

# Non-State Actors in Education Evidence Gap Map

## Update Summary: Gap Analysis & Evidence Concentration

*December 2023*

---

### **1. Introduction**

The Non-State Actors in Education Evidence Gap Map (EGM) illustrates the existing research on the role and impact of non-state actors in education in low- and middle-income countries. The aim of the EGM is to synthesize findings and identify gaps in existing research to inform the research priorities of the Education Finance Network (EFN). The EGM provides links and summaries of existing studies that cover a set of thematic areas, presented in an interactive visual map so that users can easily identify topic areas that have been subject to the most research, and which areas have a lack of, or limited evidence. The interactive map also allows users to filter the available evidence by country, region, or the study's level of rigor, ensuring the map is easily tailored to specific research interests. The EGM presents research on key intervention areas including financing mechanisms, core education delivery and ancillary services, and outcomes including access and equity, education quality, and affordability.

The EGM was first produced by the EFN team in September 2022. Following this successful launch, the team consulted with EFN members to understand how they were using the tool and whether it met research and programmatic needs. Feedback on the EGM was collected through direct member consultations, audience polls during meetings and events, and an online member survey. Based on this input, the EFN team decided to update the EGM to meet member feedback and to fill evidence gaps based on evolving research priorities.

In December 2023, the EFN updated the EGM, adding 176 studies to the existing 196 papers. The update included research responding to key areas of interest identified by members, in addition to new evidence that had been published since the EGM launch.

This document presents a high-level analysis of the updated EGM, including a revised summary of key findings, remaining evidence gaps, topic areas with high concentrations of evidence, and a summary of the methodology. For an in-depth analysis of the original 2022 version of the EGM, including a detailed methodology, the supplemental report can be accessed at: <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/nonstate-actors-education-interactive-evidence-gap-map-0>.

## 2. Summary of the EGM update

The December 2023 EGM update prioritized outcomes and interventions that EFN members identified as key interest areas. These included: (1) Innovative financing, (2) Gender equity, (3) Early childhood education (ECE), (4) Ancillary services (EdTech, teacher training, school leaders training), and (5) Research conducted in Latin America. The rationale and process behind each of these update areas is provided below:

- 1. Innovative financing:** The initial EGM covered impact bonds and result-based financing, but did not include examples of innovative financing beyond these two topics. However, through the consultation process, members identified the need for greater evidence on innovative financing. Thus, the revision aims to align with member interests by adding four interventions: Blended Finance (including Public Private Partnerships), Social Impact Incentives, Social Impact Guarantees, and Debt Relief/Financing. The aim of this revision was to better capture the varying types of innovative financing that are implemented in the education finance space. The update also aimed to highlight new interventions, including Social Impact Incentives and Social Impact Guarantees, for which little evidence is yet available, but that are important focus areas for impact investors and practitioners in the EFN membership.
- 2. Gender equity:** To respond to EFN member requests to highlight greater evidence around gender, the EFN team added a new outcomes category to the tool called “gender equity.” This aimed to capture studies that were not included within “female enrollment” and “female drop-out rate” including, for example, ECE programs that enhance employment opportunities for female entrepreneurs and caregivers.
- 3. ECE:** The updated EGM responded to a growing interest in ECE programs by highlighting more research in this area. As noted above, many of these ECE interventions also highlighted gender outcomes.
- 4. Ancillary services:** The initial version of the EGM highlighted significant research available on ancillary services, including teacher training, EdTech, and school leadership, but included only systematic reviews rather than primary studies or gray literature. The updated version of the EGM added research on ancillary services from across a wider range of study types.
- 5. Latin America:** While the initial version of the EGM relied only on English-language sources, the updated version of the EGM includes research published in Spanish and Portuguese in order to better capture research conducted in Latin American contexts.

Lastly, the updated EGM included new research produced by EFN members themselves and prioritized gray literature from practitioners in order to be most relevant to EFN members’ work.

### 3. Methodology

To update the EGM, a desktop literature review was conducted to gather key source material published between 2015 and 2023, including academic studies, systematic reviews, evaluations, and other reports. The desktop review relied primarily on backward and forward snowballing methods (reference tracking and citation tracking) in which initial source materials were used to identify further sources based on reference lists or citation tracking in Google Scholar. This method was supplemented with the use of key search terms in Google Scholar that searched for exact matches of each intervention and outcome area (e.g., “Public-Private Partnership” AND “learning outcomes”). Each source was then coded with author, date, intervention and outcome areas, source type, country and regional focus, and key findings. In addition to reference tracking and targeted Google Scholar searches, the team also proactively requested that EFN members share research they had recently published, and searched directly on member websites for new publications.

#### Limitations

This desktop review relied primarily on snowball sampling methods of publicly available sources, with key search terms on Google Scholar used as a supplemental method to check against initial gaps, as noted above. As such, it was not possible to ensure that all relevant published research was captured, in particular for those sources that are not frequently cited by other authors, published in online databases or by EFN members. While effort was made to prioritize practitioner and gray literature research by proactively searching on practitioner websites and reaching out to EFN members, it was not possible to capture all gray literature comprehensively, as it is most often scattered across multiple databases and websites.

An effort has been made to include research studies published in Spanish and Portuguese, but language limitations remain a barrier that could determine the omission of relevant publications. This review was also limited to studies focused on low- and middle-income countries, and excluded studies related to higher education or high-end private schools, as it assumes these studies to be less relevant to the research aims. However, it is possible some studies related to these areas produced relevant findings that were not captured in this EGM. Lastly, studies included in the updated EGM were restricted by publication dates between 2015–2023.

### 4. Key Findings

The EGM is organized into three intervention types (vertical axis) and three outcome types (horizontal axis), resulting in nine quadrants. In the original version of the EGM, this framework included a total of 22 interventions and 20 outcomes that were identified as priority research topics during initial consultations with key stakeholders and through an EFN needs assessment conducted in 2021. The update to the EGM incorporated four additional interventions and one additional outcome beyond the 42 areas that were originally identified.

Figure 1 illustrates the total volume of evidence in the nine quadrants captured in the updated version of the EGM.

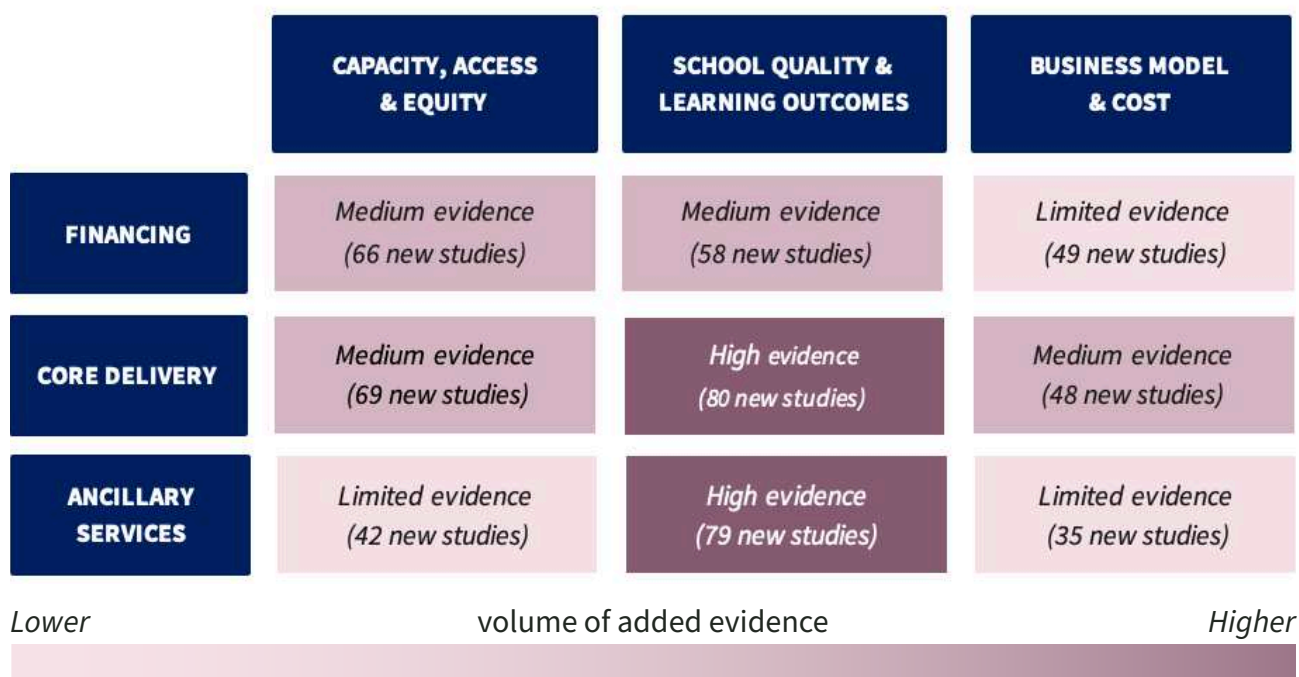


Figure 1: EGM Quadrant Analysis Visual

Please note that this graphic includes both new studies that were added to the updated EGM, in addition to studies that were already included in the previous version, but were coded to new categories in the update.

Overall, evidence gaps and areas with high concentrations of evidence in the second iteration of the EGM are consistent with the first review. For a summary of that first-round analysis, please refer to the *Supplemental Report and Quadrant Analysis* that was published alongside the original EGM. Below is an analysis of the updated areas only:

### Analysis of evidence gaps

A high-level analysis of the updates to the EGM revealed that there remains a limited amount of research and evidence in the following areas:

- Impact of ancillary services beyond test scores:** As discussed above, research for the updated EGM sought to focus on ancillary service provision, including EdTech, teacher training, and school leaders training. This research revealed gaps in evidence on the impact of ancillary services outside of test scores. These gaps include, for example, evidence on whether ancillary services lead to greater parental engagement, access to teaching and learning materials, or diversity, equity, and inclusion in curriculum and language of instruction.
- Gender equity:** In the EGM update, a concerted effort was made to include a greater focus on gender outcomes, including female enrollment, female drop-out rate, and gendered access to EdTech, among other outcomes. Despite strong evidence around female enrollment rates and access to EdTech, there remains a limited number of studies on female drop-out rate. As such, more research is needed to examine the longer-term impacts of non-state education interventions on female drop-out rates and long-term educational attainment for girls.
- Innovative finance:** While the recent EGM update identified more studies on innovative finance in education, the evidence in this area remains constrained when compared to other high-volume areas. Evidence is limited around results-based finance, school improvement loans, and impact bonds for education. Further, new methods of innovative financing, such as social impact incentives and social impact guarantees, lack any rigorous evidence, and

no high-quality studies were identified in these two areas. Despite this gap in evidence, the second round of research found a slightly higher volume of evidence on cost-effectiveness when compared to the first round, indicating that cost-effectiveness is becoming more of a priority to researchers, particularly in gray literature produced by practitioner organizations.

- **Latin America:** The initial research conducted for the EGM found that few studies focused on Latin America, revealing a significant regional gap. For this update, a concerted effort was made to include more studies focused on the Latin America region, namely by including studies published in Spanish and Portuguese. However, there is still limited research on the Latin American context when compared to other regions. The updated EGM found 65 studies in Latin America, compared to 135 in Sub-Saharan Africa and 90 in Asia.

## Analysis of areas with high concentrations of evidence

A high-level analysis of the updated EGM demonstrates that there continues to be a large volume of evidence on the impact of learning outcomes and the role of ancillary services such as EdTech and teacher training. Specifically, the updated EGM highlighted a higher concentration of research on early learning outcomes and the intersection of ancillary services and gender equity, as well as cost effectiveness.

- **Learning outcomes:** As with the first iteration of the EGM, a large amount of new evidence focuses on learning outcomes across all 26 intervention areas. Since the second round of research focused on evidence around ECE, a key priority area for EFN members, the update includes a large number of studies tracking early learning outcomes.
- **EdTech:** Consistent with the first iteration of the EGM, the update revealed a high volume of evidence on ancillary services and learning outcomes, including EdTech. In the updated research, many studies on EdTech focus on gender equity, recognizing that gendered access to technology might impede equitable learning outcomes for female students if it is not taken into consideration during program design. Other studies also examine the cost effectiveness of EdTech interventions when compared to traditional learning approaches.
- **Teacher Training:** The updates include a significant amount of research and evidence on teacher training and professional development across a range of models, including cascade or train-the-trainer models, peer-to-peer or cluster-based training, and coaching and mentorship. The majority of these studies focus on the impact of teacher training on student learning outcomes, while a smaller but still substantial number also consider gender equity and cost-effectiveness.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

DISCLAIMER: This report was made possible through support provided by CATALYZE, a Private Sector Engagement Hub, Bureau for Inclusive Growth, Partnerships, and Innovation (IPI), U.S. Agency for International Development, under the terms of Contract No. 7200AA19C00080. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development.