



IN SCHOOL, BUT NOT LEARNING

Tackling the “hidden inequity” in education

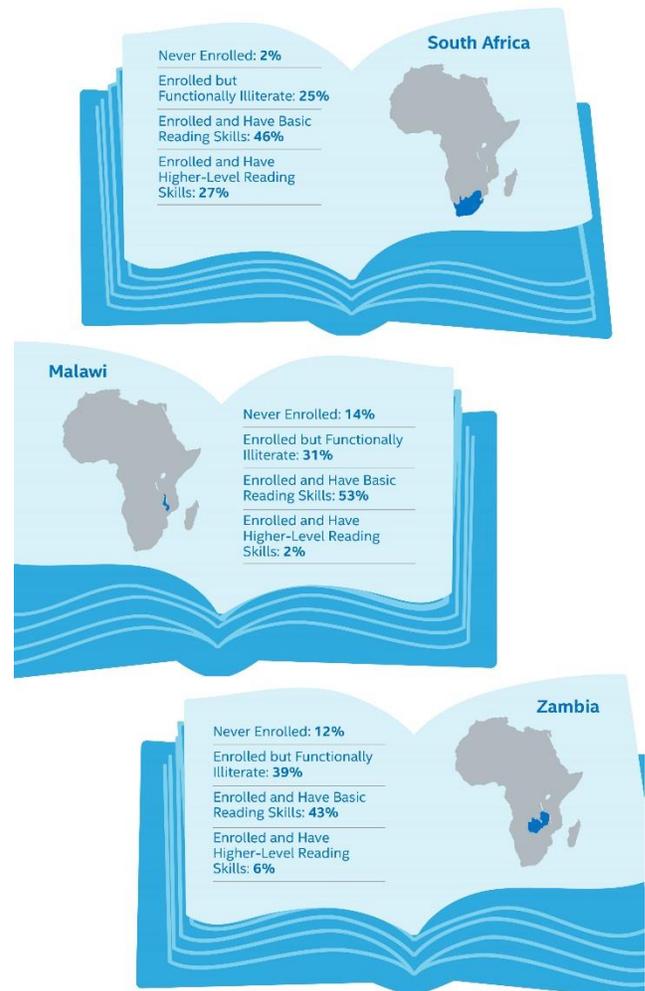
Over the past decade, many developing nations have seen an encouraging increase in school enrollment rates. But getting children into the classroom is not enough. Currently, 130 million children are in school but not learning the basics.

“There has been a lot of celebration about the progress the global community has made in increasing enrollment rates, but when we look at *effective* enrollment rates—kids who are actually learning things—we see there is a hidden exclusion,” says Heather Simpson, senior director of education and child development for Save the Children, which, in 2013, released its report, “[Ending the Hidden Exclusion: Learning and equity in education post-2015.](#)”

The report notes that many children attend school for five years or more without acquiring basic reading and math skills. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, an [analysis](#) by economists Nicholas Spaul and Stephen Taylor shows that many children at the grade 6 level are effectively illiterate and/or innumerate.

Reading Between the Lines

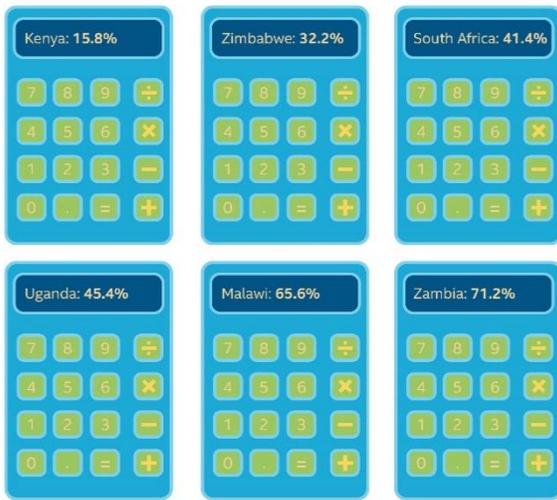
High Enrollment Doesn't Mean High Literacy Rates in the Grade 6 Population of Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Spaul and Taylor

Not Adding Up

Percentage of Grade 6 Population Who Are Innumerate in Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: The Brookings Institution

Although this problem is not exclusive to the developing world, a [Brookings Institution analysis](#) of the literacy and numeracy rates of students in more than 90 countries found significant educational disparity between developed and developing regions.

Different Worlds

4th-6th Graders Meeting Minimum Proficiency Levels



Source: The Brookings Institution

Children in developing regions face a far different employment and economic landscape than did their parents. Where once most transactions—from applying for a job to opening a bank account—were handled in person, digital technology has significantly increased the use of the written word. “Children need to master literacy skills and numeracy skills so that they can function, help their families get support and be effective members in their community,” says Simpson.

The Save the Children report notes that computer skills are becoming a necessity for workers in both the developed and the developing world, as employment moves away from farming and into more urban areas. In the past 30 years, 900 million non-farm jobs have been created in developing economies, says a [report](#) by The McKinsey Global Institute.

Farm vs. Non-farm Jobs in Developing Economies



Source: The McKinsey Global Institute

The McKinsey report predicts that current trends, if they persist, will result in a shortage of 45 million medium-skilled workers in developing economies; at the same time, the world will have a surplus of 90-95 million low-skilled workers.

To ensure that children succeed in the 21st century workforce, Simpson recommends investing in early-childhood education—research has found that children exposed to quality early education or caregiving show stronger brain development than those who are not. Properly training teachers should also be a priority; in many areas, it’s assumed that if the teacher is literate herself, she will know how to teach children to read. “That’s not fair to teachers,” she says.

Simpson also recommends increasing the number of out-of-school learning programs, noting that in many developing countries children are often in school for only two or three hours a day. Such programs both help bridge the learning gap so children can master the basics and also help students reap the full benefits of the knowledge economy.

The Intel® Learn Program, for example, is a digital literacy program that uses a project-based approach to empower children to direct their own learning. The program, which has served more than 1 million learners in 15 countries, is administered in partnership with local governments, communities, and nonprofit organizations. By focusing on problems that the children see in their own communities—pollution, infrastructure, transportation, etc.—the program inspires young learners to create innovative solutions and helps them master important 21st century skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork.

“It’s really critical to help children develop these skills so they can help create a positive way forward,” says Simpson.

Sources:

[“Ending the Hidden Exclusion: Learning and equity in education post-2015,”](#) Save The Children International, 2013.

[“Effective Enrollment’—Creating a composite measure of educational access and educational quality to accurately describe education system performance in sub-Saharan Africa,”](#) Nicholas Spaul and Stephen Taylor, Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers, November 2012.

[“Why Wait 100 Years?: Bridging the gap in global education,”](#) The Brookings Institution, June 2015.

[“The world at work: Jobs, pay, and skills for 3.5 billion people,”](#) McKinsey Global Institute, June 2012.