



LUMINOS FUND: SPEED SCHOOL

The Luminos Fund is a non-profit organization launched in 2016 to ensure that children everywhere get a chance to experience joyful learning, especially those denied an education by poverty, crisis, and discrimination. To date, the Luminos Fund's Speed School initiative, (also known as Second Chance), an accelerated learning program for out-of-school children, has helped more than 136,000 children get back to school and develop vital skills needed to support a lifetime of learning.

The Speed School program is focused on primary school-aged out-of-school children (aged 8-12) who have never attended school or who have dropped out and are currently overage to attend the grade that matches their academic level. In ten months, the program enables children to learn to read, write, and do basic math. Through a condensed curriculum, children cover grades 1-3 within the 10-month program. With this knowledge, they are able to mainstream into their local school, together with children their own age.

The model aims to improve individual learning by seeking not only accelerated learning but also deeper and more effective learning. A six-year longitudinal study (<https://luminosfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Sussex-Evaluation-Full.pdf>) demonstrated that graduates of Speed Schools complete primary school at twice the rate of their peers and have higher academic outcomes and aspirations for the future. The Second Chance pedagogy, specifically its ability to build learners' confidence in their ability to learn, was identified in the evaluation as a key factor for the success of the Luminos model (<https://luminosfund.org/long-term-impact/>). The evaluation results provide strong evidence for the long-term impact of the program on out-of-school children in Ethiopia and beyond.

Luminos currently operates in Ethiopia, Liberia, and Lebanon. In 2020/21, Luminos is impacting 2,500 out-of-school children in Liberia and over 10,000 students in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, Luminos is also supporting the government to adopt and scale Speed School nationally.

By the end of the program, Lunimos students read 40 words per minute on average. Once they complete the program, students take a government-designed placement exam which determines the grade into government school that they will transition to (generally grade 3 or grade 4). Out of school children are generally overage but are expected to transition with children their own age as per government regulations. Speed School follows the same calendar as the regular school in the context that they work. For example, in Liberia, children start in September and finish in June. Classrooms are located in the community, often within empty town-halls, churches, mosques, or empty government primary school classrooms.

SOLUTION

Criteria	Category	Details
Technological Readiness	No technology	Luminos works in some of the most remote, rural communities. The model does not utilize technology in the classrooms.
Content availability	No	Luminos works with the national government to ensure that the Speed School curriculum is aligned to the national curriculum. All materials are open source.
Personalization	No	The content is based on the national curriculum and is translated into local languages. In Ethiopia, the curriculum is delivered in seven different local languages. Struggling students are supported with remedial instruction, which is delivered in small groups.
Interactivity	Yes	The program focuses on activity-based learning. The program runs over an 8-hour school day with 5 hours for Literacy and 2 hours for Maths with a strong focus on students' development of basic skills. Activities including role play, acting, song, dance, class presentations, which stimulate and deepen learning through multiple modalities. Speed School facilitators (teachers) create opportunities for small group work so that students

		are constantly learning from peers. The curriculum encourages facilitators to use local materials (clay, bottle caps, stones, etc.) for a variety of activities. The use of physical materials supports the engagement of the five-senses and augments learning.
Mode	Synchronous	Speed School is delivered in the classroom within the communities
Feasibility to replicate		
Time	Long	Luminos estimates the time to create a classroom to be approximately 6 to 8 months.
Effort	High	The effort needed to replicate the Speed School model is high. Activities needed include curriculum development and adaptation, selection and training of partners, facilitator/student selection, teacher training, government partnership management, establishing classroom monitoring and support systems and tools.
Money	Low	Luminos costs are approximately \$150 per student annually. The government provides classroom space and the necessary infrastructure in both Ethiopia and Liberia. In Ethiopia, the Government is providing one teacher for each Speed School classroom that is implemented and managed by the government. Luminos and its implementing partners provide ongoing technical support and teacher training.

FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION

Luminos works with local implementing partners, education NGOs, who have strong experience in education service delivery in the communities where Luminos is working. There are very close relationships developed with the local partners, all of which have been working within the

communities for a number of years. Building the capacity of implementing partners to implement the Speed School/Second Chance pedagogy is a primary focus of Luminos’ work.

Luminos trains their partners through a two and a half week intensive session to deliver the model. The training includes child-centric activity-based learning, behavior management, lesson planning, child protection, and other topics that teachers will need to develop to be able to run a Second Chance classroom. Luminos also provides monitoring and evaluation, student assessment, child protection, teacher training, and ongoing classroom-based coaching. They support contextualizing the model, select out-of-school students that have the most to gain from the program, and select teachers. The Luminos Fund scaled its programs to Liberia, adapting 30% of the program to their local context, and 70% of the original model remains unchanged. NGO partners support monitoring classrooms through weekly support visits. Every week there is a “program supervisor” providing facilitators classroom-based coaching and feedback.

Local partners are also responsible for building relationships with local government schools – called “Link government Schools”, in Liberia, for example, there is one Link School for every two Speed School classrooms. Local partners work with link government schools to facilitate children’s transition to mainstream school upon completion of the 10-month program.

As a response to national guidelines during COVID-19, all schools in Ethiopia, Liberia and Lebanon were closed from mid-March and have remained through the summer. Program facilitators have been instrumental to Luminos’ COVID-19 response effort, supporting the distribution of food relief and learning materials, ensuring that learning is taking place, and sharing the latest health guidance with families and community members.

Criteria	Category	Details
Preparedness of teachers to design and facilitate learning	Low	Teachers in Speed Schools are called “facilitators” – they are young people from the local community with a minimum education of grade 10. They go through a two and a half intensive week of training and receive ongoing refresher training and support during the year. Since the curriculum is broken into three phases: grades 1, 2, and 3. After each phase, all facilitators have refresher training to improve their skills for the next phase.
Availability and ability of parents or caregivers to	Available for guidance	The vast majority of Luminos parents and caregivers are illiterate, which limits the ability of parents to support home-based learning. Luminos mobilizes parents and

facilitate effective home-based distance learning

but not as an educator

communities to support their children's education both during and beyond the Speed School program. In Liberia, one parent/caregiver for every student is part of a "Parent Engagement Group (PEG)". PEGs, which are run by both the facilitator and the program supervisor, meet monthly. One of the most impactful PEG sessions is to invite parents to a class so that they can see for themselves the learning that is taking place in the classroom. This activity has improved parents' engagement and support for their children's education.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

To support Luminos children and families during COVID-19 school closures, Luminos provided its communities with handwashing stations and supplies, food relief, and vital health information and guidance regarding COVID-19. Given that only [12% of the population in Liberia has access to electricity](#), Luminos employed a low-tech approach to ensure that all students/families would be reached. Luminos leveraged its network of facilitators, who live within the same communities as Luminos students, to conduct socially-distanced home visits to check in on student health, nutrition, wellbeing, and learning. Paper-based worksheets, aligned to the program curriculum, were created and distributed to students. Facilitators also held micro-classes with 4-5 children/batch to ensure that students remained engaged in learning through the school closures. Given that 1 in 4 children did not return to school following the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, Luminos' primary aim through the school closures has been to ensure that children remain safe and connected to learning so that every child returns to school once schools reopen.

The Luminos Fund program uses a combination of formative and summative assessment to ensure that each student achieves learning benchmarks. Every fifth day of the curriculum is dedicated to assessment. Formative assessments include weekly individually administered numeracy and words per minute (wpm) tests to gauge students' literacy/numeracy levels. A diagnostic test at the beginning of the year, phase-level assessments at the end of each of three phases, and a government-designed Placement Test (which determines the grade in a government school that students transition into) are administered annually. In addition, Luminos conducts annual externally administered literacy and numeracy assessments to gauge student learning progress over the 10-month program.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Limited government capacity

To ensure program sustainability, Luminos' long term goal is government adoption. Limited government capacity can limit the government's ability to adopt the program in the long term. Luminos works to build government capacity by inviting government teachers, District Education Officers (DEOs), and the Ministry of Education officials to Luminos teaching training workshops and to observe the Speed School/Second Chance pedagogy in action during classes.

Limited capacity in link government schools

Another challenge is the limited capacity of the link government schools, which are vital to ensuring the successful transition and continued education for program graduates.

TAKEAWAY LESSONS

The demonstrated impact of Speed School has helped Luminos gain the support of the national government. In Ethiopia, Luminos is supporting the government to scale Speed School to all nine regions to address the significant number of students that are overage or out-of-school and also support the low learning outcomes in Ethiopia's primary schools. External research conducted by the University of Sussex shows that program graduates complete primary school at nearly twice the rate as their peers, have stronger academic outcomes across subjects and higher aspirations for the future compared to those who have not been through the program³ (Akyeampong, 2018).

The program has demonstrated the ability to reach learners who would otherwise drop out of the learning journey. Thanks to its model, 90% of Luminos students complete the program and transition to government primary schools the following year. Speed Schools are an ideal alternative education for those who have missed years of their schooling to catch up with their peers.

³ Akyeampong, 2018 <https://luminosfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Sussex-Evaluation-Full.pdf>