



DOCUMENTING SALIENT GROWTH AREAS IN YOUTH IN ACTION LEARNING CURRICULUM¹ IN ETHIOPIA

Study Brief-2014

Prepared by Nelly Karanany, George Washington University, 2014

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Save-University Partnership for Education Research (SUPER) Study Brief

Introduction

Youth in Action (YiA) is a six-year learning and livelihood program. In partnership with The MasterCard Foundation, YiA aims to improve the socio-economic status of 40,000 out-of-school young people, both girls and boys, in rural Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda. Through the development of youth's foundational, life and transferable skills, youth are empowered to make informed pathway choices for the future. This is achieved through a learning phase where youth build on and enhance their literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills. At the end of the learning phase, youth move to the action phase where they apply their learning in an income generating livelihood initiative they choose themselves among: Entrepreneurship, Vocational Training/Apprenticeship or Education/Employment. The program also supports them with small start-up funds, mentorship, networking and peer-to-peer support.

Youth in Action is generating a robust learning and research opportunities that will serve the youth economic development sector by creating an evidence base of effective program interventions from its tested approaches. As part of the efforts to document and advance these learnings, Save the Children works with Academic research fellows through the Save-University Partnership for Education Research (SUPER) fellowship that was formed to help measure, document, and analyze the mechanisms affecting the program's impact.

In 2014, Ethiopia's YiA country team decided to document the *Salient Growth Areas in the Youth in Action Learning Curriculum* in a SUPER study in cooperation with the George Washington University.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the literacy and numeracy components of the YiA learning curriculum **Learning for Life** in Ethiopia
- Gain specific information about the set of literacy, numeracy and employability skills that employers identify as important for employment for out-of-school youth.

Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in four areas: Habru, Raya Kobo, Gubalafto, and Gidan in Northern Ethiopia. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with 143 YiA youth, 25 facilitators, 10 potential employers and small-micro enterprise (SME) officers.

The YiA youth in this study were part of the first three beneficiary cohorts in Ethiopia. Because each cohort was rolled out approximately 3 months after the other, youth from each cohort were at different points in the program cycle, with cohort 1 youth being at the end of the learning phase.

Research Questions

Question 1: What Improvements in Literacy did Youth Self-Report?

Overall, we were not able to compare the self-reported literacy improvements for youth across the three cohorts because cohort 2 and 3 had a much higher proportion of youth who were in the mid and high literacy groups, as compared to cohort 1.

However, there were interesting trends among youth who were assessed as being in the low literacy group at the start of the program.

More youth from cohort 1 and 2 reported being *beginning readers* or *readers*, than from cohort 3. This could be because of the longer time that cohort 1 and 2 youth had spent in the program.

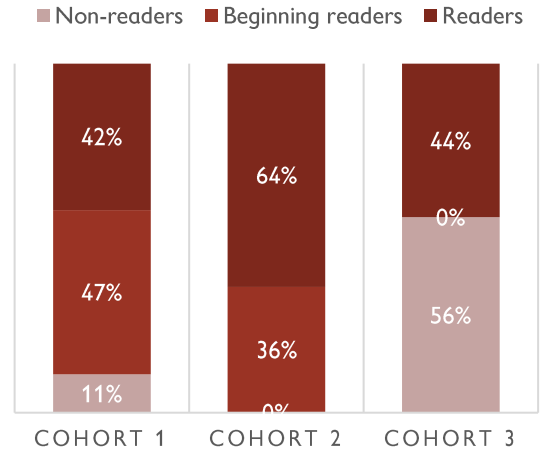


Figure. Self-reported literacy of youth who were initially identified as having low literacy levels, by cohort

When comparing literacy gains among youth who started the program with different literacy levels, youth who were in the low literacy group reported learning the most. This was reflected in facilitator reports. Facilitators noted difficulties engaging the mid and high literacy youth because they had to focus their attention on youth with the lowest literacy. They also reported that the curriculum and book bank materials were not challenging enough for high literacy youth.

Question 2: What Improvements in Numeracy did Youth Self-Report?

Youth from cohort 1 reported feeling more comfortable with all numeric operations, as compared to their peers from cohort 2 and 3. Seventy four per cent of cohort 1 youth interviewed reported feeling comfortable doing basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. However, baseline for these numeracy skills was not collected and so this observation could be an artefact of youth self-selection into the different cohorts.

Similar to literacy, low literacy youth reported stronger gains in numeracy than their peers from mid and high literacy groups. This is not unexpected since youth who had higher literacy levels also reported more schooling; this would also mean that they had more exposure to numeracy while at school.

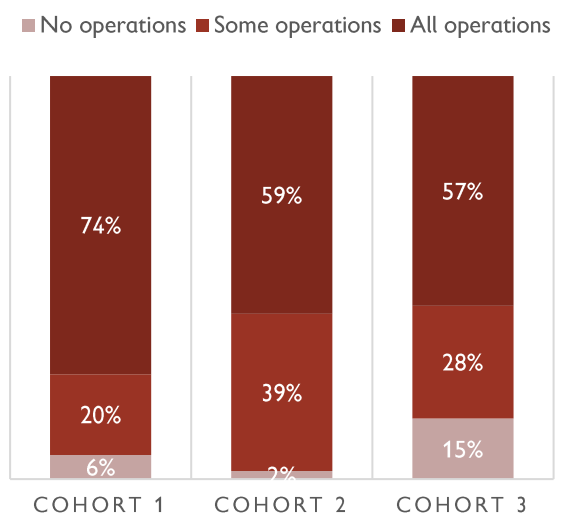


Figure. Self-reported numeracy skills of youth, by cohort

Facilitators reported that numeracy, especially as related to budgeting and savings was one of the strongest parts of the curriculum. Youth seemed the most engaged with this component of the program.

Question 3: What Skills do Employers Value?

Employers reported on the importance of six kinds of employability skills:

- Numeracy: Do basic calculations, especially as related to measurement and currency;
- Financial literacy: maintaining a budget and manage the finances of a small business;
- Literacy: Read basic instructions and sign one's name;
- Communication: Organize ideas and communicate clearly with others, be friendly with customers;
- Previous experience: Direct experience in the current profession or experience in a related profession;
- Certificates: Priority is for youth who have certificates demonstrating job-related training.



Recommendations

- Ensure facilitators are given additional training on differentiated literacy instructions for youth with different literacy profiles. This should be accompanied by more challenging materials in the curriculum and book bank.
- Include more challenging numeracy material in the curriculum, especially as related to finances and measurement, for youth who have had several years in school.
- Work with employers to create a recognizable and acceptable certificate that youth are given upon graduation. Make sure that key employers recognize this certificate as a valid document.

For more information on the study or YiA program, contact:

Arwa Mhanna, YiA Communications Manager

Email: amhanna@savethechildren.ca

Toll Free (Canada): 1-800-668-5036

Mail:

Save the Children
4141 Yonge St., Suite 300
Toronto, ON
M2P 2A8