

TONY BLAIR INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL CHANGE

Time for a World Education Service: Focused, Free and for All

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Published at https://institute.global/policy/time-world-educationservice-focused-free-and-all on July 28 2022

Executive Summary

The global education crisis is real and urgent. To meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 of every child completing secondary school in 2030, the world will need to have 272 million more children in school that year than in 2015. On current trends, we are projected to miss this target by 110 million.

Moreover, there are children who go to school but do not learn. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, data showed that more than half of all ten-year-olds, of whom two-thirds were in school, were in "learning poverty", meaning they lacked minimum proficiency in maths and literacy and were unable to read or understand a simple narrative. Latest projections suggest that, as a result of school closures since 2020, as many as seven in ten may now be unable to do so. Without these foundational competencies, they cannot progress to or succeed in secondary school. We need a radical new approach to accelerating their learning.

In this paper, we are proposing the creation of a World Education Service (WES) to ensure that every child in the world has access to the best digital tools, free of charge, to build their foundational learning. It will act as a vehicle for reducing learning poverty by creating universal access to remote-first, adaptive learning experiences focused on helping users reach a minimum level of proficiency. This proposal builds on the analysis from our report <u>Tech-Inclusive Education: A World-Class System for Every Child</u>, which highlighted the need for a radical rethink of the way we approach technology in education, and is intended as a starting point for discussion.

The WES would significantly expand the reach of existing high-quality learning platforms, multiplying their impact on learning poverty. It would support new providers to develop best-in-class content and adaptive learning tools, raising standards across the world. It would expand the range of offline and online channels through which world-class education is available, so that children anywhere could learn to read, write, count and more.

The WES's aim is to rapidly create documented learning gains for millions of children, building for scale as well as impact. To ensure that its content is available to as many learners as possible, it will enlist a broad coalition of partners – international organisations, NGOs, private-sector companies such as edtech providers, publishers and social-media platforms – to develop, localise and deliver high-quality learning content. The core WES team would support the partners by providing:

1. A set of best-in-class sequenced curriculum maps and model content for literacy, numeracy and digital skills that partners can use "as is" or adapt to local languages, cultural contexts and delivery channels (online, offline or low-tech).

- 2. A built-in, adaptive assessment that follows "Teaching/Learning at the Right Level" principles so that learners always know which topic to tackle next.
- 3. Hands-on support and quality assurance to create WES-aligned content that is contextually adapted to partners' target audiences, and a feedback mechanism to improve their offering.
- 4. Critical data infrastructure to support interoperability with other tools and national systems as well as mutual recognition of progress between WES delivery channels.

To maximise its reach and impact, the World Education Service should operate as an autonomous, agile team hosted by a UN agency, with an advisory board including key partners from the public, private and non-profit sectors. Based on our assessment of the team structure required and stakeholder consultation, we estimate that at launch, the service would require an initial funding commitment of \$5 million per year for three years, rising to between \$10 and \$20 million at full scale. At less than 0.15 per cent of annual global aid to education, this funding for the WES represents a very small investment with potentially enormous returns.

A combination of global scale and local partnerships would make the WES a powerful intervention. No one platform can achieve both global reach and local relevance. By tapping into the global movement for education, and the UN's influence in this sphere, it can ensure that no country is left behind. By engaging with local education systems and networks, the WES would ensure high-quality content is available in learners' native languages and fully adapted to local cultures and needs. It will have the flexibility to directly engage with willing national governments and to reach children elsewhere through private and non-profit sector partners – welcoming government buy-in, but not depending on it.

The WES is an ambitious proposal for a global initiative that would knit together existing projects and platforms, help technology providers improve the quality of their products and catalyse new approaches to reducing learning poverty. With a focus on reaching the broadest possible audience with high-quality, adaptive remote-learning experiences, it has the potential to significantly alter the current trajectory on minimum proficiency, freeing up more national resources to provide a well-rounded education to all pupils. The WES is not a substitute for investment in good schools, but it would act as a backstop for emergencies and support learners who are falling behind.

As the world looks forward to the UN Transforming Education Summit this September, we are calling on potential partners – international organisations, national governments, NGOs and private-sector actors – to join forces in supporting the establishment of a World Education Service, so that every child, anywhere can access quality learning for free.

Introduction: Why Is a World Education Service Needed?

It is beyond any doubt that access to quality education for every child is a universal good. Education transforms lives and powers economic growth. Today, as the technology revolution sweeps the world, education is key to mastering new skills, new forms of communication and new types of knowledge.

In 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly came together to recognise the importance of learning for everyone. They committed to an ambitious goal: ensuring that by 2030, every child in the world will be completing secondary school. This became the cornerstone element of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4): "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

And yet, far too few children around the world have access to quality education. The global learning crisis is real and urgent. More than 250 million young people are out of school. Analysis for our report <u>Tech-Inclusive Education: A World-Class System for Every Child</u> showed that to achieve universal enrolment in secondary education, 272 million more children would need to be in school in 2030 than were in 2015. Based on current trends, the world is likely to fall more than 100 million places short of that goal.

Figure 1 – Progress towards UN SDG4



Historical and required increases in enrolment to achieve universal secondary-school completion

Note: The current trend is based on Wittgenstein Centre's "middle of the road" scenario for population growth, which takes educational-attainment trends into account.

Worse, being in school is no guarantee of learning. <u>UNESCO estimates</u> that, globally, 56 per cent of young people (617 million) do not have basic reading or mathematics skills, even though two-thirds of that number will have completed at least primary school. In 2019, the World Bank introduced the <u>concept</u> of "learning poverty": a combined measure of school enrolment and minimum reading proficiency for children of late primary-school age. Its original pre-Covid calculations showed that 90 per cent of children in low-income countries and 9 per cent in high-income countries are learning-poor – unable to read and understand a simple text by the end of primary school.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the global learning crisis. At its height, <u>1.6 billion</u> children were not attending school. As late as March 2022, 23 countries, which between them have 400 million schoolchildren, were yet to fully open their schools, which risks significantly driving up dropout rates. The impact of school closures on learning has in many cases been devastating. The latest assessment from the World Bank is that between 2019 and 2022, the global learning-poverty rate has increased to an estimated 70 per cent (up from 57 per cent), with Latin America and South Asia particularly severely affected. UNESCO's modelling in 2021 suggested that unless urgent action is taken, more than 100 million children who would otherwise have acquired minimum proficiency in reading will instead <u>fall below these levels</u> over the next decade. And without minimum proficiency, children will not be able to progress into and succeed in secondary education.

An urgent rethink of our approach to education is needed. To resolve the education-crisis trilemma of quality, scale and cost, we must be imaginative in how we use technology. As we suggested in last year's report, the first step should be the creation of a World Education Service to deliver high-quality, remote, foundational learning for free to every child.

What Is the World Education Service?

The World Education Service would be a new global organisation with the mission of securing free access to the best digital tools for foundational learning for every child in the world. Through a network of partners in the private, public and non-profit sectors, it would aim to provide universal access to highquality learning tools and world-class content wherever a child might be, pairing a remote-first, adaptive learning experience with a focus on fundamental competencies: literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Its core principles would be:

- Focused: provide a single entry point and clear adaptive learning pathways for a small set of critical subject areas – unlike massive online open courses (MOOCs), which require users to choose from a large selection of content of varying quality.
- Free: ensure that access to WES content is free of charge at the point of delivery for any user, wherever they are - unlike popular education-technology (edtech) platforms, which depend on monetisation for long-term survival, potentially deepening inequalities in educational outcomes.
- For all: deliver quality content through partnerships, ensuring the broadest possible access in a way
 that welcomes buy-in from national governments but is not dependent on it unlike the UNICEF
 Learning Passport initiative, which has a broader focus than foundational learning alone and whose
 reach is limited by its remit to only work directly with national governments.

The WES can be thought of as a digital textbook that automatically adapts to the learner. Its content is based on the best research into what works in foundational learning. Its readers are the broadest possible user base, reached through a coalition of the most influential players in education.

Partnerships at Global Scale

The WES would knit together a global network of partners from among international organisations, national governments and the private sector. To reach as many learners as possible, we propose an innovative delivery model that is highly adaptable to local context, capacity, infrastructure and political will.

Where infrastructure and capacity exists, the WES would work through education ministries, directly or via international organisations such as UNICEF. Elsewhere, it would engage with non-governmental partners, including the private sector, international organisations, NGOs and other local actors, helping them to develop WES content and deliver it to their audiences. Some of these partners may already have learning platforms of their own. Others might work with the WES to reach new audiences. The

service will cover online, offline and low-tech learning (such as radio and SMS), with partners customising it for local contexts. The central WES team will provide delivery partners with:

- A set of high-quality sequenced **curriculum maps**¹ and model content for literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Partners will be able to use this material "as is" or adapt it to any language, cultural context and delivery channel (online, offline or low-tech).
- A built-in **adaptive assessment**, in the style of "Teaching/Learning at the Right Level", to build up a record of learning and always provide learners with the most relevant lesson to tackle next.
- Critical **data infrastructure** to support interoperability with other tools and national systems as well as mutual recognition of progress between WES delivery channels.
- Hands-on **support and quality assurance** to build out WES-aligned content that is contextually adapted to partners' target audiences. As its reach grows, the WES will collect feedback from teachers, learners and community leaders and work with partners to update their content.

To maximise its impact, the WES should be a dynamic, autonomous team of learning and technology experts, operating under the umbrella of a UN agency and accountable for its contribution towards UN SDG4.

Complementarity to Other Solutions

The last few years, particularly in the context of Covid responses, have seen the growth of a diverse range of platforms and initiatives to support remote learning. One example is the <u>UNICEF Learning Passport</u>, originally established in 2018 and expanded in response to the pandemic's impact on in-person schooling. The proposed partnership model would bring initiatives such as these together and support them by a) improving the quality of the learning offer and b) maximising the reach of high-quality learning across as many channels and places as possible. For example, it would:

- Allow the UNICEF Learning Passport team to pre-populate their platform with high-quality, localised content focused on the fundamentals in every new partner country.
- Accelerate the adoption of UNESCO and USAID's Global Proficiency Frameworks across the edtech industry by supporting their implementation in edtech products.
- Build on the expertise of organisations such as Imagine Worldwide and Imaginable Futures to rapidly scale up support for a much wider range of partners and geographies.
- Collaborate with initiatives like <u>Giga</u> and local telecom companies to ensure that newly connected places can make immediate use of high-quality learning content.
- Accelerate the uptake of evidence-based solutions shown to improve learning outcomes via EdTech Hub.

At present, geographic and infrastructure constraints limit the impact that different initiatives in this space can have. For example, the Learning Passport is soon slated to function in approximately a third of countries in the world, focusing on those where the need is greatest. Global learning platforms such as <u>Khan Academy</u> or large social networks such as <u>Snapchat</u> are only accessible to those who have internet access. Other initiatives may have more success in reaching a broad audience but are constrained by the availability of content. The WES can reduce fragmentation and increase the aggregate reach of quality platforms. It will also help ensure that learning tools meet a baseline standard of quality when it comes to content, assessment and data privacy.

What Are the Potential Coalitions and Partnerships?

The World Education Service will work with and through partners to deliver content and assessment, supporting learners inside and outside the classroom with a remote-first, adaptive approach. The WES will integrate and connect the best of existing edtech tools and services, such as UNICEF's Learning Passport, to accelerate the scale and reach of digital-first education on a global scale. The core purpose of the WES is not to recreate existing edtech services or delivery models, but instead act as a "force multiplier" for them.

This requires a coalition of funding, content and delivery partners, including national governments, international organisations, NGOs, publishers, edtech providers and private-sector technology companies. To magnify the reach of quality education for those who need it most, the service will, through a remote-first education model, help relieve pressures on national education systems and support the work of international organisations and NGOs in assisting those lacking access to the formal education sector.

To maximise the opportunity of the UN's Transforming Education Summit in September 2022 and to serve as proof of concept, we propose coordinating an initial coalition of core partners from across key categories. Some examples of potential partners include:

- International organisations: UNESCO, UNICEF, OECD, African Union
- Funders: Global Partnership for Education, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Imaginable Futures
- International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) implementers of education programmes in crisis and development contexts: large NGOs like CARE, Save the Children and FHI 360, as well as education-specific or local NGOs
- Social-media companies delivery channels to a broad international audience: TikTok, Meta, Snapchat or similar
- Edtech platforms and publishers: UNICEF Learning Passport, onebillion, Khan Academy, Byju's,

Pearson and smaller, local edtech companies in different countries

• Education experts and think tanks: The Brookings Institution, Imagine Worldwide, EdTech Hub

How Does the WES Align with Previous UN SDG4 Calls to Strengthen Digital Education Services?

The bulk of global initiatives to advance digital education services have focused on connectivity (for instance, closing the digital divide) and improving digital skills (both supporting access to digital education services and helping adapt to the requirements of the modern economy). Most efforts have focused on supporting individual governments or national education systems, placing a limit on their ability to achieve on a larger scale. Attempts to leverage digital technologies to drive up minimum proficiency at a global level have been limited and largely focused on access to technology, not the quality of tools available.

According to the UNHCR, more than 89 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes, 27 million of whom are refugees. There are at least 10 million refugee children who are often excluded from formal education systems in host countries. who are often excluded from formal education systems in host countries. Using that metric alone, it's abundantly clear that we cannot achieve universal education by 2030 by taking a national education system-only approach. A successful WES must integrate with national education systems where possible, but the only way to achieve SDG4 is by taking a global, border-agnostic approach to driving up access to minimum-proficiency learning.

Welcome efforts have been made to compare and track proficiency standards across country (and subnational) contexts through, for instance, the UNESCO and USAID <u>policy linking</u> initiative. Their impact on the global scale remains limited, particularly in the private sector. Such standards are rarely incorporated into edtech products, with low awareness and little practical support. The WES would support such efforts by actively engaging partners across the public, non-profit and private sectors. It would support them in raising the standard of remote-first learning tools and aligning their content to global proficiency frameworks.

The recent UN Transforming Education Pre-Summit in June 2022 demonstrated the growing consensus for more coordination in the use of tech to achieve UN SDG4: to ensure inclusive and equitable access to free, high-quality digital learning; to develop global, public digital-education platforms and treat digital learning resources as part of the digital commons; to establish local, national and global partnerships that support context-specific solutions, especially for the most marginalised children. The WES proposal is fully in line with these calls to action.

What Evidence Suggests the WES Would Be Impactful?

The success of the WES would be judged by whether it helps children learn and how many of them it can reach. More than a decade ago, we began to see the huge positive impact of effective self-directed and teacher-supported learning tools (see following examples). Most promisingly, good edtech platforms improve outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as – or even more – effectively than for their peers. What unites these tools is attention to pedagogy and instructional design, meeting learners where they are and customising to the local context.

The reach of each tool is limited by the time and effort that customisation requires. Scaling to new audiences requires significant adaptations. New entrants to the edtech space can struggle to develop relevant curricula and hone effective pedagogical approaches. A recent UNICEF review of <u>personalised</u> <u>learning platforms in LMICs</u> concluded that these tools hold a lot of promise but access across countries is uneven, disadvantaged learners are underserved and more than half of products require an active internet connection.

Taken together, these factors mean that, promising as they are, these technologies are not achieving a truly global impact or audience. The WES would reduce barriers to good instructional design, wide audience reach and localisation of high-quality content, unlocking the transformative potential of these technologies at global scale.

The Impact of Technology on Foundational Learning: Some Examples

Mindspark is an adaptive learning platform for maths, English and science used by 500,000 students, primarily in India. After 4.5 months of use, its users' knowledge of maths and Hindi increased by more than two times as much as that of students going through small-group tuition.

onebillion is a non-profit organisation based in the UK that has developed instructional software for numeracy and literacy that can be used without an internet connection. The software is used in schools with support from teachers or for independent study and has been shown to improve learning outcomes in Malawi, Brazil and the UK. In Malawi, for example, use of the platform led to the equivalent of an additional 5.3 months of literacy learning after two years, at a cost of less than \$10 per student.

Researchers in El Salvador found that computer-assisted maths instruction led to gains equivalent to 1.2 years of learning after 46 additional lessons, compared to teacher-led classes only, and offered better value for money.

How Would the World Education Service Work?

In the following section, we describe a proposed model of operation for the WES that would allow it to achieve its full potential. The model includes three main elements:

- Building blocks: providing globally relevant foundational learning (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) to a minimum proficiency level, coupled with adaptive assessment, core data infrastructure and support for delivery partners
- Governance: ensuring that the service's impact is maximised, combining credibility, agility and accountability
- Funding: supporting the launch of the service and its operation at scale

Building Blocks

High-Quality Curriculum Maps and Model Content

A globally focused WES that aims to reach all students, including those outside formal education systems, must prioritise a core set of fundamental competencies: numeracy, literacy and digital skills. Where possible, these can be aligned to national curricula. In some cases, formal recognition of learning gains made through the WES may not be possible. However, improvements to literacy, numeracy and digital confidence would still positively impact national education systems, reducing drop-out rates and freeing up resources to deliver a higher-quality, rounded education (not to mention the benefits to learners themselves).

As "<u>The Learning Passport: Research and Recommendations Report</u>" from the University of Cambridge highlighted, the development of globally relevant content even across these foundational areas is immensely complex. It is likely beyond the means of a single organisation, particularly when it comes to literacy. To address this challenge, the WES should focus instead on developing well-sequenced curriculum maps for each foundational competency. These maps should be aligned to minimum proficiency requirements and provided to a wide variety of partners to produce locally relevant content. The Global Proficiency Frameworks for maths and literacy, developed in recent years, would provide an excellent starting point. For digital skills, a brand-new framework may need to be developed. With time, model content in the most widely used languages can be developed, to be used on an open-source basis by some of the partners or serve as an exemplar to guide their own content development.

Numeracy

Early numeracy benefits from largely consistent curriculum frameworks internationally. The WES's role would be to create a coherent, well-sequenced map for early numeracy and maths courses, including numbers and operations, algebra, geometry and measurement. This would build on the <u>Global</u> <u>Proficiency Framework for Maths</u> and follow the principles of <u>mastery learning</u>, ensuring that children understand all relevant concepts before they move on to more advanced topics. Partners will need to customise content for language and to take into account local pedagogical traditions (for example, where children in Europe might expect to learn to count apples, children in other geographies would be familiar with other objects).

Literacy

Educating students in the same language they speak at home is associated with better learning outcomes. However, this practice is often neglected. According to one estimate, nearly 40 per cent of all students globally do not have access to an education in a language they speak or understand. This number is even higher in areas with greater linguistic diversity, such as sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. To address this challenge, the WES will rely on local delivery partners to customise content, ensuring that children can access high-quality content aligned to its curriculum (based on the Global Proficiency Framework for Reading) in a language they speak.

Digital Skills

The 21st-century economy requires a new set of foundational skills. Chief among them are digital skills, the indispensable competencies allowing citizens to take part in today's increasingly digitalised society and economy. While recent advances in technology and digital tools offer new and more inclusive ways to access quality education, the education systems themselves, specifically curricula, need to adapt to meet labour-market demands and prepare students for the future of work. To better support this education-to-livelihood pathway, the WES will include digital skills within its definition of foundational learning.

This means developing an entry-level digital-skills curriculum. At present, no global minimumproficiency standard exists for digital skills. The WES could take the lead, in collaboration with UNESCO and education experts, on developing such a standard. It would be informed by and developed in consultation with education and technology specialists, focusing on building basic computer and smartphone literacy and proficiency in email and web-based communication, web research and navigation, video conferencing and word processing. These basic ICT building blocks will prepare young people for today's digitalised society and workforce and will set the foundation for each user's future growth in the digital sphere, forming a baseline for advanced digital-skills education and training.

Built-In Adaptive Assessment

The World Education Service must build on recent advances in <u>adaptive learning</u> so that every user is presented with the right content at the right time and can learn at their own pace. Its instructional designers must supplement the curriculum maps for numeracy, literacy and digital skills with a set of test questions, to be presented to WES learners on their first time using the service and at regular intervals after that.

The combination of curriculum maps and test questions would enable partners to more easily develop adaptive solutions of their own. An initial assessment should form part of new-user onboarding, so that in their first encounter with the WES learners would be tested on their current level of knowledge. The results of this assessment would inform the first learning path constructed for the user, so that they start with content at the right level of difficulty. Such "<u>Teaching/Learning at the Right Level</u>" approaches have been shown to be pedagogically effective across a range of contexts, including in low-income settings. The test questions would then be used to regularly assess student progress and adjust content accordingly. For example, if the assessment shows that a learner did not fully understand an earlier lesson, that lesson can be repeated.

Linking the curriculum maps to specific test questions would make the development of such adaptive learning tools quicker and cheaper. As the service grows, it may also open-source (make freely available) the technology components necessary for creating individual learning paths, so that partners could incorporate them into their platforms rather than develop their own from scratch.

Critical Data Infrastructure

As no single solution could provide quality remote learning adapted to local contexts, the WES does not aim to develop a learning platform of its own. However, to ensure that learners can seamlessly move between different delivery channels for the WES without losing their progress, the service should be responsible for establishing and maintaining the necessary data infrastructure: learner IDs and profiles that include a continuous record of achievement. This infrastructure must aim for interoperability with national data systems and edtech tools through an open API (Application Programming Interface).

To partner with WES and receive its support, partners will need to securely share the learning records of WES users with the organisation. This commitment would need to be reflected in partners' own dataprivacy policies and must be built on best practice for data sharing and retention, prohibiting the sale of WES-user data and minimising the amount of data collected. This will provide the WES with a lever for improving data privacy for underage users in the global edtech sector.

Hands-On Support and Quality Assurance

Establishing the service and creating a set of high-quality curriculum maps with adaptive assessment are only the first of many steps required to create a sustainable, inclusive education model. To ensure its effectiveness over the long term, the WES would aim to integrate hands-on support and quality assurance to help partners adapt content to local contexts, maintain it and update it over time. It is expected that different partners would need varying levels of support in different areas: for example, social-media platforms may need help with integrating adaptive assessment, whereas edtech tools would benefit from local expertise to align existing content to the WES and national curricula.

Additionally, the WES should include a feedback mechanism to collect information and insights from teachers, learners, parents and community leaders. This feedback would be analysed by the central WES team and used to modify and improve the curriculum maps and partners' content, and to provide ongoing quality assurance. With time, the WES's support function should also include device-management support and other services.

Governance and Funding

Central to maximising the impact of WES are the organisational structure and governance model underpinning it. First, we envision the WES taking on a startup model within an international organisation such as the UN, or one of its education-focused agencies, such as UNICEF or UNESCO. It would operate as an autonomous, agile team but would benefit from the credibility and reach of the host organisation. As such, it would be directly accountable to the host organisation for its impact on relevant metrics under UN SDG4.

While under the aegis of the UN, the WES would be supported by a broad coalition of NGOs and private partners (outlined in the next section). To provide transparency and accountability, it would establish an advisory board with representatives of key partners and supportive national governments.

The core WES team should include instructional designers, technology experts and partnership managers (including regional coordinators). Consultation with a diverse range of external stakeholders suggests that at the initial stage of development, the objectives of the WES could be delivered by a team of 15 to 20 employees, working in central locations across the key global regions covered by the WES. Over time, this might expand to include country-level liaisons as well as other staff depending on emerging needs.

The core World Education Service team should be initially funded by the host organisation for a period of three years (giving it enough initial runway to test and iterate the proposed model and assess its impact). This would cost approximately \$5 million per year, for a total cost of \$15 million in initial funding.

Stakeholder consultation suggests that at full scale, the core budget would expand to between \$10 and 20 million per year. The service should also consider offering grants to cover the costs of adapting content to local needs or providing devices to learners for select partners working with students most in need, with a discretionary fund of \$50 million (topped up annually depending on disbursements).

Annual global spend on education is \$4.7 trillion, of which \$3.4 trillion comes from the public purse. International aid to education reached \$15.3 billion in 2019. Global spending on instructional software was estimated at \$19.4 billion and rising in 2020, while venture-capital firms invested just short of \$21 billion in edtech companies in 2020 alone. In this context, our projected budget for the WES represents a vanishingly small proportion of global education spending, aid or venture-capital investment. Even at full scale and with the discretionary fund in operation, it would still represent 0.45 per cent of global education aid and 0.33 per cent of annual venture-capital investment in edtech. This makes the WES, while ambitious and pioneering, a low-cost, low-risk proposal.

How Will the World Education Service Reach Learners?

Access to quality education is not simply a luxury but a human right. However, monumental access challenges exist for millions of children and youth globally – an issue not specific to any one region in the world. No single platform could ever have truly global reach while also providing content that is fully adapted to the local environment.

To address these access challenges and ensure that access to the WES is as broad as possible, we propose two delivery models in parallel: **the government and non-government partnership models**. Each approach is designed to address varying sets of complex educational-access challenges. It would include students who are engaged with their national education system but still lacking access to quality education as well as those caught outside the formal education sector, within or outside their origin country.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the WES's proposed delivery model adapts to the nuances of each situation. Each context will require its own unique set of partnerships and delivery models to ensure the service reaches all students.

Figure 2 - WES partnerships for delivery



Partnership model \rightarrow Delivery channel \rightarrow Audience

The World Education Service would aim to reach users across a wide range of audiences (those connected to the internet, offline or using low-tech means such as SMS). This requires a broad coalition of partners who can reach these audiences through existing delivery channels.

Source: TBI

Government Partnerships

In most country contexts, working with and through existing national education systems is the most direct and impactful way to reach students. In these contexts, the WES can be embedded through two channels. First, it can partner directly with willing national governments to support students and teachers. Second, it should collaborate with existing government partners, such as UNICEF or trusted NGO organisations who are already working within the national education system. In both cases, this would involve working with ministries of education, teachers, edtech providers, telecommunications corporations and private-sector companies to most effectively distribute and modify content to meet local needs.

The priority, where possible, should be to work through UNICEF's Learning Passport programme, which currently operates in several dozen countries. The Learning Passport is a trusted medium through which WES content can be customised, translated, delivered and integrated with the WES's global assessment framework. The benefits are mutual: the WES can help facilitate the interoperability of the platform across country contexts, and help scale the Learning Passport across the globe with high-quality "default" content for foundational learning. Support and partnership from the UN will play an integral

role in the success of the WES. However, it should be noted that the WES's goal is to work with the broadest possible coalition of partners without exclusive agreements.

Non-Government Partnerships

Achieving SDG4 will not be possible without reaching millions of children who are currently outside the formal education system. This means bringing quality education to marginalised populations and children on the move, including refugees and internally displaced people, as well as those caught in crises or in areas outside formal government control. In these and other instances where working through national education ministries is not practical, the WES can partner directly with NGOs and private-sector actors to give all children a fair chance to receive a quality education in the fundamentals. Working through private-sector partners would also enable the service to increase its reach by meeting users where they are to supplement formal learning.

Delivering on both the government and non-government models means partners and partnerships are central to WES's success. From the outset, the WES would engage with an extensive and diverse group of organisations from across the education spectrum to source and develop high-quality content, curriculum, assessments, technology and delivery mechanisms. These partners would include teachers, edtech providers, education donors and philanthropic organisations, device manufacturers, social-media companies, telecom providers and end-users. To ensure the WES achieves its aim of meeting students where they are, extensive preliminary coalition building and stakeholder engagement are critical.

The WES should work with both the private and non-profit sector to develop and deliver its curriculum in ways adapted to each partner's audience.

- Social-media example: a social-media platform identifies successful education influencers and commissions them to develop content.
- Telecom-provider example: an SMS-based version is zero-rated as a value-add for current and potential customers.
- Edtech example: a startup builds in WES content for existing users as a free feature of their app or validates existing content against the WES curriculum.
- NGO example: a charity distributes tablets with pre-loaded WES content to children in a refugee camp.

To become a WES partner, each organisation must commit to provide WES content to end-users for free. Some of these partners may integrate with the WES on a "freemium" basis (offering the WES for free while potentially charging for other services). Others may see it as part of their corporate social responsibilities and subsidise the necessary work on that basis. With time, WES may also seek out funding to provide targeted support to partners addressing areas of greatest need.

What Would Learning With WES Look Like in Different Contexts?

The central advantage of a global World Education Service is its ability to adapt across contexts to meet learners where they are, from a location- and needs-based perspective.

What sets the WES apart from existing education offerings is its potential to deliver localised content and curriculum, aligned to a global standard, through online, offline and low-tech channels, combined with adaptive learning technology and assessments.

Realising these critical benchmarks depends on each part of WES's extensive partnership network. Figure 3 shows a basic model of how the core WES team and partner organisations could work together in different scenarios.





Source: TBI

Rural Schools Without an Internet Connection

More than a third of the global population (2.9 billion people) is not connected to the internet. When it comes to schools, data on connectivity is not readily available, but we know that internet access lags electrification: for example, in middle-income countries 40 per cent of primary and 35 per cent of upper-secondary schools have electricity but no internet connection. And in many countries, for example in sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 10 per cent of schools have electricity.

To address this challenge, platforms such as the Learning Passport have <u>developed an "offline hub"</u> <u>model</u>, where a central device containing learning content and learner records is placed in a classroom. It can then connect either to individual devices for each learner or to a TV or projector at the front of the room. Supporting staff can periodically synchronise the content via a USB flash drive.

Under this model, a WES-Learning Passport partnership would see WES content included among the other materials on a Learning Passport hub in a rural school. Individual devices could be used to carry out the onboarding assessment, with teachers using localised WES content – aligned to national curricula where possible – for classroom activities. Learner records associated with WES would be stored on the hub device and synchronised with its data infrastructure whenever the hub is updated.

Home Learning

A lack of minimum proficiency is not solely a problem for less wealthy countries. According to the World Bank, between 12 and 14.5 per cent of children in high-income countries are learning poor (up from 8 per cent in 2019), and up to 20 per cent of 15-year-olds in OECD countries lack minimum proficiency in reading and writing. The WES should be available to these young people, too. In environments with higher internet connectivity, existing edtech or social-media platforms can serve as a channel for delivery, meeting users where they already spend their time online.

Under this scenario, the tech provider would integrate a WES onboarding assessment and content into their platform (for example, a business-to-consumer edtech app). Regardless of the monetisation strategy for the platform overall, the WES content would be available for free (possibly as part of a "freemium" offer). Alternatively, a social-media platform might commission successful content creators to develop WES-aligned content and invest development time into accompanying testing functionality. Such an approach would significantly broaden the reach of the WES around the world.

Crisis Settings

As of December 2021, 36.5 million children have been displaced (abroad or within their own countries). These children make up some of the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups – and a formidable roadblock to achieving UN SDG4.

Given the fluidity and sensitivity of working in crisis settings, delivering the WES and connecting it to students would require working through local, community-accepted organisations, including both local and international NGOs. These organisations, which are well attuned to local practices, politics and conflict-dynamics, would be central to the partnership network when operating in crisis settings. The WES team would support local operational partners with acquiring tech for "last-mile" delivery and content development. The in-country partners would then supply children with devices pre-loaded with WES content, help to onboard them and provide hands-on support with learning activities. Given that the issues of education accreditation in these circumstances can be politically contentious, the WES would aim to advocate, in coalition with others, for international policies that help all children access quality education and pursue the opportunities it affords.

Conclusion

Improving minimum proficiency levels across the world is an important pre-condition for achieving the UN's SDG4. Without minimum proficiency, children will not be able to successfully progress through to secondary education or engage in the learning process. Emerging education technology, and in particular adaptive learning platforms, are showing significant promise in improving basic literacy and numeracy in many contexts, including offline and through low-tech channels. However, the scale of the challenge that the global learning crisis presents and the need to customise learning content to fit local contexts mean that no single digital platform could achieve the required reach on its own.

The World Education Service is an ambitious proposal for a low-cost, low-risk, high-impact global initiative. It would knit together existing projects and platforms, support technology providers in improving the quality of their offering and catalyse new innovations. With a focus on reaching the broadest possible audience with high-quality, adaptive remote-learning experiences, it has the potential to significantly alter the current trajectory on minimum proficiency. As the world looks forward to the UN Transforming Education Summit this September, we are calling on potential partners – international organisations, national governments, NGOs and private-sector actors – to join forces in establishing a World Education Service so that every child, anywhere can access quality learning for free.

Acknowledgments

The authors are extremely grateful to the following people for contributing their expertise in conversations and at a virtual roundtable in June 2022:

- H.E. Dr David Moinina Sengeh, Government of Sierra Leone
- Adam Kreimeia, EdTech Hub and ODI
- Amee Tolia, UNICEF
- Amy Klement, Imaginable Futures
- Andrew Dunbrack, FHI360
- Bo Stjerne Thomsen, LEGO
- · Dan Sandhu, Sparx Learning
- Daniel Aldridge, BCS (Chartered Institute for IT)
- Jamie Proctor, FCDO
- · Joe Wolf, Imagine Worldwide

- Les Hopper, Pearson
- Mac Glovinksy, UNICEF
- Michael Childress, FHI360
- Nathalie Louge, FHI360
- Parth Arora, Imagine Worldwide
- Rapelang Rabana, Imagine Worldwide
- Rebecca Winthrop, the Brookings Institution
- Stefanie Kendall, FHI360
- Thomas Rosenfeld, USAID

Footnotes

^ A curriculum map clearly defines the order in which pupils go through content so that they
are prepared for each successive lesson. The sequence of lessons ensures that, together, they
lead to a pre-defined set of learning objectives (such as minimum proficiency in reading). The
content itself (for example, short video clips) can then be created separately and presented to
pupils in the right order.

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