
Policy formulation and programme development

BRIEF 3

Educational planning methodology

A plan for improving quality and learning outcomes should be based on the findings of an education sector analysis (ESA), offer a vision for the future education system, set medium-term policy goals, and identify major strategies to achieve them.

Developing a relevant response to the learning challenges raised by the sector analysis

The range of education quality challenges facing the education system, as identified by an ESA, will form the basis to develop policy priorities and strategies, that should focus on resolving their underlying factors.

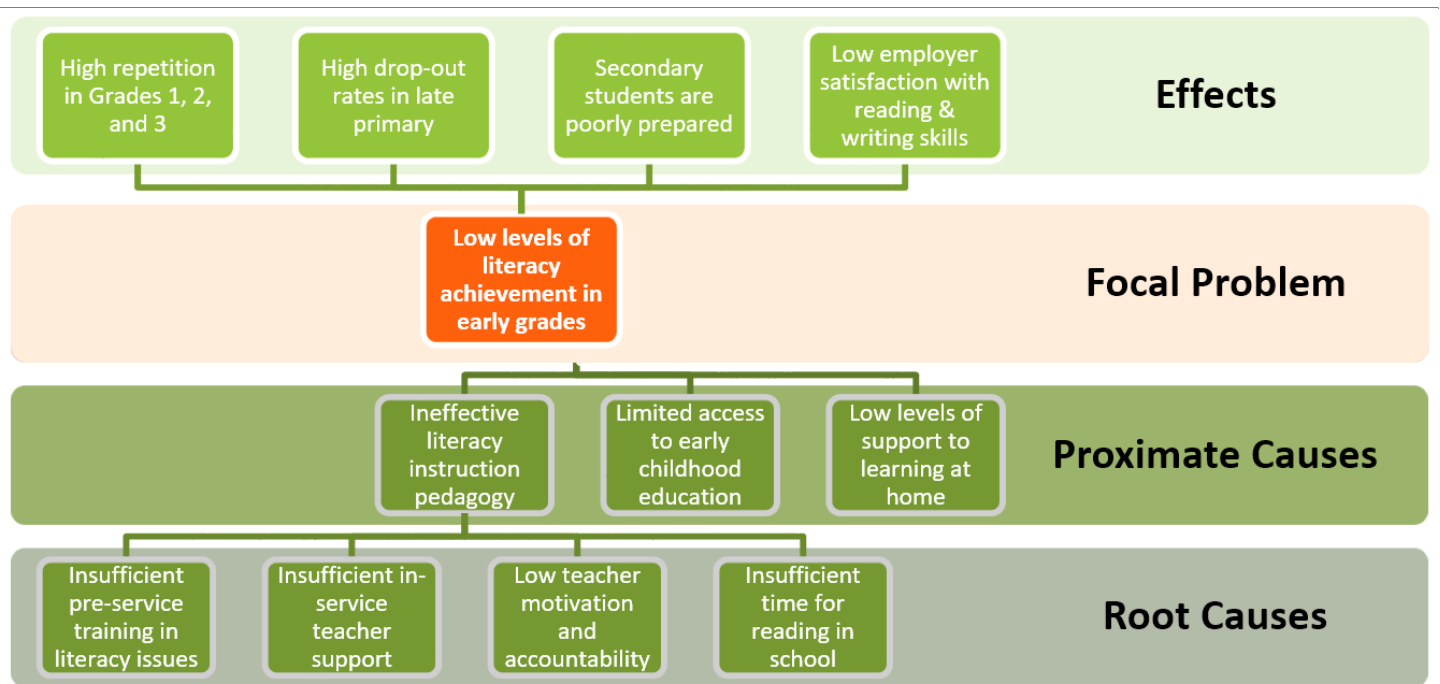
Policy can be defined as ‘a broad statement that sets out the government’s main goals and priorities’, and which ‘defines a particular stance, aiming to explore solutions to an issue.’ (UNESCO, 2013a: 7). Through the creation and meticulous examination of an explicit causal chain, strategic planning teams can determine the most appropriate policy orientations to address learning issues. Public debates on the question also allow clarification of critical aspects. The resulting model, often diagrammed in the form of a problem tree, shows how particular learning problems are related to different, proximate and root, causes.

On the basis of the identified causes of learning problems, priorities are established by determining which issues represent key levers to achieve broad change; which are feasible to address, considering financial and human resource constraints; and which will receive political and public support. The priorities that are selected through this process are expressed as policy statements and translated into key strategies.

Policy formulation steps - Illustrated

1. Problem analysis

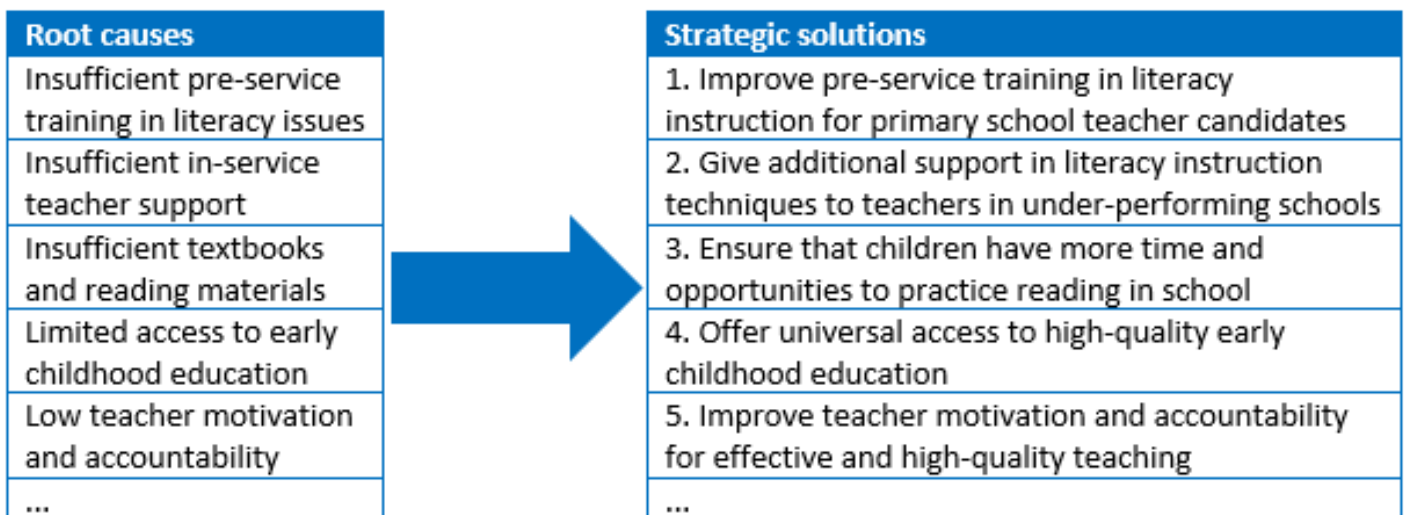
In developing a new education sector plan (ESP), a strategic planning team wishes to emphasize a select number of key medium-term policy priorities to improve learning. An examination of the education system’s internal and external efficiency highlights low literacy levels among primary school pupils as a key obstacle. Poor reading ability causes high early-grade repetition, contributes to dropout, and affects pupils’ preparedness for further education and the workplace. By reviewing the issues that impact learning, the planning team identifies several key causes that contribute to the issue in their context and develop the following problem-tree:



Low early grade literacy problem tree

2. Policy priority-setting and strategy determination

The strategic planning team determines that one of the sector’s medium-term policy priorities should be to Improve early-grade literacy skills among all pupils, particularly those from under-achieving primary schools. To determine the key strategies to achieve this policy goal, the team converts their problem-tree into an objective-tree by re-stating the problem’s causes as strategic solutions, and re-wording the strategies for clarification where required, producing the following result:



Low early-grade literacy strategic outlook

3. Strategy feasibility analysis

The strategic planning team then determines which of the strategic solutions might be particularly effective, as well as financially, politically, and organizationally feasible: While it is ultimately desirable to increase access to early childhood education (Strategy 4), resources are not currently available for widespread investment in this area; furthermore, focusing on teacher motivation and accountability (Strategy 5) may not be timely, as many teachers do not yet know how to effectively support literacy development, a prerequisite for this to be effective. The team therefore decides to initially focus on Strategies 1, 2 and 3. Their decision is then tested during programme development and cost estimation. Following these steps, it may be necessary to review the chosen strategies, gradually working towards a plan that is both evidence-based and realistic.

How to translate strategies into action?

Learning policy priorities and key strategies must be translated into specific, actionable programmes. The same causal chain used to identify policies and strategies should be used to determine the programmes that will produce the desired change. Education sector plan (ESP) programmes specifically define how the chosen strategies will be carried out. More than one strategy can be pursued by a single programme, just as several programmes may be needed for a single strategy.

The elaboration of results or logical framework helps to structure and describe the theory of how change will be achieved through systemic transformation, linking programmes to sector-wide goals in a clear hierarchy. For each programme, key outcomes will be determined. Upstream, these should directly address the focal problem identified during policy elaboration, and contribute to achieve the set objective. Downstream, the framework will further specify the nature of the programme by laying out the major activities it implies, that will in turn be associated with measurable indicators and specific targets that help to define success.

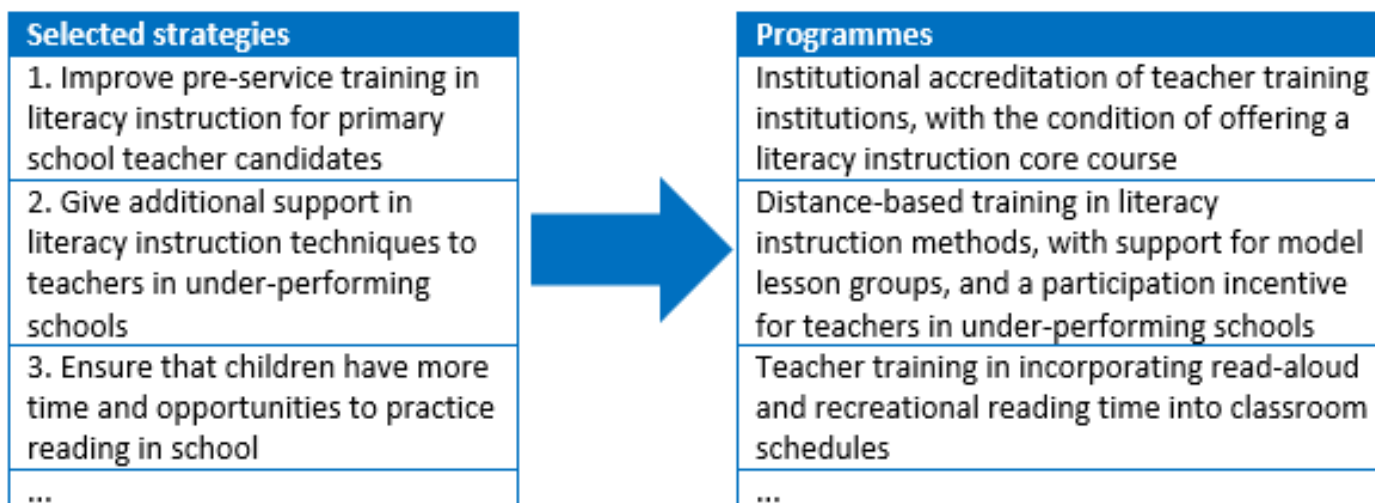
The elaboration of a logical framework is also the opportunity for planners to discuss the conditions to be met at each stage to achieve improved learning outcomes for all, further appraising feasibility: Will the programmes resolve the main challenges identified in the sector diagnosis? Are the objectives, programmes and activities coherent? Are the required financial, human, technical, and time-related

resources available?

It may be beneficial to adopt a participatory approach to such a feasibility study, involving a broad and representative spectrum of stakeholders, to both test the programme proposal from different perspectives, and improve chances of success through early ownership. The review may highlight the need to rethink the plan's objectives, draft alternative strategies, and/or include a capacity-building programme.

Developing context-specific programmes - Illustrated

A strategic planning team is developing programmes to improve early-grade literacy, on the basis of selected strategies. They recognize that there are multiple approaches to translate each into action. To determine the best approach, available data are reviewed, international practice considered, and various options brainstormed. Each option is discussed in terms of its expected effectiveness and feasibility. A final set of programmes is reached by discarding some options and adapting others.



Low early-grade literacy programme development

The determined programmes are context-sensitive. For instance: as teachers are trained by diverse public and private institutions, Strategy 1 will be best achieved by a change in teacher training accreditation requirements; as available research suggests that teaching practices are unlikely to change through coursework alone, Strategy 2 envisions working with district-level staff on the implementation of the model lesson approach to promote good practice.

References and sources

GPE (Global Partnership for Education), IIEP-UNESCO (International Institute for Educational Planning). 2015. [Guidelines for education sector plan preparation](#). Paris: IIEP.

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