East Asia and the Pacific
Early Grade Reading Assessments Conference
April 12-14, 2011 | Sydney, Australia

Background

The United Nations' Education for All (EFA) campaign and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have focused attention on educational achievement over the past decade and this attention has led to measurable success. Many low-income countries are now enrolling children in primary school at nearly the rates of high-income countries. However, data on learning outcomes – the little that exists -- show that average student learning in most low-income countries is quite low and lags significantly behind improvements in access to schooling (World Bank, 2006). Problems with learning in many schools – whether in developing countries or in high income countries – often begin during the first years of a child's schooling when the foundations of learning established.

Empirical research shows that the failure of children to learn to read and understand a simple text in the early grades is associated to increased grade repetition and dropouts, and ultimately reduced life-chances and social ills. Yet few developing countries give priority to measuring how well children are acquiring reading skills in the early grades. Many countries do develop national assessments in an attempt to measure learning outcomes against nationally defined standards (UNESCO, 2007), but nearly all national and international assessments are paper-and-pencil tests administered to students in grade 4 and above. Because these tests assume that students can read and write, it is not always possible to distinguish between students who score poorly because they lack the knowledge tested by the assessments or because they lack basic reading and comprehension skills (USAID, 2009).

In response to a growing demand from ministries of education and development professionals, an increasing number of countries are measuring how well children develop foundational reading skills in the first years of primary education. Early grade reading assessments aim to help countries begin the process of measuring these skills in a systematic way to ultimately, spur more effective efforts to improve performance in this core learning skill.

To date, more than 41 countries and 74 languages have increased their knowledge about reading outcomes through early grade reading assessments. A smaller group is doing the same in early numeracy. In East Asia and the Pacific region, Cambodia, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Timor-Leste have undertaken assessments and are in the process of introducing quality improvements in areas such as teacher training, production of relevant instructional materials, and enhanced community participation. Around the world, early grade reading assessments are being used to refine and improve curriculum, curricular materials, and instructional approaches. In The Gambia and South Africa, early grade reading results informed the development of focalized-instructional approaches for reading acquisition which include the development of and training in reading instructional handbooks. In Mali and Niger, Plan International has worked with ministries of education in Mali and Niger to develop and pilot improved instructional approaches and materials. Other examples of how countries have used early grade reading results are available at www.eddataglobal.org.

By focusing in the early grades and addressing learning deficiencies early, countries are laying the foundations of a continuous cycle of improving student learning outcomes through diagnosis, remedial interventions and monitoring. Through periodic assessments, governments promote a constant feedback on overall policy and system performance to monitor progress and improvements in student learning over time.

Purpose

The East Asia and the Pacific Early Grade Reading Assessments Conference aims to serve as a South-South knowledge sharing event for policy makers, education managers, educators and experts to share experiences on how to improve student learning outcomes and reading levels in the early grades of primary education. In particular, the event will focus on country experiences with these assessments and how results have informed policy improvements on teacher development, supported the production of linguistic and culturally relevant instructional materials, and galvanized community support and parental involvement towards improved reading outcomes.

Objectives

The main objective of the event is to share country experiences to advance reading development in the early grades. In addition, the workshop aims to provide the opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of early reading diagnosis as the basis for effective remedial interventions, to allow policy makers and experts build networks and partnerships; and assist countries in the region to define a country-defined strategy to advance early grade reading assessments to inform policies and provide constant feedback on the quality of reading levels in their countries. In particular, the workshop aims to:

1. Share regional international experiences of early grade reading assessments and remedial interventions in East Asia and Pacific island countries;
2. Identify the main challenges facing East Asia countries interested in launching a cycle of reading instructional improvements for the early grades;
3. Discuss among government officials and development partners on policy and strategy recommendations how early grade reading assessments can benefit and/or integrate national assessment systems; and
4. Agree on follow-up activities for countries in the region.

Workshop Dynamics

As a knowledge sharing event, the Early Grade Reading Assessments Conference will hold a series of presentations by regional policy makers to introduce participants to how early grade assessments have been introduced into their national assessment strategy, as well as the lessons learned during the design and implementation of early grade reading assessments in their country. Each session will have short presentation followed by a round of Q&A discussion.

Presentations by international experts will focus on the key elements that contribute to successful teacher development programs and effective reading materials, and promote greater parental involvement and community awareness towards a common goal of improving reading outcomes. These will be followed by a working session where country teams will have the opportunity to

reflect on the state of teacher development programs, production and provision of relevant and effective instructional materials, and community participation in their own countries to identify the main challenges and opportunities facing early grade assessments in their countries.

Finally, the workshop will offer a series of four thematic clinics (survey implementation, teacher development programs, reading materials and teacher aids, instructional approaches, and community mobilization) where participants will have the opportunity to discuss with regional peers and practitioners the main challenges and opportunities facing the introduction of early grade assessments and/or remedial interventions into their national education frameworks.

Expected Participants
- Senior government officials and/or policy makers from participating Ministries of Education
- Research / Technical staff from curriculum, teacher training, and/or assessment divisions within
- International experts
- Specialized agencies
- Development partners

Participating Countries
Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar*, Mongolia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Vietnam.

AGENDA

Time	Topic	Presenter
Day 1 – 12 April 2011		
8:00	Registration	
9:00	Welcome and Agenda/Objectives	Binh Thanh Vu (Regional FTI Coordinator EAPHE, World Bank)
9:20	A Focus on Student Learning and the Elements that Promote It	Eduardo Velez-Bustillo (Education Sector Manager for the East Asia and the Pacific Region, World Bank)
9:50	**Break**	
10:00	Early Grade Reading Assessments: Research Foundations and Policy Uses	Amber Gove (Senior Education Research Analyst, RTI International)
10:30	*Discussion*	Moderator: Eduardo Velez-Bustillo (Education Sector Manager for the East Asia and the Pacific Region, World Bank)
11:00	The Gambia: Results that Inform System-Wide Literacy Improvements	Burama Jammeh (Director of Curriculum Research, Evaluation and Development, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education of The Gambia)
11:30	*Discussion*	Moderator: James A. Stevens (Senior Operations Officer, World Bank)
12:00	**Lunch**	
13:00	Timor-Leste: Using EGRA Results to Inform Development of Teaching Aids and Reading Materials	Julia Gaio (Early Grade Materials National Advisor, Ministry of Education of Timor Leste)
13:30	*Discussion*	Moderator: Stephen D. Close (Human Development Specialist, World Bank)
14:00	Tonga: Using EGRA Results to Inform the Development of Reading Standards and Monitoring Strategies	Raelyn L'Esau (Director of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Education, Women's Affairs and Culture of Tonga)
14:30	*Discussion*	Moderator: Stephen D. Close (Human Development Specialist, World Bank)
15:00	**Break**	
15:20	Vanuatu: Using EGRA Results to Inform Improvements in Teacher Training and Resource Development	Roy Obed (Acting Director General Education, Ministry of Education of Vanuatu)
15:50	Discussion	Moderator: James A. Stevens (Senior Operations Officer, World Bank)
16:20	Recap	Myrna Machuca-Sierra (Education Specialist, World Bank)

Day 2 – 13 April 2011		
Start	**Topic**	**Presenter**
8:30	Arrival	Event Management
9:00	PNG, Laos and Cambodia: Design and Implementation Challenges	Panel Discussion
10:00	Discussion and Wrap-Up of Country Experiences	Moderator: Binh Thanh Vu (Regional FTI Coordinator EAPHE, World Bank)
10:30	**Break**	
11:00	Key Elements in Reading Development: Teacher Professional Development	Sylvia Linan-Thompson (RTI International)
11:30	*Working session*	Moderator: Binh Thanh Vu (Regional FTI Coordinator EAPHE, World Bank)
12:00	**Lunch**	
13:00	Key Elements in Reading Development: Early Grade Reading Materials	Stephanie Al Otaiba (University of Florida)
13:30	*Working session*	Moderator: Stephen D. Close (Human Development Specialist, World Bank
14:00	Key Elements in Reading Development: Social Mobilization for Learning Results	Eduardo Velez-Bustillo (Education Sector Manager for the East Asia and the Pacific Region, World Bank)
14:30	*Working session*	Moderator: James A. Stevens (Senior Operations Officer, World Bank)
15:00	**Break**	
15:20	Key Elements in Reading Development: Instructional Approaches Based on Early Grade Reading Assessment Results	Amber Gove (RTI International)
15:50	*Working session*	Moderator: Myrna Machuca-Sierra (Education Specialist, World Bank)
16:30	**Break**	
16:40	Recap	Myrna Machuca-Sierra (Education Specialist, World Bank)

Day 3 – 14 April 2011		
Start	**Topic**	**Presenter**
8:30	Arrival	Event Management
9:00	Summary and Objectives for Clinic Sessions	Myrna Machuca-Sierra (Education Specialist, World Bank)
9:10	Clinic Sessions on: (1) Teacher Professional Development, (2) Early Grade Reading Materials, (3) Social Mobilization, (4) Development of Results-based Instructional Approaches	(1) Linan-Thompson (2) Al Otaiba (3) Velez (4) Gove * Machuca-Sierra to coordinate clinic dynamics
10:45	**Break**	
11:00	Roundtable Discussion in Plenary	Moderator: Binh Thanh Vu (Regional FTI Coordinator EAPHE, World Bank)
12:30	**Break**	
12:40	Summary of Lessons, Challenges and Recommendations	Myrna Machuca-Sierra (Education Specialist, World Bank)
12:50	Next Steps and Closing Remarks	Eduardo Velez-Bustillo (Education Sector Manager for the East Asia and the Pacific Region, World Bank)
13:00	**End of event**	