

EFA FTI Global and Regional (GRA) Program
Stakeholder Consultations
UNESCO International Bureau of Education

Comments are given with regard to the thematic issue paper of learning outcomes. The paper addresses gaps in knowledge and practices at the country and regional level as well as possible results needed and expected from new activities, pointing to eligible activities. The paper emphasizes the importance of the FTI process to work with selected countries to boost learning outcomes focusing on reading, and reading outcomes (fluency, comprehension, reading acquisition) in the early ages (grade 1-3).

Comments will go in two lines:

- a) Are there more gaps in knowledge and practice areas that are not yet being considered?
 - a.1) Knowledge gap
 - a.2) Practice gap
- b) Activities for GRA carried by IBE as a Supervising Entity (SE)

The learning outcomes paper targets eight areas that are without any doubt substantive areas to improve performance. (EFA FTI 2010, p.6) We would make the point that there is a need to link some of these areas to actually improve learning outcomes. Of particular interest to us are: research-based reading acquisition (perhaps also based in actual countries' curricular approaches); teaching reading and basic skills in local languages; teacher training, supervision and support; effective remediation strategies for failing students; textbook production, use and distribution; performance measurement and evaluation. Treating some of these areas in an articulated manner (in particular countries) perhaps will be more advantageous than using specific isolated interventions.

We agree with the statement that all results framework indicators are impacted by the quality of service provision. With regards to the assumption: "If students are learning in school what the curricula are supposed to teach, they will be less likely to drop out, repeat grades, become overage... and they will be more likely to graduate from primary education and transition to secondary"(FTI EFA, p. 6). This seems a simple assumption but looking in detail at what actually happens will bring attention to important policy interventions that can improve performance.

a) Gaps

a.1) Knowledge gap:

There is indeed a knowledge gap concerning the underlying theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of what curriculum documents in various contexts intend to accomplish in specific terms in relation to reading acquisition in early grades. There might also be significant gaps in implementation concerning curriculum alignment with teaching and learning practices, teacher

education, learning materials and textbooks, classroom assessment and remedial pedagogical measures (classroom and school based) concerning reading acquisition.

Well performing countries are benchmarking themselves with regard to their most successful competitors with the aim of focusing not on isolated examples of good practice but rather on the systemic elements that lead to effective education systems at scale (e.g. USA benchmarking against Ontario (Canada), Singapore, Shanghai (China), Finland, Japan and Singapore) (Trucker, 2011). One core finding is that, in these top performing systems there is a close alignment between curriculum, evaluations and next level requirements at each level, including basic education. In these cases, the examinations are set to the standards or competencies that are directly derived from the national curriculum. Teachers are taught to teach the curriculum. Curriculum frameworks include decisions related to what themes should be taught and how they should be taught at each grade level in each of the major subject areas of the curriculum. Students progressively acquire the knowledge, skills and values that are required and allow them to succeed in the next level. Textbooks and learning materials are aligned with the national curriculum frameworks (Tucker, 2011, p.7). This seems to be a simple conclusion but it does not happen often, even in well performing countries let alone in developing countries; there tends to be a lack of alignment between the competences or standards expected, curriculum, teachers' preparation, textbooks and classroom practices.

We believe that there is an advantage in comparing countries with similar levels of development of their education system in a regional or interregional basis and that these comparisons somehow show different requirements for improving quality based on various levels of the countries' development; but even in these cases an attempt at an alignment with clear objectives from the beginning would be desirable.

The IBE has experience in supporting countries by working with ministry of education officials, experts and stakeholders in developing their curriculum framework; this is the case especially, but not exclusively in conflict affected countries. After the devastation of education systems caused by war, the need for national reconciliation and education reconstruction (Afghanistan, Iraq), or the harmonization of education systems (Bosnia and Herzegovina) involving setting up the foundational basis of an education system in terms of the orientations of the why, the what, the how and the how well students should learn, becomes the basis of the systems and their reconstruction. Curriculum revision, guidelines for teachers and for textbooks have also been developed along with capacity development with practitioners involved in poorer countries (Gambia, Angola, Sudan and South Sudan, Guatemala, Vietnam). Efforts are underway at the IBE also to generate and implement more in-depth curriculum design and development training through regional diplomas targeted at ministry of education officials and other education experts (in Latin America and Africa).

Regarding school systems the Mackenzie report (2010) identifies a menu of interventions appropriate to countries' performance levels: such as those going from poor to fair; fair to good;

good to very good; and very good to excellent. At the lowest level of performance, not surprisingly the emphasis is on supporting students in achieving literacy and mathematics basics. The report also points to a second set of interventions that apply equally to all stages of performance, but that manifest differently at each stage. The first of these six common interventions is precisely: revising the curriculum and standards; others are reviewing teachers' reward and remuneration structure; building technical skills of teachers and principals; assessing student learning; data systems and establishing educational policies and laws. In this case, even though there are clear goals and objectives for each level there is a call for alignment at all levels of the instructional mechanism and incentives.

In terms of the knowledge gap:

Considering the EFA FTI emphasis on improving children's learning outcomes with regard to reading in the early grades and paying attention to what the curriculum states and its correspondence with teaching and learning practices, teacher support and student assessment there are certain gaps in knowledge for better orientation of policies and practices.

Research and desk review:

Looking at the curriculum framework, syllabuses, and textbooks of well performing countries could highlight the specific approaches, measures and assessments these systems are using with regard to early reading acquisition (fluency, comprehension, reading skills, and critical analysis of text) at early grades. (e.g. Finland, Korea, Singapore, Ontario). Then looking at a sample of the approaches and methods used in developing countries would also highlight practices in more demanding contexts. (e.g. Kenya, South Africa, Chile, Colombia, etc). Furthermore, it would be important to inquire how fluency is operationalized and evaluated into in-class and/or systemic assessment. The outcome will be: two possible models and their variations with a series of pedagogical approaches, operationalization and assessment measures along with their supporting systems.

a.2) Practice gap: Field work would in three FTI countries would allow to better understand and address practice gaps.

Field work:

At the country level a sample of three FTI countries will be considered for field work. In these cases, an analysis of the curriculum documents, textbooks, and approach to the teaching of reading, along with classroom observations of teaching and learning practices will be the basis for assessing the situation gaps and needs for instructional improvement. Classroom observations will also include teachers' registration of their work and lessons plans; students' notebooks and exercises; and tools for reading assessment. Both the curriculum documents as well as the teaching and learning practices will give orientation to the approach to the teaching of reading; testing of fluency; comprehension and critical analysis of text. A very important aspect to

consider in FTI countries is the relationship between mother tongue and language of instruction in early literacy. Other relevant exercises will include establishing teacher competency and mechanisms for teacher training, supervision and support; effective remediation strategies for failing students; textbook use and distribution; student performance and pedagogic support. This empirical sampling should derive in proposals for targeted and specific instructional interventions.

b) Activities at the Global Level and Regional Level:

The IBE will operate as a SE in partnership to other University and research institutes internationally (Stockholm University, Stanford University, University at Albany State New York, and University of San Andres could be possible partners) and other academic and partners and ministers of education locally. The IBE will coordinate the knowledge and practice gap-filling activities addressing the FTI priorities in order to enhance capacity in EFA FTI countries coordinating a common view of the instructional aspects of early reading and learning outcomes.

Concrete expected results: models of improvement of early reading acquisition including the relationship with textbooks, language of instruction and student assessment for various development-contextual situations. The IBE will be involved in the following activities:

- Research and dissemination
- Pilot interventions to address specific issues
- Technical workshops related to curriculum development and implementation
- Conferences

UNESCO IBE organizes the International Conference of Education, important policy dialogue event that brings ministers of education worldwide. The next Conference will be in Geneva in 2013; this could be an important platform to disseminate FTI GRA Program and outcomes. FTI can be an important partner in the organization of the ICE.

References:

EFA FTI (2011) Global and Regional Activities (GRA). Thematic Area Learning Outcomes.

Trucker, Marc S. (2011) Standing on the Shoulders of Giants. An American Agenda for Education Reform. National Center on Education and the Economy

McKinsey&Company (2010). How the world's most improved systems keep getting better