



**The Potential of Accelerated Education Programmes in Solving the Out-of- School Children and Youth Problem in West Africa**

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## Background

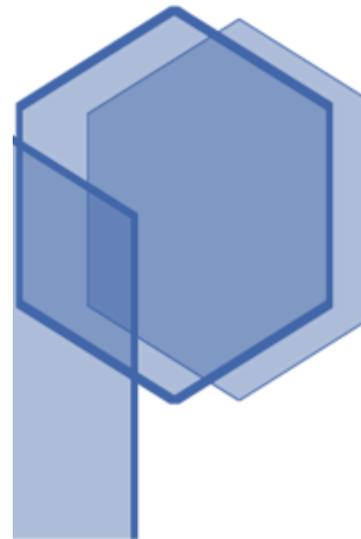
In many countries, myriad policy efforts and initiatives have been launched toward achieving the goal of Education for All. These include: grass-roots lobbying for the importance of schooling, political declarations for universal access to education, introduction of school fees abolition initiatives, and/or pro-poor education financing frameworks, among others (UNICEF, 2018, p.2). Despite these efforts, too many children are still excluded from schooling. One of the most recent statistics on out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) shows that globally, 258 million children and youth are excluded from education, 59.1 million of which are of primary school age, 61.5 million of lower secondary school age, and 137.8 million of upper secondary age (UIS, 2019). Half of the world's OOSCY population are concentrated in fourteen countries alone, nine of which are in sub-Saharan Africa and of which five are from West Africa including: Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire (Milan & Nicholas, 2015). Nigeria ranks highest among these five in terms of its number of out-of-school children, currently reaching up to 10.5 million.

Most children who face exclusion from education are mainly from the most vulnerable groups of children and include those from low-income households, those living in remote areas, girls, children from marginalized groups, children with disabilities, orphans, refugees and internally displaced persons (Rohen & Odile , 2014). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the potentials of an alternative education programme like the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) for correcting the OOSCY problem in West Africa.

### The gaps in the formal system of education

The formal system of education has played a significant role in educating the West African populace. However, given its statutorily regulated nature, it tends to suffer some limitations in its capability to reach the OOSCY. The prime challenge with the formal system is the inadequate supply of schools within residential communities in West Africa. This has made accessibility to schools difficult for most communities. Also, the formal system's school hours are regimented. This does not allow flexibility for children from poor families who need to support parents in economic activities before going for lessons. In emergency situations like conflict, education intervention might warrant taking the school to the children in their safe spaces. The formal school system is not as mobile, rendering it ineffective in reaching out to children whose education get interrupted in emergency situations such as conflicts and other humanitarian crises. Another weakness of the formal school system is the age structure of admitting learners into classes or grades which tends to exclude some from access to basic education. The formal school admits children into different levels according to age. Hence, this system tends to side-step over aged children.

## Policy Insight



## Potentials of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP)

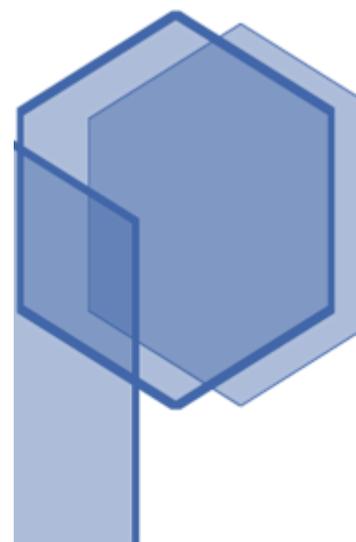
The accelerated models of education address these gaps and complement the formal education in the efforts to reach the OOSCY. AEP has proven to be a viable innovation deployed by various development organisations to reduce the high numbers of OOSCY in West Africa. It is also a flexible age-appropriate programme that promotes access to education in an accelerated time-frame for disadvantaged groups, over-age out-of-school children and youth who missed out or had their education interrupted due to poverty, marginalization, conflict and crisis (Boisvert, Flemming, & Ritesh , 2017). The goal of the AEP is to provide learners with equivalent certified competencies for basic (primary) education using learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity (Boisvert, Flemming, & Ritesh , 2017). It focuses on foundational learning, that is, basic education. It is in-between formal and informal education, essentially, a non-formal education. Non-formal Education interventions record high attendance rates, facilitate transition to formal education, prepares students for employment, and improve girls' retention with lower dropout rate (Shanker, Marian, & Swimmer, 2015), all at little or no cost to parents.

According to CROWN Agent (2017), some key factors influencing parental and learner choice and preferences regarding Complementary Basic Education (CBE)<sup>1</sup> in Ghana include the use of community language for instruction, quality teaching as indicated in transformation of the children, absence of fees, among others. The timing of AEP classes is flexible and allows learners to assist their parents at home before coming to school at their convenient schedule. In Mali, the Educational Development Center (EDCs) institutions offered courses in the dry season to allow “the learners to engage in farm activities during the rainy season” (Weyer, 2009)

AEPs are also **cost-effective**. According to DeStefano et al. (2007) in comparing the cost effectiveness of complementary models and formal educational systems, the available data suggests that complementary models are much less expensive than government-run schools. For example, the School for Life (SFL) model in Ghana is more than four times as cost effective as government schools in Ghana. Annual recurrent unit cost data showed \$31 per child for SFL and \$39 for government run school. The cost of schooling a student who has Grade 3/4 ability is \$50 for SFL compared to \$204 for government schools. The low cost of AEP teachers is recognized as another vital factor that contributes to the cost effectiveness (DeStefano, et al., 2007). These teachers are often volunteers, so they are only paid small amounts as monthly stipend making them a lot cheaper to maintain than public schools teachers whose remuneration and benefits constitute a major overhead expenditure in the education budget. While this is not an argument for the replacement of formally trained teachers in schools with volunteer teachers, it simply presents the manpower affordability of implementing AEP.

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<sup>1</sup> CBE is a model of AEP implemented in Ghana



Remarkable **learning outcomes** in AEP have also been documented. Evidence shows that AEPs support learners to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills which in some cases, outperform their counterparts in conventional schools. Arkorful (2013) confirmed that Complementary Education Programme (CEP) graduates do “cope, catch on and perform on an equal footing with their peers when they transition to formal school” (p. 194). For speed schools (Mali), learners improved by 25 percent in math, which enabled them to completely catch up with their peers (IPA, 2014, p.11).

Evidence of **reintegration of learners into formal** school via AEP abound from various implementations carried out in various countries and contexts. Two-thirds of the Speed School graduates re-entered the school system after the program ended and three out of four successfully completed their first year back in school (IPA, 2014, p.11). The CBE in Ghana<sup>2</sup> is reported to have proven very successful with over 90% of CBE graduates being fully integrated in the formal primary school system (DFID, 2018).

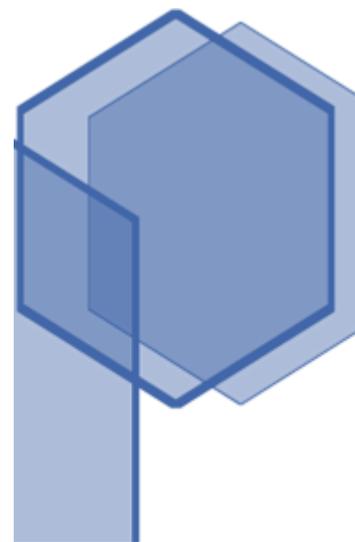
### Scaling up AEP

AEPs are designed to ultimately re-integrate learners into the formal education mainstream. However, it has suffered poor recognition and weak endorsement by the governments (with the exception of few) since it is not operated within the structures that derive from the elements of the foundational programmes available in the formal education system. Because the program does not look like the formal program it is considered non-formal. Non-formal education is sometimes perceived by ministries as being second class education (Menendez et al., 2016)

Given the proven effectiveness of AEP in mainstreaming various cohorts of its learner over the years in many countries and contexts of implementation, it is recommendable that governments should embrace this innovation at scale. Ministries of Education should incorporate this programme into the National Educational Plan and set up a system of administration of curricula, teachers and learning as it concerns the issues of teacher certification, accreditation of programs, reconciliation of salaries and coordination of curriculum as well as the obvious task of having learners move smoothly from a non-formal setting to a formal setting through recognition of the learning achievements. (Menendez et al., 2016). For uniformity in implementation, a common guideline can be drafted in alignment with the ten (10) principles of AEP for best practices.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/complementary-basic-education-cbe-programme-entering-a-new-phase-in-ghana>



<b>Principles of Accelerated Education Programme</b>		
<b>Learners</b>	Principle 1	AEP is flexible and for over-aged learners
	Principle 2	Curriculum, materials and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable and use the relevant language of instruction
	Principle 3	AE learning environment is inclusive, safe and learning-ready
<b>Teachers</b>	Principle 4	Teachers are recruited, supervised and remunerated
	Principle 5	Teachers participate in continuous professional development
<b>Programme Management</b>	Principle 6	Goals, monitoring and funding align
	Principle 7	AEP center is effectively managed
	Principle 8	Community is engaged and accountable
<b>Alignment with MOE and Policy Frameworks</b>	Principle 9	AEP is a legitimate, credible education option that results in learner certification in primary education
	Principle 10	AEP is aligned with the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture

*Source: AEWG Pocket Guide.*

AEPs have mostly been funded by international donors for a short duration of time in most cases which only see about a maximum of three to four cycles completed. It is therefore recommendable that a yearly budget should be made for this by the government in order to sustain this innovation perennially. With a sustained AEP, coupled with existing policies like free basic education, the prospect of a significant reduction in the number of OOSCY becomes more realizable.

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