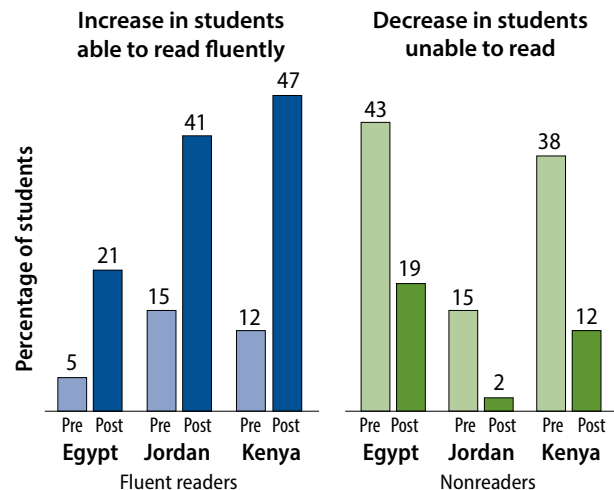# Why Education?

Education benefits both individual students and society. For students, education results in greater opportunities and higher expected income; for society, a more educated population increases a country's potential for economic and human development. Investment in education contributes to economic growth, innovation, an expanded workforce, greater political stability, lower crime rates, and better public health. It supports national and international efforts to achieve a broad range of development goals, and the impact tends to be strongest in lower- and middle-income countries.

Why Early Grade Reading?

The ability to read is fundamental for overall academic success and positively affects life outcomes. Yet, literacy rates lag in much of the developing world. While efforts over the past two decades have resulted in substantially increased enrollment, education quality has not improved significantly, particularly in the early grades. Research has shown that students who do not learn to read in the first few grades are more likely to repeat and eventually drop out of school, and the education attainment gap between readers and nonreaders increases over time.

With the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and other donors, and working with local government counterparts, RTI has implemented nearly 30 reading improvement projects—including experimental studies and national-scale programs—that have directly impacted student reading performance—including in Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Tanzania, and Uganda. To date, more than 40 million children have benefitted from early grade reading programs supported by RTI.

Through our projects and research, we have compiled empirical evidence of what works to improve reading in low-income countries. The graph below shows results from evaluations of three early reading interventions—the Jordan National Survey (EdData II), Egypt Girls' Improved Learning Outcomes (GILO), and Kenya Tusome (Let's Read" in Kiswahili). In each case, the intervention produced remarkable increases in student performance, on a scale seldom seen in educational research.

Increase in students able to read fluently

Decrease in students unable to read

Percentage of students

	Egypt	Jordan	Kenya
Pre	5	15	12
Post	21	41	47

Fluent readers

	Egypt	Jordan	Kenya
Pre	43	15	38
Post	19	2	12

Nonreaders

Improved Reading Instruction and Results

Jordan: Improving student performance

Working with the Jordanian Ministry of Education under the USAID-funded EdData II project, RTI and its local partners designed and implemented a reading and mathematics improvement program to strengthen areas of weakness identified in an RTI-led early grade education assessment. The improvement program included developing and providing supplementary teaching materials, teacher training, and school-based support. Motivated by concerns regarding the increase in the number of Syrian refugee children in Jordanian schools, a second pilot program was designed to help teachers identify and target support to students in need of remediation.

Results. Over the course of this one-year pilot program, reading fluency rates among third grade students more than doubled, with **the percentage of students reading fluently increasing from 15% to 41%**. This approach is now being expanded and should ultimately reach 540,000 students throughout the country from the second level of kindergarten through grade 3. Preliminary findings from this expanded program are showing continued increases in student performance, even after only a few months of implementation.

Egypt: Improving Learning Outcomes

Under the USAID-funded Girls' Improved Learning Outcomes (GILO) program, RTI and the Egyptian Ministry of Education undertook a comprehensive textbook analysis, which informed the design of an in-service teacher training module tailored to complement existing textbooks and approaches to reading instruction. The module and supporting materials (featuring active, kinetic activities for students) were trialed in 166 schools beginning in 2010.

Results. Endline results demonstrating an astounding **82% increase in oral reading fluency** (compared with a 38% increase in control schools) led the Ministry of Education to scale up the project nationally using its own funding, benefitting 4.2 million grade 1 to 3 children in 16,000 schools.

RTI's "5 T's" for what works to improve reading

Better techniques and support for **teaching**

More **texts** in the hands of students

More **time** devoted to teaching

Testing, or measurement, of results

Teaching children in the **mother tongue**

Kenya: From Pilot Program to National Scale

The Tusome Early Grade Reading Activity is a Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) program that is implemented nationwide, with support from USAID and DFID, and aims to improve English and Kiswahili reading outcomes for students in grades 1-3. The program was designed based on multi-layered rigorous research conducted under the USAID-funded Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) program that tested several implementation options relevant to the Kenyan context over several years. Tusome's expansion of PRIMR's most effective elements began in 2015 in all of Kenya's public primary schools (approximately 23,000), as well as in 1,500 low-cost private schools serving low-resourced urban settlements. By December 2019, Tusome will have reached approximately seven million students.

Results. Midline data showed that reading performance among students in Tusome schools has dramatically increased: **the percentage of students able to read with fluency tripled in Kiswahili** (from 4% to 12%), and **more than tripled in English** (from 12% to 47%). Further, the percentage of nonreaders has been cut in half in both English and Kiswahili, and the overall impacts are equal across various income distributions, showing that Tusome is increasing educational equity at a national level.

More Information

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