

What evidence do we have on transferable skills programming for youth in low- and middle-income countries?

“The skills and knowledge young people acquire must be relevant to the current economy and enable them to become innovators, thinkers and problem-solvers.”
United Nations Population Fund

Development policymakers recognise that to succeed in today’s complex world, young people living in low- and middle-income countries (L&MICs) need to apply skills beyond those traditionally taught in classrooms. Transferable skills, also referred to as non-cognitive, soft or life skills, enable youth to adapt to and solve problems across work and life situations. Donors, governments and NGOs are increasingly focused on interventions to increase these skills. There is great interest about which of these interventions work, for whom, how and at what cost?

What are transferable skills?

Transferable skills are distinct from vocational skills and cognitive skills, such as literacy and numeracy. They provide youth with the tools and confidence needed to succeed in terms of employment, health and personal well-being. Examples include communication, critical thinking, decision-making, negotiation, perseverance, problem solving and self-efficacy. Recent literature reviews by social scientists find a connection between transferable skills and educational, health and labour market outcomes in L&MICs.

Main findings

3ie identified 90 impact evaluations of transferable skills interventions for youth in L&MICs.

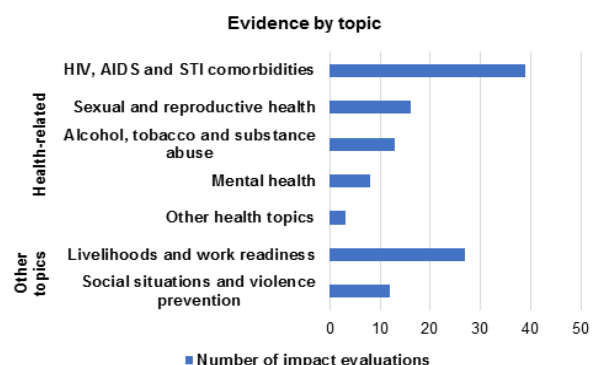
Evidence by topic

Assessing the frame of reference of these studies, we found that only one-third of the evidence base is related to livelihoods and work readiness. In education, very few studies measured academic outcomes. The majority of current evidence on this topic is related to health and focuses largely on HIV prevention.

What are evidence gap maps?

3ie evidence gap maps (EGMs) provide an overview of rigorous evidence on the effects of development policies and programmes in a particular sector or thematic area in L&MICs. They consolidate evidence from impact evaluations and systematic reviews to identify research gaps and provide easy access to existing research. All EGMs are structured around a framework of interventions and outcomes. They include a graphical display of the framework and are accompanied by a short report.

About the map: 3ie created the youth and transferable skills evidence gap map as part of a scoping research project funded by the John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation and The MasterCard Foundation. The map and report and the related scoping paper are available on [3ie's website](#).



Evidence by country

Just over half of the 90 studies evaluate interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa. In order of prevalence, the other half is spread across Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa and Europe. The heat map (Figure 1) depicts where there is evidence available.

Filling the gaps: priorities for further research

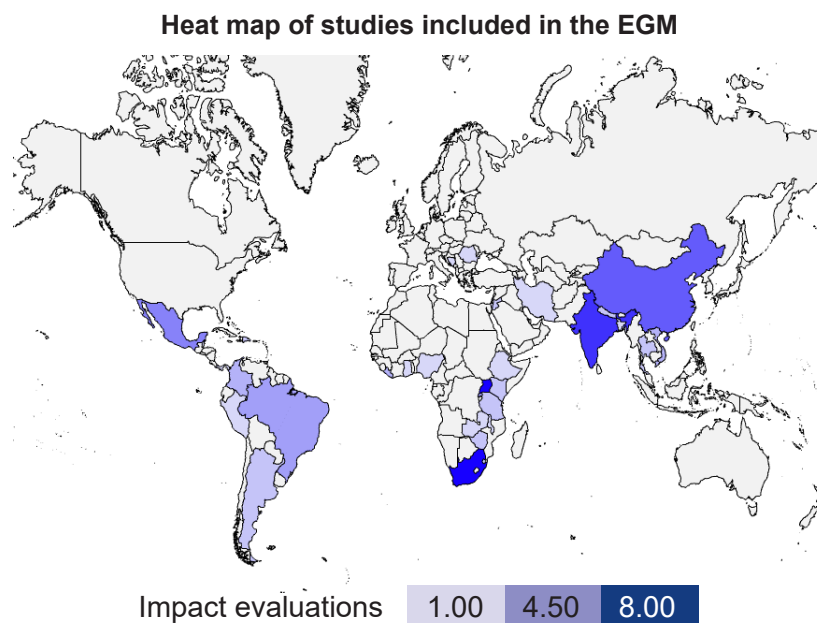
In consultation with experts, including policymakers, implementers, researchers and donors, 3ie identified priority questions for future impact evaluation investments that could help fill evidence gaps:

- Curriculum reform and teacher training to build transferable skills
- Teacher incentives and capacity building
- Learner-centred approaches for teaching transferable skills
- Academic and schooling outcomes

Promising questions for synthesis research

The 3ie evidence mapping also reveals promising concentrations of evidence with potential for research synthesis:

- Skills courses inserted into formal education settings
- Stand-alone transferable skills courses
- Technical vocational education and training programmes that intentionally incorporate transferable skills elements



The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) is an international grant-making NGO promoting evidence-informed development policies and programmes. We are the global leader in funding, producing and synthesising high-quality evidence of what works, for whom, why and at what cost. We believe that high-quality and policy-relevant evidence will help make development more effective and improve people's lives.

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For more information about this brief, contact krankin@3ieimpact.org

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