



K-12 education in Asia and the Pacific: Building quality and inclusion into the learning journey

The approach to early childhood education is evolving, and in Xi'an, in China's Shaanxi Province, modern teaching methods and comprehensive teacher training programs are helping children on the path to becoming capable learners. In Sri Lanka, upper secondary students are benefiting from new innovation labs that increase access to science and technology subjects, enabling them to apply their critical-thinking skills to real-world problems.

These snapshots tell a story of how education is modernizing across Asia and the Pacific. From the first day of preschool to the last day of high school, ADB is helping countries improve the quality and relevance of K-12 education, reimagining it as an interconnected journey rather than a series of isolated stages. A K-12 education system that puts learners at the centre and brings learning to life strengthens outcomes, minimizes the costs of untapped human potential, and turns human capital into the foundation for future growth.

Improving access and quality

Over the past few decades, Asia and the Pacific has done much to improve access to education and today, nine out of ten children are enrolled in primary school. But with only five years left to meet the [UN's Agenda 2030](#) goals, there is still a big gap between what education promises and what it actually delivers. To meet the [SDG 4](#) target for inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning, education systems need to become more connected, linking early foundational learning with improved outcomes. By supporting innovations that link each stage of learning, ADB is giving everyone the chance to build their skills.

The first steps to lifelong learning

Investing in early childhood education is one of the smartest choices a country can make. With results including higher lifetime earnings for children and increased labor market productivity, its impact reaches far beyond the classroom and the individual learner.

In Xi'an, a rapidly growing city in China's Shaanxi Province, ADB is helping the government plan for the future by focusing on its youngest citizens. Through the [Shaanxi Xi'an Preschool Education Development Program](#), a total of 2,400 new public and affordable private kindergartens are planned which will help address the current shortage of preschool education facilities. The kindergartens will be built to environmentally-friendly standards, helping ensure both their safety and resilience in extreme climatic conditions. The program also includes the delivery of high-quality training to improve the skills of early years teachers. The increase in the number of kindergartens offering high-quality preschool education is also intended to support



parents, especially mothers, in returning to work, which is a significant step toward shaping a more equitable and productive labor market.

Building strong foundations for every learner

The move from early childhood education to primary school is a significant step, as children start learning core skills like reading and mathematics. But when children miss school or struggle to follow, and the quality of teaching is poor, knowledge gaps can start to appear. For children from disadvantaged groups facing poverty, limited access, or other barriers, the gaps can become even wider, making it harder to keep up and in some cases, leading them to drop out of school altogether.

To prevent students from falling behind, ADB supports initiatives like [Teach for the Philippines Tara, Kaya!](#) project. The program is based on an approach of personalized interventions in the classroom with outreach to engage families and their wider community. In 2024, the program reached 2,000 students and 1,100 parents, with children showing an average improvement of 42% in reading and 59% in numeracy. Non-cognitive skills were also boosted, with teachers reporting a significant increase in students' confidence and participation levels.

Transforming secondary education

To prepare young people for an increasingly interconnected and digital world, ADB is prioritizing secondary education investments that link science, innovation, and learning outcomes to the skills demanded by knowledge-based economies.

In Sri Lanka, ADB is helping the government redesign secondary education to build knowledge as well as problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The results-based lending [Secondary Education Sector Improvement Program \(SESIP\)](#) has supported developments in the National Curriculum Framework that prioritize digital literacy and STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), while new resource hubs and innovation labs promote hands-on learning. With a focus on helping students connect their studies to real-world contexts, the results are compelling: more girls are enrolling in science and technology streams, thanks to career counseling with female role models, and teachers report greater engagement from all students in the classroom.

A few thousand kilometers northwest, Pakistan is also renewing secondary education. In Punjab province, ADB's results-based lending program, [Responsive, Ready and Resilient Secondary Education](#), is transforming at least 1,700 schools into centers of STEM excellence. At least half of the new STEM labs are in girls' schools, helping boost their interest in science and encouraging them to consider science-related careers. Increased recruitment and training of female teachers will further support gender equality in the school system. With the integration of green skills teaching into the

curriculum, the program advances climate literacy and social inclusion, both key development goals for the country.

New approaches, including results-based financing, are strengthening accountability by linking funding to clear, measurable improvements in access, teaching quality, and learning outcomes. By supporting more inclusive education systems, ADB is helping countries ensure equality is at the heart of human capital development.

Heritage at the heart of learning

Nowhere is this more evident than in ADB’s support for culture-based education for indigenous learners in the Philippines. Asia and the Pacific is home to about 70% of the world’s Indigenous Peoples, although many are excluded from education as development has undervalued their way of living. Through the Department of Education’s National Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework and ADB’s [Senior High School Support Program](#), the establishment of the Tboli Sbu Senior High School in Lake Sebu has strengthened access to learning for indigenous communities.

Community elders and educators helped develop the program, which combines traditional knowledge with academic subjects and technical and vocational tracks at grades 11 and 12. Since 2020, enrolment has grown by 50%, enabling learners to participate in modern education approaches while preserving their cultural traditions and industries. It has since become a model for other schools across the country, demonstrating how culture-based education can foster inclusion.

K-12: How connecting the stages leads to a brighter future

These are just a few examples of the stories illustrating how ADB is helping countries across Asia and the Pacific transform K-12 education. By strengthening each stage of the learning journey and ensuring continuity and relevance, ADB’s support is helping every child to start strong, learn deeply, and acquire the skills needed to step confidently into the future.

Details of case studies

Project	US\$	Status	Link to project
Shaanxi Xi’an Preschool Education Development Program, PRC	150 million	Active	https://www.adb.org/projects/53060-001/main#tabs-0-2
Secondary Education Sector Improvement Program (SESIP), Sri Lanka	400 million	Active	Secondary Education Sector Improvement Program (SESIP)



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Responsive, Ready and Resilient STEM Secondary Education in Punjab Program, Pakistan	100 million	Active	https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/54298/54298-001-pssa-en.pdf
Secondary Education Support Program: Assessment of the Education Service Contracting, Senior High School Voucher Program, and Joint Delivery Voucher Program for Senior High School Technical-Vocational Livelihood Specializations, Philippines	300 million	Active	https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/phi-45089-004-tacr

