

Pioneering education scheme boosts learning for poorest Ghanaian children, Faculty research team finds

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A UK-funded education programme that transformed the lives of the poorest children in Ghana is to be continued following an evaluation by Faculty of Education experts.



The Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Programme, an out-of-school accelerated learning scheme supported by the Department for International Development, has helped almost 250,000 rural children who were missing out on education to catch up with their studies and successfully make the transition to primary school.

The scheme, launched in 2013, will now be funded and managed directly by the Ghanaian government, which this month announced it would commit 1% of the country's budget for basic level education to support CBE's continuation.

Independent evaluation

The decision to endorse the programme followed an external, independent evaluation by a team whose lead quantitative researcher was Dr Ricardo Sabates of the REAL Centre at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. Over the final two years of the five-year project, the team - also including Professor Pauline Rose and Dr Emma Carter of the Faculty - measured the progress of children as they took part and after their move to public schools, as well as observing lessons and interviewing all involved.

The CBE programme, backed by the US government alongside DFID, targeted out-of-school children aged eight to 14 in 50 rural districts and five regions of Ghana during the five-year pilot. Working closely with local communities, it provided lessons for children using specially developed materials in their local languages. Classes were held in the afternoon with flexible hours to allow pupils to fit in the household and farming chores that often keep them from attending school.

Under the scheme, lessons take place in any suitable building or outdoors, equipping children with literacy, numeracy and life skills over a period of nine months. Pupils are then supported to make the transition into the closest public school, mainly joining at primary level.

Significant improvements in learning

The research team, led by Professor Kwame Akyeampong of the University of Sussex and funded by DFID, found that in nine months of accelerated learning the CBE programme produced significant improvements in children's local language literacy and numeracy. The number of children able to identify letters in the language rose from 30% to 57%, and single number identification went up from 50% to 70%.

A year after making the switch to primary school, children who had completed the CBE programme matched the performances of their peers already in public schools in local language but made significantly more progress in English literacy and - in the case of younger children - in numeracy. The fact that children who had been out of school ended up outperforming their peers was probably the result of the positive learning experience and improved learning skills they gained through the programme, together with greater family and community support, the researchers concluded.

Dr Sabates said: "Our evaluation shows that CBE is an effective way of providing a second educational chance for children who have not been to school or drop out. It's very encouraging that the government of Ghana has committed 1% of its basic education budget to continue to reach out of school children."

While the programme produced important improvements, low-achieving children, especially low-achieving girls, were still often not benefiting and remained at significant risk of dropping out of education, the team found.

Professor Rose said: "It is exciting to see how evidence is shaping government policy in ways that will increase education opportunities for some of the most vulnerable children in Ghana. The achievements of the CBE programme are striking. In moving forward, it will be vital to tackle the barriers that continue to hold back progress for low-achieving girls."

- Find out more about the CBE Programme in this short [video](#).