

Child rights and quality education

Results and learning from an innovative bundle of interventions
to improve education quality in Côte d'Ivoire

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Results and learning from a pilot
project to improve children's access to
quality education in Côte d'Ivoire



International
COCOA
Initiative

Introduction

All children have the right to a quality education. This means learning in an environment where they are safe and protected, guided by effective teachers and school leadership, and supported by their parents and the wider community. The right to quality education links with several other child rights.

This report presents the results of a pilot project to improve the quality of education in eight cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire. The project included a bundle of different activities designed to improve children’s learning and protection at school. It also aimed to test whether improving the quality of education would affect the prevalence of child labour, a common challenge in these communities.

The project was implemented by the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) between May 2019 and June 2021¹ and financed by ICI members.

Working with communities, national and local authorities, the pilot aimed to test two elements:

- First, the *feasibility* of delivering the intervention bundle
- Second, the *effects* of the intervention bundle on schools, teachers, and children

This report summarises **the results of the pilot on the school environment, student learning outcomes, and child labour, together with lessons learned in relation to the implementation of these activities.**

The final section of this report provides conclusions and recommendations.

Project overview

With the main objective of improving **the quality of education in the targeted communities, a bundle of interventions was put in place to improve**

¹ This project was initially planned for the 2019-20 school year but was extended following the closure of schools during the COVID pandemic in 2020 to observe the effects of the intervention bundle during a “normal” school year.

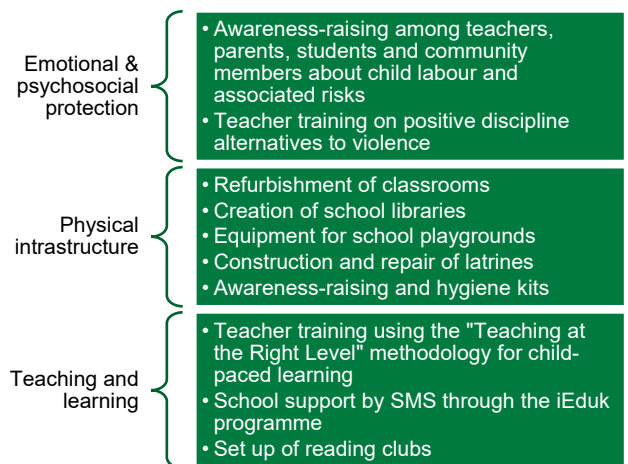
² This project focused on three of five foundations that support the wellbeing and learning of all children, as set out in Save the Children (2017) [Quality Learning Framework](#).

several dimensions of a quality learning environment:² school infrastructure; emotional and psychosocial protection; and pedagogical approaches to improve teaching and learning.

All activities had been previously tested in Côte d'Ivoire, but never in this combination. The only exception is the *Teaching at the Right Level* methodology, known in French as *Programme d'Enseignement Ciblé*, which for this pilot was specially adapted for use with children in the first two years of primary school (CP1 and CP2).

The following activities were conducted in eight primary schools in five regions of Côte d'Ivoire, in the departments of Agneby-Tiassa, Béliér, Guémon, Lôh-Djiboua and Nawa.

Overview of the intervention bundle



In total, 115 people were trained on children’s rights, child safeguarding, and alternatives to violent and humiliating punishment. These include primary education inspectors, pedagogical advisors, school headteachers, teachers, as well as parents and school staff who were members of school management committees. A total of 48 teachers were trained in the use of innovative teaching methods: the Teaching at the Right Level methodology (TaRL)³ and the iEduk programme of support via SMS. More

³ The *Teaching at the Right Level* approach, developed by the NGO Pratham, aims to improve children’s skills in reading and maths. It was implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education through the Direction de la Pédagogie et de la Formation Professionnelle (DPFC).

than 2,200 pupils in the 8 primary schools were reached by the project activities.

Method

To understand the effects of the project, data was collected data in all eight intervention communities, as well as in four similar control communities, where no project activities took place.

Data collection was focused on **three areas**:

- **Learning outcomes for children in reading and maths.** Children's progress over the course of the school year was measured using ASER⁴ tests, administered by evaluators from the Ministry of Education in September 2020 and June 2021 for a total 1,931 of pupils in the first six years of primary school.
- **Protectiveness of the school environment.** This was measured in May 2021 by interviewing 48 teachers and 360 pupils aged 8-11, using a specially developed survey tool.
- **Child labour prevalence.** This was measured through interviews with children, as part of a household survey. 1,146 children were interviewed in October 2019 and 1,212 children were interviewed in June 2021.

Results

School environment

The school environment is both a physical space, and a social and emotional space, including teacher-student relations, students' experience of school life. We examine the differences between intervention and control schools in these two aspects.

Protective environment at school

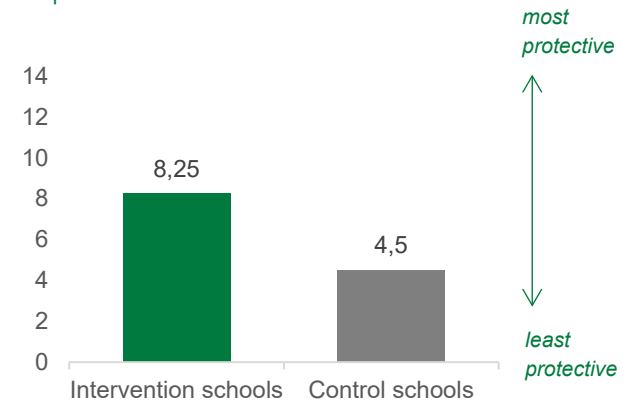
The protectiveness of the school environment was measured using a simple assessment tool, specially developed as part of this project. It covers several dimensions: infrastructure (toilets, access to drinking water, canteen), teaching methods and extra-curricular activities, stability of teaching staff and

school attendance, teachers' attitudes (violence, gender stereotypes, expectations of student success) and institutional mechanisms (financial support for access to the school, involvement of a parents' association in school management). The tool produces a score ranging from 0 (least protective) to 15 (most protective).

A validation study of the tool shows that information gathered from teachers and through observation is backed up by reports provided by pupils.

Using this **tool**, we see a significantly higher level of protection in the intervention schools compared to the control schools (**mean 8.25 vs. 4.5, p = 0.048***; **see graph below**).

Protective environment score in intervention schools compared to control schools



More protective school environments were correlated with higher levels of well-being at school, higher levels safety at school, and better their academic performance by children.

Violence at school

Teachers' attitudes towards the use of violence against pupils was assessed through interviews with

⁴ These tests measure children's reading skills (letter identification, word decoding, sentence, and story reading) and basic arithmetic skills (number recognition, subtraction, and division).

teachers in both intervention and control schools, conducted at the end of the project in June 2021.

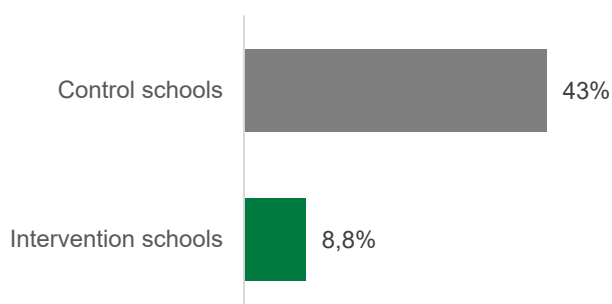
Teachers in intervention schools were significantly more likely to reject the use of violence to discipline children. More than 75% of teachers rejected the use of violence as a way of disciplining students in five out of eight project schools (63%) compared to one out of four control schools (25%) The difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.012^*$).

Pupils were also asked about their experience of physical or verbal violence in the classroom, and about whether they were afraid of their teacher.

Students in interventions schools were significantly less likely to report physical violence by teachers than those in control schools.

In treatment schools, 8.8% of pupils reported being a victim of physical violence by a teacher, compared to 43% of pupils in control schools, $p = 0.0001^{*}$.**

Proportion of pupils reporting physical violence by teachers



Children in intervention schools were also much less likely to believe that teachers have the right to use physical violence against pupils.

Teacher attitudes

There were also clear differences **between intervention and control schools related to teacher attitudes to gender and to their beliefs that all children could succeed.**

In intervention schools, teachers were significantly less likely to have a gender bias, and significantly

more likely to believe that all pupils had the potential to progress to secondary school.

Children's perceptions of the school environment

The Children's Safety and Well-Being at School Scale⁵ was used to assess how children perceived their school environment. This scale is based on the following interview items: *"I think my teacher cares about me"*, *"I feel safe at school"*, *"I feel part of the school"*, *"I like spending time at school"*, *"I am afraid of my teacher"*.

Pupils in the project schools felt significantly better and safer in the school environment than pupils in the control schools.

The average wellbeing score of the pupils in intervention schools is significantly higher than the average of the pupils in the control group.

Teacher's perceptions of the intervention bundle

The qualitative information collected from teachers in the beneficiary schools showed that teachers and school head teachers were satisfied with school improvements delivered as part of the project and were supportive of the Teaching at the Right Level approach.

"Now the children have become more like friends...the methods allow children to talk and tell stories, even in their local language and this enlivens the class. The atmosphere in the classroom is great. This encourages the children to participate actively and motivates everyone."

⁵ Merrill, K. G., Knight, L., Glynn, J. R., Allen, E., Naker, D., & Devries, K. M. (2017). *School staff perpetration of physical*

violence against students in Uganda: a multilevel analysis of risk factors.

Teachers described how the Teaching at the Right Level method had contributed to a better classroom atmosphere and better school results.

School teachers in Sabou were particularly proud to report that their school was ranked second in its region in the junior high school entrance exam.

However, teaching staff also wished to make some adjustments to the cultural context, for example abandoning the need for teachers to sit on the floor during activities. They also suggested conducting awareness raising with parents on the new teaching method, to help them better understand the changes.

“Through the book club, children have become more and more interested in reading.”



Teaching at the Right Level in action

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes were measured using ASER tests at baseline and end-line. These were conducted with children in both intervention and control communities. Difference-in-difference analysis allows us to estimate the causal impact of the intervention bundle on children’s literacy and numeracy skills.

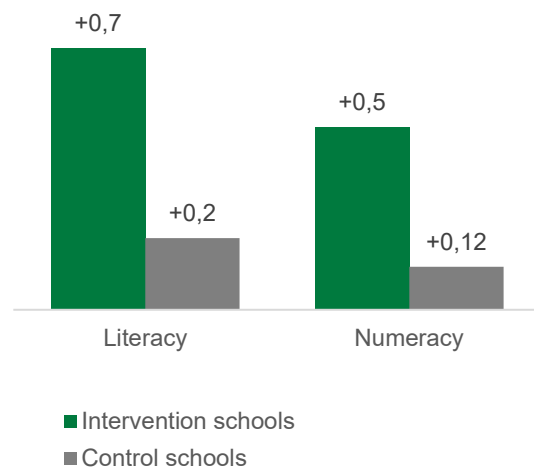
Test scores for both numeracy and literacy range from 0 (beginner level) to level 4 (pupil can read a story or do division).

In intervention schools, pupils’ average reading level increased from level zero to one (from 0.88 at baseline to 1.61 at endline), while pupils in the control schools remained at level one (from 1.52 to 1.73). The average level in maths also increased in intervention schools from one to two (from 1.72 to 2.23), while again students in control schools remained within level two (2.1 to 2.23).

Children in intervention schools made significantly more progress in both reading and maths, than children in control schools.

When we look at the progress of individual children, we also see that children in intervention schools are more likely to have progressed in literacy and numeracy in intervention schools.

Average progress made by pupils in literacy and numeracy



Focus on the youngest children

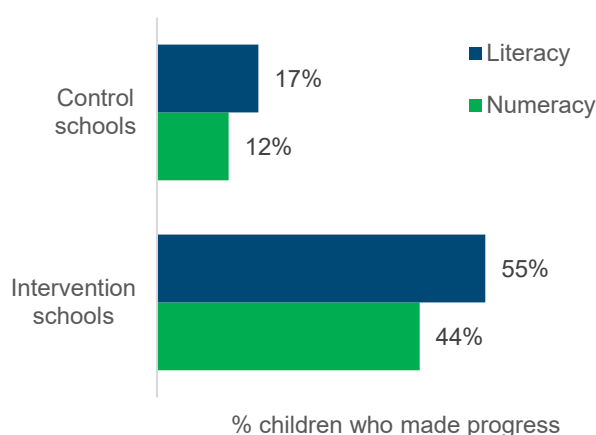
ICI worked closely with Ministry of Education to adapt the *Teaching at the Right Level* methodology for use with children in the first two grades of primary school, CP1 and CP2.

The results show that this method is effective for the youngest children too.

Just as for older children, children in intervention schools made significantly more progress in literacy and numeracy than in control schools.

Among children in the first two grades, average test scores increased by 0.56 points in literacy, and 0.35 in numeracy ($p < 0.0001^{***}$ for both comparisons).

Percentage of students who made progress in literacy and numeracy



The increase in learning is strongly related to the protective environment score and the safety and well-being scores reported by the students. The data suggests that a more protective environment promotes better learning (these correlations are statistically significant, $p < 0.0001^{***}$).

⁶ The initial sampling design covered 8 project and 8 control communities, with 100 children to be interviewed per community. Two events led to substantial attrition of the sample between baseline and endline: (i) 4 out of the 8 control communities had to be discarded because they had been selected by the Ministry of

Child labour

Child labour prevalence surveys were conducted among children in the intervention and control communities at baseline (October 2019) and endline (June 2021). In the intervention communities, only children attending the intervention schools were included in the sample. A total of 687 children attending the intervention and control primary schools were interviewed at both baseline and endline.⁶ The prevalence of child labour was measured based on the activities children reported doing in the past seven days.

We see that the prevalence of child labour decreased in both treatment and control communities between baseline and endline. This is likely because the need for (child) labour varies according to the agricultural calendar and the data was collected at different times of year (baseline in October, endline in June).

When we compare the change in intervention and control communities, we see no statistically significant difference. The data does not show whether the intervention bundle had an impact on the prevalence of child labour in the communities targeted by this project.

Child labour prevalence at baseline and endline

	Intervention communities	Control communities	Difference
Baseline	37%	41%	4pp
Endline	20%	22%	2pp
Difference	17pp	19pp	-

With the reduced sample size, due to attrition of communities and children between baseline and endline (see footnote 6), the study lost substantial statistical power. This means that an effect would only have been detectable if there had been a reduction of child labour prevalence by at least 15 percentage points. However, we expect that any

Education to implement innovative educational approaches so that they no longer qualified as control group; (ii) several children interviewed at baseline could not be followed up at endline.

effect on child labour from this intervention was of a lower magnitude, due to the following points:

- The relatively short time window of the project, which may not be enough to allow the improvements to education quality to result in changes to child labour
- Activities addressed more directly at child labour, notably awareness-raising on the hazards from child labour, took place at the start of the project in 2019 and were not repeated during the extension phase in 2021
- Seasonal fluctuations in child labour may veil the effect of the intervention (baseline was in October, where demand for labour is higher, while endline was in July, where demand is lower).

Conclusions and Learning

Key conclusions from this project include:

- **The intervention bundle has resulted in a more protective school environment both in its physical and relational aspects.** The triple focus on emotional and psychosocial protection, teaching and learning, and school infrastructure have made school a more nurturing environment for children's development, and one that can build resilience.
- **The activities that made up the intervention bundle were mostly feasible to deliver,** despite some delays related to procurement and training in the early months of the project.
- One exception was the iEduk mobile phone-based programme, which suffered several challenges, including misunderstandings by parents and teachers, problems with network access and electricity. Engagement by pupils was limited.
- It is very likely that the intervention bundle has had a positive impact on teachers' attitudes and behaviour towards pupils, in addition to the acquisition of new teaching methods.
- A protective school environment is linked to the child's sense of security and well-being at school, as well as to better learning outcomes in reading and mathematics.
- It was not possible to identify an impact of the project on the prevalence of child labour due to limited sample of communities.
- The intervention bundle was well received and generally appreciated by authorities and teachers.

Teachers reported an improved atmosphere in the classroom and felt that children were progressing because of the new teaching methodologies and techniques used.

Recommendations

- **The *Teaching at the Right Level* approach is both feasible to implement and highly effective and should continue to be scaled up,** including for pupils in the first two grades of primary school. Collaboration with the Ministry of Education has greatly facilitated adoption and scale-up to date and should continue.
- **Some small practical adjustments to the *Teaching at the Right Level* approach,** such as allowing teachers to sit on chairs, instead of on the floor, could make it even better suited to the local culture in Côte d'Ivoire and would help encourage teachers to continue using the methodology.
- **Efforts to improve the quality of education should include more engagement with parents and the wider community.** This would both reinforce messages delivered in the context of the project and avoid placing too much focus on the school environment at the expense of the broader environment around the child. It is important to remember that school is one of several levels of the child's environment. Since these different levels interact, it is desirable to adopt a coherent approach at home, in school, and in the wider community.
- **The systematic inclusion of teacher training on positive discipline should be promoted, as well as deconstruction of gender stereotypes and growth mindset in future education-related projects.** It appears that the focus on emotional and psychosocial protection has made positive contribution to children's well-being, safety and learning outcomes.
- **An impact study should be designed to better understand how improvements to quality education affect child labour prevalence.** The results should be used to inform further scale up of similar intervention bundles focused on quality education.