

# LEARNING CURVE

To realize education's promise, countries need to prioritize learning, not just schooling

**HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS** of children across the developing world are shortchanged on their educational experience, reaching young adulthood without even the most basic life skills. Many grow up not knowing how to calculate the correct change from a transaction at the local market, how to read a doctor's instructions, or how to interpret a campaign promise—even if they have attended school. In short, monitoring school attendance is a poor measure of what, if anything, a child has learned.

At the current rate of improvement, it would take 75 years for teenagers in Brazil to reach the rich-country average score in math. It would take them more than 260 years to do the same in reading. In 14 sub-Saharan African countries, the average sixth-grade teacher could read no better than the highest-performing sixth-grade student. In rural India, nearly 75 percent of third-grade students were unable to solve a basic math problem. This learning crisis widens inequality, because poor students suffer the worst learning outcomes. Malnutrition, high fees, and gender barriers fuel the crisis; so do

absent, ill-prepared, and poorly supported teachers. What drives it all is a political system that doesn't prioritize learning.

Delivered well, education—and the human capital it creates—has many benefits. For individuals, education promotes employment, earnings, and health. For societies, it drives long-term economic growth, reduces poverty, spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion.

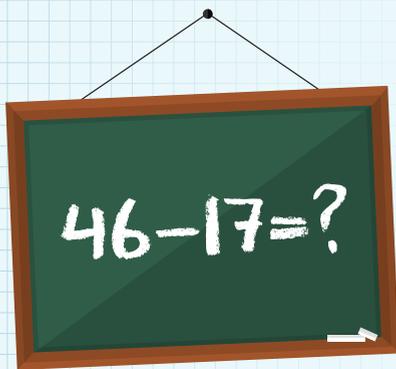
The World Bank's *World Development Report 2018* proposes a three-tiered approach to get a grip on this crisis. First, countries need to use learning assessments to shine a light on the problem of low learning. Second, they should leverage research on effective educational interventions. And third, countries need to prioritize learning, data collection, and reform at the national level.

After all, an educated workforce is critical to a nation's future prosperity. **FD**

Prepared by **MARIE BOURSQUOT**. Text and charts are based on the World Bank's *World Development Report 2018*.

## The problem

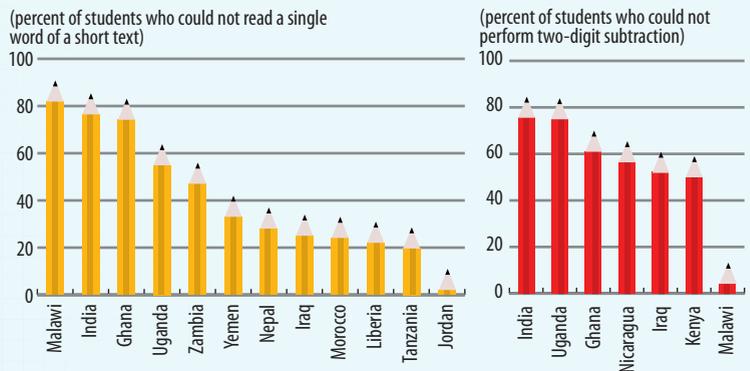
### Schooling does not equal learning



In rural India, **nearly 75% of students in grade 3 could not solve a basic math problem:** two-digit subtraction, such as 46 minus 17. By grade 5, 50% of these students still could not do so.

### Shortfalls in learning start early

Percentage of grade 2 students who could not perform simple reading or math problems, selected countries.



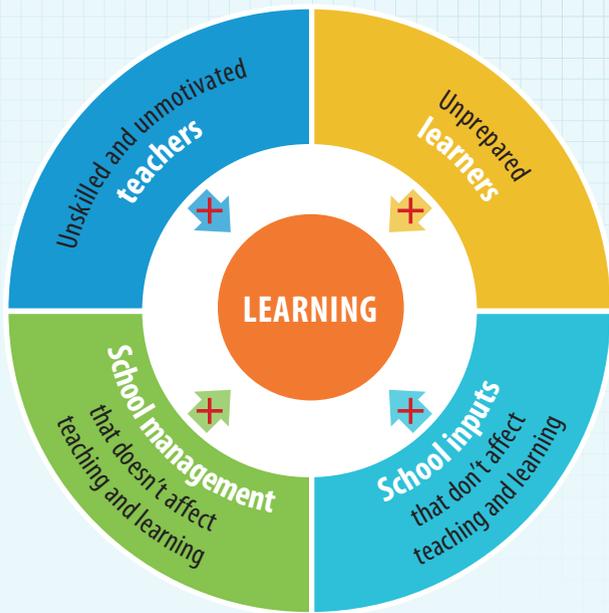
Source: World Bank, *World Development Report 2018*.

Note: These data typically pertain to selected regions in the countries and are not necessarily nationally representative.

# The story behind the numbers

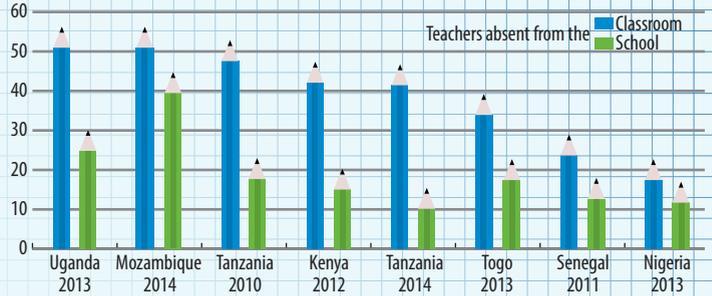
## Why aren't students learning in school?

Four factors are at play:



### Teachers are sometimes absent

Percentage of teachers absent from school and from class on the day of an unannounced visit, participating African countries



Source: World Bank, *World Development Report 2018*.

Note: Absent from the classroom combines absences from school with absences from class among teachers who are at school.

Of the 121 countries studied, **half lack the data required to report on levels of reading and mathematics proficiency** of children at the end of lower secondary school.



## Key numbers

### 75 YEARS

At their current rate of improvement, 15-year-olds in Brazil won't reach the rich-country average score in math for more than 75 years.

### 180 YEARS

At their current rate of improvement, 15-year-olds in Tunisia won't reach the rich-country average score in math for another 180 years.

### 260 MILLION

Some 260 million children worldwide are not enrolled in primary or secondary school.

## The solution

Countries have made enormous progress on getting children into school. Now it is time to focus on improving learning.

