

Reading Benchmarks in African Languages

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Overview

- By 2000s, nearly all 7-15 year-olds attended school, access to education has been a major accomplishment
- Between 2002-2019 South Africa was one of the fastest improving countries in TIMSS, PIRLS and SACMEQ thanks to key reforms:
 - ❖ DBE Workbook Programme
 - ❖ Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)
 - ❖ Expansion of Grade R
 - ❖ Annual National Assessments emphasized accountability for learning
- Improvements in primary and early secondary grades positively impacted Matric results, leading to more Grade 12 candidates and higher pass rates.
- Overall strengthening and improvement of the education sector more broadly



local and international practice in early grades?

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- Small number of developing countries participate in international assessments
 - ❖ SA is one of 3 African countries in PIRLS
 - ❖ Less than 10 developing countries participate in PIRLS overall
- Early reading skills assessments existing were complex and expensive
- Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs) developed in response in 2006
 - ❖ Assess letters, **phonemic awareness**, **word recognition**, **comprehension**, **vocabulary**, **fluency and writing**
- Low-cost and language-adaptable early grade assessments for use in various countries
- Easy and quick administration by teachers or fieldworkers without specialized knowledge

local and international practice in early grades?

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- By 2016 more than 70 countries in 120 languages used EGRA including SA
- Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda, Liberia, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia, leveraged their EGRA data to create early grade reading benchmarks
 - ❖ Only 5% of learners reach the benchmarks – same floor effect issues
- Main critique:
 - ❖ Inappropriateness of English as the reference language
 - ❖ Absence of language-specific skills, e.g complex consonant sequences
 - ❖ lack of language-specific interpretation of the reading scores
- Clear need for relevant early grade support to measure aspects of reading but clear flaws in the existing tools – identified in 2018



Why do we need reading benchmarks for early grades in South Africa ?

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Goal

is a long-term aspiration, maybe without a numerical value (for example, all 10 year old children reading for meaning)

Metric

is a valid, reliable unit of measurement (for example, correct words per minute (cwpm) reading connected text)

Benchmark

is a numerical representation of the goal, using the metric, or a milestone on the way to achieve the goal (for example, 45 cwpm reading a passage of grade-level text)

Target

is the proportion or number of learners targeted to reach the benchmark in a given time (for example, 50 per cent of learners to meet the benchmark in two years).



How can we use reading benchmarks?

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National and Provincial Administration	School	Classroom
Establishes definition of reading proficiency	Standards and targets that school leaders can aim towards	Standard against which to measure learner skills
Clearly communicates standards and targets	Standardises assessment practices across and within schools	Identify early on learners at risk of not being able to read
Monitor progress	Identify the extent of remedial support required	Adapt instructional focus to meet learners' needs



How does the curriculum address this?

- Foundation Phase curriculum: 5 essential components in the teaching of reading;
 - **Phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency**
- Fluency: defined as reflecting a combination of **accuracy, speed, and prosody**
 - Independent reading level: 95% Accuracy
 - Instructional reading level: 90% Accuracy
- Activities such as Group Guided Reading and Paired Reading identified for practice
- Explicit mention of fluency less clarity on how to assess it – initially 7-9 assessment requirements with details but reduced to 1 per term with less detail
- **Conclude:** lack of assessment details enabled lack of awareness of slow and low reading



Benchmarks plans per language

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Progress	Public Release/Availability
1. Nguni language	
Consolidated, adopted by the DBE and released publicly	October 2020
2. English First additional language	
Consolidated, adopted by the DBE and released publicly	November 2022
3. Sesotho-Setswana language group	
Consolidated, adopted by the DBE and released publicly	November 2022
4. Afrikaans language report	
Consolidated, adopted by the DBE and released publicly	November 2022
5. Tshivenda language report	
Consolidated, adopted by the DBE and released publicly	November 2023
6. Xitsonga language report	
Consolidated, adopted by the DBE and released publicly	November 2023
7. English Home Language report	
Initial data analysis and fundraising underway	November 2024



Thank you

Reports are available here:

<https://www.education.gov.za/Research,MonitoringEvaluationReports.aspx>



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