

## Original Research

# Accelerated Learning Program Significance, Challenges, and Prospects in Oromia, Ethiopia

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the status of the Accelerated Learning Program/ Speed School. The program was designed for children out of school, ages 9 to 14. Respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. Structured interviews were designed to collect data from 105 participants. The findings reveal that parents send their children to the Accelerated Learning Program owing to its contribution. Students are able to complete their literacy skills in a short time and catch up to their age equivalent at grades 4, 3, and 2. Except for some challenges, the program has shown remarkable practices in terms of access, equity, and quality education that can be adopted by formal schools to reach disadvantaged children, children out of school, or dropouts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a vast array of learning methods and styles. Accelerated Learning (or Brain Friendly Learning) is considered unique in the history of innovative learning because of its user-friendly methods of imparting skills to the learner (Glasse & Bälter, 2021; Morrison, 2018; Passig et al., 2024). The two most often cited by accelerated learning theorists are the theory of multiple intelligences and the concept of learning models or styles (Meier, 2000; Wisudarni, 2023). An accelerated learning program was originally evolved by the work of Lozanov and further developed by the contribution of Gardner, (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. The theory proposes that people learn in a variety of ways through emotional, social, physical, reflective, and cognitive learning systems. Gardner originally proposed seven categories of intelligence: Linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Smith simplified the basic theory of multiple intelligences by suggesting distinct types of learning and combining his own work during the mid-1990s and early 2000s (Smith, 2003). Accelerated learning is not about improving learning speed and helping pupils reach higher levels of achievement faster in this cycle than they did in the original theory. Rather, the emphasis was on more effective and in-depth learning (Charlick, 2004; Longden, 2013). Condensed or compressed curricula were first used in initiatives meant to assist developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Menendez et al., 2016). This

modified methodology was used to construct and administer organized educational programs in a variety of contexts.

Empirical evidence has shown that the Accelerated Education Program (AEP) or speed school has tremendous advantages, two of which are common across different countries: it promotes literacy and numeracy; it overcomes the potential psychological problem that might be created while different age groups learn together (Borkan et al., 2015). Speed School is distinctly effective because of the equal and enthusiastic commitment of students, teachers, and parents to the learning process (Muskin & Barcelata, 2021). This importance is not limited to solving the literacy and psychological problems, but also in making learners successful. For instance, it is noted that 'as we come to realize that the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) was producing striking improvement in student successes. Moreover, AEP is useful in reducing the number of dropouts and overcoming inefficiency in student learning (Adams et al., 2009; Akyeampong et al., 2018).

Based on the foregoing literature, accelerated learning has its own theoretical foundation. It has been confirmed that children learn differently through different activity-based learning methods. In this regard, for the last ten years and above (2011/12-2023), Geneva Global Ethiopia (GGE) has initiated and supported speed schools, or Accelerated Learning for Africa (ALFA), in Ethiopia in general and in the Oromia region in particular, to solve the problem of educating children out of school. The ALFA curriculum is equivalent to grades 1–3 in formal school, completed in 1440 hours. Facilitators were grade 12 completers, fewer numbers of diploma and 1st degree holders, but nonprofessional. They received intensive training on the condensed curriculum using activity-based learning for ten days and engaged in teaching, assessment, and facilitation of students' learning for ten months/1440 hours. Upon completion, placement exams are used and administered by district education offices to help students pass to grades 4, 3, or 2 based on their performance. The highest scorers will join grade 4, the medium scorers to grade 3, and the lowest scorers to grade 2 of the formal school. In the speed school program, between 2011/12-2023, ALFA enrolled 222,960 out-of-school children, with the majority moving to grade four (GGE, 2021).

On the other hand, a new program adapted from ALFA, named "Accelerated Learning Program" (ALP), was introduced into the education system and has enrolled 27,700 students (GGE, 2021). ALP used a condensed curriculum in two phases that is equivalent to grades 1 and 2 in formal schools, and was completed in 880 hours. Teachers are professionally trained but received additional intensive training for ten days on activity-based learning. Upon completion, placement exams are used and administered by district education offices to help students pass to grades 3 or 2 based on their performance. The highest scorers will join grade 3 and the low scorers to grade 2 of the formal school. The cut-off point for the pass mark is based on context. In the two programs, learning opportunities have been created for a total of 250,660 out-of-school children, aged 9-14.

However, the intention of this study is not to compare the two programs but to explore the overall status of the program, particularly the government-adapted ALP program, in relation to its significance, challenges, and prospects. In this regard, a study was conducted to assess the practices and progress of speed schools, particularly for ALFA, not for ALP. For example, Akyeampong, et al., (2018) conducted research on pupils transitioning from speed school to formal school and reported the following: Compared to government primary schools students in Speed School are less likely to drop out. Furthermore, students have stronger aspirations to proceed beyond primary education and are less likely to drop out by the time they reach lower secondary school (Akyeampong et al., 2018).

The above research used a longitudinal study involving students who attended speed schools. Some of the students joined formal primary schools. The students were from ALFA and the southern region. In the Oromia region, adopting the experiences of ALFA, an accelerated learning program initiative began in 2021. Since then, it has been expanded to include 31 elementary schools undertaking the program classes alongside formal government schools. The mainstream programs allow children to catch up with their age equivalent and qualify to enter the fourth grade, third grade, or second grade of formal classes. However, little is known about the achievements and problems related to parents' and students' perceptions, resources, structure, training, and communication encountered in the implementation of the programs. Thus, to fill the knowledge and understanding gaps, strengthen the program, increase access, and improve learning outcomes for out-of-school children, this study assesses the significance, challenges, and prospects of an accelerated learning program for out-of-school children in Oromia Regional State, based on the views of students, parents, facilitators, educational leaders, teachers, and supervisors.

To do this, the study answered the following basic research questions:

1. How do stakeholders in the Oromia regional state view the significance of accelerated learning programs for disadvantaged children?
2. What are the challenges of accelerated learning programs implementation at the school level in the Oromia region?

3. What are the realistic chances of sustaining an accelerated learning program undertaking in the Oromia region?

## 2. METHOD

The study adopted an explorative qualitative research design to collect qualitative data for analysis. In Oromia, there are 31 primary schools running the Accelerated Learning Program for out-of-school children. As a new intervention for out-of-school children, ages 9-14, ALFA's and ALP programs used a condensed curriculum in three and two phases, respectively. In the region, since the majority of the schools are located in the areas where security was not stable, we were forced to select nine primary schools running the programs from four zones purposefully (see Table 1).

We intend to apply data saturation techniques instead of applying randomization in the two programs, particularly in selecting the students, because of the intense security problem. The size of the sample and the techniques of sampling are often determined by the availability of resources and the type or purpose of the research (Gray et al., 2009).

To conduct the study, students from the nine schools attending the two programs were involved. We also included parents, teachers and facilitators, supervisors, and educational leaders using the census sampling technique. Accordingly, (32) parents, (40) students, (4) facilitators, (8) teachers, (14) educational leaders, and (5) supervisors as indicated in Table 1.

The study used interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data from respondents. The interview was conducted for all students who participated in the program, from low to high scorers, facilitators, and teachers. These officers were targeted because of their direct beneficiaries and knowledge about the program. There were nine FGD conducted at each school, which involved parents, educational leaders, and supervisors who have close follow-up on speed school and accelerated learning program. This is to generate information that may not be elicited through interview data collection instruments.

The guiding interview questions were produced in Afan Oromo. The team discussed the validity of the instrument in February, commented, refined, and improved the interview guiding items. The survey was conducted from February to April. After fixing the date of data collection, the Oromia Education Bureau has written a formal letter to the districts where the study was conducted. The researchers arranged a team of four groups to collect the data from nine schools located in four zones of Oromia. Data were gathered using written, photos, and sound recorders, classified, organized, arranged, and transcribed into English.

**Table 1.** Participants

Zone	District	School	Parent		Edu. Leaders		Supr		Faci		Teach		Program	Students															
			M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		M	F														
Arsi	Dodota	Dirree lak 3	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	ALFA	2	1														
																2	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	ALP	1	2	
		Argitii Danaba	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	ALFA	2	2														
Arsi	Nagalee	Danshee	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	ALP	1	2														
Lixaa	Arsi	Watara	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	ALFA	2	2														
Shawaa																Wachale	Sayoo Maja	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	ALP	2	2
																	Gimmbichuu	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	ALP	1
Kaabaa	Bacho	Bakaraa	3	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	ALP	1	2														
Shawaa		Abdii Gudina	2	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	ALP	1	2														
Kibba		Awash Bune	3	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	ALP	2	1														
Lixaa	Ida'ama		14	20	11	1	7	0	3	1	2	6	ALFA	8	7														
													ALP	11	14														

Total participants 103(M=56, F=47)(field data,2023),

\* Edu.-education, Supr-supervisor, Faci-Facilitator, Teach-Teacher, ALFA- Accelerated Learning for Africa, ALP-Accelerated Learning Program

### 2.1. Quality of data management

In this study, the researchers have used various techniques to ensure the quality of the collected data. First, the researchers held a discussion at a day workshop, then after the assessment or the evaluation of data gathering tools had been completed. The data collectors experienced in field research used audio and video recordings to supplement the oral interview. The collected data were organized, the guiding questions were merged, and carefully coded using participants' responses. Going through the responses, theme formation was conducted. The responses were finally categorized under their major theme; these were significance, challenges, and prospects of the accelerated program. Further, besides conducting participant interviews when the data from classroom observation was collected to get insight into learning activity-based learning methods, assessment, attendance, production, and utilization of teaching aids.

### 2.2. Data analysis

Data analyses were conducted at different phases. First, the gathered data were transcribed from Afan Oromo to English, edited, organized, and made clear by the team for analysis. Using data saturation techniques, similar responses from the interview were identified, reduced, and condensed. Second, for clarity's sake, all data collected from respondents have been coded. Accordingly, the participants were coded as parents (Prt-1,2,3...32), ALFA students (St-1,2,3...15, ALP students (St16,17,...,40), facilitators (Fs-1,2,...4), teachers (tch-1,2,3...8), education leaders (Educl-1,2,3...14), and supervisors (Sup-1,2,3,4,5). The focus group discussion was coded as (FGD1...9), which involved parents, educational leaders, and supervisors. The data collected through interviews were transcribed, organized, and patterned, and similar response categories were brought together to form a theme. The redundant and uncommon responses were eliminated and limited to essential information or selected. The analysis was made using thematic narrative analysis, and similar responses given by different participants were organized under the same theme.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Significance of accelerated learning

Under this major point of discussion, participants from beneficiary groups and program implementers were involved. In order to elicit responses from the participants of the study, samples of specific interview questions were presented. The questions go like this: "What are your thoughts on the benefits of an accelerated learning program?" "What is the strength of the accelerated learning program?" This study reports that the accelerated learning program has a lot of significance for the students who were out of school but are now in school. For example, some parents said that the learners were found to be more active than the regular class students, and had more motivation than other learners to attend their classes regularly (Prt 3, 6, Feb 5, 2022 & FGD 5, 8, Feb 5, 2022).

In this study, participants said that students in both programs learn better; they learn by doing, which could help them acquire the minimum level of learning competence in a short period of time. One parent said that "from my observation, students have developed self-discipline and have more ethical character than before joining the accelerated learning program"(Prt 4, Feb 5, 2022). Other parents also said that when we compare the regular students with those who are attending the accelerated learning program,

... the accelerated learning program learners have more motivation than other students attending a traditional classroom. Example, they didn't absent from classroom, after school they spent their time with their exercise book, engaged themselves in activities, and spent more time at school (Prt 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, & 31, Feb 5, 2022)

In addition, other parents said that students in the accelerated learning program started writing and reading in a shorter time than the regular students (Prt. 19, 25; St 10, St16 & St 23, Feb7,2023), but the regular class students can't read when they complete grades 3 and 4 (Prt. 6,& 9, Feb7,2023 ). In this connection, the responses of parents 4 and 6 were found to be similar. In addition, the activity-based learning method and supportive materials in accelerated learning programs have given reinforcement for the learners' motivation (Prt 2,7,8,23,26 &28, Feb 8, 2023). As a result, students usually gave priority to their lessons, which increased their knowledge and skills of the subject matter daily (Prt . 5 & Prt. 24-29, Feb. 6, 2023). In this regard, some students were also reported as saying that, because I read well and discuss with other learners, which I am not clear about, it makes them more motivated (St.6, St. 13, St 18, & St. 23, Feb 10, 2023). Other students gave similar ideas about learning in the program, that the program and its approaches are motivating us to learn more. They said, because we are more active than our senior brothers learning in a traditional class. Above all, because of our competence, we can assure you that we will complete the program and promoted to grades four or three (All interviewed St., Feb 17-25, 2023). In supporting the ideas of their children, some parents also said that the teaching and learning approach is unique, activity-based learning

and engaging, which makes them highly motivated towards the learning program (Prt.7, 8, 9 &10, Feb 12, 2022).

On the other hand, parents also responded to the behavior of their children. They indicated that, in addition to the academic performance they show, they have responsive behavior in and out of school. "Because we did not get any report from the teacher about the misbehavior of our children" (Prt. 8, March 3, 2022). They say our children are governed by "self-discipline, ethics, and respect for the rules and regulations of the school" (Prt . 1, Prt. 4, Prs24. & 25, Feb. 12, 2022). They are also more ethical than other traditional class students (Prt 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, Feb 12, 2022). They never waste their time, learn through play, and get focused activities (Prt 24, 27, 30, & 32, Feb 12, 2022).

In general, regardless of gender, age, family background, and location differences, the majority of the respondents through interviews and FGDS, agreed that children attending accelerated learning programs both in ALFA and ALP have strong motivation and aspiration for the future, develop a sense of competence, are self-disciplined, and have the spirit of working together. Some participants have reflected on their ideas about the advantages of education in general and accelerated learning in particular, as follows: The students' family participated in the interview, described their idea as:

...the program helped her or my child to perform well as learners who were registered before her and were attending their education at a formal school. In addition, the school also arranged a weekend program for her to attend her lessons. This helped her read, write, and perform some math skills. Her behavior toward the school has also improved and changed. In other words, I myself have benefited because I sent my daughter to school. As I observed her, she is so concerned and attends her lesson consistently, which I certainly assume is the advantage that this program contributed to my family, said the parent. (Prt. 11, 14, &22, Feb 10, 2022).

Other parents also informed that the way in which they capture the information from the lessons, reading, and writing is by far better than that of formal class learners. To add more, they say that learner who stay at school for longer periods of time, study together, ask their teachers, and practice and learn by doing (Prt,15, 16, & 19-21, FGD 1 & 8, Feb 5, 2022). "A father further noted that because I sent my child to school to attend an accelerated learning program, I got the opportunity to be hosted in an SHG and started saving. The fund, or seed money, we received from GGE has helped us support our family and the child at school and save about 40 birrs per month. She says the program helps our learners reach their age level in a short time "(Prt. 16, Feb 9, 2022). The other parent said that I received 13,000 birrs from the organization and bought an Ox for plowing the land that I never had before Prt. 15, Feb29, 2022. Aside from that, we save 30-40 birr per month, said the parents. The program has brought opportunities for the learners to reach their age-level grades (Edu. 2,4,5, & 8 FGD1-3, Feb14-20,2022).

The leaders further said that the program privileged the students to attend their class actively, without interruption, and to be promoted to the required equivalent grade level in a short time. It also supported their peer group in the other class, helping learners reach their friends (FGD 3,7, 8 &9, Feb 15, 2022). Teachers and facilitators describe that this program has a significant influence on the quality of education in primary schools (Fs2,3, Feb 15, 2022). Besides, completing grades 1, 2, and 3 in one year and being promoted to grade 3 makes our advantages double ( Prt,7, Feb 15, 2022). Students from the two program said that we feel happy and it seems that we are better (St1, 2,... 15 & St16-40, Feb15, 2022). Moreover, describing the advantage of an accelerated learning program to a student is said as follows:

Attending this program helped me a lot to be an active participant in the classroom. I feel confident and have developed skills in reading, writing, and some mathematical skills in a short period of time. My family is also surprised and appreciative when they see me reading and writing. They bought me clothes and reading materials as a reward and gave me pieces of advice to read more each day (St. 3, Feb 9, 2022)

Responding to the opportunity, learners from low-income families came to the school because of the opening of an accelerated learning program. The program has made the schools see new ways of addressing access and improving the quality of education at all levels (Sup. 1 & 5, Feb 11, 2022). Some students supplemented this idea by saying that the teaching-learning process is not boring, but rather appealing, and that we can easily learn and understand key contents (St. 23, 26, & 31-40, Feb 18, 2022). "Some students, said a teacher, learn by practicing, developing a sense of confidence, and easily obtain minimum learning competency at a given time while working in the classroom" (Tch. 1, Feb 18, 2022). The other teacher said that "this program makes learners work in groups and develops team spirit" (Tch. 4, Feb 18, 2022).

School administrators highlighted classroom instruction while describing the importance of accelerated learning programs, adding that the teaching-learning process is learning by doing and thus attractive (EduL, 1-5, Feb 12, 2022). This program is implemented by supplying learners with some resources; as a result, instruction delivery differs from those formal classes (Sups 2-4, Feb 12, 2022). The other supervisors stated that this program has a continual follow-up, a detailed plan of what to do when, and accommodates facilitators who employ various teaching styles. As a result, kids' behavior was impacted, making it simple for them to learn to read and write quickly (Sup 1 & 5, Feb 13, 2022). Some educational leaders were surprised by the program's results, saying, "Completing grades 1-3 in one year is unbelievable, but we've seen it, and if we work on it further, we can modify and improve our children's learning" (EduL, 2 & 4, FGD. 1, 4, 5, 6, & 9, Feb 13, 2022).

In general, the responses of the participants confirmed that students achieve a minimum level of learning competence in a short period of time, indicating a positive attitude, enthusiasm, and eagerness to learn more while enrolled in the program. As parents acquired a favorable attitude toward their children's education, some began to open savings accounts, expecting that their children's education would be supported.

### **3.2. Accelerated learning program challenges**

Despite its importance, accelerated learning programs for out-of-school may not be altogether devoid of obstacles. The challenges of an accelerated learning program are explained in several directions. Based on the responses obtained from the participants under this title, the challenges are mostly observed under the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) run under the government than ALFA which runs under GGE.

#### **3.2.1. Awareness and attitude challenges**

Parents' comments in sending their children to school suggest that they have a positive attitude toward the program. Apart from opening opportunities for their children, the program also provided assistance to their families through Self-Help Groups (SHG) in ALFA, said parents (Prt 24, 26, & 27, Feb 15, 2022). However, at the commencement of the project, some parents were skeptical of it since it had a couple of problems, including a long delivery time, a single teacher teaching all courses, a lack of facilities, and regular teachers' unwillingness to handle accelerated learning classes. Some children also expressed an interest in dropping out of formal school and enrolling in an accelerated learning program. According to the supervisor, children developed such an interest and desire as a result of the program's family benefits (Sup1, Feb 16, 2022). In addition, due to the current high level of living standards, facilitators, teachers, and supervisors are very concerned about salary increments, incentives, or remuneration. "The salary we are receiving could not support our expenses," they claimed (Supr 1, Fst 3, & Tch 2, 3, & 4, Feb 16, 2022).

#### **3.2.2. Challenges of supply**

As previously stated, the accelerated learning program has both internal and external, or indirect, problems that affect students' learning. Regardless of the efforts, there are still a number of obstacles that could limit the program's expansion and outstanding progress. In response to the issue of service provision, parents stated that we were assured at the start of the program that our children would receive meal services if they stayed longer at school, but nothing has been supported. We can't afford to miss our children's lunch or snack at school since we are so poor that the majority of our money comes from hand to mouth (Prt. 2, 3, & 10, Feb 11, 2022). If the school is unable to provide, the school day (8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.) must be shortened. Other families stated that pupils did not receive individual textbooks, which could have aided them in reading at home, doing their homework, and taking assignments at home (Prt, 1-10 & Prt 19-24, Feb 11, 2022). It is extremely difficult to find teachers for this program who have equal knowledge in all subjects; a single teacher cannot teach all subjects alone (Prt 13,15, & 16, Feb 11, 2022).

When giving the lessons to the accelerated learning program, the participants advised the school that teaching all subjects by a single teacher is a high risk. Teachers or facilitators, for example, do not have the same or equal knowledge of various subjects. Furthermore, in the event of illness, death, or social issues, someone should be present to automatically replace and assume responsibility for the lesson instruction without wasting time or interruption (Sup, 2, 3, & 4, Tch, 3, FGD 7, 8, Feb 11, 2022).

According to educational leaders, the accelerated learning program has a lack of learning classes, and a well-organized arrangement of teaching aids, and is entirely created locally from locally sourced resources (EduL 1 & 3, Feb 14, 2022). "During classroom observation, school principals indicated that the majority of teaching aids were produced by teachers, with little involvement from students or homemade materials" (EduL3, Feb 14, 2022). Furthermore, resources such as Gada textbooks, teaching materials such as pens, and practice books are not delivered on time (EduL 8 & Prt 6, Feb 14, 2022). "All of these issues arose

as a result of inadequate leadership from school principals, senior officials, and teachers or facilitators “(Prt, 8, Feb 14, 2022).

### 3.2.3. Challenges of developing competence

It is difficult to promote learners to grades three or four in an accelerated learning program without covering chapters, working on activities and assignments, and conducting continuous assessments in the time allotted (Edu, 3 & 4, Feb 13, 2022). The process of gaining knowledge and skills in a short period of time is dependent on effective lesson delivery and the active engagement of teachers/facilitators. One of the school directors said that some teachers and facilitators do not have experience in pedagogical training to build their strategy for preparing plans in this regard (annual, weekly, and daily lesson plans). According to the leader, competency also includes the ability to apply psychological theories and principles, which appears to be lacking among teachers and facilitators (Educ 1, & 3, Feb 12, 2022).

In order to minimize the gap, the Education Community of Practice (ECOP) can be practiced among senior teachers and model teachers in order to improve skill development (Tsc1, Sup-2, Feb 14, 2022). ALP was also given a lot of attention by the teachers, according to some facilitators. When comparing the ALP to the regular program, government-employed teachers frequently underperform. An attempt to correct misunderstandings, orientation was not given, and teachers must be hired and trained as facilitators to manage the program (Fst, 1 & 3, Feb 13, 2022). Participants observed that some students, notably girls, underperformed when compared to their male peers during a classroom observation in both programs. In this case, samples of students with high, moderate, and low scores were taken to assess their reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities (St 1, 4, & 7, Feb 13, 2022).

Based on the foregoing responses, it is necessary to prepare continuous professional development activities to be delivered by the supervisor and directors twice a year (the first at the beginning before the class begins, at the end of each semester, and at the end of the semester). This will help the schools collect information about teachers, students' performance, challenges faced, and the gap observed to simplify the problem before moving on to the next year. On the other hand, the goal of speed school or accelerated learning programs is to help students be able to read and write in a short time compared to traditional classrooms, based on a condensed curriculum and activity-based learning.

### 3.2.4. Structural challenges

The structure of the accelerated learning program is explicitly disclosed, as detailed in the Ministry of Education manual (FDRE, 2021). The structure was specified from top to bottom, up to the school level, in the text. However, the study's respondents stated that there is no suitable framework in place at the school level. As a result, there is no effective communication about what is going on at the school (Sup 3 & Edu14, Feb 13, 2022). Supervision and follow-up are ineffective in the management of ALF and ALP operations. The structure, for example, differs from that of a traditional primary school. There is no evidence that planned superiors visit schools, observe classrooms, provide short-term training for ALP and ALFA teachers, or support model teachers, assign lead teachers, and organize periodical reports to the district and zone (Tch 2 & Sup3, Feb 15, 2022).

In general, this short report confirmed that there is soft and low communication that could not support the implementation of accelerated learning programs among local schools, district education, and zonal education offices, except for fulfilling some basic issues like teachers' assignments, classes, tables, and chairs for teaching. The schools are not yet taking full responsibility for running the program as a formal or traditional school program. To solve the problem, there is a need to prepare a context-based manual based on the MoE manual.

## 3.3. Prospects of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)

The participants of the study have mentioned not only the significance and challenges of the program, but they also pointed out the future direction or sustainability of the program in light of its benefits for the children, families, and community at large.

### 3.3.1. Supply improvement

In this study, the majority of the parents expressed their genuine concern about supporting their children's school in terms of materials such as buying books, stationery materials, uniform clothes, and food supplies because of their low income. To this end, they said that the institution shall provide the necessary supportive materials that can improve the learning of the children and help them study better. Regarding the assignment of professional teachers, a single teacher cannot teach all subjects, nor do they have equal knowledge and skills in the different subjects they teach. It is also a risk during times of sickness, death, and other social problems. The participant suggests that at least one more teacher has to be added so that he/she

shares subjects and replaces him/her when there is a serious problem that enforces absenteeism (Educl,3, 4, Sup 1, Prt 7 & 9, Feb 18, 2022).

In order to make the provision of an accelerated learning program inclusive, the issues of orphan children, children of single parents, adopted children, or disabled children attending the program shall receive special attention. Identification, material assistance, and special academic support have to be given to cover some of their expenses through fundraising or searching for some sources that can assist the children in not dropping out of school (EduL, 2, 3 & 4, Feb 13, 2022).

### 3.3.2. Improvement of competence

It was recalled that prior to the start of the program, teachers and facilitators received training on the condensed curriculum, said the facilitators (Ft 1-5, Feb 14, 2022). He went on to explain that the training might have included grades 2 and 3, a briefing on how to pick significant content, and the preparation of lesson plans. The briefing could have been given at the appropriate time before starting phase two of the condensed curriculum. As a result, we're not sure whether or not we should cover the remaining phases and chapters in the given time. Aside from that, the teachers and facilitators also point out that short-term training to build our pedagogical, psychological, and sociological knowledge of handling children could have been given by instructional supervisors based on frequent visits to the class. In an accelerated learning classroom, there is overloaded work (Tch 5, Sup 3, & EduL 2, Feb 18, 2022).

It has been claimed that facilitators lack some pedagogical training in order to develop a method for generating plans in this area (annual, weekly, and daily lesson plans). To address this issue, an Education Community of Practice (ECOP) will be established so that beginner teachers can learn from experienced teachers. The time might be scheduled weekly or monthly, depending on the teacher and facilitators' agreement. It was noted that facilitators and teachers must understand that developing literacy skills from the very first days will lead to high proficiency by the tenth month. Students must be able to read, write, and compute numbers using mathematical operations, according to certain educational leaders, parents, and supervisors (Tch 8, EduL 3, & Sup 2, Feb 11, 2022). If the student fails to accomplish so, the ten months of effort will be an educational waste (Tch 8, EduL 3, & Sup 2, Feb 7, 2022).

One of the educational leaders stated that in order to boost learners' competency, teachers and facilitators should develop:

Short stories, brochures, leaflets, flash cards, and other supportive resources that may be shared in hard copy or soft copy with the children or parents in all subjects. Follow-up on the learners' progress and reporting the gap should be done on a regular basis. This program necessitates optimum efficiency, which necessitates the assignment of well-trained, high-performing teachers. As a result, at least three teachers must be assigned to both classes (EduL,4, Feb 18, 2022).

In order to close the instructional skills gap that has been identified, the teachers and facilitators shall attend training and share their experiences with model teachers in the regular program. The government can own and run the accelerated learning program to ensure its long-term viability. I am absolutely amazed that I only needed ten days of training to complete this task after attending an accelerated learning workshop. It is possible to achieve the desired aim if the government works on the key problem indicated above as a weakness and implements it in another school (Fst 3, & EduL 5, Feb 7, 2022). On the other hand, an educational leader recommends that a program of training should be provided before the school program begins, whether for teachers or facilitators (EduL, 6, Feb 7, 2022).

In explaining their future, students reflect on their interests. When asked, "What do you want to be?" Students consider their interests when expressing their future plans. The vast majority stated that they aspire to be doctors, engineers, police officers, businessmen, and teachers (Stu. more than half of them). As a result, schools and parents must provide the necessary skills and knowledge to attain their goals in the future.

### 3.3.3. Structural improvement

Accelerated learning can be adjusted to the Oromia Regional State's demands. The region must prepare its own manual to administer the program, which shall include, among other things, a budget, curriculum issues, teacher selection, student screening, and a chain of command. The manual could facilitate the program's implementation and reporting strategies and would assist in proper communication following the chain of command to solve specific problems in the schools. For example, some participants stated that in order to be accepted into this program, children must be examined without discrimination or bias and instructed by criteria. The screening method must be meticulously built to address all facets of the individual's situation (Tch 2 & Fs 3, Feb 8, 2022).

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Significance of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)

In this study, the aim was to present an overview of the significance, challenges, and prospects of the accelerated learning program implemented in the Oromia region, Ethiopia. In the Oromia region, currently, the ALFA and APL programs cover 13, reaching about 92,410 out-of-school children. An assessment was made from the perspective of both beneficiaries (parents and students) and implementers (teachers, facilitators, supervisors, educational leaders, and coordinators). Overall, based on our findings, the program has contributed much to the basic education system in Oromia and is highly recognized by the stakeholders. Speed school or accelerated learning programs have made a significant contribution to reaching children who are out of school. In the current study, participants confirmed that the programs have made a significant contribution to improving children's behavior and their literacy skills development.

In speed school/ALFA or an accelerated learning program, students acquire the basic academic skills practically while cultivating essential core competencies such as collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. It gives students the academic, practical, and personal skills to find fulfillment in their future adult life (Muskin & Barcelata, 2021). Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of multi-faceted interventions that provide more educational opportunities, improve teaching, and better schools, and address financial and social barriers to girls' education (Nicholson, 2006). A longitudinal study has witnessed that Speed School students outperform formal government and Link School students (Akyeampong et al., 2018). Learning by doing is the fundamental focal point of this method, and the more a learner knows, the longer he/she retain it (James et al., 2022; Kersten, 2023; Srinivasa et al., 2022; van Dun & Wilderom, 2021). Activity-based learning involves reading, writing, discussion, practical activities, engagement in solving problems, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Hansraj, 2017). The use of the activity-based method in the teaching process can boost a desirable change in students' roles from inactive to participatory learners. Khan et al. (2012) found that the activity-based method was useful in developing higher-order skills in learners. Celik (2018) reported that the activity-based method improves students' academic achievements and attitudes toward activities. Coskun and Eker (2018) reported that the activity-based method significantly affects students' achievement. Akhtar and Saeed (2017) found that the activity-based approach enhances students' learning.

The findings of this study are in line with a study conducted in Turkey by Borkan et al. (2015), which found that catch-up schooling made a substantial difference in the lives of children who completed the program. Apart from that, the ALFA and ALP study found that parents viewed the program favorably because it aided their children's literacy development and enabled them to attend school and learn to read and write in a short period of time. Another study has confirmed that children's awareness of the importance of accelerated education is somewhat positive. 90% of respondents believe that accelerated learning programs helped them catch up with their peers' age equivalents (Wali & Muhammad, 2019). The finding is consistent with some studies; for example, activity-based learning engages both pupils and teachers (Frost, 2010). Activity-based learning has constructivist purposes, and its activities provide both access to information-rich possessions and cooperative interaction. The series of activities is considered the central backbone of the course pedagogy, which provides the students with prospects for "learning by doing" (Macdonald & Twining, 2002).

### 4.2. Challenges of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)

This study revealed that the major challenges that are facing accelerated learning programs being implemented in Oromia Regional State are: shortage of budget, materials, and facilities; students' textbooks; time management and duration; a lack of proper communication and follow-up; teacher competency; and teacher training background. The finding of this study is also consistent with the study made by Borkan et al. (2015), which depicted that the catch-up program was challenged by communication, the short duration of educational components of the program, children's absenteeism due to seasonal work that sometimes uproots whole families, the lack of financial, material, physical, and managerial systems, and the lack of institutional capability, especially at the local level. However, Broken et al. stated in their study that accelerated learning has made improvements in terms of student absenteeism and dropout rates. Children who are enrolled in accelerated learning programs have demonstrated that they attend class regularly and minimize dropouts (Borkan et al., 2015).

The challenges can be minimized if the program is well-planned and implemented. The speed school program is helpful in promoting learning outcomes. In this regard, researchers such as Adams et al. (2009), Borkan et al. (2015), Akyeampong et al. (2018), and Randall et al. (2020) suggested the following likely benefits of the program: Institutional capabilities and resources needed for a successful implementation should be identified ahead of time; a small-scale pilot implementation should be carried out; certain

incentives should be in place; Assign a clear structure responsible for the program (from the bureau to the school level) and organize a strong team of experts to compress curriculum content and design a blueprint to implement ALFA and ALP wherever it is required, which includes a teachers' guidebook and course books (condensed curriculum); involve different partners during the planning and implementation; produce a directive and implementation handbook, which can serve as a reference for practitioners, include the aims, objectives, scope, principles, procedures, and regulations of the program and the roles and responsibilities of practitioners and commissions, determine a manageable class size, ensure continuous follow-up and evaluation of the program, and create awareness for the implementers.

#### **4.3. Prospects of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)**

Overall, ALFA and ALP provided a way for out-of-school children to get access to education. An accelerated learning program, using activity-based learning and a condensed curriculum, allows students to acquire minimum learning competency in a short period of time. A study conducted by Shah and Choo stated that accelerated learning is a flexible, age-appropriate program, run in an accelerated timeframe that aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-aged, out-of-school children and youth. This may include those who missed out or had their education interrupted by poverty, marginalization, conflict, and crisis. The goal of the Accelerated Learning Program is to provide learners with equivalent competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity (Shah and Choo, 2020). The study found that the program may be managed by the government by devising appropriate strategies in terms of enrollment, facilitators or teachers training, and solving budget constraints. The current study's findings are consistent with a previous study conducted by Borkan et al. (2015), which concluded that in the future, existing policies should be pushed and implemented more effectively, and new policies and practices should be developed to reduce the number of children in danger of dropping out.

#### **4.4 Study limitations**

This qualitative study was carried out in Ethiopia's Oromia area, and the approach was carefully selected to thoroughly examine the nature of the subject. Although rich, a significant understanding is made possible by the qualitative design, the sample size may limit how broadly the results may be applied. By using quantitative techniques and statistical tools to supplement the qualitative data, future research could expand the study's scope and produce a more thorough and possibly generalizable analysis.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study shows that the accelerated learning program (ALP) in the Oromia region has had a significant positive impact on children who were previously out of school. This program has succeeded in increasing student motivation and basic academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic in a short period of time, as well as building positive character traits, including self-discipline and better ethics compared to students in traditional classrooms. However, the main challenges faced include a lack of resources, such as textbooks and learning materials, the inability of teachers to teach all subjects competently, and weak communication and supervision between schools and the government. To ensure the sustainability of this program, improvements in program structure, training for teachers, and the provision of adequate support materials are needed. Overall, despite the challenges, ALP has good prospects for providing access to education for marginalized children and has the potential to be expanded if implemented with better planning and stronger support from the government and the community.

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### **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The conflict with Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) is a fight over whether it's better to go fast or to learn things deeply, or a tug-of-war over speed versus depth, or whether it's smarter to race ahead or pause long enough to truly absorb the material, like taking time to smell the ink on a freshly printed page. People worry that by teaching things quickly, students might not truly understand or remember the material well, even though ALPs are great at getting students back into school fast. This need for quick results also

knocks up against traditional schools that think ALPs aren't serious enough and prefer their old, slower ways of teaching. The future of these programs often looks good because they can help so many students, but they constantly face a big challenge, such as enough money to purchase materials, train teachers, or buy books, which means their positive work often can't last. Finally, even though studies show that students in ALPs do well, some folks still wrongly believe that the fast pace is bad for the students' emotions or social lives.

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This research has not received any funding.

### ETHICAL STATEMENT

The fact that designing and running Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) matters deeply, since they answer the moral call to guarantee education for children in crisis or on the margins children who've lost months, even years, of school. The core ethical challenge is finding balance between the pressing need to deliver quick access and certification and the duty to protect learning quality and avoid lasting harm, like a bridge built in haste that must still hold strong. So ALPs have to be built on equity, psychological safety, and sound teaching practice, making sure that a child's learning pace never outruns their full growth or the chances waiting down the road, like letting curiosity bloom without cutting it short for the sake of speed.

### AI USE STATEMENT

AI was used only to grammaticalize the research.

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