

Management response ALMA -learning evaluation

This document presents DFAT's management response to the independent evaluation of Australia's support to the ALMA (*Apoiu ba Lideransa, Mentoria no Aprendizajen*) program in Timor-Leste. The evaluation was undertaken in 2025 to assess ALMA's contribution to improving teaching practices, school leadership, and early grade literacy outcomes. DFAT welcomes the evaluation as an important source of evidence and learning to inform Australia's future engagement in the education sector in Timor-Leste.

ALMA is a national program of the Ministry of Education that supports implementation of the Basic Education Curriculum through leadership support, peer learning groups, and the use of data from classroom observations and student assessments. Australia, through the Partnership for Human Development (PHD), supported the design, implementation, and national roll-out of ALMA from 2016, with the program expanding to schools across all municipalities and becoming embedded within Ministry systems and staffing structures. The evaluation examined relationships between ALMA-supported activities, teaching practices, and student literacy outcomes, drawing on Early Grade Reading Assessments, classroom observations, and comparative analysis across schools.

The evaluation finds a clear association between ALMA's leadership-centred support approach—particularly engagement with school administrators—and stronger early grade literacy outcomes, including higher reading fluency and comprehension and fewer non-readers. It also notes that when ALMA was implemented with high fidelity (indicated by administrators self-reporting receiving mentoring), schools showed consistently stronger outcomes. However, only around one-third of schools were identified as high-fidelity. This highlights both the strength of the model where it was delivered consistently and the practical challenges of achieving full coverage at scale. Improvements in classroom practice were most evident in schools making more active use of formative assessment and data to guide teaching, pointing to the importance of reinforcement through school leadership and peer learning. Overall, the findings align with ALMA's system-focused design, while reflecting some trade-offs with a national roll-out under PHD, including variation in intensity across schools and more limited reach in remote contexts. The evaluation further highlights the positive role of teacher working groups (GTPs), ongoing disparities linked to remoteness and gender, and the importance of basic enabling conditions—such as access to reading materials, water, and protein-rich school meals—in supporting learning.

Ahead of this management response, ALMA has fully transitioned to Ministry management, alongside a system consolidation and alignment with Ministry priorities over the final year of PHD. While the evaluation has made recommendations specific to ALMA, its findings informed Australia's next education investment and will be examined in more detail through inception work with the Ministry.

#	Recommendation	Rationale from the study	Response and explanation	DFAT management response
1	Strengthen tracking of fidelity of implementation of the mentorship model.	Around one-third of administrators recalled mentorship and these schools showed consistently stronger literacy outcomes. The analysis reports that this is 'associated with high fidelity of implementation'.	DFAT agrees that more systematic tracking of implementation fidelity would enable a clearer understanding of what works best, and under what conditions and enable better adaptation.	DFAT will strengthen MEL design in future programs to support improved fidelity tracking and learning.
2	Document and analyse high-performing mentorship cases to inform future practice.	A subset of long-term schools demonstrated sustained literacy gains, suggesting the presence of effective mentorship practices and a potential maturation effect.	DFAT partially agrees. Case studies could give valuable insights. During the final year of support under PHD, attention was focused on institutionalisation of ALMA in relevant areas of the MoE, rather than analytical pieces.	DFAT will work with the Ministry in our future program (starting 2026) to continue to learn from ALMA implementation and continue to strengthen MoE systems.
3	Refine and strengthen approaches that support non-readers and the most vulnerable learners.	Administrator mentorship was strongly associated with reductions in non-readers, likely through improved formative assessment and school-level support. It is important to explore why this is occurring and consider how to scale-up.	DFAT agrees that addressing low foundational literacy remains a priority for the Ministry. Ministry leadership has shifted emphasis toward strengthening the capacity of local mentors to directly support teachers' use of formative assessment and targeted instructional strategies.	DFAT will work with the Ministry to ensure that MEL in our future program (starting 2026) will identify what works to support the most vulnerable learners.

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4	Develop alternative mentorship approaches for extremely remote schools.	Extremely remote schools reported lower mentorship exposure and significantly poorer learning outcomes, reflecting access and feasibility challenges.	DFAT agrees that there are structural challenges associated with supporting extremely remote schools, and that there are many factors that affect learning outcomes in extremely remote areas. During the final year of support under PHD, discussions focused on how the Ministry might adapt mentoring approaches over time rather than defining new delivery models.	DFAT will work with the Ministry in our future program (starting 2026) to support MoE systems that can strengthen learning outcomes for all Timorese students, with a focus on inclusion.
5	Strengthen linkages between mentorship and improvements in school conditions (e.g. reading corners, water, school meals).	Enabling conditions were more prevalent in schools where administrators reported mentorship and were strongly associated with better learning outcomes.	DFAT notes the importance of enabling conditions for learning, however this was beyond the scope of PHD in its final year.	DFAT have shared this evaluation with MoE to inform their management of ALMA. We will work with the Ministry in our future program (starting 2026) to identify opportunities within our scope to strengthen enabling conditions.
6	Address high student and teacher absenteeism through complementary approaches.	Absenteeism levels were high and not directly influenced by mentorship or peer learning activities, likely constraining learning gains.	DFAT acknowledges that absenteeism is driven by a wide range of factors including health, climate shocks, and food insecurity and that this constrains learning outcomes. Absenteeism was recognised as beyond the scope of the PHD education program in its final year.	We will work with the Ministry as part of our future program (starting 2026) to identify opportunities within our Australia's scope to strengthen enabling conditions.

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8	Further explore how mentorship can be more effective to address gender gaps in learning.	Boys consistently underperformed girls in literacy outcomes, while female administrators and teachers appeared to benefit more strongly from mentorship.	DFAT acknowledges the observed gender differences. While PHD was concluding, these findings were shared with the Ministry as part of ongoing policy dialogue under Ministry-led education reform efforts.	DFAT will work with the Ministry in our future program (starting 2026) to understand the causes of gender gaps in learning and support MoE systems that can address the causes of gender learning gaps.