

Assessing for Results: Early Grade Reading Assessments for Learning Improvement

In education, assessment is the process of documenting—usually in measurable terms—knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. Education systems use a variety of assessments. For example, many countries participate in regional or international assessments that provide an indication of the educational attainment of their students relative to other countries such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). At a national level, achievement tests and end of cycle or exit exams are administered, often to make decisions about student placement and promotion.

In classrooms, teachers use a variety of assessments. Formative and summative assessments provide them information on the effectiveness of the instruction they are providing during and after a lesson. Assessments also differ in the type of information they provide. Criterion-referenced assessments measure what students know against a set of skills or knowledge. Results from norm-referenced assessments indicate how well a student did in relation to a group of similar students. Each type of assessment has a function and provides unique information to the system.

The Purpose of Early Grade Assessments

Recently, there has been an emergence of national-level assessments that test the skills children need to acquire in the early grades. These assessments fill a gap by providing information on the rate at which children acquire critical foundation literacy and numeracy skills. These foundation skills are traditionally



*Conducting an early grade reading assessment
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
Photo: RTI staff.*

not measured by other assessments that assume children are already literate. This type of assessment responds to converging research that documents the importance of early intervention in ensuring the acquisition of basic literacy skills in the first two years of schooling. Therefore, it is essential to know how well and at what rate students are acquiring basic literacy skills.

Developing a Comprehensive Assessment Plan

In developing a comprehensive assessment plan, the purpose of each assessment and its relationship to others has to be considered. The goal is to have adequate data to make informed decisions at the national, district, school, and classroom level without redundancy. To determine which assessments are needed, one must first identify what information is needed and for what purpose. Participation in international and regional assessments may be useful in measuring student gains against an international norm. Likewise, assessments at upper elementary and secondary school levels provide useful information about the quality of the instruction students are receiving. Finally, an assessment that provides data on how well children are acquiring initial skills is also needed. Ideally, these assessments should be linked so that information from one serves as a predictor of success on the next. For example, a child who can read a grade-level passage with 80% comprehension has an 85% probability of passing or mastering an end of cycle

assessment at the end of primary school. This alignment should be the goal of a comprehensive assessment plan.

Overview of Different Reading Assessments

The following table contains examples of five assessments. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) assess

basic literacy skills. PIRLS (and Pre-PIRLS) and SACMEQ are international assessments of literacy skills. Although some of these measures have additional components, the information provided is only for the reading sections. Examples of end of cycle or exit exams are not provided since those are country-specific assessments.

	ASER	EGRA	PIRLS	Pre-PIRLS	SACMEQ
Purpose	Assess what a child can do comfortably on an untimed test of basic reading skills	Assess children's acquisition of basic literacy skills	Measure trends in reading literacy achievement	Measure trends in reading literacy achievement	Measure the quality of primary education. The eight levels of competency provide an analysis of what pupils can do
Grades/Ages	Ages 6–16	Grades 1–4	Grade 4 is the target but can be administered at grades 5–6	Grades 4–6 depending on a country's educational development; administered to students who are still in the process of learning to read	Grade 6 pupils attending registered mainstream primary schools the first week of the eighth month of school
Administration format	Individual and oral	Individual and oral	Written, multiple choice, and constructed-response items	Written, multiple choice, and constructed-response items	Written
Type of assessment	Criterion-referenced	Criterion-referenced	Achievement; norm-referenced	Achievement; norm-referenced	Criterion-referenced
What do the results provide?	Level on an ordinal scale indexing mastery in each of the basic skills of reading	Score for each subtest. All except for phonemic awareness represent speed and accuracy	Scale scores in which 500 is the mean score with a standard deviation of 100	Scale scores in which 500 is the mean score with a standard deviation of 100	Scale scores in which 500 is the mean score with a standard deviation of 100 and levels of competency. Reading includes eight levels: pre-reading, emergent, basic, and five levels of reading for meaning
What does it measure?	Basic reading tasks: read letters, common words, paragraph with four simple sentences (Standard 1 level), and short story of 10–12 sentences (Standard 2 level)	Basic reading tasks: phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, word reading, nonword reading, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension	Purposes of reading (literary experience and to use information) and reading comprehension	Basic reading skills that are prerequisites for success on PIRLS; and reading comprehension, using shorter passages with easier vocabulary and syntax	Basic reading skills (matches words and pictures, word reading) and various levels of comprehension from interpreting meaning to critical reasoning
Administration	Administered in homes	Administered in school	Administered in school	Administered in school	Administered in school

More Information

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