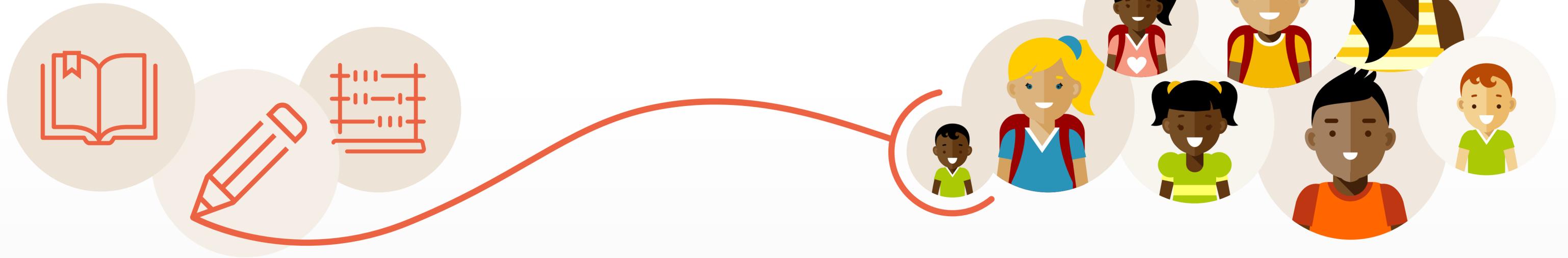


Focus to Flourish

Five Actions to Accelerate Progress in Learning

There has been tremendous progress toward ensuring that every child has access to school —and now that most children are in school, the focus must shift to ensuring universal learning, which requires fundamental changes.

The world has longstanding commitments to universal education— which is necessary for a child’s dignity, self-worth, and freedom to define their own destiny



“ Everyone has the right to education. ”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, 1948

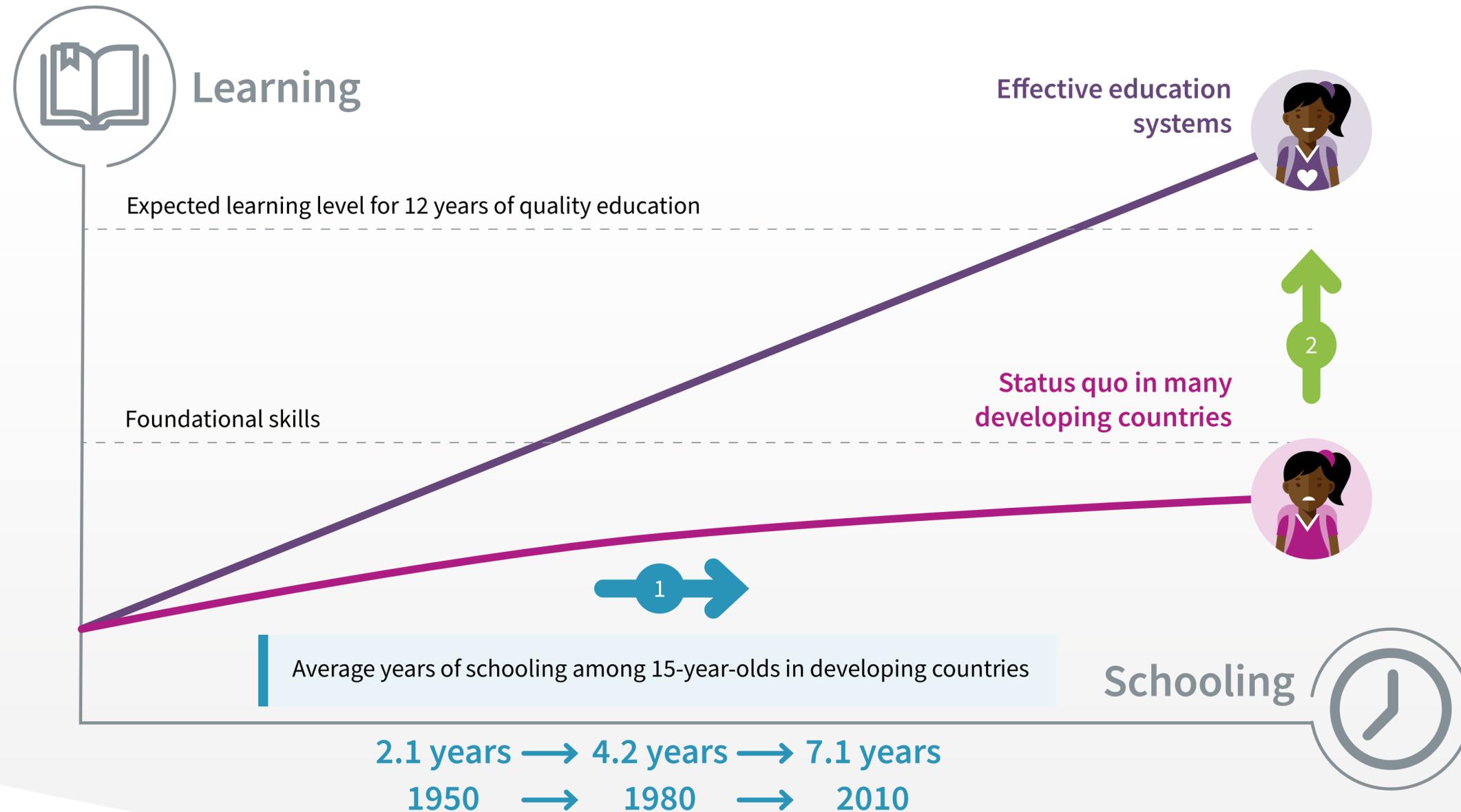
“ Every person — child, youth and adult — shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs ... required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. ”

World Declaration on Education for All, Article 2, 1990

“ By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. ”

Sustainable Development Goal 4.1, 2015

There are two paths to improving the capabilities that youths have when they finish schooling: more schooling, or more learning per year of schooling



- 1 There has been huge progress in schooling attainment in developing countries.
- 2 However, in many countries, the pace at which children master new learning per year of schooling is just too shallow—such that many children complete basic schooling without achieving foundational learning. To overcome this, education systems need to help children learn more each year.

Most countries around the world have had fantastic success in expanding access to schooling—but must make further progress on learning



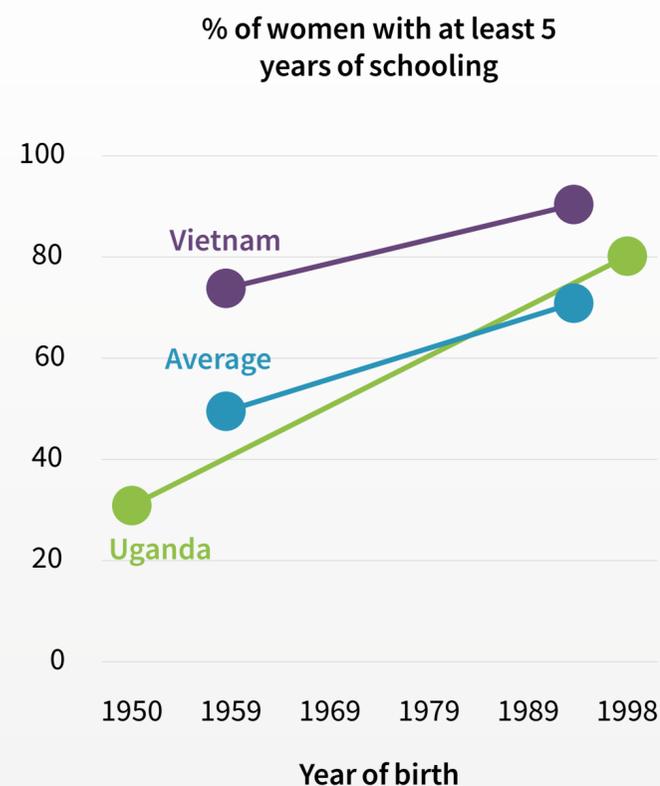
In the mid-20th century, the biggest challenge for universal foundational learning goals around the world was improving access to schooling.

Today, the biggest challenge for cultivating foundational learning for all children is helping them to learn more with each year they spend in school.

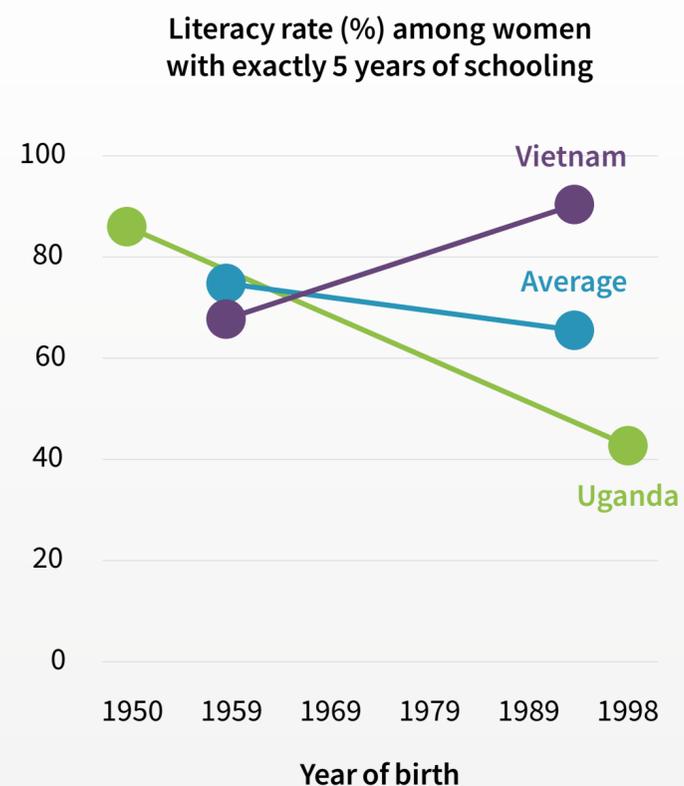
Despite great efforts worldwide to improve education—and some notable successes—most of the developing world is still experiencing a severe learning crisis in which learning levels are low and, in some cases, worsening.

In many education systems, the proportion of schoolgoing children who gain foundational learning is low—and stagnant or decreasing

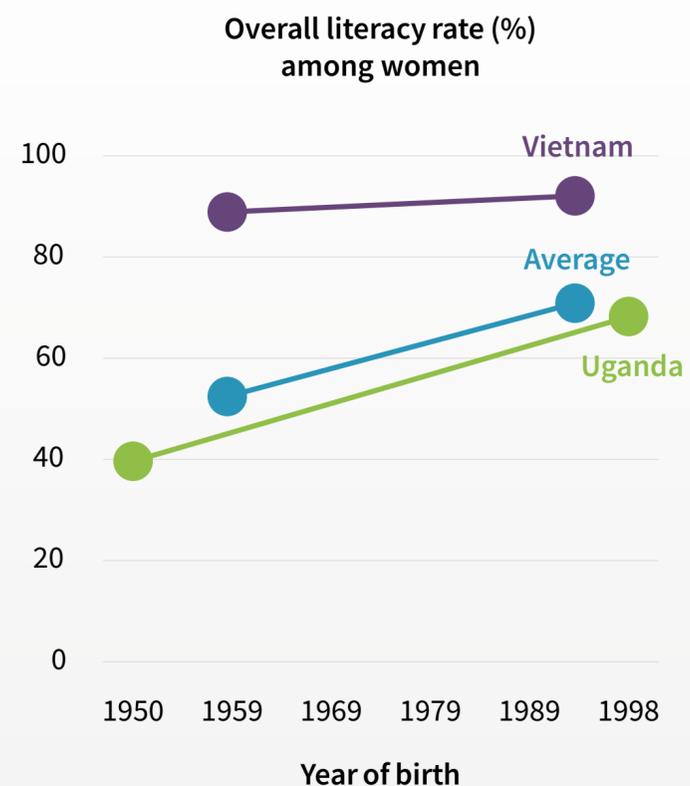
In most countries, there has been a massive expansion in school enrolment ...



... but trends in education quality have varied widely across countries ...



... such that large gains in enrollment produce mixed outcomes for learning.



In **Vietnam**, both enrolment and education quality increased, leading to an increase in overall learning levels (which were already high).

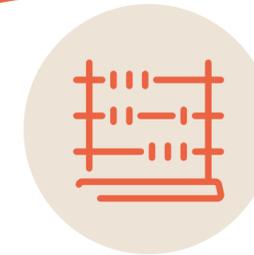
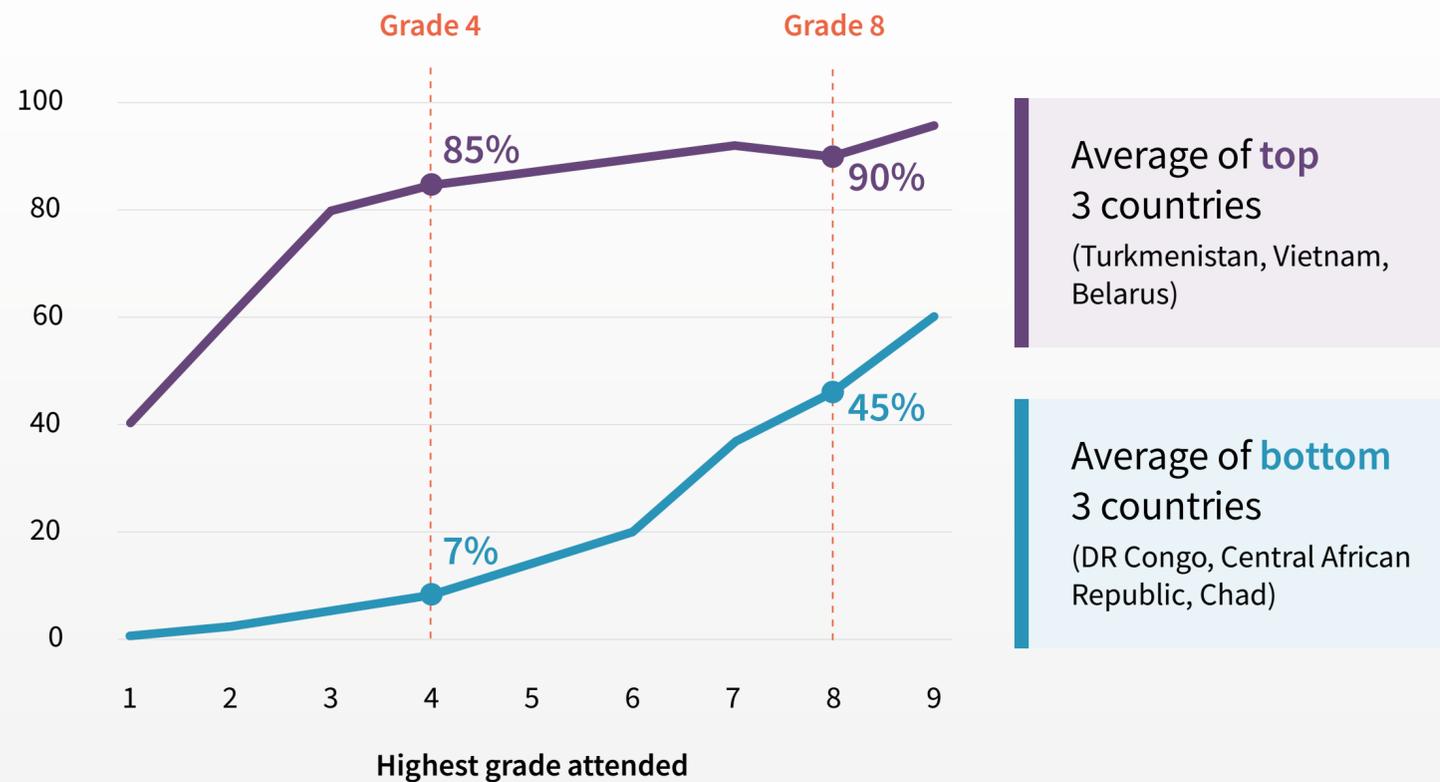
On **average**, enrolment increased steeply, but education quality declined, so the increase in overall learning levels was much smaller than the increase in enrolment.

In **Uganda**, both the enrolment gains and the quality declines were steeper than average, so the change in learning levels was similar to the average.

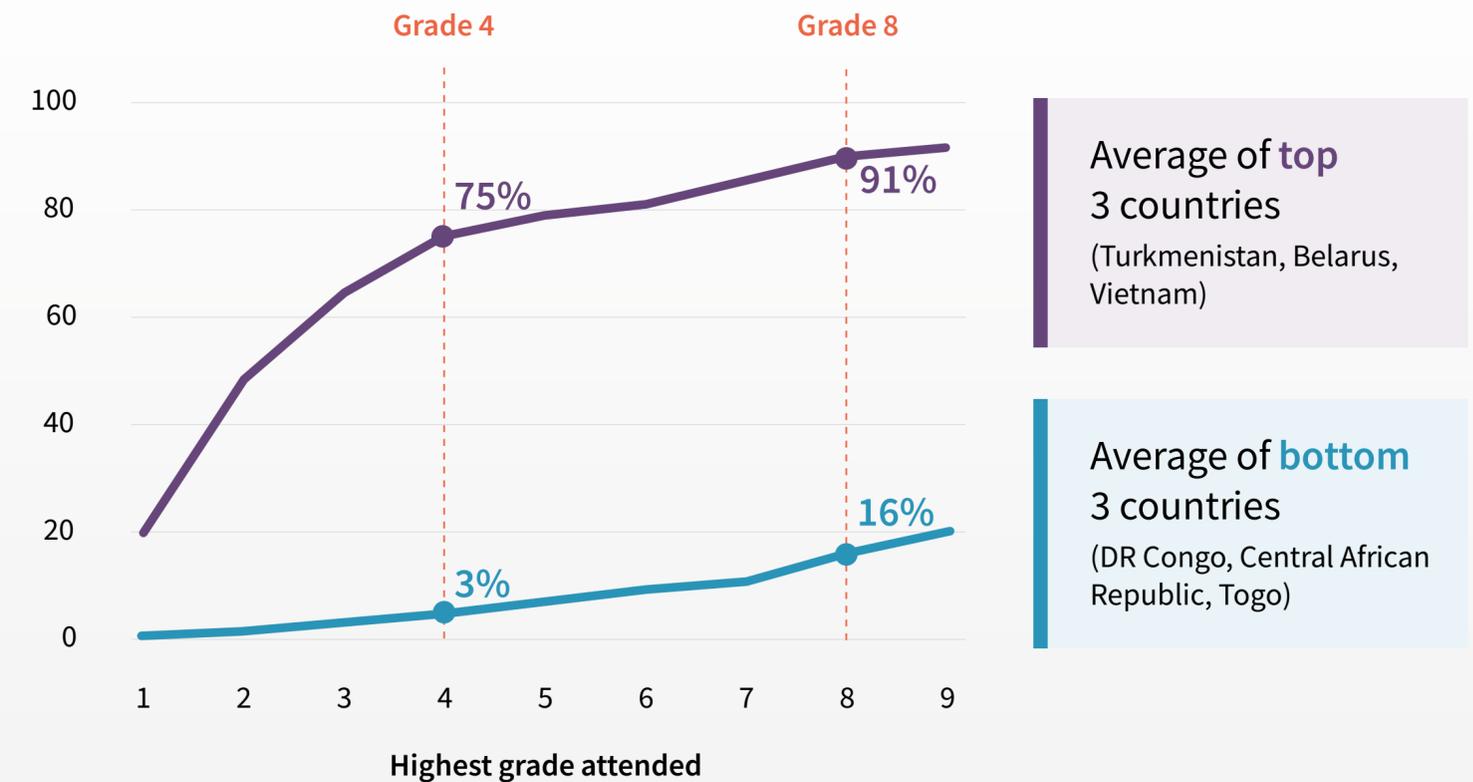
In many countries, learning trajectories for foundational skills are far too shallow, but dramatically superior performance is possible



% of children with foundational reading skills



% of children with foundational numeracy skills



Source: [Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022](#). 'Top 3' and 'bottom 3' refers to the performance in Grade 5 among countries in the MICS6 dataset for which data were available for Grades 1–8. See also [Glewwe et al., 2021](#) and [Crouch, Rolleston, & Gustafsson, 2021](#).

Five actions are needed to put every country's education system on a path to universal early foundational learning and subsequent educational goals.

Align Measure Commit Support Adapt



Commit

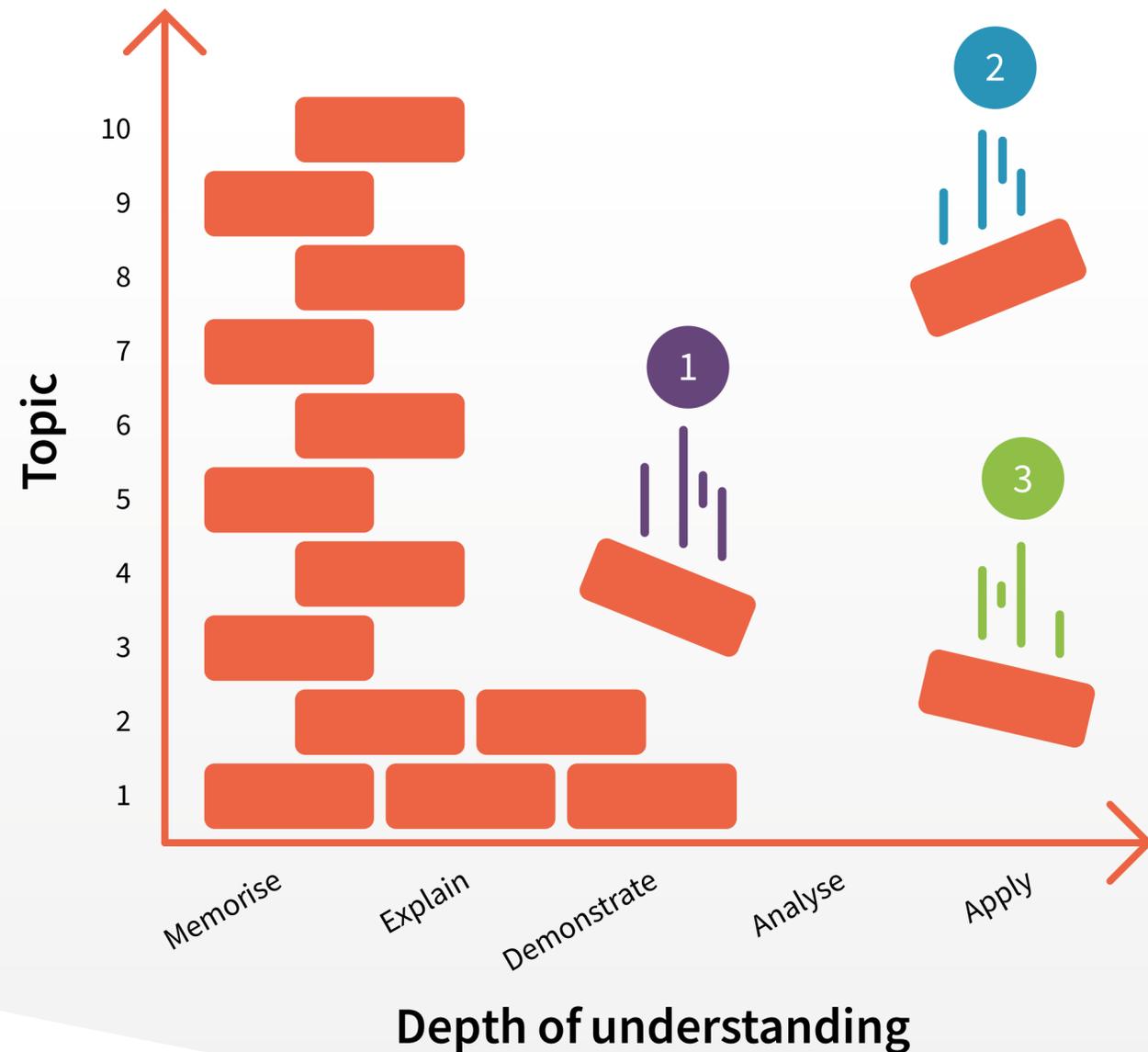
to universal, early foundational learning



Align Measure
Commit Support
Adapt

If children do not gain foundational learning in the short term, they cannot attain more complex educational goals in the long term

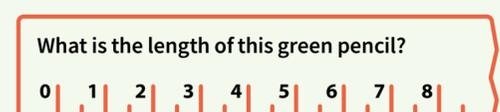
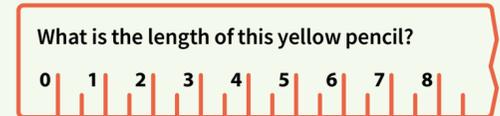
Without strong foundations, children and youths ...



1 ... cannot progress:
In 2014, less than a quarter of 12th graders in Indonesia could correctly answer " $\frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{6} = ?$ "

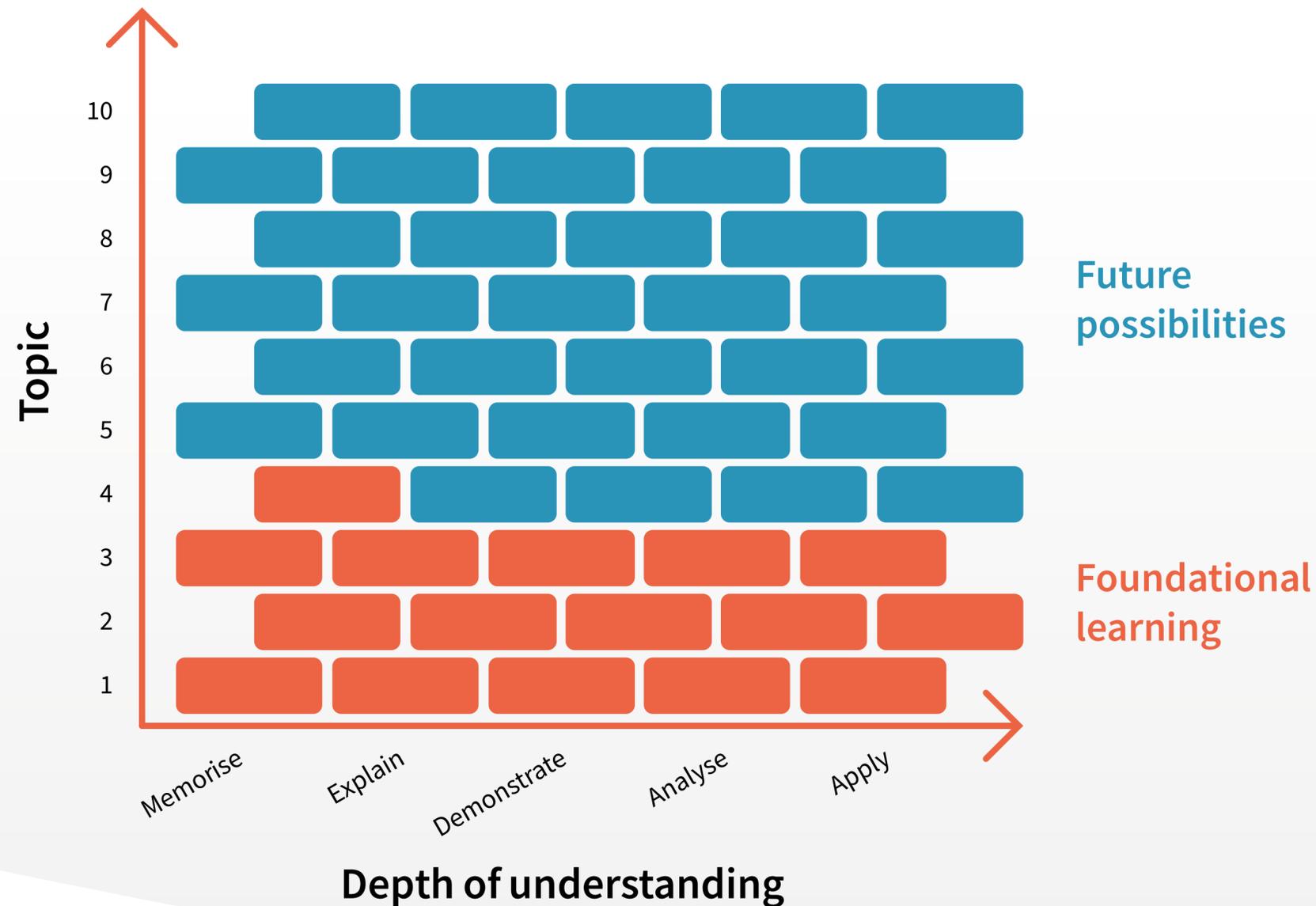
2 ... cannot master competency-based tasks:
Among the 7 middle-income countries participating in the PISA-D assessment, an average of 36% of 15-year-olds scored below Level 1c (the lowest category of PISA competencies).

3 ... cannot move beyond memorisation:
While 86% of Indian youths could correctly state the length of the yellow pencil, less than 40% of them could correctly state the length of the green pencil.



Sources: Illustration informed by Atuhurra & Kaffenberger, 2022.
(1) Beatty et al., 2021; (2) Pritchett & Viarengo, 2021;
(3) ASER, 2018; Educational Initiatives, 2009.

A commitment to universal early conceptual and procedural mastery of foundational skills in literacy and numeracy is an ambitious and forward-looking goal



With strong foundations, children and youths are empowered to access a world of knowledge and ideas.

“ First you learn to read, then you read to learn. ”

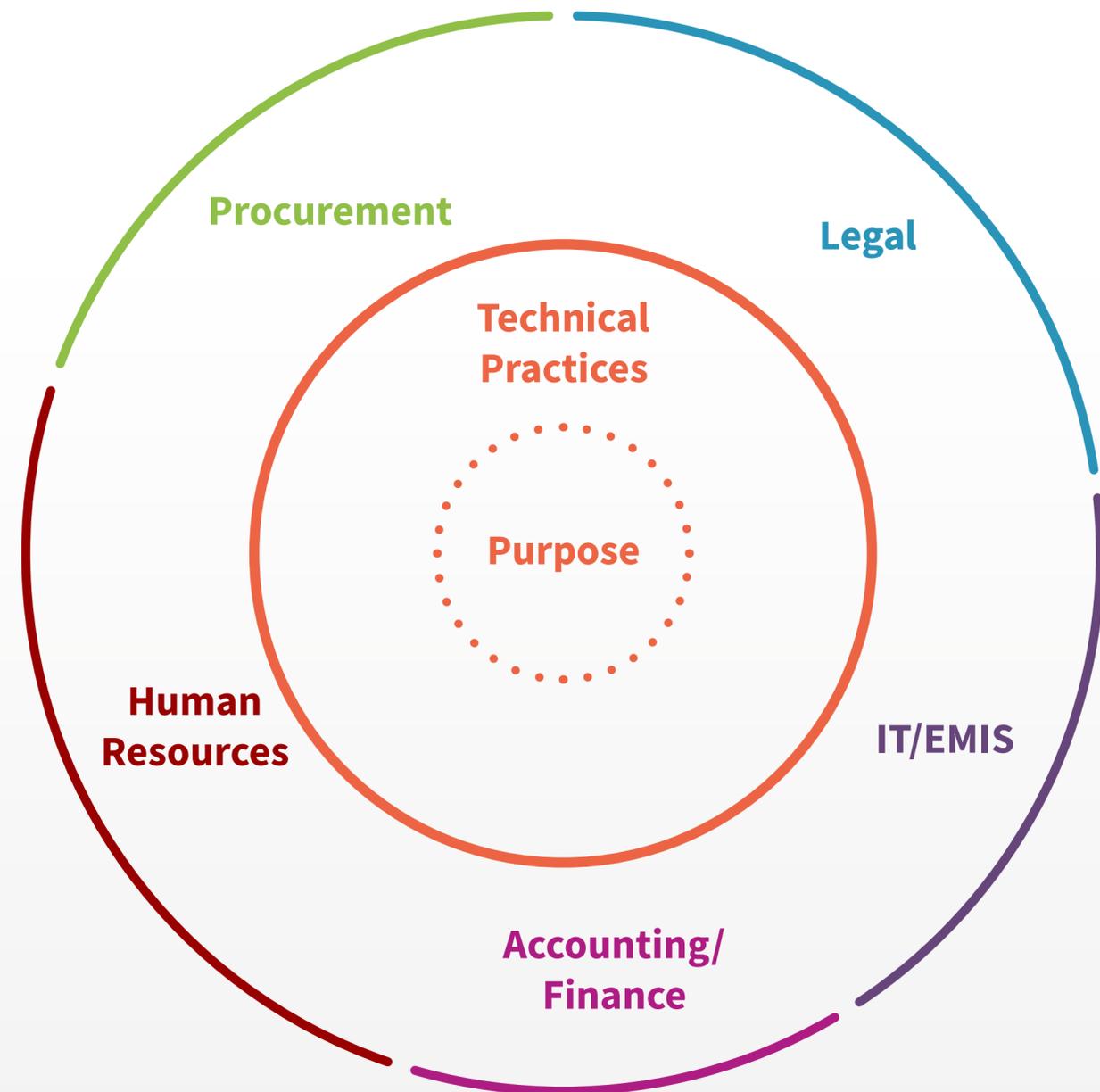
Foundational learning means conceptual and procedural mastery of broadly applicable knowledge and skills that offer a solid foundation for subsequent learning and other applications.

Learning for all requires a fundamental commitment to the purpose of universal, early foundational learning in each education system

A commitment to the purpose of learning at the core of an education system creates an enabling environment for improving technical practices and other parts of the system.

Without this commitment at the core, sustaining and scaling improvements to other parts of the system will remain challenging.

Learning for all will require all for learning.



Source: Kaffenberger, forthcoming, 'The role of "purpose" in education system outcomes: A conceptual framework and empirical examples'.
For more, see [Bano & Dyonisius, 2022](#); [Nweke, Ogwuiké, & Iheonu, 2022](#); [Asgedom, Carvalho, & Rose, 2021](#); and [London, 2021](#).



Align
Commit
Support
Adapt

Measure

learning regularly, reliably, and relevantly

Education systems collect detailed data on enrolments and inputs—yet many do not use data on student learning to inform policy and improve instruction

Governments around the world invest a lot of time and money in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)...



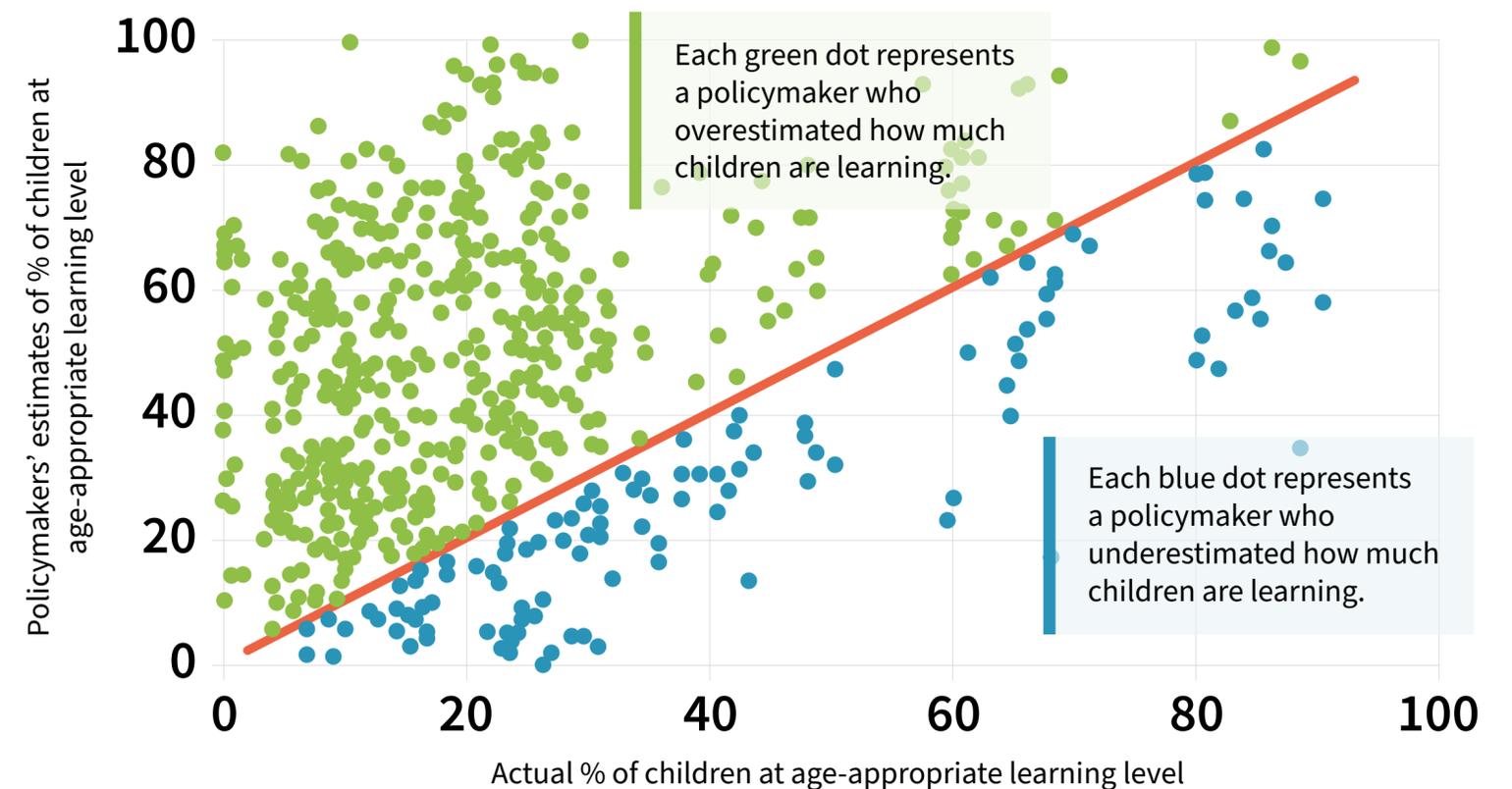
The 2015/16 DISE data for Tamil Nadu can tell you how many teachers there are in government schools that only have primary grades (64,430), it can tell you how many children are enrolled in grade 6 with a hearing disability (1,540) ... **But what about a report card for what students actually know or can do or are being taught? Nothing.**

Pritchett, 2018, p. 3



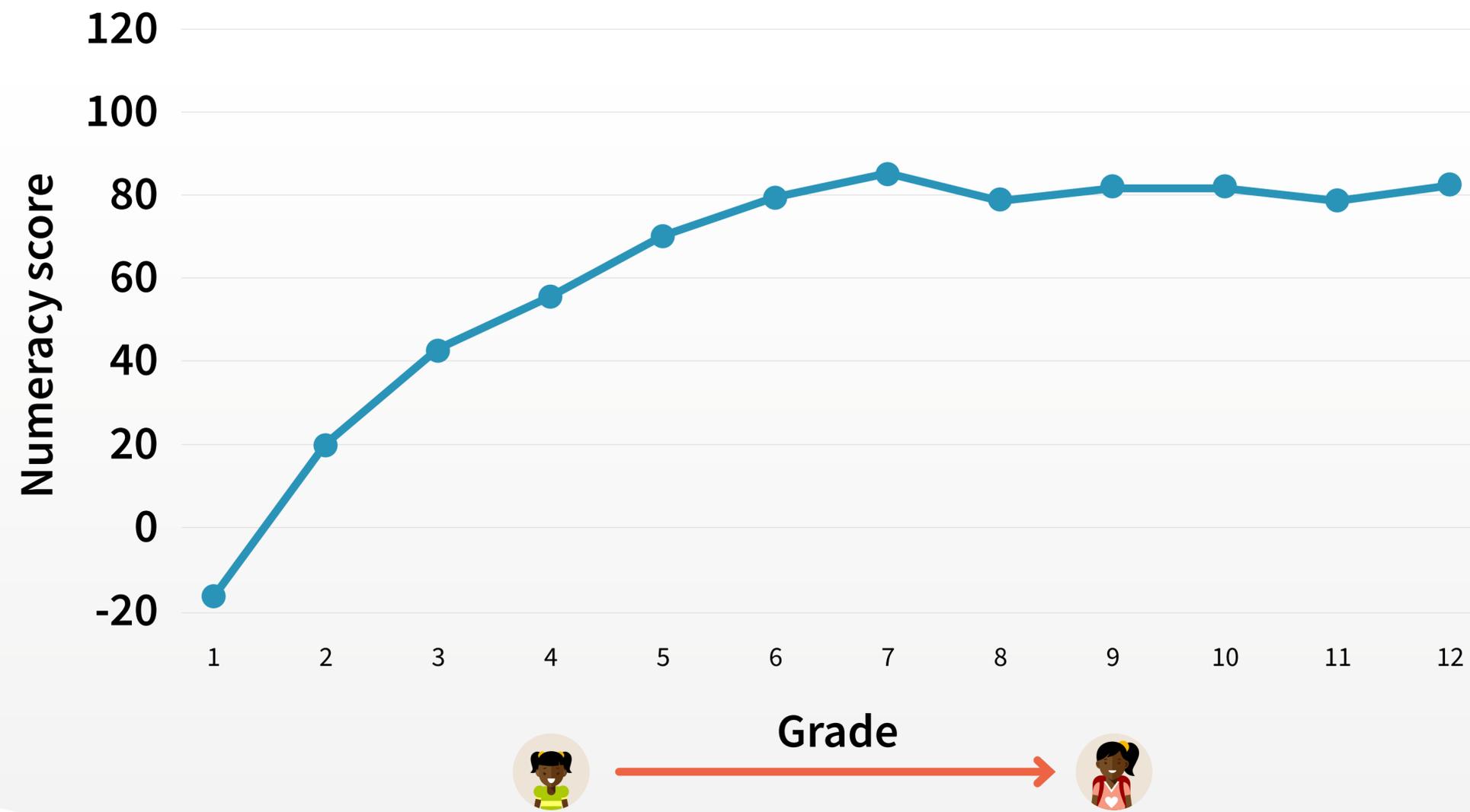
Source: Pritchett, 2018.

... yet in a sample of 684 senior government staff from developing countries, around 80% overestimated the learning levels of children in their education systems.



Source: Crawford et al., 2021. For teachers' estimates of learning levels, see Wadmare et al., 2022, and Djaker, Ganimian, & Sabarwal, 2022.

Education systems should measure learning over time, starting early in school



If Indonesian children have not gained foundational numeracy by Grade 6, they typically do not gain it later.

By measuring learning at multiple ages/grades and analysing learning trajectories, policymakers can see at what point children fall behind and, therefore, what interventions are needed.

Align

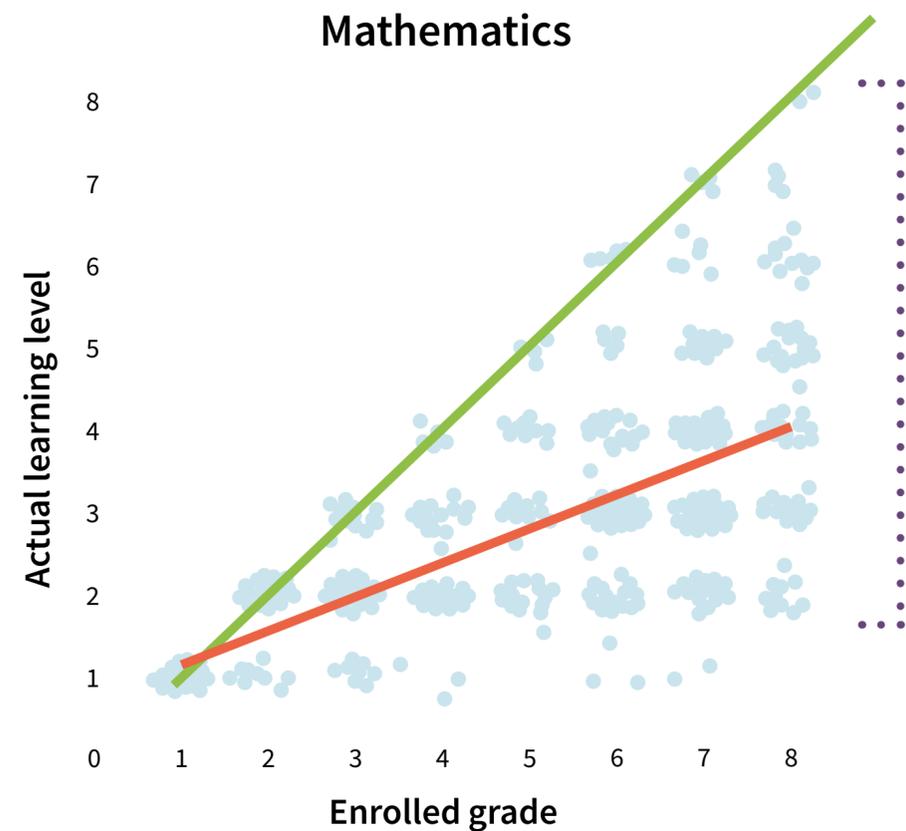
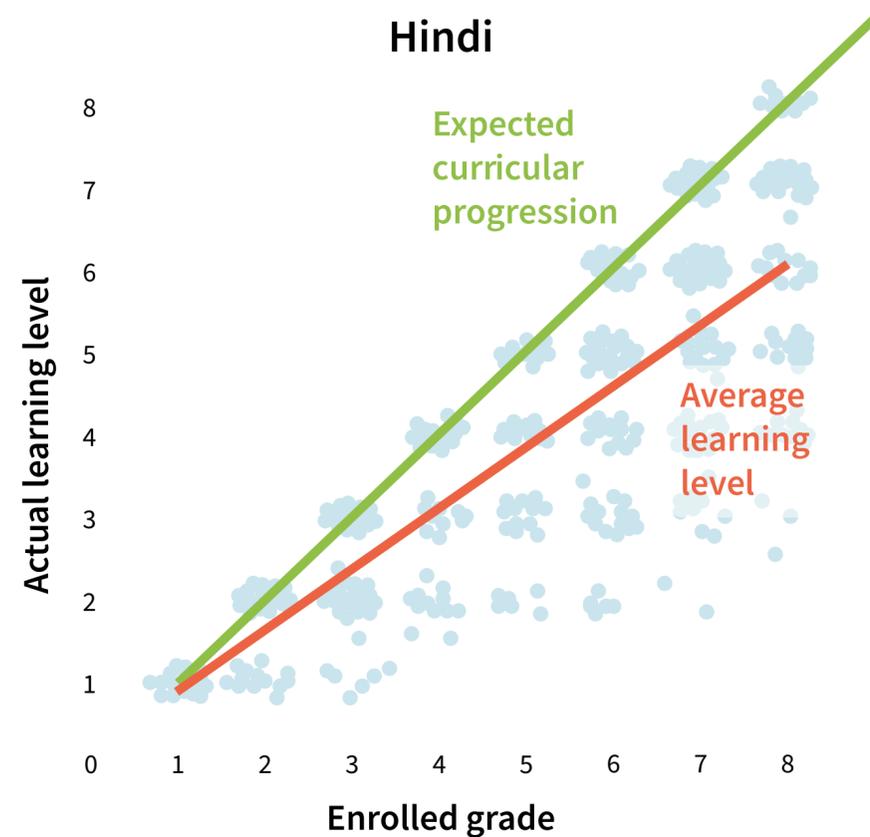
systems around learning commitments



Align Measure
Commit Support
Adapt

In many contexts, the curriculum does not match children's learning levels—and better aligning instruction with children's needs can substantially improve outcomes

In Rajasthan, India, an evaluation of a computer-aided personalised instruction programme found that the curriculum was misaligned with the learning levels of all except the most advantaged children ...

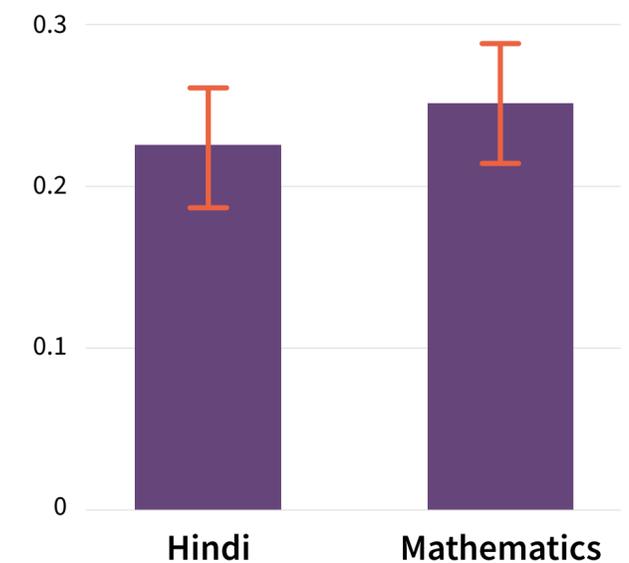


In a typical Grade 8 classroom, there is massive variation in children's learning levels, spanning 5–6 grade levels.

The typical child in Grade 8 is 4 years behind the mathematics curriculum.

... but, by aligning instruction with children's needs, the programme improved learning outcomes.

Impact on student learning (SD) after 2.5 years of exposure to the personalised instruction programme



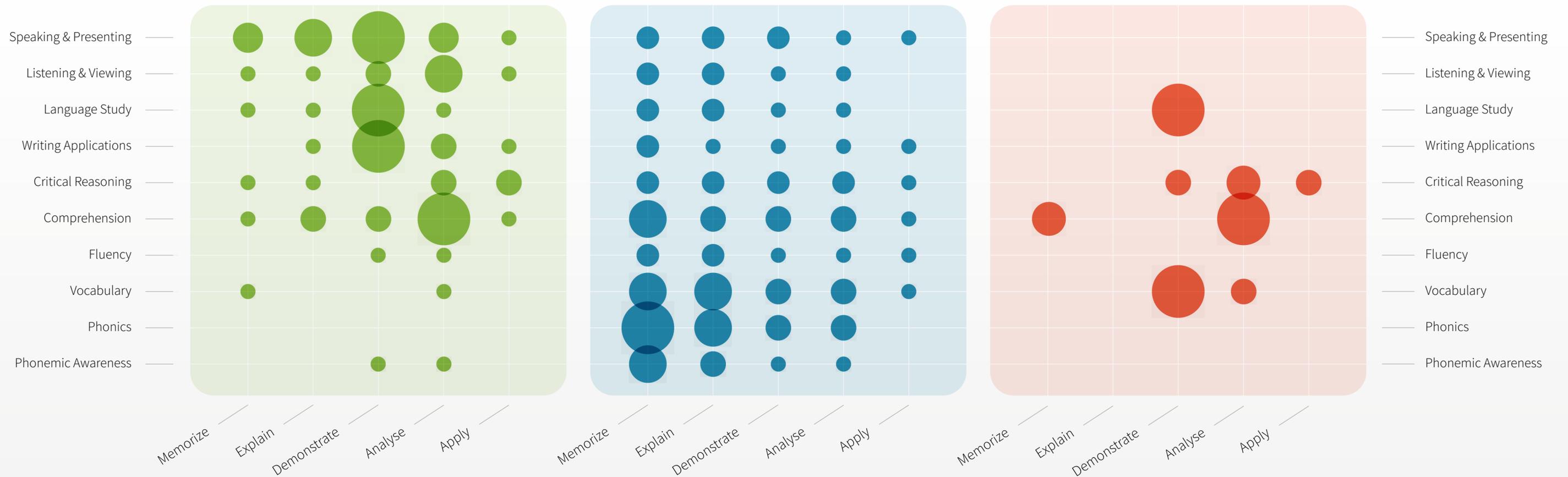
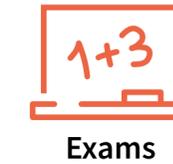
Source: Muralidharan & Singh, 2019, using Mindspark mathematics data from Rajasthan. In the scatterplots, each dot represents 10 students. See also Rodriguez-Segura & Mbiti, 2022.

Curricula, classroom teaching, and exams are often poorly aligned

In Uganda, the **national curriculum**, **classroom teaching**, and **exams** cover vastly different topics and depths of cognitive demand in primary school English.

Topics

What children should know



Depth

What children should be able to do

Source: Adapted from Figure 5 in [Atuhurra & Kaffenberger, 2022](#).
See also [Burdett, 2017](#).

There are four principles underlying efforts for better Aligning Levels of Instruction with Goals and the Needs of Students (ALIGNS)

1



Set clear goals for children's learning progress in line with current learning levels.

2



Align instruction to be coherent with both current learning levels and targeted learning progress.

3



Provide effective and coherent support to teachers and instructors.

4



Tailor implementation to the opportunities and constraints of the context.

Support

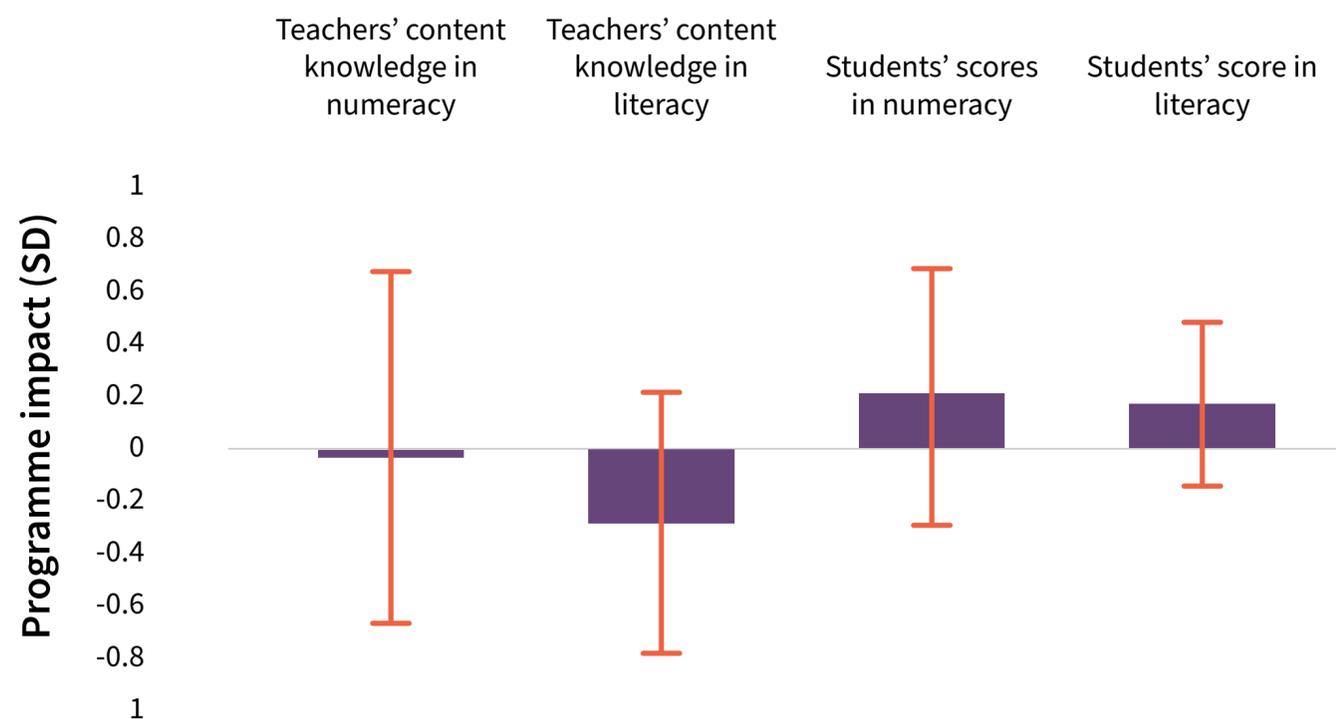
teaching



Align Measure
Commit Support
Adapt

In many education systems, neither teacher training nor teacher compensation support teaching that cultivates student learning

In Indonesia, a one-year pre-service teacher education programme had no impact on either teachers' or students' learning.



Source: Figures 2, 4, and 5 from Yusrina et al., 2022.
See also Revina et al., 2020.

In Punjab, Pakistan, teachers in the public sector earned higher salaries if they had more educational qualifications or more years of experience—but not if they made larger contributions to children's learning.

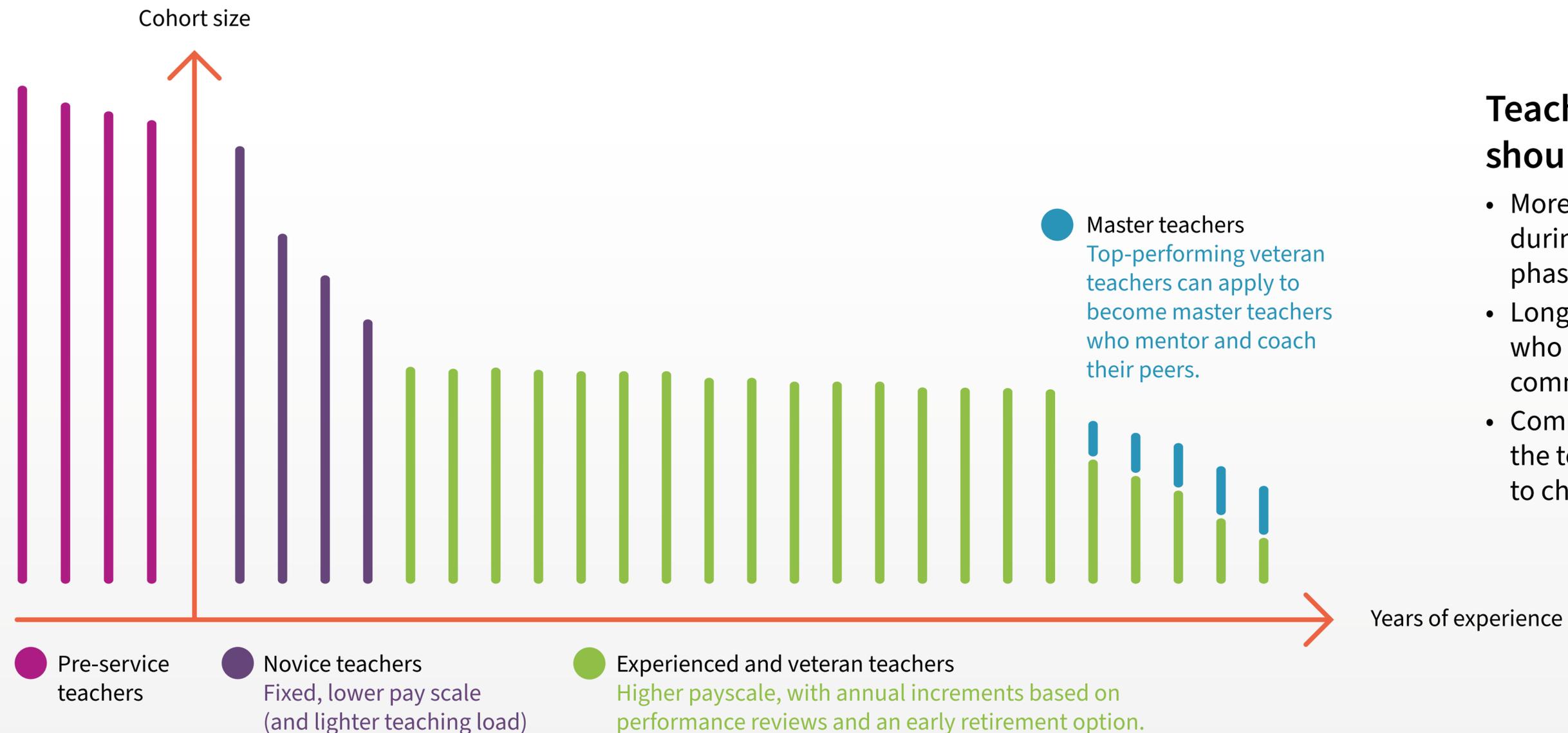


Higher quality teachers are not rewarded with higher salaries in the public sector. This finding would be of limited interest if salaries were entirely determined through a “lock-step” schedule, but in fact, there is substantial room for salaries that reflect performance.

Bau & Das, 2020, p. 86

Source: Bau & Das, 2020. See also de Ree et al., 2018; Leaver et al., 2021; and Filmer, Nahata, & Sabarwal, 2021.

Teacher career structures may need to be reformed in order to attract, retain, and motivate quality teaching



Teacher career structures should incorporate:

- More support and more selectivity during the pre-service and novice phases
- Long-term employment for teachers who have demonstrated capability and commitment
- Compensation packages that appeal to the teachers who are most committed to children's learning



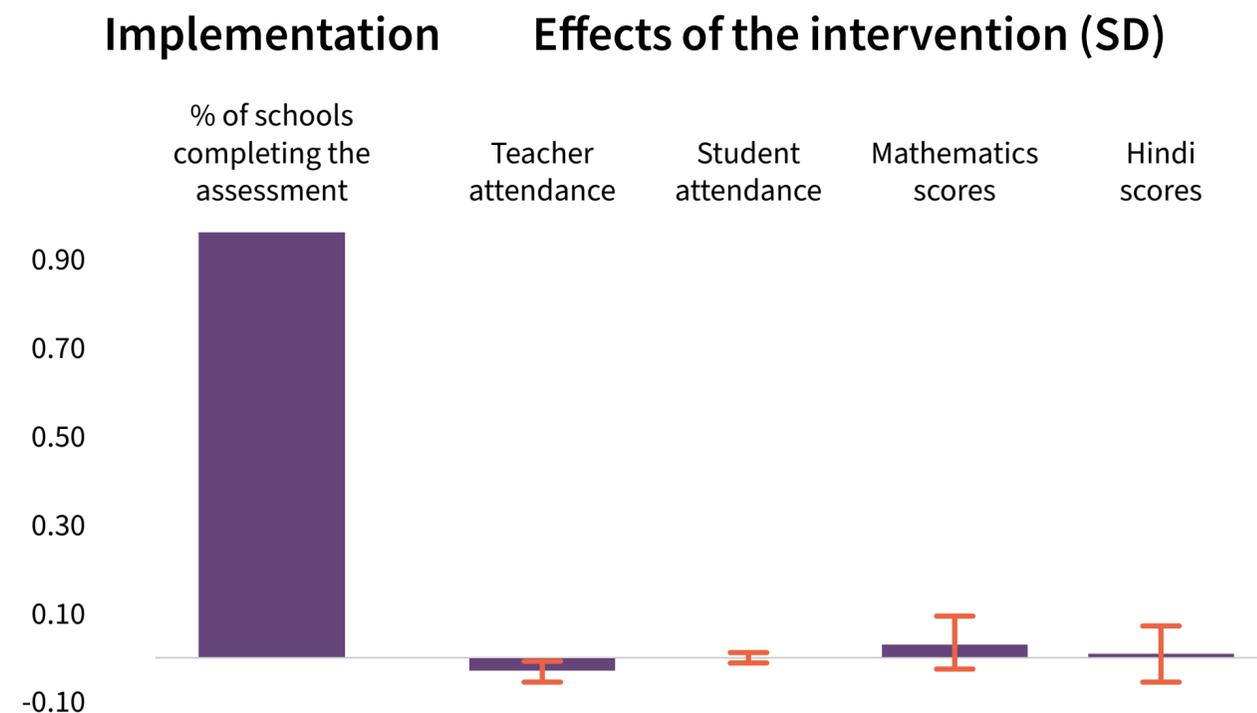
Align Measure
Commit Support
Adapt

Adapt

what you adopt as you implement

When programmes are implemented without enough adaptation or iteration, even a technically well-designed programme may have no impact

A school quality assurance programme, based on ‘best practices’ and implemented according to plan in thousands of schools in Madhya Pradesh, India, had no impact on either student learning or teacher practice



... We have to make a work plan and then upload it, get it printed. **There is so much paper work that by the time some teachers figured that out they had forgotten what [the programme] itself [is about].** I do all the documentation work at home because I have no time in the school.

—Headteacher of a champion school, quoted in Muralidharan & Singh (2020), p. 18

Source: Data extracted from Muralidharan & Singh, 2020.
For more, see Aiyar et al., 2021.

Embrace adaptation and iteration as the key to success

“... research and practical experience demonstrate that scaling is not a linear process but requires ongoing iteration and adaptations to fit different contexts and local needs, mechanisms to address problems and opportunities as they arise, and space for data-driven course corrections.”

Center for Universal Education, [Brookings, 2021](#)



Source: [Building State Capability, 2018](#).

For examples of iteration and adaptation in practice, see [Samji & Kapoor, 2022](#); [McNaught, 2022](#); and [Barjum, 2022](#).

“SPDI [Smart Policy Design and Implementation] is an iterative approach, where the lessons learned at each stage are used to refine existing designs and identify the next set of objectives and challenges.”

Evidence for Policy Design, [Harvard Kennedy School, 2022](#)

“Iterate study design decisions with stakeholders.”

Research Resources, [J-PAL, 2021](#)



Align Measure
Commit Support
Adapt

Commit to universal, early foundational learning
Measure learning regularly, reliably, and relevantly
Align systems around learning commitments
Support teaching
Adapt what you adopt as you implement