

2023 COST-EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO IMPROVE GLOBAL LEARNING

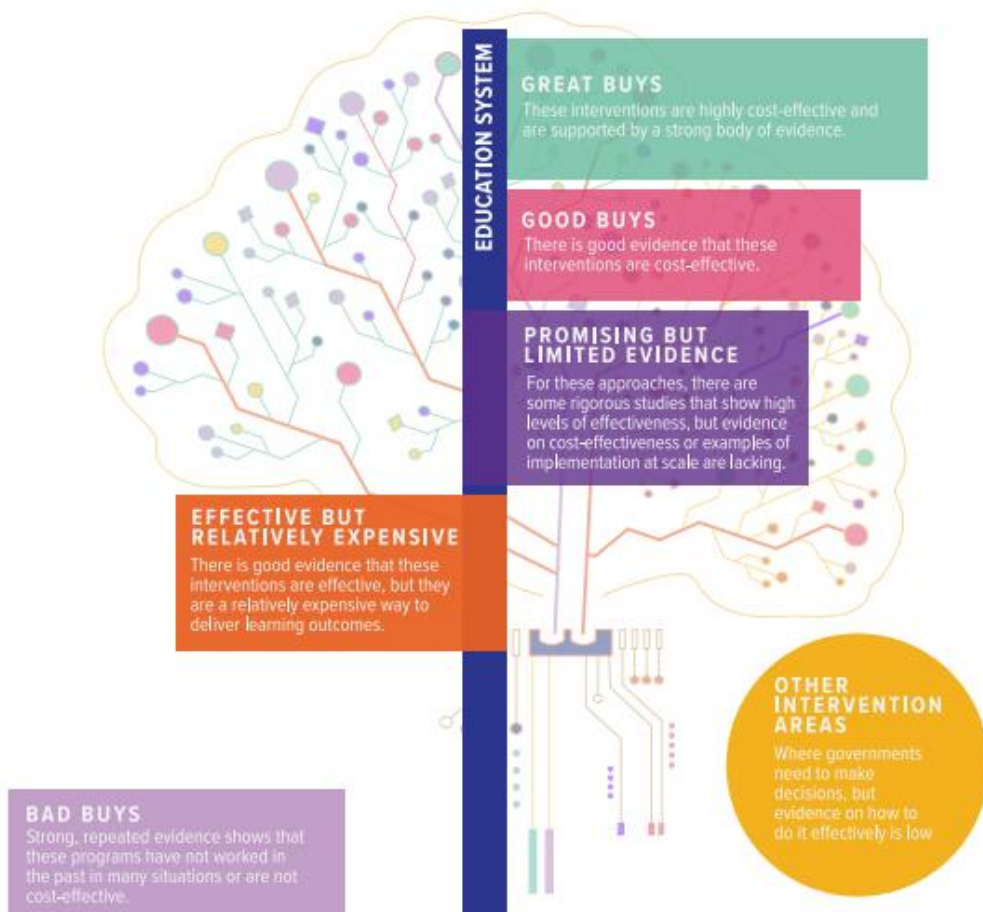
What does recent evidence tell us are “Smart Buys” for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries?

Recommendations of the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP)

This report provides a guide for governments and other stakeholders in low- and middle-income countries about what works in improving learning and education outcomes. Produced by the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP), an independent interdisciplinary panel of global experts in international educational evidence and implementation, the current report updates a previous version of the “Smart Buys”.

With this report, the Panel aims to summarize the best, most up-to-date evidence on cost-effectiveness at scale in a user-friendly way for policymakers. It groups many different types of education policies and programs into categories from Great Buys to Bad Buys, along with categories where more knowledge is needed.

For this new update, the Panel carried out a systematic search of over 13,000 additional studies, through which it identified over 250 additional high-quality evaluation studies. The added studies bring the total number of evaluations referenced in the Smart Buys categorizations to over 400, and they expand the categories of interventions evaluated into new areas such as health, nutrition, and socioemotional development. These 400 evaluations were reviewed based on various criteria—most notably, how cost-effective they were at improving learning and other outcomes, and whether they had been successfully implemented at scale. On the basis on this evidence, the Panel was able to classify many interventions into the following categories:



Great Buys:

These interventions are highly cost-effective and are supported by a strong body of evidence.

- Providing information on the benefits, costs, and quality of education
- Supporting teachers with structured pedagogy (a package that includes structured lesson plans, learning materials, and ongoing teacher support)
- Targeting teaching instruction by learning level, not grade (in or out of school)

Good Buys:

There is good evidence that these interventions are cost-effective

- Providing parent-directed early childhood stimulation programs (for ages 0 to 36 months)
- Providing quality pre-primary education (for ages 3 to 5)
- Reducing travel times to schools
- Giving merit-based scholarships to disadvantaged children and youth
- Administering school-based mass deworming where worm-load is high

Promising but Limited Evidence:

For these approaches, there are some rigorous studies that show high levels of effectiveness, but evidence on cost-effectiveness or examples of implementation at scale are lacking.

- Using software that allows personalized learning and adapts to the learning level of the child (where hardware is already in schools)
- Augmenting teaching teams with community-hired staff
- Providing mass treatment for common health conditions including free eyeglasses, multi micronutrients, and preventative malaria treatment
- Leveraging mobile phones to support learning
- Safeguarding students from violence
- Teaching socio-emotional and life skills
- Involving communities in school management
- Targeting interventions towards girls

Advisory panel

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Effective but Relatively Expensive:

There is good evidence that these interventions are effective, but they are a relatively expensive way to deliver learning outcomes. They might be appropriate for school systems with larger budgets or to achieve non-education objectives.

- Transferring cash (as a tool for improving learning)
- Feeding in Primary Schools

Bad Buys:

Strong, repeated evidence shows that these programs have not worked in the past in many situations or are not cost-effective.

- Investing in hardware like laptops, tablets and computers alone
- Funding additional inputs alone, when other issues are not addressed, including:
 - Textbooks
 - Additional teachers to reduce class size
 - School buildings
 - Grants
 - Salary
 - Libraries

Context, political economy, and implementation details are all critical factors in the effectiveness of each of these interventions. Under each sub-section, we discuss the specific educational, developmental, and political economy contexts in which the interventions are most likely to be cost-effective based on the evidence and implementation challenges. We encourage policymakers to review both the contextual factors and the evidence on cost-effectiveness when contemplating scaling these interventions.

Former GEEAP reports:

“Prioritizing learning during Covid-19”, 2021



“Cost-effective approaches to improve global learning”, 2020

