particularly in the relative role of state and non-state agencies but they typically involve communities in strongly supportive roles.

There is a potential tension between ALP and formal school systems. On the one hand, there is a fear that the ALP will be of lower standard. When, as many studies have shown, this is not the case and the ALP outperforms formal schools, there is a fear of competition. This should not be the case because each system serves a different group of learners, one of the right age for the grade and one overage.

As the EQUIP2 highlighted in its study of BPS (Chabbott C, 2006: p7), apparently lower quality inputs (students of lower socio-economic status, teachers with less formal qualification, building borrowed from other users) have been coupled with higher quality processes (teaching and learning environment). Despite the former, the latter is able to lead to higher outputs in terms of completion, equity measures, learning and cost-effectiveness.

This study has shown that ALPs can be a cost-effective approach of providing marginalised children with a basic education. As programmes go to scale, the challenge is to retain the distinctive features that differentiate ALP learning centres from other schools. What works for overage children may also work for right-aged children in school. This paper has made several suggestions in this regard. The most pressing recommendation is that basic education curricula should be re-evaluated to determine whether they cover appropriately and sufficiently what is needed for life, especially in terms of literacy, numeracy and learning how to learn. At the moment, it would appear that many of them are overloaded with content which is not particularly relevant.

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## Appendix I: Methodology

In order to analyse Accelerated Learning Programmes, a matrix of key features was developed. To compile the matrix, the principal method was a detailed literature search on the internet. Key terms were searched for in 144 countries categorized as low-income, lower-middle income and upper-middle income economies by the World Bank. *Google* and *Google Scholar* were the main search engines used to find relevant sources along with Ministry of Education web pages. In total, 43 websites and documents were found.

Key terms included "Accelerated Learning Program", "Non-Formal Education", "Basic Education", "Complementary Basic Education", "Alternative Basic Education", both with and without parentheses. Where relevant hits were found for key terms other than "Accelerated Learning Program" (ALP), a second search was conducted using Boolean searching with the key term, country name "AND accelerated" to ascertain whether education programmes were accelerated or not. Sometimes it was necessary to skim through sources to determine if a programme, such as a complementary basic education initiative, was accelerated.

No significant results were found for 113 countries so they were deleted from the matrix, leaving 36 countries and 42 programmes in the full matrix. Most of these countries have or had implemented single programmes, although Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Uganda have multiple ALPs. One programme, Speed Schools, has been applied in three West African countries and more recently in Ethiopia. For 14 programmes[39] very little information was found and these were removed from the selected matrix. Detailed information was available for 22 countries and 28 programmes[40].

The sources used to compile the matrix are mainly project documents, including reports, evaluations, and case studies. In many cases, it was difficult to find all the required information from these documents, particularly the end dates of programmes and the extent to which a national curriculum had been adopted or adapted. Such information may be available by contacting current programmes directly.

A second method used to compile the matrix was through personal contacts and information already available largely in the form of project documents and reports. This was the case for Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

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[39] Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, Haiti, India, Jordan, Maldives, Myanmar and 1 programme each in Bangladesh and Mali, and 2 in Nepal.

[40] Of these, complete information is available for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Ghana, Liberia, Malawi and Sierra Leone. Almost all information has been found for Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Honduras, Tanzania and Uganda, and only partial information is accessible for Ecuador, El Salvador, Iraq, Kenya, South Sudan and Zimbabwe. In the cases of Mali and Zambia, programmes that started out with some elements of accelerated learning reverted to the formal school equivalent.

The categories in the matrix were based largely on the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference. Additional general information was added to the matrix to provide an overview of each programme. The full matrix is shown in appendix II with the selected matrix in appendix III.

**Appendix II: Full Matrix of Accelerated Learning Programmes for which information was found.**

See spreadsheet '2013-04-01_ALPMatrix_Full'

**Appendix III: Matrix of Selected Accelerated Learning Programmes for which detailed information was found**

See spreadsheet '2013-04-01_ALPMatrix_Selected'

# Appendix IV: ALPs according to type of marginalization

## SITUATIONAL

Angola PAAE
Brazil ALP
Congo, Dem. Rep.
Haiti
Honduras Educatodos
Liberia ALP
Malawi CBE
Sierra Leone CREPS
Uganda BEUPA
Zambia Community Schools
Zimbabwe

Afghanistan APEP
Burundi TEP
Ivory Coast
Iraq RISE
S.Sudan ALP
Speed Schools
Uganda COPE

Tanzania COBET
Uganda NFE Mubende
Uganda CHANCE
Uganda ELSE

Ethiopia Somali Region
India
Nepal OSP and FSP

El Salvador
Ghana SfL

Bangladesh UCEP
Bangladesh BRAC Primary
Schools
Ecuador
Ethiopia TEACH
Ethiopia SCOPE

Cambodia ALP
Egypt
Ethiopia Gambella ABE

## LOCATIONAL

## RELATIONAL