

EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENTS CONFERENCE: MAIN MESSAGES AND CHALLENGES



Motivation

- Great regional record on enrolment but concerns about quality of learning outcomes
- Ongoing efforts to improve reading outcomes in primary education
- 6 countries generating data on reading acquisition in the early grades: Timor-Leste, Cambodia, Tonga, Vanuatu, PNG, and Lao PDR
 - ▣ Results in line with those from other countries
 - ▣ Though there are differences in scale/capacity, similar challenges (training of teachers, mother tongue instruction, availability of books, parental/community involvement, optimal instructional time)

Motivation

- Reading development is critical for student achievement
- Early diagnosis is essential to timely address learning deficits
- Assess to identify gaps in instruction
- Test as a means – not an end
 - ▣ Assessment is only the first step of the process
 - ▣ Each country will have different process

Main Messages from Country Experiences

- Test to diagnose and act upon results
- At the technical level, technical support to country teams was determinant
- Funding available to undertake assessments and plan for follow-up intervention
- Commitment at all levels for sustainable:
 - ▣ Assessment
 - ▣ Implementation of follow-up activities / interventions
 - ▣ Support student learning (teachers, school principals, parents, etc.)

Summary – Teacher Professional Development

Issues

- ▣ Training of trainers
 - How to ensure consistency
 - How to deal with different languages
- ▣ Content
 - In addition to content, include
 - Reflection
 - Bridging new and old knowledge and content
- ▣ Delivery
 - Need to include various delivery modes

Summary – Early Reading Materials

- Lessons: This is hard work!
 - Cambodia: Idea to use data to learn what works
 - Examine correlation between scores and instructional methods
 - For example look at outcomes (or gains) in English and in Khmer reading (and perhaps spelling or writing) in schools which begin teaching in Khmer and English at same time vs. schools which do not begin English until later
- Everyone needs more books and the challenge to pay for them (and who to publish)
- Challenges:
 - Samoa: Helping teachers move toward thinking of teaching letter-symbol correspondence in mother-tongue without being English-centric in thinking about phonics
 - Laos: Reading readiness and the issue of kindergarten
 - PNG: Multiple languages and bridging to a language (English) BUT all teachers learned to read in English-only

Summary – Social Mobilisation

- We know that to improve learning outcomes we must empower parents and communities
- Diverse context of parents & communities
- Many tools/ methods from our countries: PTAs, community involvement in teacher training, School Learning Improvement Planning, NGO role in nationwide mobilisation, reading contests, TV/DVD/Radio/song, kids take books home to parents...
- What is our information base on parents and communities?
- What's been missing – Accountability!
- Remember social marketing is an art

Summary – Evidence-based instructional improvement

- Test: how you communicate matters (evaluation is a dirty word, use evidence wisely)
- Teach: follow Sylvia's advice, work on support system
- Tongue: figure out goal of system (maintenance or transition) and make sure there is alignment
- Text: Get creative, digital?, never hurts to ask, seek out guidance (rubric promised by Stephanie)
- Time: professionalism of teachers, support of community, value every minute
- Overarching lessons: evidence-based decisions, coherence, alignment and communication about success are key

Wrap-up

- Ready to start up the process:
 - ▣ Review of existing / ongoing programs and policies in early grades: What are the differences? What are the potential synergies?
 - ▣ Plan for an early grade assessment (identify purpose, use, in-country team, etc.)
- Ready to incorporate results into your country's process to improve quality in reading outcomes to address gaps in curriculum, teacher professional development, teaching and reading materials, and parental support
- Two elements cut across:
 - ▣ Need to develop strategies to build and sustain capacity in MoEs
 - ▣ Need to identify adequate, relevant strategies to mobilize stakeholders both at the top (decision makers, politicians) and the bottom (communities, parents, NGOs)

Development Partner Support



- Technical assistance (assessment & incorporate results into key areas)
- Funding, when not available
- Opportunities to network with regional peers



Thank you!