

# Reimagining How We Measure Our Impact in Education: The RAISE Framework

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In recent decades, driven by concerns over an alarming learning crisis<sup>1 2</sup> and exacerbated by a global pandemic, education projects across the Global South have prioritized improving learning outcomes as their overarching project goals<sup>3</sup>. It seems that every initiative in education, whether spearheaded by the World Bank, UNICEF, or international NGOs, aims to demonstrate a statistically significant improvement in learning outcomes measured by standardized assessments. While these metrics are valuable, they capture only a fraction of what constitutes a quality education. As someone who has run impact evaluations in the education sector for over a decade, I firmly believe that donors and government agencies across the Global South must broaden their focus to prioritize other critical indicators essential for the long-term health of an education ecosystem: retention, attendance, interest, and socio-emotional development (RAISE). This comprehensive approach is crucial for developing education systems that not only improve academic performance but also foster overall student well-being and development.

## The Limitations of Short-Term Learning Outcomes

The current model of assessing educational programs often emphasizes measuring short-term learning gains, evaluated over a 12 to 24-month period. This timeframe is dictated by understandably rigid structures of typical project assessments: baseline, midline, and endline. However, this narrow focus can lead to misleading results.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. (2013). The Global Learning Crisis. *UNESCO*.  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000223826>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. (2018). World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. *World Bank*.  
<https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>

<sup>3</sup> Popularized through the World Bank's 2011 strategy paper - "Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development." Education Strategy 2020. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available here: <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/418511491235420712/Education-Strategy-4-12-2011.pdf>

Educational technology, for instance, can significantly enhance student engagement and interest in school, especially in challenging environments.<sup>4</sup> When students find school exciting due to innovations like e-labs, they are more likely to attend regularly. In the long run, such an innovative project is likely to lead to lower drop-out rates, lower rates of absenteeism, and a reduction in learning poverty, even if it doesn't immediately translate into improved test scores over the project lifetime.

Moreover, integrating new innovations into classroom culture takes time. Teachers need to adjust to a new teaching modality, and it can take even longer for these adjustments to translate into tangible improvements in learning outcomes. Additionally, when previously absent or out-of-school children return to school, their initial performance might lag as they catch up, potentially skewing short-term results (in studies that don't follow a particular cohort from baseline to endline).

## The Challenges of Measuring Educational Impact

It is also important to admit that measuring learning outcomes is inherently challenging. We aren't measuring such improvements in sterile environments. There is no test tube. There is no beaker. There are often harsh environments - from regional conflicts causing school closures to the movement of teachers and students between schools.

The standardized assessments that we hold on to — EGRA, EGMA, IDELA, or ASER, to name a few — require reasonably complex instruments that need to be contextualized to the local context through thoughtful participatory workshops. If that isn't done or if the enumerators don't collect data accurately and using the exact same protocols as the baseline or midline, then, it is quite easy to have significant measurement errors in our understanding of learning outcomes.

These complexities necessitate a broader and long-term perspective on educational success.

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<sup>4</sup> ADRA (2024), Evaluating E-labs in Niger: Learning Outcomes and Implications

## Beyond Literacy and Numeracy: The RAISE Framework

To genuinely capture the impact of educational interventions for the long run, we must look beyond short-term literacy and numeracy gains. The RAISE framework—retention, attendance, interest, and socio-emotional development— offers a more comprehensive understanding of educational success. The first two factors are also less prone to noise than learning outcomes and are easier to measure.

1. Retention: Keeping students in school until they complete their education and preventing vulnerable students from dropping out should be a critical indicator of success. A lack of reduction in dropout rates can nullify any short-term gains in learning outcomes and continues to remain a critical challenge in most countries of the Global South<sup>5</sup>.
2. Attendance: Regular attendance is a fundamental prerequisite for learning. Programs that succeed in keeping students in school are already making significant strides, even before considering test scores.<sup>6</sup> Such successes should be monitored and celebrated.
3. Interest and engagement: When students are interested and engaged in their learning, they are more likely to participate actively in their learning. This involvement is crucial for fostering a love of the subject, opting-into more complex learning material<sup>7</sup> and life-long learning.

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<sup>5</sup> About 258 million children and youth are out of school, according to UIS data for the school year ending in 2018. The total includes 59 million children of primary school age, 62 million of lower secondary school age and 138 million of upper secondary age. <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>

<sup>6</sup> Kassarnig, V., Bjerre-Nielsen, A., Mones, E., Lehmann, S., & Lassen, D. (2017). Class attendance, peer similarity, and academic performance in a large field study. *PLoS ONE*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0187078>.

<sup>7</sup> Köller, O., Baumert, J., & Schnabel, K. (2001). Does interest matter? The relationship between academic interest and achievement in mathematics. *Journal for research in mathematics education*, 32(5), 448-470. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/749801>

4. Socio-Emotional Development: Education is not just about academic skills. With the advent of AI, socio-emotional development, including skills like resilience, empathy, and teamwork, is essential for students' overall growth and future success.<sup>8</sup>

## Moving Forward: A Call for Broader Metrics and Longitudinal Studies

To truly understand and enhance educational outcomes, we must adopt broader metrics and incorporate longitudinal studies that don't end abruptly with a project endline. By considering retention, attendance, interest, and socio-emotional development, we can capture the full spectrum of educational impact, from immediate involvement to long-term retention and socio-emotional growth. This comprehensive perspective will enable us to better identify and support programs that make a real difference in students' lives, both now and in the future.

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<sup>8</sup> Zins, J., Bloodworth, M., Weissberg, R., & Walberg, H. (2007). The Scientific Base Linking Social and Emotional Learning to School Success. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17, 191 - 210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474410701413145>.