MERLA in International Education

Monitoring, evaluation, research, learning, and adapting (MERLA) experts at RTI International work across the globe to develop innovative and sustainable monitoring methods; measure the impact of education programs; collect high-quality, actionable data; conduct ground-breaking research that contributes to program learning and moves the field forward; and use all data to help adapt and improve program effectiveness.

With MERLA, we apply results-focused monitoring, evaluation, and research to inform continuous learning and adaptation. MERLA improves program operations when:

- Data collected through M&E systems are timely and high quality, and are analyzed and used to evaluate program performance;

- Operations research fills gaps in evidence to complement traditional M&E data;

- Key results and evidence from M&E and research are regularly reviewed and synthesized into program learning; and

- Program learning and adaptation are continuously incorporated to improve implementation, communicate results, document lessons and best practices, and inform policy decisions.

MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E)

M&E data and evidence gaps help frame operations research (OR) questions

OPERATIONS RESEARCH (OR)

Results from M&E and OR contribute to learning

LEARNING

Learning informs decision-making in collaboration with stakeholders

ADAPTING

Programmatic learning and adapting lead to improved M&E and OR results

Expertise

- Assessment design, development, validation, and implementation

- Survey instrument/questionnaire design, development, validation, and administration

- Measurement and psychometrics: classical test theory, item response theory

- Complex survey design, cluster sampling, and data analysis

- Project monitoring: planning, data collection, analysis

- Program evaluation: formative, process, outcome, and impact

- Research design: experimental, quasi-experimental, randomized controlled trials, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research

- Learning agenda development and action-oriented research

- Collaborating, learning, and adapting

- Policy engagement and dissemination

- Training and capacity building for design, analysis, and reporting

Surveys and Assessments

The **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)** is an oral student assessment designed to measure the most basic skills for literacy acquisition: recognizing letters of the alphabet, reading simple words, understanding sentences and paragraphs, and listening with comprehension.

The **Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)** is an oral assessment designed to measure a student's foundational skills in numeracy and mathematics. Tasks are number identification, quantity discrimination, missing-number identification, word problems, addition and subtraction, shape recognition, and pattern extension.

The **Group Administered Literacy Assessment (GALA)** and **Group Administered Mathematics Assessment (GAMA)** are orally administered, paper-and-pencil assessments that measure foundational skills similar to those of the EGRA and EGMA. Designed for routine education monitoring, they can be administered and scored simply, quickly, and cost-effectively.

Social-emotional learning (SEL). RTI has developed assessments of executive function and culturally relevant social and emotional competencies for learning and healthy development in primary school, as well as game-based assessments for adolescents.

Early childhood development assessments. In addition to innovative work in SEL measurement, RTI has developed, adapted, and administered a wide array of child development and early learning assessments, including expressive language and emergent literacy and numeracy.

Disability screening tools. We use existing open-source and clinically validated tools on mobile devices to screen children for potential sensory, cognitive, or learning disabilities.

The **Survey of Student Experiences of School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)** assesses the extent to which students ages 8–18 experience all forms of SRGBV. It measures bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual violence. Methods are face-to-face interviews or audio and computer-assisted self-interviewing.

The **Local Education Monitoring Approach (LEMA)** is a simple and sustainable school monitoring approach for local governments, and uses binary indicators and small school sample sizes to quickly collect and process local data on school and student performance. Users can readily apply the data in their decision making to improve program effectiveness.

Highlighted Projects

JORDAN. Funded by USAID, RTI supported the Ministry of Education (MoE) to conduct a national EGRA/EGMA/SSME survey in 2012. In response to the results, RTI aided the MoE in piloting two interventions by means of a randomized controlled trial. Immediately afterward, the MoE, with RTI support, incorporated aspects of the interventions into its textbooks. It has since taken the intervention pedagogies to scale, targeting 13,000 teachers and more than 540,000 children (including 41,000 Syrian refugees) by the end of 2019 as part of the USAID-funded Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Initiative (RAMP).

TANZANIA. RTI has worked with several donors in Tanzania to lead three biennial national surveys of student reading and mathematics performance. Actionable data inform nationwide teacher and curriculum reforms, as well as regional program initiatives. As part of the five-year, USAID-funded Tusome Pamoja program, RTI initiated focused, in-depth monitoring activities; rigorous evaluation; and annual operational research. These efforts have led to continuous data-driven adjustments in training activities, learning support materials, and government-provided pedagogic support to teachers in more than 3,000 schools in five regions.

UGANDA. Learning and adapting are central to our education programs in Uganda. Under the School Health and Reading Program (SHRP), when a reading assessment in one region at the end of Primary 2 showed poor outcomes, RTI and the Ministry of Education and Sports conducted field research to answer questions they had around the underlying causes. One key discovery was that teachers were not guiding learners to read on their own, but instead were simply reading words aloud from the chalkboard and asking the children to repeat them. In response, teacher training and teacher support were retooled to emphasize support to individual reading. When assessed again at the end of Primary 3, learners in the SHRP-supported schools were reading more than twice as many words per minute as control learners.

More Information

Jonathan Stern
Senior Research and Evaluation Specialist
International Education
jstern@rti.org
+1 919.541.6747

www.rti.org/idg_education
http://SharEd.rti.org
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9858 R2 0419