

Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education, Afghanistan (ALSE)

A Project by Professors Dana Burde (NYU), Joel Middleton (Berkeley), and Cyrus Samii (NYU)

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Community-Based Education in Afghanistan: A Primer

In this, the first issue of the ALSE Newsletter, we give an introduction to community-based education (CBE) in Afghanistan and the ALSE project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development. We also provide an overview of some of our key activities over the past year. CBE is a strategy for delivering education to children living in conflict-affected and/or remote areas. Instead of constructing a school, education providers recruit and train a teacher who leads a class of students in a space donated by the community. The community, in cooperation with the education provider, monitors and oversees that class. In Afghanistan, in 2007/8 Drs. Dana Burde and Leigh Linden found that CBE works extremely well to enroll children in school and even eliminates the gender gap in education. In the years since that study, CBE has become one of the Afghan Ministry of Education's (MoE) strategies for expanding access to education. In light of this development, ALSE was designed to understand how to make sure that NGOs and the MoE provide CBE sustainably and increase children's learning to the greatest extent.



ALSE is an **impact evaluation**, seeking to inform policy and delivery of **community-based education** (CBE) in Afghanistan. Using a **mixed-methods, randomized controlled trial** (RCT), ALSE aims to understand how to ensure that CBE is effective and sustainable. The project is led by Drs. Dana Burde of New York University (NYU), Joel Middleton of University of California at Berkeley, and Cyrus Samii of NYU, in partnership with CARE and CRS, and the Afghan Ministry of Education. ALSE is funded by USAID.

ALSE in Numbers: January 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015	
Villages selected for study	180
Households surveyed for baseline	14,820
Children assessed for baseline	3,662
Participants in the third Executive Seminar	27

An Introduction to ALSE: Studying Innovative Education Interventions

ALSE kicked off during the 2014 academic year, when implementing partners CARE and CRS opened classes in 129 villages across six provinces of Afghanistan. CARE and CRS's program, the Community-Based Education Enhancement Program (CBEEP), supported by Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development, incorporates two variations. These variations were designed in coordination with the NGOs and the Afghan MoE to assess two methods for boosting children's learning and CBE sustainability. They are being studied in addition to a third, which varies when CBE classes are transferred to MoE administration.

Teacher Recruitment: Rural communities of Afghanistan often have a deficit of qualified teachers. In these cases, education providers have to choose between hiring teachers who meet a certain standard of qualification, but who come from outside the community or hiring teachers who are known and acceptable to the community but may not meet the Afghan MoE's standards, and therefore



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ALSE Quick Facts	
Total Number of Villages	180
Treatment Villages	129
Wait List Villages	51
Provinces	Bamiyan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, Kapisa, and Parwan
Experimental Variations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Teacher Recruitment 2) Community Engagement 3) Timing of transferring the administration of CBE classes

are barred from being formally accepted into the civil service. Among communities where there is no qualified teacher already living in the village, ALSE is testing whether access and quality are enhanced by

- (a) hiring a qualified teacher from outside the village, or
- (b) hiring a less qualified teacher who is from the community.

Community Engagement Enhancements: In a randomly assigned half of the villages, CARE and CRS are implementing two innovative education interventions intended to boost community and parents' engagement in children's learning. In the first intervention, adult reading groups (ARG), community members participate in monthly meetings led by community librarians. During these sessions, the group discusses children's stories and comes up with home-based activities that parents can do with their children. In the second intervention, religious leaders compile Qur'anic messages in support of education. These messages are printed onto posters that are shared with the community.

Executive Seminars

On March 1, 2015, staff from Afghanistan's Ministry of Education and NGOs met in Kabul, Afghanistan for a five-day research methods workshop, or Executive Seminar, titled Capacities and Best Practices in Evaluation. This was



the third of six Executive Seminars conducted by the ALSE staff. These seminars are designed to expand the

MoE's ability to conduct research and evaluation and transform findings into policy. The first Executive Seminar introduced MoE and NGO participants to experimental research designs and impact evaluation. The second Executive Seminar discussed qualitative research methods. The most recent Seminar presented randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as an ideal method for evaluating educational interventions and answering questions of policy-relevance. The participants studied three RCT case studies, including Professor Dana Burde's and Leigh Linden's RCT on CBE in Afghanistan and two others: Professor Lawrence Aber's (NYU) assessment, done in conjunction with the International Rescue Committee, of the Opportunities for Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education (OPEQ) program in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Professor Sandee McClowry's (NYU) evaluation of the program INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament, conducted in New York City schools.

Baseline Data Collection

Given the size and geographical spread of this study, we contracted Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR), a survey firm. ACSOR, with our supervision, surveyed 35 households and conducted a learning assessment with children, ages six to ten in all 129 villages during the Fall 2014. The team also recruited 11 temporary project associates and paired them into six teams (two project associates per province, except in Herat) to ensure the validity of the data collection. The project associates directly observed a sample of the surveying, conducted brief verification interviews with surveyed households and reviewed completed questionnaires. They reported their findings daily to the senior management staff. The senior management staff developed corrective action plans if there were any deviations in data collection protocols. This rigorous approach ensured that the team captured quality data ethically. We have spent the past months analyzing the baseline data, and we are looking forward to sharing our baseline data findings in the next issue of the newsletter!

In Focus in ALSE Research Brief Issue 2

- ALSE baseline findings
- Conducting household surveys