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Press release

New report offers evidence-based solutions to address global literacy crisis among children

Ghana, 12:00pm 30 October 2025 – The ‘literacy crisis’ is complex, but two things are clear: some teachers lack confidence in teaching literacy effectively and some children are not learning foundational literacy skills despite being in school. This new paper, [Effective Reading Instruction in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: What the Evidence Shows](#), is based on evidence from around 120 studies (including 50 studies in African countries), on effective reading instruction conducted across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, across over 170 languages of which 22 languages are specific to the African region (including ; Arabic, Chichewa, isiZulu, Kikamba, Kiswahili, Oromo, Setswana and Siswati and amongst others). It identifies the key skills pupils must learn, and that teachers must learn to teach, to effectively support the acquisition of literacy. Launched today at the ADEA Triennale in Ghana, the report is endorsed by the [Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel \(GEEAP\)](#), an independent, multidisciplinary panel of leading global experts in education evidence and policymaking that is co-hosted by the UK’s [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office \(FCDO\)](#), [UNICEF](#) and the [World Bank](#).

70% of children in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) cannot read and understand simple, age-appropriate text, as noted in the 2022, World Bank State of Global Learning Poverty report. With the situation being more severe in Sub-Saharan Africa where the Learning Poverty rate is estimated to be 89%. A study that analyzed data from early grade reading assessments (EGRAs) from over 500,000 students across 48 LMICs in 96 languages revealed the depth of the crisis: it showed that after three years of schooling, over 90% of students can’t identify letter names, letter sounds or read simple words at expected levels.¹ Failure to use evidence-based approaches to instruction is one of the main causes of the literacy crisis but improving how teachers teach can change this. Investing in proven reading methods during children’s early school years is likely to reduce the need for expensive remedial programs later, decrease grade repetition, and lower dropout rates.

“Too many children are in school but not yet learning to read. This report underscores how literacy is at the very core of a child’s learning trajectory - shaping their opportunities and future,” said Pia Rebello Britto, UNICEF Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development. “With African governments committed to the Decade of Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills Development in Africa as well as Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040, this paper highlights the key investments needed to turn those commitments into action for children. Investing in the early years is essential.”

This research shows that two main sets of skills are needed for reading - decoding and language comprehension.

- *Decoding* is the ability to recognize written symbols (e.g., letters) and convert them into the sounds they represent to recognize words.

¹ [Crawford et al. \(2024\)](#)

- *Language comprehension* involves understanding the meaning of words, sentences and texts.

To develop these skills, children need to be explicitly taught the following sub-skills:

1. **Oral language skills:** This includes listening and speaking skills, and vocabulary development. Children must understand spoken words before they can comprehend written text. While children naturally develop some oral language skills, targeted classroom instruction significantly accelerates this development.
2. **Phonological awareness:** This is the ability to identify and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken language. Children must understand that spoken words are made up of smaller sound units before they can connect letters to those sounds and blend them into words.
3. **Systematic phonics instruction:** This refers to teaching children the specific relationships between letters and sounds, and how to combine these to form words. Children learn to "sound out" unfamiliar words by identifying each letter's sound and blending them together.
4. **Reading fluency:** This is the ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with appropriate expression. Fluent reading frees up mental energy for understanding meaning rather than struggling to identify individual words.
5. **Reading comprehension strategies:** As part of reading instruction, children also benefit from explicit instruction in specific techniques for understanding texts, such as monitoring their own comprehension, and building knowledge about the world.
6. **Writing skills:** A strong evidence base, including emerging research from LMICs, demonstrates that writing instruction - including letter formation, spelling, and composing texts — significantly supports reading development and reinforces the other core skills.

“A central finding of science-based approaches to reading is that children do not learn to read naturally: they must be explicitly taught. Going from consensus to identifying specific skills for all languages including African languages is an important concrete contribution to improving literacy practices.” Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, co-author of the literacy report and Deputy Director at the Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate at the Department of Basic Education, South Africa.

“Literacy is the cornerstone to education, lifelong skills, and meaningful employment. When children master literacy early, they have better learning outcomes, and are more able to adapt, innovate, and thrive in the rapidly evolving job markets of the 21st century.” Luis Benveniste, World Bank Global Director for Education and Skills.

The report urges education policymakers to promote evidence-based instruction so more children become skilled readers, recommending that policymakers:

1. **Make a national commitment** to ensure all children become skilled readers through effective, evidence-based instruction.
2. **Choose appropriate languages of instruction** and give children the support they need to learn to read in those languages.

3. **Deliver explicit, systematic and comprehensive reading instruction** in all six core skills: oral language, phonological awareness, systematic phonics, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing. Ensure that instruction is explicit and systematic – without leaving children to ‘figure it out on their own’. Provide students sufficient time to practice reading - including ample opportunities to engage with books, read a variety of texts independently, and build a culture of reading.
4. **Adapt instruction to language characteristics:** the core principles of evidence-aligned reading instruction are universal, but successful programs tailor instruction to address contextual needs.
5. **Focus on effective implementation** by providing teachers with structured support, user-friendly materials, and ongoing professional development.

Nathanael Bevan, Deputy Director Research, FCDO, comments on the practical use for the report findings and upcoming how to guide: “These approaches offer policymakers a practical evidence-informed plan for improving reading in schools. They can be aligned to local contexts, cultures, languages, and goals, using the accompanying how to guide to help tailor implementation.” Nathanael Bevan, Deputy Director Research, FCDO

Following the report launch a accompany how to guide will be released alongside translated versions of the report and language briefs detailing how the findings impact teaching in Spanish, French, Arabic and Hindi. These will be released in November around the Global webinar launch.

For more information or to download the report please visit the [Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel webpage](#).

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Notes to editors

This report is endorsed by the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel’s (GEEAP’s), an interdisciplinary panel of the world’s top education experts that provide educators with practical evidence-based recommendations to improve children’s learning.