

A New Micro Measure for Education Interventions:
Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS)

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Abstract

Efforts to improve educational outcomes in low- and middle-income countries abound, but the current way of reporting the results of such efforts (in standard deviation improvements of access or learning) presents several challenges: access and learning are separated, forcing policy makers to consider each challenge separately; standard deviations are not an intuitive measure for non-technical audiences; and individual study results do not translate to how much interventions could shrink gaps across countries. This study proposes a new measure, Learning-Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS), to present internationally comparable estimates of educational interventions. LAYS combine the quantity and quality of schooling into a single metric of educational progress. This paper presents the results of dozens of impact evaluations into LAYS units. Results reveal that many interventions are not effective, but that the most effective interventions can significantly close the gap between schooling and learning. This paper demonstrates the viability of LAYS to become a standard unit of measurement for education outcomes – the analogy to two standard units used in health: Quality-Adjusted Life Years (QALYs) and Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). A few prominent recent policy examples of the use of LAYS include large-scale efforts by the World Bank, USAID and DFID.