

LEARNING REPORT

THE CATCH-UP LEARNING PROJECT

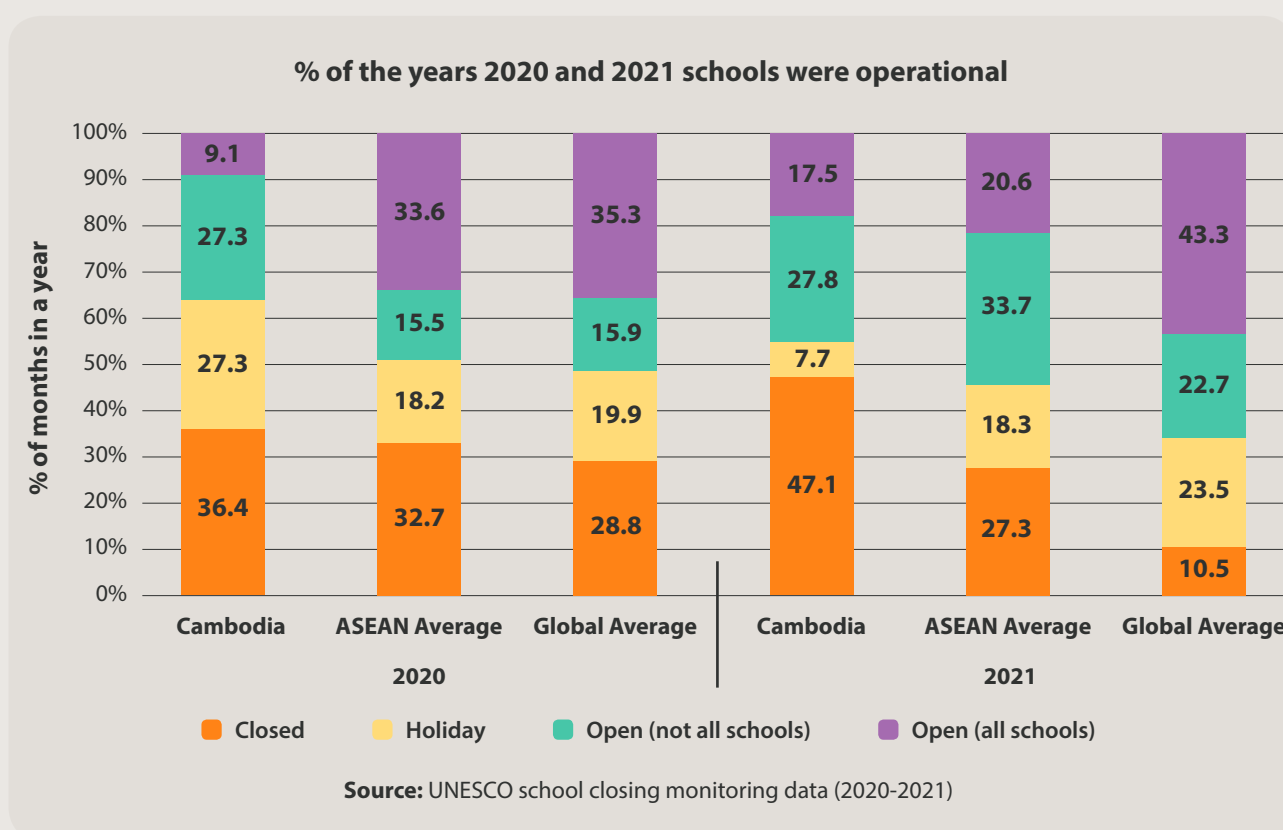
Addressing the COVID-19 Learning Crisis in Cambodia



The COVID-19 Learning Crisis in Cambodia

School Closures and Distance Learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia had one of the longest periods of school closure in the region with face-to-face education suspended for more than half of the official school calendar over the years 2020 and 2021.



During these periods of school closures, several approaches were implemented to support to learn remotely.



Online learning that enabled students to access material and content through various internet platforms;



Learning through television and radio¹;



Local support by schools and teachers through home visits, small group teaching, provision of worksheets and other activities aimed at keeping students engaged.

¹ Two TV channels – the National Television of Cambodia (TVK) and Decho DTV Center – broadcasted programmes to support students during distance learning. Similarly, several national and local radio stations had special programmes to support students during school closures.

The Limits of Distance Learning

Despite these measures, students in the country struggled to continue to learn during school closures.

Around 70% of the students studied less than 3 hours per week².

Key challenges and barriers to distance learning for students

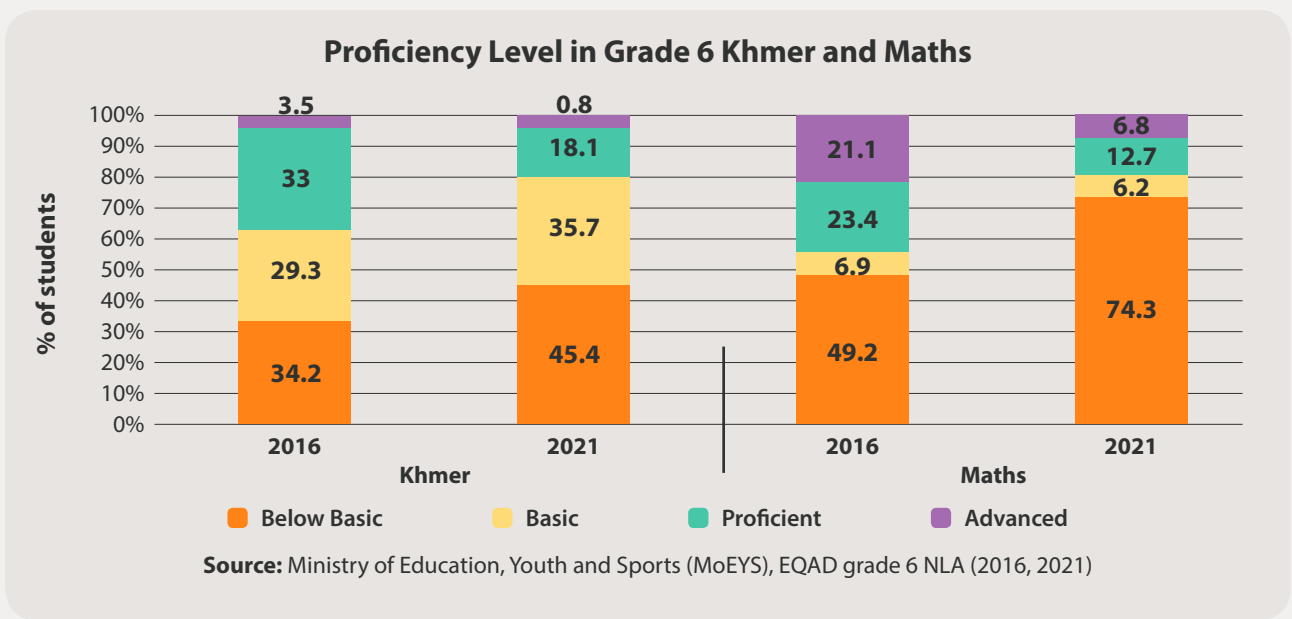
Lack of learning material at home
(books, manuals, notebook, etc.)

Difficulties to access internet
(lack of devices such as smartphones or tablets, financial constraints to buy internet data, etc.)

Caregivers not able to support their children
(due to a lack of knowledge and/or time)

The Learning Gaps

A learning assessment conducted in 2021³ confirmed that there were substantial learning gaps among grade six students.



² Joint Education Sector Needs Assessment (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2020)

³ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and UNICEF, Learning Loss in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era: Evidence from the 2016-2021 Grade Six National Learning Assessment in Cambodia, Supplementary Technical Report for the 2021 Grade Six National Learning Assessment, April 2022

The Response to the Learning Crisis

Following the reopening of schools at the end of 2021, the Royal Government of Cambodia adopted several measures aimed at supporting children to catch up and address learning gaps, specifically through the development of:

- A condensed curriculum (for grades 2 to 6) to support schools and teachers to focus learning on Khmer and mathematics.
- A remedial education package (for grades 2 to 6) for mathematics and Khmer to support schools and teachers to organize catch-up learning programmes.

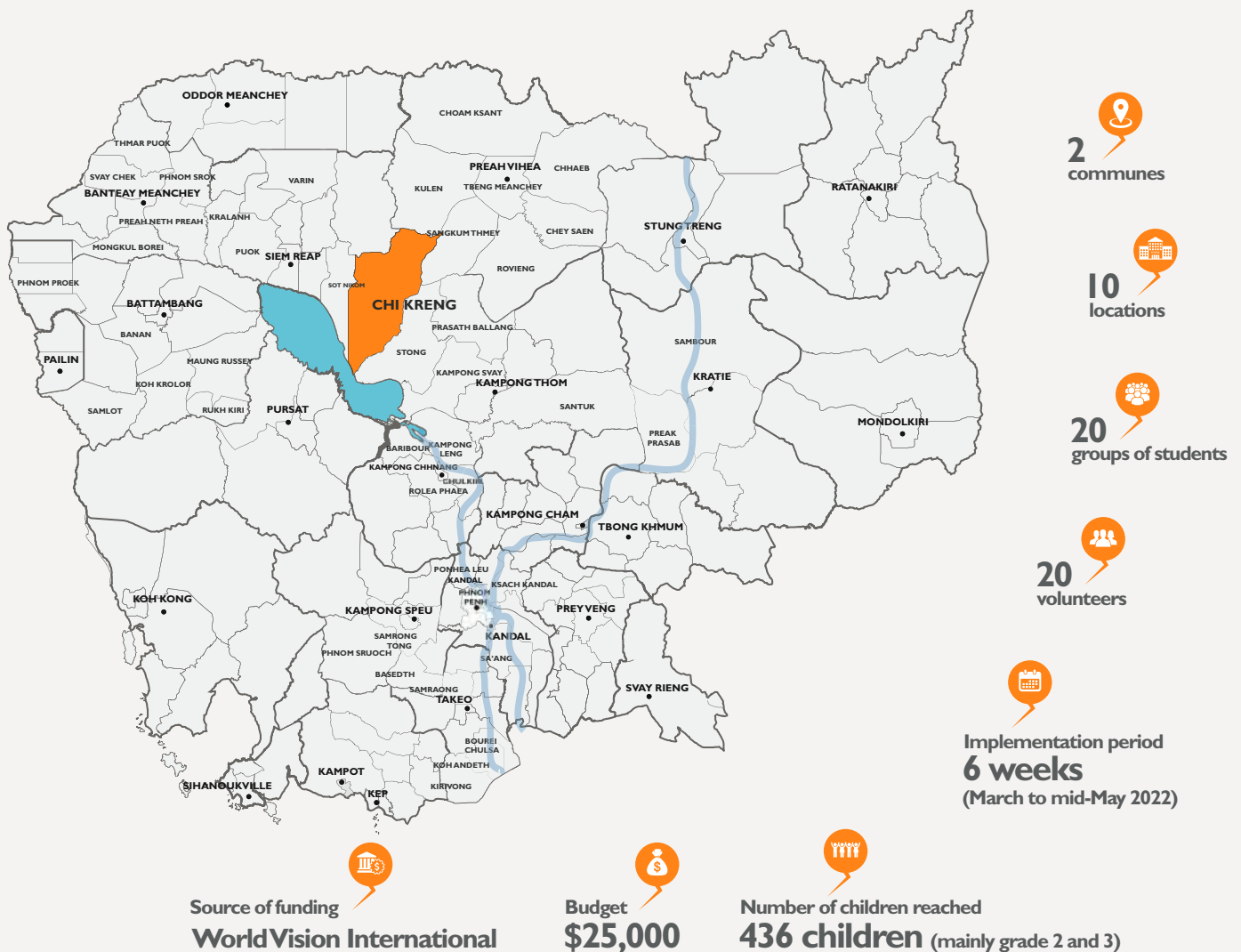
However, the implementation of these measures is facing significant challenges such as the limited resources of local schools and the capacities of the teachers to implement the packages.



WVI's Response to the COVID-19 Learning Crisis in Cambodia: The Catch-Up Learning Project

Objectives:

To support children in early primary to catch-up to the fundamental literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skill levels that they need to successfully engage in the formal education system and at their grade.



The Key Components of World Vision's Approach

The Catch-Up Learning project builds on World Vision's global approach to remedial education. This approach has been adapted to fit the context of Cambodia and the needs identified among the target students.



Community Engagement

The project approach requires significant engagement with local communities:

- To identify the challenges and gaps that have impacted distance learning among the target students
- To map out the existing learning resources available in the community
- To identify appropriate locations for the learning sessions
- To inform caregivers about the schedule of the catch-up learning sessions
- To ask caregivers to encourage their children to attend the catch-up learning sessions and to support them at home.

To inform and engage caregivers and students, World Vision worked with local authorities (village chiefs) who organized multiple meetings in the target communities.

Which grade to target with catch-up education projects?

The pilot project focused on students from grades 2 and 3. This decision was based on global literature that suggests that younger students are more vulnerable to learning losses arising from school closures as they are at risk of losing their foundational learning (specifically literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skills) on which future learning will be built.



Initial Assessment

The project started with an assessment of the literacy and numeracy levels of the target students in order to:

- Identify the needs of the target students (and adapt the content of the catch-up sessions accordingly).
- Baseline the level of the students to be able to measure their progress by the end of the project and assess the effectiveness of the project model.

The assessment tool for children included five sub-tests (vowels, consonants, consonant subscripts, words and reading with comprehension) for literacy and three sub-tests for numeracy (number counting, addition and subtraction).

The questionnaires used for the assessment were adapted from a global World Vision's tool and contextualized for Cambodia.

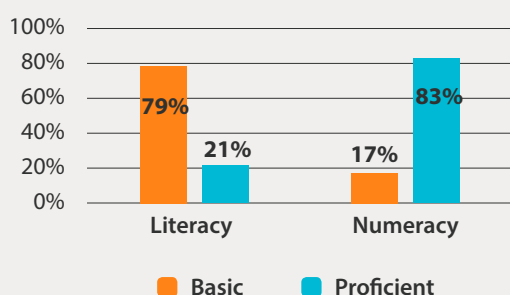


Key Learning from the Initial Assessment ⁴

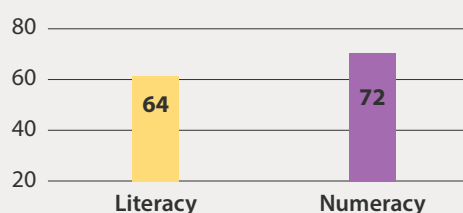
Significant learning gaps, especially for literacy

The initial assessment showed some significant learning gaps, especially for literacy for which only 1 in 5 students could be rated as 'proficient' ⁵.

Distribution of the students by levels



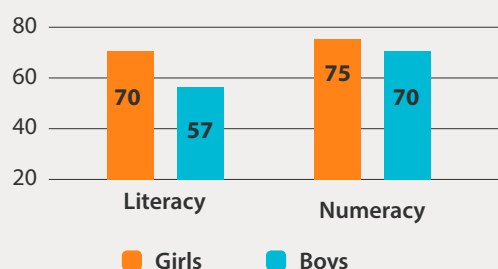
Average score of the students out of 100 (initial assessment)



Girls score higher

This is in line with the findings of most studies conducted in Cambodia that show that girls outperform boys at every level and in any subject.

Average score of the students out of 100 (initial assessment)



Learning gaps and duration of the Catch-Up Learning Project

Based on the gaps identified during the assessment, it was estimated that around 5 to 6 months would be required to cover all the lessons that students would need to catch up with the learnings that they are expected to have acquired through grades 2 and 3. While the pilot was not planned to last that long, World Vision's future catch-up projects and integrated activities will align the duration of the project with the estimated time required to address the needs identified in the initial assessment.

⁴ The questionnaires used for the assessment were adapted from a global World Vision's tool and contextualized for Cambodia. For more information, see above paragraph 2. Initial assessment.

⁵ To be considered proficient, students had to score at least 60% for each sub-test of the questionnaires.



The Syllabus

- The syllabus was developed combining content from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), World Vision International and other civil society organizations.
- The curriculum gave priority to literacy due to the fact that the initial assessment showed that learning gaps were much higher in this area in comparison with numeracy,
- For literacy the main activities focused on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) activities, phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, reading syllables, reading words, reading sentences, learning strengthening (reading, writing and games) and reading aloud.
- For numeracy, the activities focused on problem solving in small groups, explanation of the key concepts by the volunteers and practice through exercises.
- The project used different teaching methodologies such as the Gradual Shared Responsibility approach (I Do, We Do and You Do) in class and the adult learning approach for the facilitators.



The Volunteers

- 20 volunteers (2 per locations) already involved in the facilitation of World Vision's Reading Camps led the facilitation of the learning sessions.
- They received a 3-day training on the syllabus and on facilitation skills at the beginning of the project and then another 2-day training after 3 weeks of implementation (focusing only on the content of the upcoming sessions, especially on numeracy).
- Every week, reflection meetings were organized to discuss challenges, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement.



The Catch-up Learning Sessions

- For each group of students, 30 sessions were organized: one per day, Monday to Friday, for 6 weeks.
- Each session lasted 2 hours.
- 20 – 25 students maximum joined each session.
- The volunteer facilitated the same session twice a day (in the morning and then in the afternoon) as the targeted students attended school either in the morning or in the afternoon.
- To respond to the needs identified, more time was allocated to literacy (50 hours) than to numeracy (10 hours).



Methodology of the Evaluation of the Project

- **Two assessments of the levels of the students in literacy and numeracy were conducted:**
 - An initial assessment that enabled the identification of the needs of the students and to baseline their levels
 - A final assessment that enabled measurement of progress against the initial assessment.
- **Both assessments used the same questionnaire and methodology.**
- **Only 142 children (out of the 436 who took part in the learning sessions) completed both the initial assessment and the final assessment⁶. The present report only focuses on the scores of these 142 students.**
- **Regarding the students who did not complete the 2 assessments:**
 - Most of them joined after the initial assessment.
 - A small number of students either missed the final assessment or dropped-out during the implementation period.
- **The evaluation also involved interviews with local stakeholders and five focus group discussions with parents (1), students (2), local authorities (1) and the volunteers (1).**



⁶ Even if some of these 142 students did not attend all the sessions in between the assessments, their scores were still taken into account in the final evaluation.

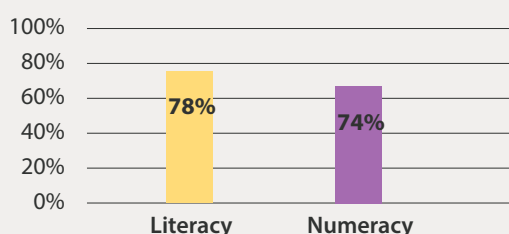
Learnings and Recommendations



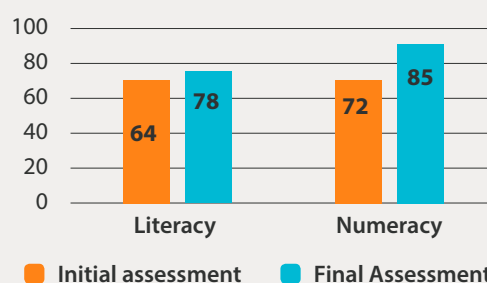
The pilot project led to some good progress...

After a month and a half of implementation, around $\frac{3}{4}$ of the students improved their scores from the initial to the final assessment. The progress is more marked for literacy (22% increase vs. 17% in numeracy), likely because of the higher number of learning sessions on this subject.

% of students who improved their scores between the initial and the final assessment



Average score of the students out of 100

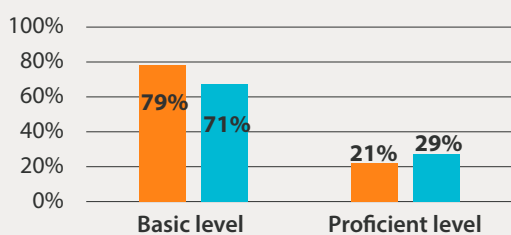


...but more time is needed to fully address the learning gaps, especially in literacy.

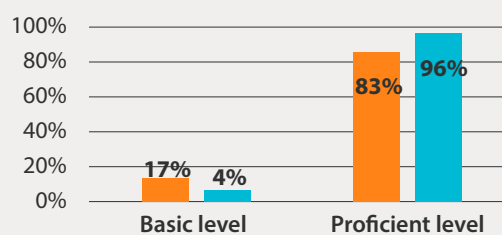
After a month and a half of implementation, the proportion of students that could be rated as proficient⁷ only increased by 8 percentage points in literacy and by 13 points for numeracy. This is aligned with the findings from the initial assessment that suggested that 5 to 6 months would be needed to implement a curriculum that could address the significant learning gaps affecting the target students.

This finding is important and organizations interested in implementing catch-up learning projects should consider implementing them for an extended period of time in order to address the significant learning loss affecting students post COVID-19.

Distribution of the students by levels (literacy)



Distribution of the students by levels (numeracy)



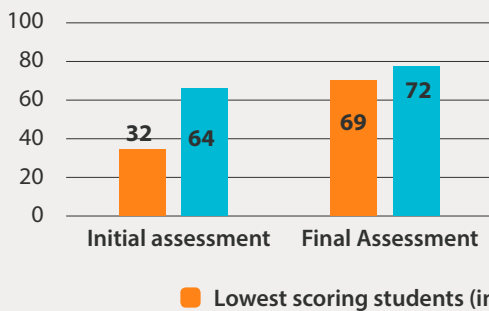
⁷ To be considered proficient, students had to score at least 60% for each sub-test of the questionnaires. See Page 6 for more information on the assessments



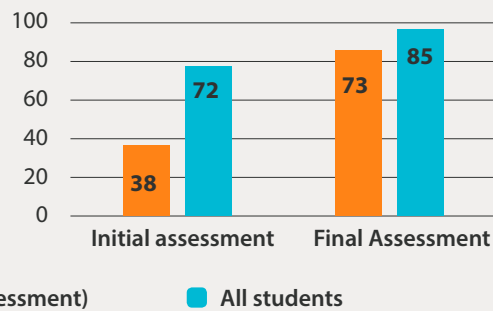
Students who scored the lowest at the initial assessment registered the strongest progress and were able to catch-up with other students through the project.

Focusing on the 25% of the students (35 out of 142) who scored the lowest at the initial assessment, the data shows that they progressed more than the average student. This strong progress allowed them to finish the pilot project with a level closer to the average level of the target students.

Average scores of the students out of 100 (literacy)

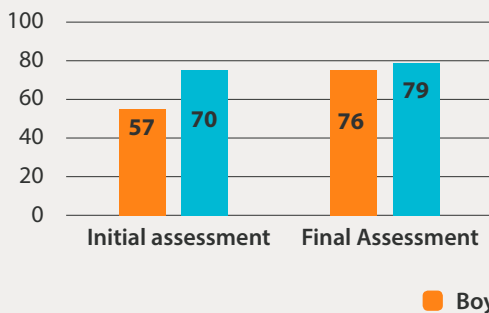


Average scores of the students out of 100 (numeracy)

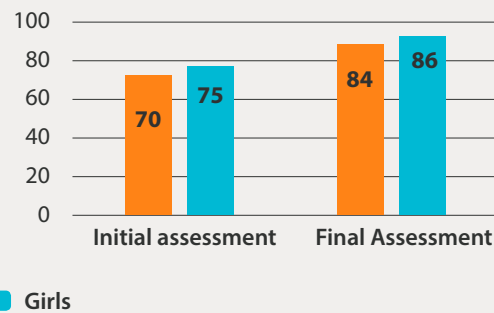


The situation was similar for boys: they registered stronger progress than the girls and were able to more closely catch-up with them through the project.

Average scores of the students out of 100 (literacy)



Average scores of the students out of 100 (numeracy)



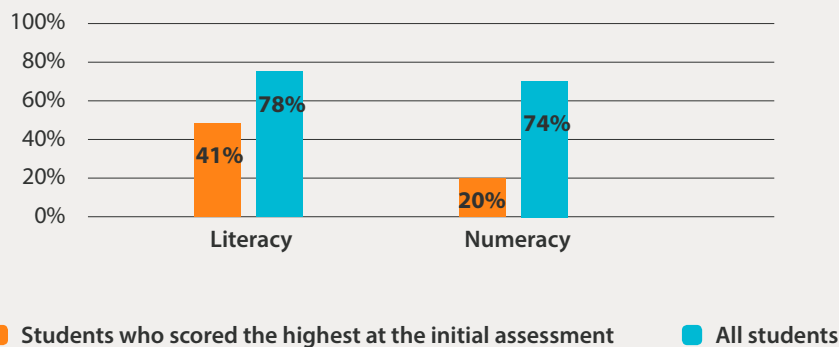


Limited impact of the project on the students who originally scored the highest

The project had initially planned to group the students by levels (advanced and less advanced) and to adapt the content of the learning sessions to their different levels. However, this approach was not implemented due to the fact that each session had to be conducted twice (once in the morning and once in the afternoon) to allow both the students attending school in the morning and the ones attending in the afternoon to take part in learning sessions. Creating two level groups would have required to repeat each session four times (two sessions for different level groups in the morning and two in the afternoon), increasing significantly the costs and complicating the logistics of the project.

However, analysis of the data shows that the students who had scored the highest during the initial assessment⁸ did not progress as much as the rest of the students. This finding confirms that, for better results, there is a need to either group the students by levels and adapt the content to the level of each group, or to give priority to the less advanced students to create more homogenous groups.

% of students who improved their score between the initial and the final assessment



⁸ In following comparison, we focused on the 25% of the students who scored the highest at the initial assessment.



Capacities of the volunteers

The quality of the learning sessions depends greatly on the facilitation skills of the volunteers and their understanding of the content and material. During the pilot project, the time allocated to the training of the volunteers (3 + 2 days) proved to be insufficient to cover the content of all sessions and the volunteers had to prepare some of these sessions by themselves during implementation. Based on the evaluation of the project, it is recommended that:

- The initial training should focus on the facilitation skills and the content of the first learning sessions.
- Following this initial training, the volunteers should be trained on a regular basis (weekly or bi-weekly) on the content of each session.

The limited time that was available for the design and preparation of the project did not include sufficient time to start the project with a facilitator manual that the volunteers could use on a daily basis. However, this document was developed during implementation, building on the weekly reflection meetings and the final evaluation.



Learning materials for students

The approach of the pilot was to leverage the learning material and resources locally available (at school libraries and at Reading Camps) by mapping them out and then referencing them during the relevant learning sessions so students knew what was available to them and where to find them.

The volunteers suggested during the focus group discussions and reflection meetings that developing and distributing a student workbook would be a better approach. However, the design and printing of the manual would increase the cost of the project and would require additional preparation. Since the content of the learning sessions is based on the needs identified among the target students, this manual would also have to be reviewed for each project.





Coordination with the local education system

Only a few activities were conducted in coordination with education officials and local schools. This is mainly due to the fact that World Vision started implementation very quickly after the reopening of the schools, leaving little time for joint design and coordination. However, as we prepare for potential scale-up, deepened coordination will be addressed and relevant stakeholders (Department of Education at the district level, school directors and teachers) will be involved in key activities such as the development of the questionnaires for the assessments, the development of the curriculum (following the initial assessment) and the supervision, mentoring and coaching of the volunteers to ensure the quality of teaching and learning.

WorldVision will inform these key stakeholders about the results of the project, especially on the progress achieved by the students in their schools and the remaining learning gaps so they can be prioritized locally.



Building sustainability from the start

In the target communes, the village chiefs were involved in the implementation of the project from the start, especially to support community mobilization. This enabled the volunteers to advocate for the Commune Investment Plan (CIP) to cover part of the costs of the project.

This co-funding as replicated will enable the extension of project coverage while creating a sustainable solution to support the less advanced students longer-term, even beyond the current learning crisis. The response of local authorities has been very positive and additional monitoring will be conducted during the development process of the CIPs to track whether local budgets are allocated to support local implementation of catch-up learning projects.



World Vision



World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.

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