



1. Project Data

Project ID P148110	Project Name EQRP	
Country Mongolia	Practice Area(Lead) Education	
L/C/TF Number(s) IDA-54880	Closing Date (Original) 31-Dec-2019	Total Project Cost (USD) 27,075,670.58
Bank Approval Date 06-Jun-2014	Closing Date (Actual) 30-Jun-2023	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	30,000,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	29,999,897.99	0.00
Actual	27,075,670.58	0.00

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The PDO was identical in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD) and Financing Agreement (FA). It was stated as follows: “The Project Development Objectives are to improve the quality of education for primary school children in Mongolia, with particular emphasis on improving native language and mathematical skills, and strengthen school-level planning” (FA, p. 4; and PAD, p. ii).

At a second restructuring (2020), the PDO was revised to add an additional aim, as follows: “The revised PDO would be ‘to improve the quality of education for primary school children in Mongolia, with particular emphasis



on improving native language and mathematical skills, strengthen school-level planning, and increase support for child welfare transfers during the COVID-19 emergency” (Restructuring Paper, p. 10).

In this case, application of the split rating methodology due to the added objective would not change the overall efficacy or Outcome ratings. To avoid unnecessary complexity, a split rating is therefore not used in this Review.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

Yes

Date of Board Approval

15-Jun-2020

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

Component 1: Improving learning outcomes (Appraised cost: US\$14.9 million, Revised cost: US\$11.4 million, Actual cost: US\$10.75 million).

The purpose of this component was to ensure that by the end of grade 2 of primary school, Mongolian students could read fluently and had mastered basic numeracy and math skills. Sub-component 1.1 would scale up several key interventions of the predecessor Rural Education and Development (READ) project nationally. That project, which was implemented from 2006-2013, aimed to improve rural students' access and use of quality learning materials and improve teachers' skills. Specific activities under this sub-component were to include provision of books and materials, creation of school libraries, a public reading campaign, development of scientific and mathematics-focused children's books, content development for special needs children, and an impact evaluation/assessment. Sub-component 1.2 would support a national rollout of skills assessments of native language and mathematics for grades 1 and 2 students and a national assessment for grade 5. The project would support: (i) development and validation of the early grade assessment instruments; (ii) training of teachers in appropriately using the instruments and interpreting results; (iii) on-site monitoring and support on the correct use of the instruments; and (iv) development of corrective and/or preventive policy and tailored-made interventions. With respect to the grade 5 assessment, the project intended to support: (i) strengthening of the Education Evaluation Center (EEC) to administer and analyze the assessment; (ii) developing and validating the standardized assessment test; and (iii) training for school administrators and teachers in preparation for the nationwide administration of the assessment, including: (a) administering the test; (b) scoring and grading; (c) data capture and entry; (d) developing and administering quality control mechanisms of the results; and (e) using the results to support systems and policies for pedagogical and curricular improvement.

Component 2: Pre- and in-service professional development of teachers (Appraised cost: US\$3.3 million, Revised cost: US\$3.1 million, Actual cost: US\$2.58 million).



The purpose of this component was to upgrade teacher quality by helping teachers develop the appropriate tools to provide individualized support for all children to improve their learning outcomes, in particular reading and mathematical skills for grades 1 and 2. Sub-component 2.1 aimed to support primary education Teacher Training Institutions throughout the country by (i) providing high quality teaching and learning equipment and materials, especially for early grade reading and mathematics; (ii) funding in-service training for teacher trainers; and (iii) a review of the practicum programs for teacher trainees, especially relating to teaching and learning practices of early grade reading and mathematics. Both pre- and in-service training programs planned to develop: (a) sample scripts that would help teachers initiate children into reading, and (b) teaching methods and materials to improve skills that have been shown to be highly predictive of later mathematical skills. Sub-component 2.2 would support (i) in-service pedagogical training for teachers, especially in the use of early grade learning materials for reading and mathematics and in classroom-level assessments of achievement; (ii) in-service training and hands-on support to improve academic leadership of school principals, and (iii) strengthening the capacity of and providing enabling support to district and provincial education officers, methodologists, school principals, and teachers. The project would also support carrying out classroom observations using the internationally comparable Stallings instrument to measure teachers' use of instructional time, materials, and core pedagogical practices. This would help assess the effectiveness of the training provided and derive lessons learned to feed back into the pre- and in-service teacher training programs.

Component 3: Implementation of a school support program (Appraised cost: US\$6.1 million, Revised cost: US\$8.6 million, Actual cost: US\$7.3 million).

This component would scale up the Ministry of Education and Science's (MES) "Talent Program" of school financing from the initial 100 pilot schools to all primary schools in the country. It would provide about US\$3,000 per school per block of financing for them to implement an approved school quality enhancement proposal. This would transfer funds from the MES to schools to spend autonomously to implement an approved school proposal that included objectives, targets, and a budget. All primary schools nation-wide would be able to apply for this financing, whose broad purpose would be to increase the quality of education, including providing enrichment opportunities for students. Independent annual audits would be conducted to ensure that financing was used in compliance with the approved proposals. The component included support for increasing the time available for learning, along with the development of a school-level planning function. A School Support Handbook, developed as an attachment to the Project Operation Manual, identified broad areas of eligible expenditures such as co-curricular activities, management, staff development, services, teaching materials, furniture and equipment, and minor maintenance.

Component 4: System management, monitoring, and evaluation (Appraised cost: US\$5.7 million, Revised cost: US\$1.9 million, Actual cost: US\$1.45 million).

This component would assist MES to effectively implement the project with the support of qualified technical assistance (TA). The TA would include: (i) a chief technical advisor and financial management and procurement specialists attached to the office of the Project Director; and (ii) qualified consultants attached to the working groups established for project implementation. The component would also finance an impact evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the project in improving reading and mathematics learning outcomes in primary schools by supporting (i) the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation of the MES and the EEC to integrate student learning outcomes into the tracking of learning trends; and (ii) capacity building for the MES in financial management, internal audit, and procurement.



Components 5: Social Welfare Transfers to Families of Needy Students (Appraised cost: US\$5 million, Actual cost: US\$5 million).

This component was added at the second Restructuring in 2020 to support government efforts to provide cash transfers to poor households to help offset income shocks. As part of a US\$1.8 billion government COVID-19 emergency relief package, the project was asked to contribute up to US\$5 million to top up cash transfers under the Child Money Program for children aged 0-18 years.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Costs: Total project costs were estimated at appraisal at US\$30 million over five years. (The system-generated part of the ICR shows a revised amount of \$29,999,898 which the project team was unable to explain; presumably a system error.) The final disbursements at closing were US\$27,075,671, 90.25 percent of the original amount committed. The allocations for the components were revised during the restructuring to reflect expected disbursements, given implementation progress and use to date, and to enable reallocation of funds for child welfare payments in response to the income shocks caused by COVID-19. The allocations to components 1, 2 and 4 were reduced from US\$14.9 million to US\$11.4 million, US\$3.3 million to US\$3.1 million, and US\$5.7 million to US\$1.9 million respectively; US\$5 million was allocated for child welfare payments; and the allocation to component 3 (the school grants program) was increased from US\$6.1 million to US\$8.6 million. The percentage of the revised allocations disbursed for each component ranged from 76 percent (component 4) to 100 percent (component 5).

Project Financing: The project was fully financed by an IDA credit of US\$30 million (IDA-54880). The lending instrument was Investment Project Financing with Disbursement–Linked Indicators (DLIs) to sharpen the focus on results. Funding for components 1 and 3 was planned to be disbursed against evidence that DLI annual targets had been achieved and eligible expenditures incurred, with verification done semi-annually by a third-party.

Borrower/Recipient Contribution: No financial contribution was expected from the Borrower (PAD, p. 2).

Dates: The project was approved on June 6, 2014, and became effective a little more than a year later on August 17, 2015. A mid-term review was held in May 2018. The project closed on June 30, 2023, after three extensions (3.5 years later than the original closing date).

The project was restructured three times (all Level 2). The **first restructuring**, in June 2015, extended the closing date by one year to compensate for a delay in effectiveness caused by a government restructuring in 2014, and updated the designated Recipient's representative from the Ministry of Economic Development (which had been abolished) to the Ministry of Finance, and change the name of the implementing agency from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

A more consequential **second restructuring** in June 2020 supported Mongolia's efforts to lessen the economic and educational impacts caused by COVID-19. The following changes were made: (1) distance learning and other strategic education activities were added to support learning during the pandemic; (2) the DLI approach was cancelled because it had not been used (although most results were in fact being met, the government used the more familiar procedure of reimbursement against statement of expenditure); (3) the year 5 DLI targets were dropped, and the funds released were reallocated; (4) a new component was added to support child welfare during the COVID emergency through the Child Money Program (CMP), and



a new disbursement category was added for this component; (5) an additional fifth cycle of school grants was added to Component 3 to help enable schools to address the learning lags resulting from COVID closures; (6) the PDO was revised to add the new component, and the results framework was modified in accordance with the restructuring; and (7) the closing date was extended by two years to December 31, 2022. At the time of the Restructuring, total disbursement was US\$16.52 million, 55 percent of the original allocation.

The **third restructuring** in December 2022 extended the closing date by six months to June 30, 2023, to provide time to complete activities that had been delayed by long school closures, and to complete an evaluation of the project's effectiveness.

A split evaluation will not be undertaken. Although a split evaluation is usually indicated when the PDO changes, in this case, the outcome ratings would be the same under both the original and revised objectives. Furthermore, the overall scope of the project did not change significantly, with additions and items dropped balancing each out. The scope of the project was increased by adding social welfare payments and distance learning activities, enabled by dropping the year five targets for some of the original activities, and with corresponding changes made in the PDO indicator targets and Intermediate Results Indicators (IRIs). Although one of the PDO indicator targets was set slightly lower than originally intended, and the grade 5 evaluation and fifth-year targets for some activities were dropped in the second restructuring, these changes were offset by the additional activities (child welfare payments, fifth round of school funding, and distance learning activities).

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

Alignment with Country Strategy

The project's objectives were well aligned with the WBG's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) FY21-FY25 goals (at project closing). Improving the quality of primary education is an important contributor to the CPF overarching goal of supporting inclusive and sustainable growth and resilient recovery. The additions to the project in the 2020 restructuring helped address the impact of COVID-19 on education by introducing e-learning platforms and online education content, especially for helping schools deliver catch-up lessons, teacher professional development, and school-based management and opportunities to reach remote populations. The project was aligned with the CPF focus on improved quality of life, and its objective of improving the quality of education.

Suitability to Country Context

The project was consistent with the goals and objectives of "Vision-2050," which sets out Mongolia's long-term development goals; with the government policy on education (2014-2024); and with Mongolia's Education Sector Mid-Term Development Plan (2021-2030). The latter new strategy identified the sector priorities as to enhance the equity, quality, and relevance of education services in the country, and incorporates the effective implementation of this project.



Having successfully extended access to basic education, the government placed more emphasis on improving the quality of primary and secondary education. The country needs skilled workers able to cope with rapid changes resulting from the country's new mineral wealth, transition to middle-income status, increasing rural to urban migration, and structural changes in its labor market. These factors increase the need for the education system to deliver better quality skills (cognitive, non-cognitive, and technical skills) to help its citizens deal with complex and unexpected tasks and to continue to learn throughout their lives. This imperative implied a sharpened focus on increasing the quality of education, starting from the earliest ages, which was the project objective.

Relationship to Sector Experience

The project followed and built on an IDA-financed *Rural Education and Development (READ)* project, 2006-2013, that aimed to enhance the quality of education in rural primary schools by improving students' access and use of quality learning materials and improving teachers' skills through professional networks and learning. This project scaled up the activities of the READ project nationwide and continued to support the government's efforts to improve education quality, with specific focus on Mongolian language and mathematics teaching and learning in basic education.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve the quality of education for primary school children in Mongolia, with particular emphasis on improving native language and mathematical skills

Rationale

The theory of change was that improvements in the quantity and quality of learning and teaching materials, and in teaching skills and methods (through teacher training), provision of grants to schools to address the needs they identified, and regular student achievement assessments, would together result in improvements in the quality of primary school education, especially in native language and mathematics, as evidenced by improved student learning achievements.

Outputs and Intermediate Results

- The Mongolian language textbooks used in primary grades were analyzed and found to be deficient in several ways. Standard requirements and criteria for selecting and writing reading texts for the subject of Mongolian language were developed to help in selecting and guiding how to develop reading texts.



New, better quality reading books were developed consistent with these requirements, incorporating input from representatives of the Mongolian Institute for Educational Research (MIER), Faculties of Linguistics and Literature of the Mongolian National University of Education (MNUE), Language and Literature Institute, Council for National Language Policy, textbook writers, the General Authority for Education (GAE), children's book authors, and primary teachers. Each primary grade class in 553 schools received a full set of reading books, a total of nearly half a million books (468,995). Textbooks, workbooks, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and other learning materials were also provided to schools across the country. For many rural schools, these were the first materials received in many years.

- STEM tool sets were introduced in 625 primary schools, and 15,425 sets of tools were supplied. The tool sets were designed to provide all primary grade students with opportunities to apply what they learned in mathematics, science, technology, and other subjects using real tools, to better understand the causes of natural things and phenomena and the laws on which science experiments were based, and to stimulate their interest, teamwork skills, independent learning, creative thinking, and inventing skills.
- At least one or two primary education teachers from each school were selected as the focal point and trained as STEM trainers, to provide cascade training to all primary education teachers in how to implement the STEM program. The GAE converted the STEM teaching resources into electronic format and created a methodological manual for future use and reference.
- Various electronic learning platforms were introduced, the internet network was developed, and computers and smart devices were supplied to support students' learning and distance learning.
- School libraries were set up in schools without them, and additional books were provided to schools with libraries. A book selection committee was established, and a catalogue of the best children's books was developed. An online module was developed through the education management information system that schools could use to order books for their libraries, which were then delivered to them. The MES also ordered and provided books for Kazakh children in Bayan-Ulgii province in cooperation with the MIER.
- The project supported capacity building of school librarians, to help sustain and encourage full use of the libraries.
- A new student assessment methodology and process were developed, and the national assessment structure was reformed, including technical, technological, and software upgrades to ensure the safety and reliability of assessment data. A working group of experts developed criteria for student achievement in each subject. Skill training was provided to assessment specialists and to staff to enable them to implement the assessment reforms and interpret the data.
- Student formative assessment—early grade reading (EGRA) and early grade mathematics (EGMA), new in the Mongolian primary education evaluation system—were adapted, developed, and disseminated nationwide. The assessment results informed development of new pedagogical approaches to teaching reading and mathematics to primary grade students, as well as guidelines for selecting and developing appropriate teaching materials. The assessments results have fed into teacher training.
- The project supported the first assessment of first-grade students' school readiness. In a pilot assessment in 2021-2022 of 23,462 students from 325 schools, the average performance was 61 percent. The national school readiness assessment in 2022-2023 of 70,049 students from 2,524 first grade classes of 650 state-owned schools had an average score of 73 percent.
- Many schools (387) received distance learning materials during COVID-19.



- An evaluation of learning losses after students returned to school in September 2021, after about 18 months of school closures during COVID, aimed to identify the challenges of distance learning and the content lag for each grade and subject. The findings were used to create guidelines for school management and teachers to create and carry out an action plan to identify groups with the greatest learning losses, address the losses, and train teachers. All grants in Cycle 5 of the school grant program (SGP) were allocated to projects aimed at eliminating learning loss and supporting e-transition of education.
- A progress assessment conducted nationwide in May 2022 of 244,480 students in grades 1-5 in Mongolian language (including Kazakh and Tuva), mathematics, English, physical education, music, visual arts, technology, and health education, to assess the impact of the actions to address the learning losses, found improvements at every primary grade, but persistent gaps in 35 of the 72 learning objectives in the primary school curriculum.
- Mongolia participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the first time with project support. After preparatory work, a pilot was done in 19 schools in 2021. A full-scale study was completed in 2022, with results submitted to the Organization for International Cooperation and Development.
- Teacher training programs and continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities were provided through the project. In-service training regulations were changed to replace training every fifth year with continuously organized competence development. Another change was to direct funding to teachers and their chosen development targets instead of to the institutions organizing CPD.
- Project support for inclusive education included the establishment of a resource room (called Model Child Development Centers) in one school in each of the 21 aimags (provinces), furnished and equipped with books, teaching and learning materials, computers and other special equipment, toys for special needs, and printed and audio books suitable for children with special needs. Training was delivered by facilitators from the MIER and General Authority of Education for school administrators, training managers, primary teachers, and disability education specialists in all 21 schools. A training module on how to use the center and materials for each type of disability was developed. When a survey of mainstream teachers found that 66 percent reported not being ready or confident to teach children with special needs, a special needs education team was employed to mentor teachers in their schools. Content was developed for special needs children.
- A Mongolian Sign Language standard curriculum and related electronic materials were developed for the MNUE undergraduate program to train special needs education teachers. The project also provided support to six special education schools, giving each a US\$ 5,000 grant to help improve the learning environment and update materials, equipment, and resources.

Intermediate Results Indicators

All twelve relevant IRIs in the revised results framework **were met or exceeded** (ICR, pp. 12-13). The table below shows the baselines, targets, and actual achievements for each IRI, showing the original IRIs as well as the revisions.

IRIs, baselines, targets, and results for Objective 1

Indicator	Status at 2020 Restructuring	Baseline	Target
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IRI1: Number of schools benefiting from full set of reading books available in the classrooms	New	0	500
IRI 2: Mongolia participation in PISA 2021 assessment	New	No	Yes
IRI 3: Number of schools that received distance learning materials for distribution during COVID-19 emergency	New	0	300
IRI 4: Number of inclusive education resource rooms available	New	0	22
IRI 5: Large-scale primary/secondary learning assessments completed	Revised. Original IRI was "System for learning assessment at the primary level." ICR reported that the target was increased from 3 to 4 (p. 56).	0	4
IRI 6: Percentage of grade 2 teachers reporting native language assessment results	Target revised up from +80 percentage points from baseline	0	93
IRI 7: Percentage of grade 2 teachers reporting assessment results on: (a) addition, and (b) identification of missing numbers in a sequence	Indicator revised to drop subtraction from assessment. Target revised up from an increase of 60 percentage points over baseline.	0	89
IRI 8: Of the total number of primary school teachers to be trained during the project life, the average percentage that improved their knowledge in native language assessment methodology	Wording revised to include all primary school teachers (not only grades 1 and 2) and to change the success criterion from "achieved intended competency levels" to "improved their knowledge." Target revised from an increase of 60 percentage points over baseline.	0	65
IRI 9: Of the total number of primary school teachers to be trained during the project life, the average percentage that improved their knowledge in early grade mathematical skills assessment	Wording revised to include all primary school teachers (not only grades 1 and 2) and to change the success criterion from "achieved intended competency levels" to "improved their knowledge." Target revised from an increase of 60 percentage points over baseline.	0	65
IRI 10: Average percentage of the school year allocated for instruction in the classroom	No change	59	65
IRI : Mongolia participation in PISA 2022 assessment	New. Replaced "Roll out of Grade 5 National Assessment," which was dropped	No	Yes
IRI 14: Students benefiting from direct interventions to enhance learning.	Revised indicator, was not in PAD results framework.	0	506,000
Sub-Indicator: Female students... (etc)		0	240,000
Dropped indicator not reported on:			



Number of additional qualified primary teachers resulting from project interventions			
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Outcomes

The PDO indicator target for **improvement in native language skills was not met**. The average number of words read correctly per minute at the end of grade 2 increased by 2 percent, from 44 to 45, compared to the original target increase of 20 percent, slightly revised in 2020 to a numeric target of 50 words per minute (a 14 percent increase). Improvements were similar for boys and girls: from 40 to 42 for boys, and from 47 to 48 for girls. Reading scores were higher at the midline evaluation than at the endline (Annex 10, p. 69), at just over 46 words per minute, meeting the interim target for that year. (The original indicator required that the reading be “with comprehension”; this clause was dropped in 2020 because it required merging results from two separate tasks in the assessment. The change is moot because the simplified target was not met.)

The PDO indicator for **improvement in mathematical skills was partially achieved**. The average number of correct additions per minute at the end of grade 2 increased from 14 to 15, a 7 percent increase, compared to the original target of a 10 percent increase, and the more ambitious revised target of 16 correct additions per minute (a 14 percent increase). Girls and boys started at the same baseline. Girls showed no improvement, while boys improved by more than the target, from 14 to 17. Midline mathematics scores were not collected; the baseline survey was not done until 2017. (The original indicator included both addition and subtraction, but the latter was dropped in 2020 to simplify data collection by requiring one rather than two tasks to be assessed.)

The ICR noted that even these modest gains are a positive result, given the enormous disruption to learning that resulted from schools being closed from January 2020 through September 2021 as a result of COVID-19. Mongolia closed schools for longer than most countries, and many countries have reported losses in test scores as a result of COVID-related school closures. By contrast, the project assessment summarized in Annex 10 shows gains in far more tasks assessed than tasks that failed to show gains.

Moreover, the end-line evaluation was done after the summer vacation, rather than at the end of the school year. Assessments of American elementary school children show large declines in learning during summer vacations (an average of 21-18 percent for grades 1-3 in a large, nationally representative sample from the USA: Atteberry, A., & McEachin, A. (2021). "School's Out: The Role of Summers in Understanding Achievement Disparities," *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(2), 239-282. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831220937285>).

The project team (conversation on March 18, 2024) explained that project activities were subject to many delays, starting with taking an entire year for the project to become effective. Mongolia is highly centralized, and this—along with frequent changes in Ministry staff—often caused delays in decisions. The teacher training that was expected to be very important in driving improvements in teaching quality and student learning outcomes did not get underway until 4 or 5 years into the project. The teacher training in math mostly took place in 2021/22, close to the end of the project.

Rating



Modest

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Strengthen school-level planning

Rationale

The theory of change was that offering schools grants directed towards specific improvement objectives, and giving schools the authority to manage their proposed projects themselves, would provide motivation and the means for schools to improve their planning capacity as well as improve schools.

Outputs and Intermediate Results

The School Grant Program (SGP) offered schools the chance to apply for grants to improve the quality of the education they provided. The planning skills to be developed required the schools to assess what they needed to do to improve education quality, write grant proposals which defined an objective, determined targets for the objective, and outlined activities and a budget, and then successfully carry out the proposed activities to achieve the targets and objectives. Results and the accomplishment of the project objectives were assessed regularly. The ministry and local teams monitored each cycle of the SGP, and external evaluations were conducted for each cycle. The measure of success was that an increasing percentage of schools would be successful in getting these grants, that there would be high levels of beneficiary satisfaction with the activities supported by the grants, and that an increasing percentage of the school that received grants would achieve the targets and objectives defined in their proposals, an indicator of improving skills in thinking through and planning and achieving the implementation of the activities.

Five rounds of school grants (SGP) were implemented, funding a total of 2,113 projects and benefiting all 650 elementary schools in the country, including 50 grants to primary education specialists at local education departments and 62 to parent-teacher associations. The grant goals frequently supported achievement of the first project objective; for example, the grant focus areas included improving the quality, learning environment, and outcomes in science subjects; improving native language skills and encouraging children to read books; promoting mathematical thinking; developing teachers in their workplaces and increasing opportunities to learn from others and exchange experiences; and encouraging teachers to learn to use electronic learning materials and applications to eliminate learning losses.

MES and a local team monitored each cycle of the SGP, and external evaluations were conducted for each cycle. The ICR reported that the quality of the projects submitted for the grant improved from cycle to cycle (ICR, p. 14).

Both relevant IRIs were exceeded: the percentage of schools under the project using school grant funding for pedagogical-related activities was 78 percent compared to the 60 percent target; and beneficiary satisfaction with school grant-supported activities (assessed through surveys) was 74 percent, above the 70 percent target.



Outcomes

The indicator for this objective was the **percentage of schools receiving grant financing through the project that successfully achieved the school proposal objectives** and agreed targets. The target for the first year was just 10 percent, increasing to 30 percent in the second year, and then to 70 percent from the third cycle. In the first three years, the interim targets were met or exceeded (Cycle 1: 66 percent, Cycle 2: 52 percent, Cycle 3: 70 percent). In Cycle 4, the result fell to 55 percent because project activities were interrupted, canceled, or not fully completed due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fifth cycle results were not reported in the ICR, but overall, the ICR reported the achievement at 64 percent, substantially meeting the target.

Rating

Substantial

OBJECTIVE 3

Objective

Increase support for child welfare transfers during the COVID-19 emergency (added at second Restructuring)

Rationale

The **theory of change** was that cash transfers to families would help protect the welfare of children from the impact of COVID-related effects.

Mongolia had an existing “Child Money Program” (CMP) that was providing monthly cash transfers of the equivalent of \$7 per child to poor households. The 2020 Restructuring Paper explained that: “This program is an important safety net for lower income households. According to the Household Socio-Economic Survey (HSES 2018), the CMP covers 87 percent of poor households. CMP benefits are important for lower-income households, in particular the bottom 10 percent of households who rely on this monthly transfer as more than 10 percent of their income.” (Restructuring Paper 2020, p2). This existing Government system of social assistance for children included beneficiary databases, payment systems, human resources and monitoring mechanisms. Such cash assistance programs reach households quickly, with minimal administrative costs.

Outputs

An important part of the GoM response to COVID-related income losses was a relief package of US\$1.8 billion that included an increase (for six months) in the CMP amount per child from \$7 to \$36, for the 1.19 million children aged 0-18 in families receiving CMP. The aim was to help poor households with children offset lost income, to protect child nutrition and well-being. The EQRP was asked to contribute up to US\$5 million towards the estimated cost of US\$32 million per month of the increase in the CMP transfers. (Contributions were made also from other WB projects and other Development Partners to help the Government to finance its COVID response.) The project team identified savings that were reallocated to the new component to contribute to the Child Money Program (CMP). The funds were transferred as planned, in a timely way.

Outcomes



The indicator was fully met: **US\$5 million was distributed** through the “Social Welfare Fund top up allocated to children during the COVID-19 emergency.” Such cash transfers are well documented to be an efficient and effective way to reduce child poverty.

Rating

Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

One PDO target was fully met, one substantially met, one partially met, and one not achieved. The intermediary indicators were met or exceeded. The gender-specific goal that 52 percent of the beneficiaries should be female was substantially achieved (at 51 percent). Student test scores may have been higher had the evaluation been done at the end of the school year, rather than after the long vacation.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

Ex ante efficiency assessment

The project was expected to yield positive private returns (presumably through higher lifetime earnings) and developmental impact through productivity and income gains resulting from better educational attainment and quality. Higher-quality primary education was expected to yield gains through lower repetition and dropout rates, higher enrollment rates, better long-term cognitive development, and greater school attainment. In addition, improved educational quality could help ease socio-economic inequality by addressing inequality in opportunities, fostering improved nutritional outcomes, and providing other benefits.

The PAD reported that a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of Component 1 (national scaling up the READ project that provided science- and mathematics-focused books for primary school children via classroom libraries) and Component 2 (improving teaching quality through a cascaded scheme of in-service teacher training), based on the actual quantity and costs of the earlier READ project and a reasonable projection of project costs, estimated significant returns. The CBA estimated a combined net present value (NPV) of US\$2.09 million and an internal rate of return (IRR) of 13 percent. Individual assessments of each component were reported also to have shown promising returns. The NPV from higher educational attainment resulting from access to books via classroom libraries was estimated at US\$0.95 million. The IRR from the classroom libraries scheme was 12 percent. The in-service teacher training scheme NPV was US\$1.14 million, and the IRR was 14 percent. These results were robust to changes in “virtually all of the critical variables” (PAD, p. 13). However, no details were provided of



what benefits were assumed (or any other assumptions) or how monetary values were assigned to the projected benefits.

Ex post efficiency assessment

The ICR did not replicate the CBA done during appraisal “due to unavailable information of the analysis conducted at that stage and the absence of direct measures for assessing the achievement of the project's objectives. EQRP is centered on enhancing the quality of education, and it lacks a direct metric for quantifying the return on this aspect of quality improvement” (ICR, p. 16).

The ICR did attempt an estimate of the IRR, but without providing convincing substantiating data. The ICR asserted that the average number of words read correctly per minute at the end of grade 2 rose from 44 to 45 words (ICR, p. 47), but this is not consistent with the PDO results reported, or with the data in Table 11, Annex 4 (ICR, p. 48), which shows an increase from 32 to 34 words per minute. The alleged improvement was offered as the basis for asserting “that supporting improvement in basic reading skills will increase likelihood of students to complete at least higher secondary degree and increasing probability of getting out of poverty between 8.6 percent to 31.5 percent (if they complete the university degree)” (ICR, p. 48). The ICR thus listed the estimated ex-post IRR as in the range of 8.6-31.5 percent. The claim that a 14 percent improvement in one measure of reading proficiency at the end of grade 2 translates into a strong increase in the probability of completing secondary school or a university degree is unsupported and unconvincing. No details of the data or assumptions used to make this IRR estimate are provided.

Efficiency of design

The ICR made the case for an efficient project design, citing “over four decades of research [that] have demonstrated the crucial role textbooks and learning and teaching materials play in improving learning quality, encouraging students to learn, and improving test scores. In particular, textbooks have been found to be the most cost-effective educational input when it comes to enhancing student achievement” (Read T., 2015). There is substantial evidence in support of their importance, especially in low-income nations where they address challenges such as teacher training gaps, large class sizes, parental illiteracy, and a lack of home reading materials (Read, 2016). However, the literature makes clear that these materials are most effective when paired with other interventions, such as teacher training, and are not by themselves likely to have an impact (McEwan, 2015)” (ICR, p. 46).

Efficiency in use of resources (efficient implementation)

The ICR judged project implementation to be cost-effective, noting that the unit cost per book produced (a major project activity) was below US\$1, less than half the cost in the previous project, and that the project delivered teacher training more cost-effectively than other Bank-funded projects.

The restructuring decisions that helped address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are a positive factor in implementation efficiency. The project offered crucial support to help maintain the quality of learning during COVID-related school closures, potentially preventing significant additional learning loss. Furthermore, through



providing learning materials and child support during the COVID-19 pandemic, the project helped Mongolia to maintain its low drop-out rate: the primary education completion rate was stable around 98 percent (ICR, p. 16), whereas very large increases in dropout rates have been seen in some countries (Moghli & Shuayb, 2020).

The implementation delays (only partly due to COVID disruptions) indicate some inefficiencies: project implementation was rated Moderately Unsatisfactory or Moderately Satisfactory in Implementation Status and Results Reports (ISRs). Changes in project in leadership, staffing vacancies in the project management unit (ICR, p.20), and “challenges in decision-making by the government” (ICR, p. 21) contributed to delays.

Overall: Project design included a well-focused set of interventions justified by strong research findings and interventions to protect against welfare and learning losses during the disruptive school closures. There was some evidence of efficient implementation (low unit costs of books and teacher training, well-implemented school grants and child welfare payments, resources to support remote learning during school closures). However, the ICR's economic analysis was not adequately supported with a credible set of assumptions and data, and there were considerable delays and inefficiencies in project implementation. On balance, this Review finds efficiency Modest.

Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal	✓	13.00	61.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The overall outcome is Moderately Satisfactory based on High relevance, Substantial efficacy, and Modest efficiency. The US\$ 30 million project was disbursed fully, most project activities were completed, and there were substantial additional activities to address COVID (without any increase in funding). All IRI were met or exceeded, though there was mixed achievement of PDO targets, ranging from fully achieved, through substantial, partially, and not achieved. Notably, learning outcomes and student drop-out rates did not show the decline that was seen in the USA (and many other countries) as a result of COVID-related school closures, even though schools were closed for longer in Mongolia than in many countries. Activities funded under the project likely contributed to this achievement.



a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The fact that project goals and activities were part of the MES national reform agenda reduces the risk to the project outcomes being sustained.

The books and learning materials supplied to schools will need to be replaced at some point, but they should provide years of sustained use. Because teacher training was provided to large numbers of teachers, using cascade training, teachers should be able to support each other and new teachers to be trained as well. With appropriate commitment to continued use of student assessment by the government, and especially if teachers see the assessments as helpful (rather than a burden), then, so long as funding is available, the activities should be able to be sustained. The impact of the activities funded by the school grants are likely to last, especially as schools were able to develop and implement their proposals to match their perceived needs. However, additional rounds of grants would likely require external funding.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project addressed an important development challenge in its focus on improving the quality of education at primary level. It had a clear focus and theory of change, and a strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design, as noted below. Project design was relatively simple with a limited number of activities and a clear, logical results chain. Implementation arrangements were clearly described.

Project preparation was described in the ICR as “a consultative process between the Bank and the government” (ICR, p. 24). The technical design drew heavily on a pilot program completed under the precursor READ project, which had shown strong results. This experience facilitated this project's preparation and launch. The design incorporated lessons learned during the pilot project. For example, textbooks were provided to teachers to take back to their schools with them after being trained on their use, saving on distribution costs and ensuring that teachers had the materials they needed to immediately implement what they had just learned. The design also drew on relevant international good practice, and the ICR noted that the Bank team had expertise gained from the READ project in Mongolia and from supervising multiple projects worldwide that also focused on improved learning outcomes and school-level planning (ICR, p. 24).

The PAD included detailed lists of the technical assistance that was expected to be needed. Risks were thoughtfully assessed, and careful mitigation measures were included in the project. The project design was sufficiently flexible to allow a robust response to the disruptions caused by measures to address COVID. Thorough and relevant assessments and evaluation mechanisms were included (as noted in the M&E section below).



Quality-at-Entry Rating

Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

During the project's nine years (between appraisal and closing), there were four Task Team Leaders (TTLs). The ICR reported that smooth transitions were secured by overlapping missions and co-TTLships (ICR, p. 24). Supervision missions were adequately staffed with specialists in education, financial management, procurement, and safeguards. Locally based operational staff with responsibility for financial management, procurement, and safeguards helped solve problems quickly and provided continuity, familiarity with the local context, and support in day-to-day dialogue. The project team engaged regularly and actively with the government, supporting its efforts to implement the project. When implementation challenges arose, the team took the measures needed to build capacity of the government team to address them. Safeguards compliance was monitored regularly. Mission decisions and project progress were clearly documented in aide-memoires and ISRs.

Proactive measures were taken to restructure the project: three times to extend the closing date, and a more substantial restructuring to support Mongolia's efforts to lessen the economic and educational impacts caused by the COVID-19 emergency. A mid-term review took place in April-May 2018, about three years into project implementation. It confirmed that project activities remained fully aligned and integrated with the government's action plan and goals. Baseline values for the PDO-level outcome indicators were established. The second restructuring reflected a thorough and thoughtful assessment of implementation progress and of the new needs that had arisen as a result of the COVID-19 disruptions. When COVID-19 prevented physical visits, missions took place virtually.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The PAD noted that "strengthening monitoring and evaluation [was] at the heart of the project" (PAD, p. 42). The use of DLIs aimed to improve government reporting mechanisms on project implementation and impact, and to emphasize a focus on results. The MES Monitoring and Evaluation Department was responsible for M&E activities, in close collaboration with the working group established for that purpose. The PAD provided details of who was responsible for data collection, aggregation, and reporting at all levels (school, province, and central). Provision was made for hiring specialists in M&E and impact evaluation as part of the implementation support plan.



Most reporting was integrated into standard statistical and finance reporting requirements within MES, although some special reporting on school support program actions and deliverables was needed. Annual third-party verification and "spot check" verification during Bank supervision was expected to help ensure the validity of project progress reports. Where appropriate, data collected was planned to be disaggregated by gender.

The results framework in the PAD included three PDO indicators and ten IRIs, all clearly described, with data sources, methodology, and responsibility for data collection identified, and annual targets specified. Many baselines were to be collected in the first or second year of the project, so annual targets were specified as expected percentage increases over the baselines.

b. M&E Implementation

The relevant departments of MES monitored the project indicators, as well as DLIs until they were dropped. Data were provided semi-annually and reviewed by the Bank. As planned, a third-party verifier was hired by MES, selected competitively based on terms of reference (TOR) acceptable to the Bank. Regular Bank implementation support missions jointly undertaken with the government supervised the validation process. The MES hired a part-time M&E consultant to strengthen its technical skills in this area and regularly updated the project results indicators. However, after the M&E consultant left, it took several years to hire a suitably qualified replacement, contributing to challenges around reporting and collecting project information. The project team explained (virtual meeting on 3/18/24) that the MES struggled with project data collection because some schools and districts were unresponsive to requests, and supervision budgets did not allow visits to nudge compliance. The COVID-related closures had a positive impact on this issue because the MES started to hold Zoom meetings, and this regular face-to-face contact improved data collection.

The evaluation of the impact of the project on student reading and mathematics skills was done through the baseline and end-line student assessments. The mid-line reading assessment was done, but because the baseline math assessment was delayed, there was no mid-line assessment. There was considerable work to be done in developing the assessment tools, and in training teachers how to administer them and how to interpret and use the results. Several of the indicators were simplified during restructurings, notably the two PDO indicators for student learning, by dropping the requirement for reading with comprehension in addition to reading correctly, and dropping subtraction from the indicator of mathematical skills. This was to help ensure consistent and correct measurement; it should probably have been done earlier in project implementation, at the time the baseline values were collected, when the need for simplification would have been evident.

The project team noted that MES was committed to wanting to measure and understand the project impact, and the last extension was largely to enable the end-line evaluation to take place. Delayed permission for the evaluation team to do its work prevented the evaluation from taking place at the end of the school year; it had to wait until after the summer when the schools reopened. This is an important factor when considering the end-line learning outcomes, as it is well-documented (see citations above) that children "forget" or "lose" some of what they learned the previous year during the summer vacation, making learning outcomes lower—perhaps significantly so—after the summer vacation. Had the final evaluation been done on time at the end of the school year, the PDO indicators might well have measured much higher learning results.



c. M&E Utilization

Utilization of M&E and promoting mainstreamed M&E and its utilization in education was integral to the project design. A new student assessment methodology and process were developed, and the national assessment structure was reformed, including technical, technological, and software upgrades to ensure the safety and reliability of assessment data. A working group of experts developed criteria for student achievement in each subject. Skill training was provided to assessment specialists and to staff to enable them to implement the assessment reforms and interpret the data.

Student formative assessment—EGRA and EGMA, which were new in the Mongolian primary education evaluation system—were adapted, developed, and disseminated nationwide. The assessment results informed development of new pedagogical approaches to teaching reading and mathematics to primary grade students, as well as guidelines for selecting and developing appropriate teaching materials. The assessment results also fed into teacher training. The project also supported the first assessment of first-grade students' school readiness.

An evaluation of learning losses after students returned to school in September 2021 after about 18 months of school closures during COVID aimed to identify the content lag for each grade and subject. The findings were used to create guidelines for school management and teachers, and to create and carry out an action plan to identify groups with the greatest learning losses, address the losses, and train teachers. All grants in Cycle 5 of the SGP program were allocated to projects aimed at eliminating learning loss and supporting e-transition of education. A nationwide progress assessment in May 2022 of 244,480 students in grades 1-5 in Mongolian language (including Kazakh, Tuva), mathematics, English, physical education, music, visual arts, technology, and health education assessed the impact of the actions to address the learning losses, and found improvements at every primary grade, but persistent gaps in 35 of the 72 learning objectives in the primary school curriculum.

The project team also noted (conversation on 3/18/2024) that the SGP was good example of M&E utilization. The schools provided interim and final reports on their grant use, and the MES used the reports to identify where the schools needed help and support. The program criteria were changed in response to reviews of project progress. Initially, the grants were focused on enrichment activities for the students (music, theatre, etc.), but as MES monitored project progress, they decided to change the criteria so that grant activities directly supported the goals of the project. Also, some schools used their grants to carry out their own formative assessments to better understand where their students were falling short and needed additional support.

Overall, the ICR's discussion of M&E Quality was sparse, but the project team provided additional details.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues



a. Safeguards

The project was rated environmental category B (Partial Assessment) and triggered two safeguard policies: Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01 and Indigenous Peoples OP/BP 4.10. The restructurings did not change the assessments of social, environmental, or fiduciary risks, and therefore did not trigger additional safeguard policies. No construction was planned or carried out, and so no environmental assessment was required. The project had no (or minimal) adverse environmental impacts. The Environmental Assessment policy was triggered by the need to assess and take into account, in an integrated manner, the social aspects of the project impacts on Indigenous People communities.

Policy 4.10 was triggered because the project included activities to improve the quality of education for all primary schools in Mongolia, including schools where ethnic minority children were enrolled. As required by OP4.10, an Indigenous People Planning Framework (IPPF) was prepared by the client, disclosed locally on February 20, 2014, and an English version was disclosed on March 13, 2014. The ICR reported that the project took account of all elements in the IPPF in all project activities, and that ethnic minorities were equally included in project activities. For example, consistent with requiring data collection through baseline information about ethnic minorities, learners in Bayan-Ulgii were included in the initial, mid-term, and end-line project evaluations, all research conducted during the project (such as diagnostic and progress assessment), the PISA assessment of international academic achievement, and the School Readiness Assessment. In compliance with providing information to ethnic minorities affected by the implementation of the project and obtaining free and prior opinions, information about the SGP, including grants open to parent-teacher associations, was shared with relevant stakeholders and all schools in Bayan-Ulgii aimag.

In Bayan-Ulgii aimag, the requirement to provide primary education in the native, i.e. Kazakh language, and to teach in Mongolian from middle school onward, proved impractical. Textbooks were available in Mongolian only, and the very poor Kazakh translations used, as well as the inadequate language skills of many teachers, negatively affected implementation of the curriculum and children's learning. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was chosen as an effective method to address this. The project supported piloting of CLIL methodology by (1) capacity building training and mentoring for teachers and specialists by the MIER; and (2) observation of classes by the local specialist assigned by the MIER, to support and advise teachers to help them master the CLIL methodology. The pilot was evaluated by comparing learning outcomes before and after the pilot in schools and classes that participated in the pilot, and control classes. The evaluation indicated that the CLIL methodology was effective in supporting acquisition of Mongolian language skills by Kazakh children (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Based on the results of the pilot study, a model for unit planning and lesson planning using the CLIL methodology was developed. The project distributed reading books in Kazakh to Bayan-Ulgii province primary grade students, translated the STEM training manual into Kazakh, and facilitated intermediate and advanced Mongolian language training for teachers. Development and distribution of Kazakh-Mongolian and Mongolian-Kazakh dictionaries were organized by the project to support implementation of the standard curriculum of Mongolian language. In addition, the element of arrangements for providing ethnic minority citizens with information and receiving feedback in advance in the monitoring and evaluation mechanism was implemented in all project monitoring, professional and methodological advisory activities, and external evaluations. This made it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the project in providing educational benefits to ethnic minority children (ICR, p. 24)

Implementation Status and Results Reports (ISRs) rated safeguard compliance moderately satisfactory or above throughout the project's lifetime. The ICR lacked an explicit statement of compliance, but the project team confirmed that there was compliance with the Bank's safeguard policies.



b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management: The project audit reports were all completed as required. There were issues with budget approvals. The project implementation unit was considered a public budget entity, according to the Order of the Minister of Finance (No.4 2021), and thus the annual budget threshold for the project was set by the Ministry of Finance. This threshold was usually much less than required for the planned project activities, some of which had to be postponed. In 2021, the cost of the project activities implemented exceeded the budget threshold, resulting in a “limited opinion” in the Financial Audit Report. The Law on State Savings passed in 2022 prohibited some expenditures from being financed through project funds, including but not limited to classroom training, procurement of furniture, domestic and international travel, and project operational costs (such as car usage and stationery).

Procurement was carried out in accordance with World Bank guidelines (ICR, p. 24). The MES was responsible for all technical aspects of procurement, including packaging of contracts, procurement planning, preparation of TORs and Technical Specifications, and defining the evaluation and qualification criteria. MES also participated in bid/proposal evaluation and was responsible for contract supervision and management. Procurement under the SGP was conducted by the participating schools using simple procurement methods described in the School Support Handbook.

An assessment of the capacity of the General Procurement Agency (GPA) and MES to implement procurement under the project was carried out during appraisal (PAD, p. 15). Two key risks were identified: (i) new MES and GPA staff members were relatively new to World Bank procurement procedures; and (ii) possible lack of coordination between the GPA and MES could delay procurements. Risk mitigation measures were agreed, including: (i) the MES would hire/assign a Procurement Specialist with qualifications and TOR acceptable to the Bank to coordinate procurement activities with the GPA within three months of effectiveness; (ii) the Bank (or training institutions acceptable to the Bank) would provide procurement training to key GPA and MES staff as needed; and (iii) GPA and MES would agree on standard processing times for procurement and a detailed procurement plan with dates for key milestones, including submission of TORs and technical specifications. The draft procurement plan for the project was prepared by MES and updated annually or as required to reflect project implementation needs. In addition to the agreed Procurement Specialist, the project also hired technical consultants to assist with procurement document preparation, bid evaluation, and contract management.

Some of the key procurements, notably the endline data collection, third-party monitoring of the fifth cycle of school grants, and consultancies for improving the information technology infrastructure in education and project closing reporting, were delayed due to state budget restrictions and a transfer of procurement responsibilities to the new GAE. However, in general procurement was rated as satisfactory.

ISRs rated financial management and procurement moderately satisfactory or above throughout the project's lifetime. The ICR lacked an explicit statement of compliance, but the project team confirmed that there was compliance with the Bank's fiduciary policies.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)



The school closures during COVID demonstrated that using information technology, electronic and online educational materials, and smart and effective use of electronic devices can offer educational benefits. Teachers and school leaders learned how to use technology to keep their schools operating despite the closures, and the teacher and student resources that were developed during the school closures proved to be of continued value after schools were reopened. The MES also discovered that on-line meetings could be an effective way of supervising project activities and improving data collection.

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

These lessons are drawn from the ICR (with editing).

Cash transfers to families can provide important welfare benefits for children in mitigation of income shocks. The cash support provided to families through the Children's Welfare Fund had a positive impact. Parents and community representatives emphasized that this financial support played an important role in meeting the basic needs of children, such as food, health, school supplies, and electronic communication needed to continue schooling remotely.

Teachers and students need adequate computers and computing skills to enable productive use of technology for education. During the COVID-related school closures, teachers and students had to rely fully on e-learning and teaching. The experience demonstrated the potential of information technology to support children's self-directed learning and teacher training, using on-line interactive lessons and other resources, and self-paced learning options. However, some teachers and families did not have computers with high enough performance quality, or adequate connectivity, or computer skills.

Online teaching and learning resources need to be developed and stored in a well-structured and user-friendly way. Teachers frequently saved the original versions of interactive lessons they developed on their personal computers or Facebook groups, because schools lacked a centralized system for securely storing such materials. This increased the risk of losing work and reduced



opportunities for wide sharing. Also, security of electronic data and resources created by teachers need to be managed and enhanced at the school level.

A local support team with a specific focus worked well as a way of supporting teachers to learn, adopt, and improve new teaching methodologies. Local early-grade mathematics assessment support teams that monitored and consulted with teachers to provide constructive feedback proved effective. The teams made regular visits to schools, during which they observed teaching practices and provided immediate consultation, advice, and support.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR is clear and provided a good description of project design, an unusually thorough account of project activities, and extensive details of the evaluations that are the basis for assessing the project achievements. There is a clear account of the chain of evidence linking activities, outputs, and outcomes. The ICR mostly follows guidelines. The lessons are thoughtfully selected. The Annexes were completed with care and diligence. Annex 9 provides extensive information on project activities and outputs. Annex 3 i correctly completed with all original, revised, and actual costs (unlike many ICRs). Annex 4 cites useful research results on learning losses during COVID-related school closures, but it does not state which countries the studies covered and how relevant they might be to Mongolia. Annex 7 offers a useful and systematic summary of the changes made in the second restructuring, although this could have been even clearer if the text had distinguished between things that remained unchanged (which appear in both “Original” and “Revised” columns), and things that were added or dropped.

The ICR's main weakness is that the assessment of M&E is poor and incomplete. The section on M&E design comments on implementation rather than on design, and the section on M&E utilization lacks any information on whether or how the data were communicated to stakeholders or used. There is no discussion of the reliability of the data on project results. A discussion of trends in indicator data would have helped make clearer the extent to which project outcomes were derailed by COVID. There is no information on any other activities (for example, funded by other donors) that might have contributed to the project results. Another shortcoming with the ICR is the lack of details on data and assumptions used to make the estimate of the project's rate of return.

Finally, the ICR did not include explicit statements about compliance with the Bank's safeguards and fiduciary policies (although the project team confirmed this subsequently).

a. Quality of ICR Rating Substantial

