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FROM ASSESSMENT TO ACTION: EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR IMPROVING READING COMPETENCIES USING EGRA RESULTS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of early grade literacy assessments in driving educational reform, focusing on Tunisia's adoption of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). The 2021 results revealed significant challenges: many students struggled with basic reading fluency, with pronounced urban-rural disparities, and over 90% lacked reading support at home. These findings exposed systemic deficiencies in foundational skill development and stark inequities across geographic and socioeconomic contexts.

The analysis demonstrates how EGRA functions as an essential diagnostic tool, enabling identification of learning gaps, supporting evidence-based policy decisions, and informing targeted improvements in teaching practices and resource distribution. Tunisia's experience offers valuable lessons for education systems worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, demonstrating how rigorous assessment frameworks can transform early grade education and foster greater educational equity.

Keywords: Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Educational assessment, Tunisia EGRA, evidence-based policy, reading fluency,

من التقييم إلى الفعل: استراتيجيات تدخّل مستندة إلى الأدلة لتطوير مهارات القراءة الأساسية من خلال

نتائج EGRA

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الملخص

يستعرض هذا المقال دور تقييمات القراءة في السنوات الدراسية الأولى في تعزيز الإصلاح التربوي، مع التركيز على تجربة تونس في اعتماد تقييم القراءة (EGRA). أظهرت نتائج 2021 تحديات ملحوظة: واجه عدد كبير من التلاميذ صعوبات فيطلاقة الأساسية للقراءة، مع تفاوتات واضحة بين المدارس الحضرية والريفية، واقتار أكثر من 90% منهم للدعم الكافي في المنزل. كشفت هذه النتائج عن أوجه قصور وفجوات كبيرة بين السياقات الجغرافية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية. يوضح التحليل كيف يعمل EGRA كأداة تشخيصية أساسية لتحديد فجوات التعلم، ودعم قرارات السياسات المستندة إلى الأدلة، وتوجيه تحسينات مستهدفة في ممارسات التدريس وتوزيع الموارد. تقدم تجربة تونس دروساً قيّمة للأنظمة التعليمية عالمياً، خاصة في الدول ذات الدخل المنخفض والمتوسط، حول كيفية تحويل تعليم السنوات الأولى وتعزيز العدالة التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقييم القراءة في السنوات الدراسية الأولى (EGRA)، التقييم، تونس EGRA. الطلاقة في القراءة، السياسات القائمة على الأدلة.

Introduction

The foundational years of education play a crucial role in shaping a child's academic journey and overall growth. During this formative stage, essential skills in reading are developed, establishing the basis for future learning and success. Consequently, it is vital to assess and monitor students'

proficiency in these core subjects to ensure they possess the necessary skills to excel academically. The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) has become an invaluable tool for evaluating and benchmarking early grade learning outcomes, providing policymakers and educators with critical data to inform evidence-based interventions and reforms.

This article focuses on efforts to enhance the quality of basic education, emphasizing foundational competencies that are crucial for future academic success. By examining the Tunisian experience, it provides valuable insights for other nations encountering similar educational challenges. Additionally, it contributes to the growing body of evidence highlighting the importance of early intervention and systematic assessment as essential components of effective education systems.

In Tunisian primary schools, children start learning Arabic and then French at an early age. Emphasizing reading skills is essential for effective education, as reading ability is foundational for learning.

Tunisia is participating for the first time in EGRA Assessment, which evaluates decoding skills as well as both oral and written comprehension. Assessing word recognition fluency (accuracy and speed) and comprehension abilities is crucial, given the established connection between reading fluency and understanding. EGRA incorporates recent advancements in reading science, utilizing observation grids and contextual questionnaires to identify factors influencing student learning.

Tunisia's EGRA assessment, conducted under the *Foundations for Learning Strengthening Project* (PREFAT), generates reliable data on primary students' reading achievements. This data informs improvements in teaching practices and the learning environment. This evaluation serves as a practical training resource for teachers and trainers to reflect on their practices, ultimately benefiting Tunisian students through relevant and effective instruction.

Research Questions

- 1) What do Tunisia's EGRA results reveal about early grade learning outcomes?
- 2) What factors contribute to disparities in reading ?
- 3) What evidence-based interventions can address identified challenges?
- 4) How can Tunisia's experience inform educational policy and practice?

We hope this article will be informative and beneficial for all stakeholders, including policymakers, parents, social actors, teachers, and school leaders, enabling everyone to contribute to improving the quality of education in line with the aspirations of the Tunisian people.

1) Significance of Reading Evaluations in Early Grades

The significance of reading evaluation in the early grades cannot be overstated. These assessments serve as diagnostic tools to gauge students' mastery of foundational literacy skills, enabling educators to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. By conducting regular evaluations, educational stakeholders can pinpoint specific areas that require targeted interventions, thereby facilitating tailored support for students who may be struggling. Furthermore, an assessment such as EGRA contributes to the establishment of benchmarks and standards for early grade learning, fostering accountability and driving continuous improvement in educational practices.

Early reading competencies are foundational skills that significantly influence a child's academic and lifelong success. These competencies are not only crucial for individual development but also for broader educational and societal outcomes.

a) Cognitive Development

Early reading skills, such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary acquisition, are critical for cognitive development. According to research, children who develop strong reading skills early are more likely to excel in other academic areas. Reading stimulates brain development and enhances cognitive processes, including attention, memory, and analytical thinking (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

b) Academic Success

Proficiency in reading in the early grades is a strong predictor of future academic success. Children who struggle with these skills are at a higher risk of falling behind, which can lead to a cycle of academic underachievement. The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is a tool that helps identify students' strengths and weaknesses in these areas, allowing for timely interventions (Gove & Wetterberg, 2011).

c) Social and Emotional Development

Reading competencies also contribute to social and emotional development. Mastery of these skills can enhance a child's self-esteem and motivation for learning. Conversely, difficulties in these areas can lead to frustration and a negative attitude towards school (National Research Council, 1999).

d) Long-term Economic Impact

The importance of early reading skills extends beyond individual academic success. At a societal level, these competencies are linked to economic outcomes. Individuals with strong foundational skills are more likely to pursue higher education and secure better employment opportunities, contributing to economic growth and stability (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008).

e) Educational Policy and Reform

Recognizing the importance of early competencies, many educational systems have implemented policies and reforms aimed at improving early grade literacy. EGRA provides valuable data that informs these policies, helping educators tailor instruction to meet the needs of all students (Piper, 2010).

2) Specificity of EGRA Evaluation: Oral, Easy, and Efficient Diagnostics

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is designed to be oral, straightforward, and an efficient tool for diagnosing early literacy. Its unique characteristics make it particularly effective in evaluating young learners' competencies.

a) Oral Assessments

EGRA is primarily an oral assessment, which is crucial for several reasons:

- **Accessibility:** Oral assessments ensure that students who may struggle with written tests due to insufficient writing skills or anxiety can still demonstrate their understanding and abilities.
- **Real-time Feedback:** Teachers and evaluators can observe students' thought processes and strategies as they work through problems or read passages, providing immediate insights into their cognitive approaches.

b) Simplicity and Ease of Use

EGRA is designed to be simple and user-friendly:

- **Minimal Resources Required:** These assessments require minimal materials, often just a few printed sheets and basic counting tools, making them easy to administer in diverse settings, including resource-constrained environments.

- **Quick Administration:** Each assessment is designed to be completed in a short time frame, typically within 15-20 minutes per student, allowing for efficient data collection across large groups of students.

c) Efficiency in Diagnostics

The efficiency of EGRA in diagnosing learning needs is one of its standout features:

- **Targeted Skill Evaluation:** The assessment focuses on key foundational skills in reading, such as phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and comprehension. This targeted approach helps in pinpointing specific areas where students may need additional support.
- **Data-Driven Insights:** The results from these assessments provide educators and policymakers with detailed data on student performance, enabling the development of targeted interventions and instructional strategies to address identified gaps.

By being oral, simple, and efficient, EGRA serves as a powerful diagnostic tool that can be implemented widely and effectively, providing critical insights into early grade education and helping to shape educational policies and practices.

EGRA **studies have** been instrumental in generating empirical evidence on early grade learning outcomes, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This assessment encompasses a range of measures designed to assess students' proficiency in reading, including fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. By employing standardized assessment tools and methodologies, EGRA studies enable cross-country comparisons and longitudinal analyses, offering valuable insights into the factors influencing learning outcomes at the early grade level.

3) Introduction to EGRA

3.1. Reading to understand and reading to learn starts with learning to read

Reading proficiency stands as the cornerstone of primary education, representing a critical gateway skill that shapes a child's entire academic journey. Research consistently demonstrates that foundational literacy is not merely an educational goal but a vital tool for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty (RTI International, 2009). As emphasized in subsequent research, "Children must first 'learn to read' in order to 'read to learn.' Their progression through academic levels increasingly depends on their ability to comprehend and engage with text-based content, making reading comprehension fundamental to knowledge acquisition and skill development" (RTI International, 2016, p.2).

In today's digital age, reading proficiency has taken on new dimensions and importance. It encompasses not only traditional literacy but also digital literacy, including the navigation of online resources, evaluation of digital content, and engagement with interactive texts. Reading serves as more than just a basic skill—it is the foundation for lifelong learning, social participation, economic opportunity, and digital citizenship. The comprehensive development of reading skills involves text comprehension and analysis, critical evaluation, information synthesis, and active engagement with content.

The World Bank (2020) identifies a crucial milestone: children should achieve reading proficiency by age 10 or, at latest, by the end of primary school. This timeline is critical because early reading mastery facilitates learning across all subjects, while reading difficulties compound over time. Late intervention becomes increasingly challenging, and academic success in other subjects—mathematics, sciences, and humanities—depends heavily on reading ability.

UNESCO's framework emphasizes three core educational domains: reading, mathematics, and science. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) for 2030 establishes specific targets for

educational achievement, with reading proficiency as a key indicator. This is measured through minimum proficiency standards assessment at three crucial stages: early primary (2nd/3rd grade), end of primary education, and lower secondary completion. These measurements focus on gender-disaggregated data, progressive skill development, cross-subject application, and educational equity.

To address reading literacy effectively, educational systems must implement early intervention through regular assessment protocols, targeted support programs, and evidence-based teaching methods. Comprehensive support should include teacher professional development, appropriate resource allocation, parent's engagement programs, and community support networks. Ensuring educational equity requires access to quality materials, technology integration, individualized support, and cultural relevance in teaching materials and methods.

The relationship between reading proficiency and educational success is bidirectional: strong reading skills enable learning across all domains, while reading difficulties can create barriers throughout a student's academic journey. Effective reading instruction creates a foundation for academic success across subjects, lifelong learning capabilities, economic opportunities, social mobility, and meaningful participation in the digital age. This understanding underscores the critical importance of establishing robust reading foundations during the primary education years.

When children struggle with reading, it often signals broader systemic issues within educational structures that affect learning across all subjects. While it's possible to develop reading skills later in life, the effort required increases significantly, and the impact of delayed literacy can have lasting effects on academic achievement and life opportunities. Therefore, prioritizing early reading instruction and support is not just an educational imperative but a social and economic necessity.

The success of reading instruction ultimately depends on creating comprehensive systems that address various components while remaining flexible enough to meet individual student needs. By maintaining focus on evidence-based practices while embracing innovation, educational systems can better support all students in their journey from learning to read to reading to learn. This systematic approach ensures that students receive the foundation they need for academic success and lifelong learning, enabling them to fully participate in an increasingly text-based and digital world.

As education continues to evolve, reading instruction must adapt to changing literacy demands, including digital literacy, media literacy, and critical literacy skills. The integration of emerging technologies, from artificial intelligence to virtual reality, offers new opportunities for personalized learning and assessment. However, these tools must be implemented thoughtfully, always in service of the fundamental goal: ensuring that every child develops the strong reading foundation necessary for academic success and lifelong learning.

3.2. Overview of the EGRA Assessment

Reading is critical for children's development and academic success, with poor reading skills leading to academic failure and ongoing poverty. Despite increased educational access, many students still face reading challenges, highlighting concerns about teaching quality. Early assessment of reading skills is vital for identifying gaps in decoding and comprehension, enabling targeted interventions. Identifying difficulties early allows for effective support and adaptation of teaching methods to meet students' needs.

The EGRA focuses on essential skills for young readers, including letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and automated word identification. As students transition from learning to read to reading to learn, the assessment emphasizes automated word identification and comprehension, integrating oral comprehension and vocabulary. EGRA provides critical data to inform educational policies and

enhance access to quality education, guiding pedagogical interventions. The specific objectives of EGRA include:

- a) **Assessing Reading Skills.** Evaluating students' knowledge of the alphabetic principle, decoding abilities, oral reading fluency, and comprehension of texts.
- b) **Informing Education Stakeholders.** Providing insights to ministries, teachers, and parents about students' reading skills to guide policies and resource allocation.
- c) **Guiding Educational Programs.** Helping to identify skill gaps and develop curricula to address them.
- d) **Evaluating Program Effectiveness.** Measuring the impact of teaching programs on reading skill acquisition.

3.3. Conceptual Framework of EGRA

The conceptual framework of EGRA is based on international literature, particularly from the National Reading Panel (NRP) and the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM). It emphasizes three key elements for learning to read:

- a) **Early Predictors of Learning.** Assessing initial reading skills independent of teaching methods, focusing on written comprehension and specific reading mechanisms.
- b) **Stepwise Learning.** Recognizing that reading develops in phases influenced by spelling transparency, progressing from decoding to automated identification.
- c) **Spelling Transparency.** Understanding that the degree of spelling transparency affects learning progression.

Effective reading instruction includes mastering grapheme-phoneme correspondences, fluency, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary. Reading success is influenced by both orthographic and phonological approaches, with decoding speed distinguishing proficient readers. Early assessment of phonemic awareness is crucial, as it strongly predicts future reading success. Overall, the EGRA framework highlights the importance of early reading predictors and specific skills essential for beginner readers.

4) Methodology and Tools

The methodology employed for EGRA study is designed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of early grade reading competencies. These assessments utilize a rigorous sampling and testing process to ensure reliable and actionable data.

4.1. Sampling Methodology

The sampling process involves selecting a representative cohort of students to participate in the assessments. This is typically done using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that the sample reflects the diversity of the educational contexts and demographics within the country. For instance, in the case of Tunisia, the sample was proportionally distributed across various regions to capture a broad spectrum of student experiences and backgrounds.

The sample size is calculated using statistical formulas to achieve a high level of confidence and a low margin of error. This ensures that the results are both statistically significant and generalizable to the larger population of students.

4.2. Distinctive advantages of EGRA methodology

It is important to note that the EGRA methodology presents several distinctive advantages:

- Cultural and linguistic adaptability to local contexts.
- Cost-effectiveness compared to large-scale international assessments.
- Rapid implementation and data collection.
- Possibility of regular repetition for longitudinal monitoring.
- Immediate actionability of results for classroom-level interventions.
- Capacity building opportunities for local education officials and researchers.

4.3. Assessment Tools

- **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA):** This tool evaluates key components of reading proficiency, including phonemic awareness, letter recognition, reading fluency, and comprehension. The assessment is conducted through a series of tasks that students complete orally, allowing evaluators to gauge their reading abilities in a practical and interactive manner.

EGRA is designed to provide quick and reliable feedback on student performance, enabling educators and policymakers to identify areas where students excel or struggle. This information is crucial for tailoring educational interventions and improving teaching strategies.

4.4. Description of Contextual Tools

In addition to reading assessments, students were asked to complete a questionnaire exploring various aspects of their lives. This questionnaire aimed to gather information about individual characteristics, family environment, school context, and living conditions. Below is a brief description of the different tools used:

a) Student Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered individually to each student targeted by the EGRA assessments, totaling 2400 responses. Its primary purpose was to collect information about students, including their gender and age, as well as details about their family environment, school context, and living conditions. Questions focused on their educational background, language spoken at home, family situation, ownership of textbooks and books, and attitudes toward reading.

b) Classroom Observation Framework

Observations were conducted during two 50-minute sessions dedicated to reading in EGRA 2021 classrooms. This approach allowed for the examination of activities involving 240 participating teachers and the materials used during lessons. Data collection covered aspects such as classroom organization, availability of teaching resources, teaching methods, classroom management, and student behavior. Observers recorded their findings on paper during lessons and later transcribed them into a structured grid. This methodology helps identify existing practices in the observed classrooms.

c) School Observation Framework

This framework is designed to gather detailed information about the physical condition of school buildings and available amenities. It also collects data on school operations, observes existing infrastructure, and evaluates the teaching resources available within primary institutions.

5.1. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is typically carried out by trained assessors who administer the tests in a controlled environment to minimize external influences on student performance. The collected data is then analyzed to identify trends, strengths, and weaknesses in student learning outcomes.

The results from EGRA are used to inform educational policy and practice. They provide a basis for setting benchmarks and standards, guiding curriculum development, and designing targeted interventions to address identified gaps in student learning.

By employing these standardized methodologies and tools, EGRA study offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of early grade education systems and help drive improvements in literacy outcomes worldwide.

5) Case Study: Tunisia EGRA 2021¹



Tunisia presents a compelling case study for examining the impact of EGRA studies on educational reform and development. As a country that has undergone significant educational transformation in recent years, Tunisia has actively embraced the use of EGRA assessments to drive improvements in early grade learning. The findings from these studies have informed policy decisions, curriculum revisions, and teacher training initiatives, leading to tangible enhancements in student learning outcomes. Through targeted interventions based on EGRA data, Tunisia has been able to address disparities in reading proficiency among students, thereby fostering greater equity in access to quality education.

6.1. Tunisia EGRA 2021 methodology

The data collection process is based on three components:

- Tests to assess fluency and reading comprehension;
- In-person questionnaires;
- Observation grids to evaluate teaching practices in classrooms and school facilities.

a) Test Composition

The EGRA test consists of six subtasks:

- **Timed Tasks.** Student performance is measured by the number of correct items per minute, assessing whether they have reached the desired level of automaticity in the following areas:

¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364334182_Evaluation_EGRA_Tunisie_2021_Evaluation_des_competences_fondamentales_en_lecture

- Letter/grapheme identification
- Reading familiar words
- Reading pseudo-words (to evaluate decoding skills without relying on the visual memory of the word).
- Oral reading of a short text (approximately 60 words) to measure the number of Correctly Read Words Per Minute (CRWPM), or reading fluency. Note that "fluency" can also be used here. Fluency is assessed through both speed and accuracy in oral reading, with fluency being more of a quality to achieve.

Each task is limited to a maximum duration of one minute.

- **Untimed Tasks:**

- Written comprehension, is based on the text read by the student.
- Oral comprehension, is assessed from a text read aloud by the test administrator, with performance measured by the number of correct answers.

The texts used for these exercises are familiar in theme, often narratives with common vocabulary that appears in school textbooks for the targeted grade levels. These texts are specific to each language and are not translated between languages. Similarly, familiar words are unique to each language.

The EGRA procedure does not provide access to the source text during the test. The oral comprehension text is read only once by the administrator, while the written comprehension text is removed after the student reads it. However, students are informed about the procedures before starting each exercise.

The tasks are structured in a progressive order, carefully designed to ensure a smooth flow during the test. The test begins with the simplest and most "mechanical" exercise, identifying the sounds of letters or groups of letters, allowing the student to alleviate stress and proceed with ease. The selection of familiar words for the second exercise follows the same principle, preparing the student for the third sub-task—reading invented words. This more challenging exercise is aimed at assessing decoding skills without relying on the word's visual image, unlike familiar words.

Next is the oral comprehension test, which requires a level of concentration that would be difficult to achieve if placed first. The reading test followed by comprehension questions complements the previous exercise. It is worth noting that the oral comprehension test addresses a completely different topic from the reading text—the former being about animals, while the latter deals with the student's daily life, thus avoiding confusion.

To measure fluency, the number of words correctly read in one minute from a text of approximately sixty words is used. For comprehension questions in both oral and reading tests, the percentage of correct answers out of a total of five questions is calculated. A threshold of 80% correct answers is commonly used in similar EGRA studies to indicate reading comprehension. A minimum rate of 45 words per minute is considered essential for oral reading fluency.

If the child reads only part of the text, comprehension questions are asked based on the portion they read.

b) Questionnaires and Class Observation

The administration of the EGRA test is accompanied by three orally conducted questionnaires and two observation grids. All these activities are carried out on the same day and within the same school. The teacher questionnaire and the classroom observation grid specifically pertain to the class of the

students being assessed, aiming to identify explanatory factors that influence students' academic performance. The table below outlines the main themes covered by these tools.

The data for the EGRA Tunisia evaluation was collected directly using tablets through the Tangerine software. This tool enables test administrators and observers to instantly upload data to a server. To prevent potential data loss, backup procedures were provided to evaluators to ensure that the data was properly uploaded or saved.

6.2. Tunisia EGRA 2021 main findings

The *Evaluation EGRA Tunisia 2021* provides a comprehensive analysis of reading skills among Tunisian students. Students generally find it easier to understand words in context rather than isolated words, especially since EGRA assessment texts relate to themes familiar to them. According to Liliane Sprenger-Charolles (2009), *"The least skilled readers are also the most dependent on context, and this dependency is explained by the lack of automatization in their written word identification strategies."*

Here are the detailed findings:

- **Performance by School Type:** Students from private schools generally outperformed those from public schools in reading assessments. This trend was particularly noticeable in rural areas, where public school students faced more significant challenges.

Results by tasks in Arabic

ARABE-3 ^{ÈME} ANNÉE	ECOLES PUBLIQUES RURALES	ECOLES PUBLIQUES URBAINES	ECOLES PRIVÉES	TOTAL
Décodage - Nombre d'unités lues par minute				
Sons des lettres	54	67	79	64
Mots familiers	23	35	46	32
Mots inventés	18	25	33	24
Mots d'un texte	31	48	60	43
Compréhension-Pourcentage de questions réussies sur 5				
Compréhension à l'oral	65%	69%	80%	68%
Compréhension en lecture	41%	51%	71%	50%
NOMBRE D'ÉLÈVES (N)	363	700	101	1164

Results by tasks in French

FRANÇAIS 4 ^{ÈME} ANNÉE	ECOLES PUBLIQUES RURALES	ECOLES PUBLIQUES URBAINES	ECOLES PRIVÉES	TOTAL
Décodage - Nombre d'unités lues par minute				
Sons des lettres	39	52	72	50
Mots familiers	17	30	59	28
Mots inventés	13	20	39	19
Mots d'un texte	28	48	95	46
Compréhension - Pourcentage de questions réussies sur 5				
Compréhension à l'oral	25%	25%	63%	28%
Compréhension en lecture	26%	42%	77%	40%
NOMBRE D'ÉLÈVES (N)	338	653	96	1087

- **Situation in Urban Public Schools:** The challenges surrounding reading proficiency in urban Tunisian public schools, particularly in the context of literacy development, are substantial. These schools, which cater to approximately half of the student population, report an average reading speed of 48 words per minute in both Arabic and French. While this slightly exceeds the international minimum threshold of 45 words per minute, it remains only marginally above this benchmark, underscoring the need for targeted improvement efforts.

A deeper analysis reveals significant disparities among students, especially those experiencing severe difficulties. In Arabic, nearly one-quarter of students in urban schools read at a rate of less than 30 words per minute. The situation is even more concerning in rural schools, where almost half of the students fall below this critical threshold. Similarly, in French, rural schools face alarming challenges, with one-quarter of students reading at a rate of less than 10 words per minute.

The state of rural schools is particularly concerning. Students in these schools demonstrate significantly lower reading performance, with averages of 31 words per minute in Arabic and 28 words per minute in French. These figures fall well below the international minimum threshold, highlighting a pronounced educational divide that demands urgent and focused intervention.

The disparities between urban and rural areas reveal significant structural inequalities that impact educational outcomes. These differences are evident in areas such as infrastructure and resources, teacher quality and retention, and socio-economic environments. Urban areas often benefit from better access to pedagogical resources like libraries and teaching materials, while rural schools face challenges stemming from limited resources and inconsistent teacher training quality. Additionally, socio-economic conditions and family cultural capital in rural areas often lag behind those in urban regions, further widening the gap. School infrastructure and learning conditions, along with internet connectivity and access to digital learning tools, also vary considerably between these areas.

The data underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions, particularly in rural areas where reading performance remains critically low. A multidimensional approach is essential, addressing infrastructure improvements, teacher training enhancements, and socio-economic support for families. These findings emphasize the importance of implementing comprehensive strategies and support systems to tackle literacy challenges effectively. Bridging these gaps is vital to ensuring equitable access to quality education and equipping all students with the foundational skills necessary for academic success.

- **Comprehension Challenges:** Reading comprehension skills across all school types are notably low, with significant disparities between urban and rural students. Urban students generally perform better in this area. However, no school category has achieved an 80% success rate in written comprehension for either Arabic or French. In French, oral comprehension rates are equally low in both urban and rural areas, standing at 25%. In rural schools, students face pronounced difficulties, with oral comprehension at 25% and written comprehension at 26%. Comprehension remains a critical challenge across all student demographics and school categories.

Classroom observations reveal several key issues that hinder student engagement and learning outcomes. Learning objectives related to comprehension are often deprioritized, and lessons lack coherence and continuity. Students are not actively engaged in the learning process, with limited opportunities to construct their own understanding.

These factors significantly impact their already weak comprehension skills. Challenges faced by students are often attributed to external factors, while the primary focus remains on adhering strictly to official guidelines for lesson delivery. A cultural shift toward greater flexibility and adaptability at both the school and classroom levels is essential. Embracing the belief that all students have the potential to progress and succeed would foster a more supportive and effective learning environment.

- **Gender Differences:** The data reveals gender-based differences in reading performance, with girls generally outperforming boys. This trend is consistent with global findings in educational assessments. In Arabic, girls demonstrate higher proficiency than boys, reading an average of seven more words and achieving better scores in reading comprehension. Similarly, in French, girls exhibit stronger skills in understanding written texts.
- **Insufficient Time Allocated to Reading:** The analysis of teaching time highlights a significant issue: students are provided with less than 2 hours and 30 minutes of reading instruction per week. This limited allocation is inadequate for fostering strong literacy skills, particularly when compared to international benchmarks that advocate for considerably more time dedicated to foundational reading instruction in primary education.

A closer examination of time distribution reveals disparities between Arabic and French instruction. In **Arabic classes**, grammar instruction receives the highest allocation at **97 minutes per week**, followed by reading comprehension with **85 minutes**. Written production is given **74 minutes**, while reading aloud is allocated **71 minutes** weekly. Vocabulary enrichment receives only **29 minutes**, and recitation is allotted **32 minutes**, with copying and writing receiving **41 minutes**. Additional activities are allocated just **39 minutes** per week.

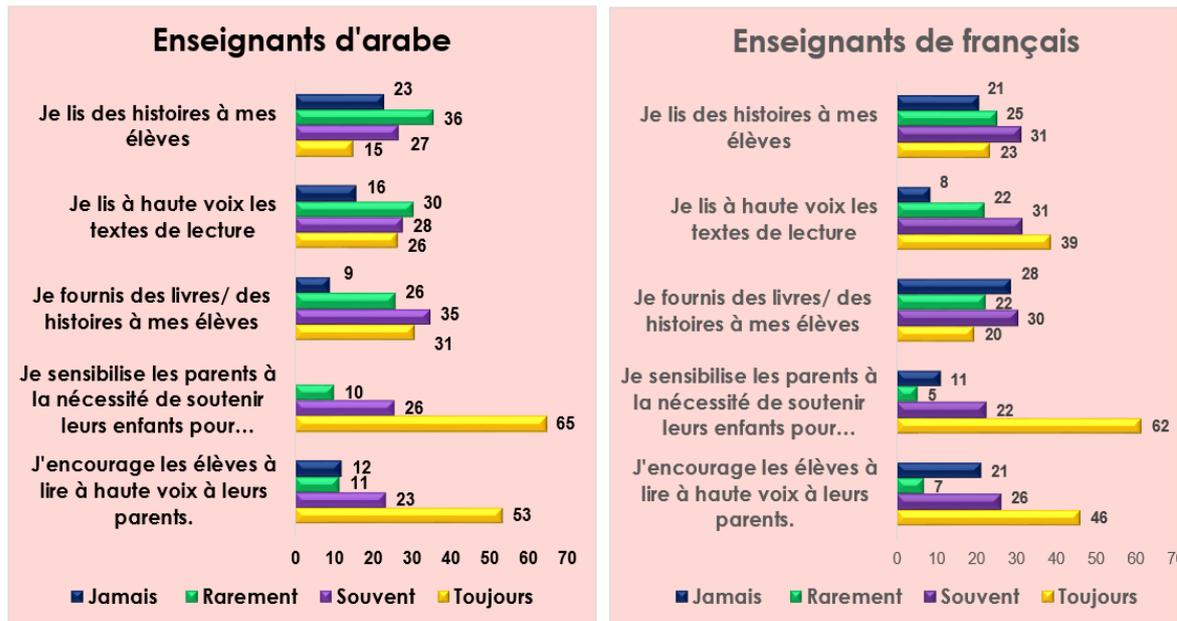
In **French instruction**, the distribution varies slightly. Grammar is allocated **69 minutes per week**, while reading comprehension receives **71 minutes**. Reading aloud and vocabulary enrichment are both given **52 minutes**. Written production is allocated **65 minutes**, recitation receives **32 minutes**, and copying and writing are limited to just **18 minutes** per week. Other activities receive minimal attention, with only **13 minutes** allocated.

This analysis reveals that **grammar instruction occupies a dominant position in the curriculum** for both languages, particularly in Arabic where it receives 97 minutes compared to 69 minutes in French. This emphasis potentially comes at the expense of more interactive and engaging reading practices. The limited time dedicated to vocabulary development in Arabic (only 29 minutes compared to 52 minutes in French) is particularly concerning, as **vocabulary knowledge is a critical component of reading comprehension**. The similarly limited time for writing activities, especially in French (18 minutes compared to 41 minutes in Arabic), indicates an imbalance that may hinder comprehensive literacy development.

Addressing this issue requires a more strategic allocation of instructional time to ensure students receive the necessary support to build robust literacy skills.

- **Teaching Practices: Addressing Gaps in Student Engagement and Literacy Development.** An analysis of teaching practices highlights significant issues in how teachers engage students with reading materials and involve parents in fostering literacy. These discrepancies, evident in both Arabic and French instruction, have profound effects on student motivation, reading proficiency, and overall literacy development.

Reading teaching practices



Reading Aloud Practices. Reading aloud is a foundational practice for modeling fluent reading and engaging students with texts. However, its implementation is inconsistent. Among Arabic teachers, 36% always read stories to students, 27% often do, but 23% only sometimes engage in this practice, and 15% never do. Similarly, for reading textbook passages aloud, 30% of Arabic teachers always do so, 28% often, while 26% only sometimes read aloud, and 16% never engage in this practice. French teachers show comparable patterns: 31% always read stories aloud, 25% often, but 23% only sometimes, and 21% rarely do. For textbook passages in French classes, 31% of teachers always read aloud, 22% often, while 28% only sometimes engage in this practice, and 19% rarely do. These inconsistencies deprive many students of the critical opportunity to hear fluent and expressive reading modeled by their teachers.

Access to Supplementary Reading Materials. The availability of diverse reading materials is another area of concern. Among Arabic teachers, while 31% always provide supplementary books and stories and 35% often do, 26% only sometimes provide these materials, and 9% rarely or never do. This leaves a quarter of Arabic students with limited access to varied reading materials beyond their textbooks. The situation is worse in French instruction, where 20% of teachers always provide supplementary materials, 30% often do, but 22% only sometimes provide books, and 28% never do. This lack of access restricts students' exposure to different genres and topics, limiting their vocabulary development and opportunities to cultivate a love for reading.

Parent Engagement Practices. A significant issue in teaching practices lies in the realm of parent engagement. Data reveals troubling patterns in how teachers involve parents in their children's reading development. Among Arabic teachers, 65% consistently engage parents in understanding their role in literacy development, while 26% do so frequently, and 10% rarely engage in this practice. Similarly, among French teachers, 62% always sensitize parents to the importance of supporting reading, 22% do so often, while 5% rarely and 11% never engage parents in this way. This means that 16% of French teachers rarely or never emphasize the importance of parental involvement in literacy, highlighting an even greater gap compared to Arabic instruction.

Interestingly, this lack of parent engagement contrasts sharply with how frequently teachers encourage students to read aloud at home. Among Arabic teachers, 53% always encourage students to practice reading aloud to their parents, while 23% do so often. Only 11% sometimes promote this practice, and 12% never do. Similarly, 46% of French teachers always encourage students to read aloud at home, 26% do so often, 7% sometimes encourage it, and 21% never promote this practice.

This discrepancy reveals a fundamental flaw in literacy instruction. Teachers emphasize the importance of home reading and actively encourage students to practice reading aloud to their parents—over 75% of both Arabic and French teachers regularly promote this. However, they seldom invest in equipping parents with the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively support these efforts. Teachers send students home with the expectation that parents will listen to them read but fail to prepare parents for why this is important, how to do it effectively, or how to handle challenges when children encounter difficulties.

This gap is especially concerning because research consistently highlights the critical role of parental involvement in reading development. When parents actively engage with their children's reading—listening attentively, asking comprehension questions, discussing story elements, and offering encouragement—children's reading skills improve significantly. However, this positive impact relies on parents understanding how to provide effective support. Without proper guidance, many parents may feel uncertain about their ability to help, particularly if they have limited literacy skills themselves or lack confidence in the language of instruction.

The consequences of this disconnect extend beyond individual reading sessions. When teachers fail to engage parents in literacy development, they miss opportunities to foster home-school partnerships that could significantly enhance learning outcomes. Parents who are informed about the importance of reading and feel equipped to support it are more likely to create literacy-rich home environments, model positive reading behaviors, provide access to books, and prioritize reading time. Without this knowledge and these skills, even well-meaning parents may struggle to provide effective support, limiting the benefits of home reading practices encouraged by teachers.

Addressing this critical gap requires a fundamental rethinking of how schools approach parent engagement in literacy development. Rather than solely encouraging home reading practices, schools must implement comprehensive parent sensitization programs that offer concrete and actionable strategies. Regular communication between teachers and parents about individual student progress, areas needing support, and tailored strategies can help parents feel confident and effective in their role.

Additionally, parent sensitization efforts should account for the diverse contexts families face. Some parents may have limited literacy skills themselves and require guidance on engaging with texts even if they cannot read fluently. Others may struggle with time constraints due to work schedules and need strategies for incorporating reading into daily routines. Effective

parent engagement programs must recognize these diverse circumstances and provide culturally responsive and flexible strategies that meet families where they are.

The current approach, encouraging home reading without adequately preparing parents to support it, represents a missed opportunity in literacy instruction. By investing more substantially in parent engagement initiatives, schools can transform parents from passive recipients of teacher expectations into active, informed partners in literacy development. This shift would dramatically expand the support available to young readers and create the consistent, reinforcing literacy environment that all students need to thrive.

- ***Students' participation in class*** is limited, with rare instances of active engagement. Only 10% of observations indicate students frequently asking questions. Similarly, expressing opinions on text elements is uncommon, observed in just 11.7% of Arabic lessons, and explaining or identifying words is also infrequent. These percentages are even lower for French lessons. Interactions largely depend on teacher-initiated questions, while peer-to-peer interactions are minimal, appearing in less than 10% of the observed reading sessions.
- ***Personal Reading Practices at School***. The data on personal reading practices at school highlights significant differences in how students from different groups engage with reading as an independent and self-directed activity. These variations are particularly evident between 4th-year French students and 3rd-year Arabic students across three key aspects of reading engagement: selecting reading materials, discussing reading with peers, and writing about their reading.

Choosing Stories to Read. When examining students' autonomy in choosing their own reading materials, the data reveals a profound and troubling pattern that fundamentally undermines the development of personal reading engagement and lifelong reading habits. Among 4th-year French students, a staggering 57.1% never choose their own stories to read. This means that more than half of these older students have no autonomy whatsoever in selecting their reading materials. Only 10.8% frequently select their own stories, while 32.1% occasionally exercise some choice in their reading.

The fact that approximately three out of every five students never choose what they read represents a fundamental failure in literacy education. This "never" is not merely a statistical data point. It reflects a daily reality where the majority of students experience reading exclusively as something imposed upon them rather than something they actively seek out based on personal interest, curiosity, or preference. Consider what "never" means in practical terms: these students never walk into a library and select a book that catches their eye, never follow a recommendation from a friend and choose to read that book, never pursue a topic they're curious about by selecting related reading materials, never discover an author they enjoy and seek out more works by that writer, and never experience the satisfaction of finding a book that speaks directly to their interests, experiences, or questions.

Reading, for these students, is something that happens to them rather than something they do for themselves. It is a requirement to be fulfilled, a task to be completed, but never a choice, never an exploration, never an act of personal agency or self-direction. When students never have opportunities to choose their own reading materials, they receive powerful implicit messages that shape their understanding of what reading is and what it means to be a reader. First, students learn that reading is not for them, not something they do but something done

to them. The absence of choice positions students as passive recipients rather than active participants in literate culture.

The nearly identical "never" percentages between French students (57.1%) and Arabic students (57.9%) reveal that the absence of reading choice is not the result of individual teacher decisions but rather a systemic feature of the educational system. The data makes unmistakably clear that current approaches to reading instruction are failing to develop autonomous, engaged readers who will choose to read throughout their lives. Addressing this requires fundamental shifts in how schools conceptualize reading instruction. Schools must establish regular, protected time for independent reading where students choose their own books from diverse, appealing collections. Teachers must explicitly teach students how to choose books effectively, as many lack strategies for doing so. The goal is not to eliminate all assigned reading but to create balance between common texts that build shared knowledge and self-selected texts that build personal engagement and reading identity.

Discussing Reading with Peers. Analyzing peer discussions about reading reveals a notable disparity between the two student groups, particularly when considering those who never engage in such discussions. Among 4th-year French students, 12.2% frequently discuss their reading with classmates, 57% sometimes do so, and 30.8% never participate in peer discussions. This indicates that 69.2% of French students have at least occasional opportunities to connect with peers about reading, reflecting a moderately active reading culture. In stark contrast, 3rd-year Arabic students demonstrate significantly lower engagement: only 4.5% frequently discuss their reading, 44.5% sometimes do so, and a majority (51%) never engage in peer discussions. The 20-percentage-point gap in the "never" category (30.8% vs. 51%) underscores a fundamental difference in how reading is approached within these instructional contexts.

The fact that a majority of students never discuss reading with peers has critical implications for their literacy development and engagement. Without peer discussions, reading remains an isolated, teacher-directed task rather than a socially meaningful activity. This reinforces its perception as mere schoolwork rather than a valued cultural practice. Consequently, these students miss vital opportunities to articulate their understanding, engage with diverse perspectives, develop critical thinking skills, and experience reading as an active, collaborative process. The absence of peer discussions deprives them of the social dimensions that make reading engaging and personally meaningful.

Addressing this gap in peer discussions about reading requires urgent and systematic action. It is not sufficient to simply add occasional discussion activities; there must be a deliberate transformation of classroom culture to normalize and prioritize conversations about reading. Teachers should implement regular, structured opportunities for peer interaction, such as literature circles, reading partnerships, and book-sharing activities. By fostering an environment where discussing reading becomes a routine and valued practice, educators can enhance students' literacy engagement and create a more dynamic and inclusive reading culture.

Writing About Reading. The analysis of writing about reading reveals significant disparities between language contexts, highlighting troubling patterns that demand attention. Among 4th-year French students, 22.3% frequently engage in writing about their reading, 52.6% do so

occasionally, and 25.2% never participate in this practice. In contrast, the situation is more concerning among 3rd-year Arabic students, where only 9% frequently write about their reading, 54.3% occasionally do so, and a substantial 36.7% never engage in this activity.

The most alarming finding is the 11.5 percentage point gap in the "never" category students completely lack the practice of connecting reading with written reflection. For Arabic students, this means that over one-third experience reading solely as a receptive activity, missing out on the reflective, analytical, and expressive benefits that writing enables. Even among French students, the one-quarter who fall into this "never" category is concerning. Similarly, the disparity in frequent engagement is notable: French students are more than twice as likely to write regularly about their reading (22.3% versus 9%), highlighting significant inequities in opportunities to develop deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and literacy identity.

While the data indicates that teachers in both contexts assign written responses with some regularity. Occasional engagement is insufficient for fostering robust literacy skills. Writing about reading should be integrated regularly into instruction rather than treated as an add-on. Students who never engage in this practice miss out on cumulative benefits, leading to gaps in competency that affect their confidence, engagement, and future opportunities.

Addressing these disparities requires immediate classroom interventions and systemic changes. In Arabic instruction, writing about reading must become a routine practice through frequent, low-stakes activities such as reading journals, quick-writes, peer recommendations, and diverse writing formats beyond formal analysis, including personal responses and creative or evaluative writing. Teachers should employ scaffolding strategies for students who lack confidence, such as providing sentence starters, models, oral discussions before writing, and authentic purposes like creating book reviews or sharing recommendations with peers.

However, classroom efforts alone are insufficient without addressing systemic barriers. Education system need to allocate adequate instructional time for literacy development, provide professional development for teaching writing effectively, revise curricula to prioritize integrated literacy practices, align assessments with these goals, and reduce class sizes to ensure teachers can provide meaningful feedback on student writing.

- **Time spent reading per week based on the type of educational institution:** The time dedicated to reading per week varies significantly depending on the type of school setting. Among 4th-year students (French), 40% of urban students and 30% of rural students spend more than one hour per week reading, which is a noticeable increase compared to 3rd-year students. Similarly, there is a distinct difference in the proportion of those who read less than an hour per week or not at all: 22% in urban areas versus 40% in rural areas.
- **Family Support and Reading Habits at Home.** The 2021 Tunisia EGRA data reveals a critical crisis in family literacy practices, with over 90% of students in both French and Arabic rarely or never participating in read-aloud activities at home. Specifically, only 8.1% of students in French and 6.4% in Arabic engage always in such practices, highlighting a systemic failure to establish foundational literacy skills early on. Research from PISA emphasizes that consistent read-aloud sessions can provide children with an academic advantage equivalent to one year of schooling. This alarming insight underscores that the majority of Tunisian children

begin their education at a disadvantage, missing out on vital vocabulary development, narrative comprehension, and the emotional connection to reading that these practices foster.

The issue is further exacerbated by the lack of oral reading practices at home. Over one-quarter of Arabic-speaking students (27.4%) and one-fifth of French-speaking students (20.6%) are never asked to read aloud. This reflects not only a deficiency in reading skills but also a troubling disengagement of families from their children's literacy development. Oral reading is essential for building fluency, pronunciation, and reading confidence. It also enables parents to monitor comprehension and provide immediate support, while fostering meaningful parent-child connections centered around learning.

Combined with the scarcity of read-aloud experiences, these patterns point to homes where reading is largely absent from daily life. Limited access to books, coupled with parents' own literacy challenges, time constraints, or lack of awareness, creates an environment where literacy development is not prioritized.

This situation reflects a broader cultural issue: reading is not yet embedded as a societal norm within Tunisian family life. Addressing this challenge requires not only educational interventions but also a cultural transformation to reshape attitudes and habits across society. A multifaceted approach is essential to tackle this crisis effectively.

Schools must play an active role by implementing comprehensive family literacy programs that go beyond encouraging reading to equipping parents with the tools to support their children's learning. These programs should include providing books for home use, establishing accountability through reading challenges, and maintaining regular communication with families. However, school-based efforts alone will not suffice.

National campaigns are needed to promote reading as a core social value. Investments in community libraries and accessible reading spaces should be prioritized, alongside media initiatives featuring respected public figures modeling positive reading habits. Policies must ensure books are affordable and widely available to all families.

Achieving this vision requires unprecedented collaboration among students, parents, educators, policymakers, and civil society. Together, these stakeholders must foster environments where books are accessible, stories are shared, and reading becomes an integral part of daily life. Only through such collective efforts can Tunisia equip its next generation with the foundational literacy skills necessary for success in education and beyond.

6) From Assessment to Action in Tunisia

- *Addressing Disparities in Reading Competencies: The Need for Targeted, Evidence-Based Interventions.* The Tunisia EGRA 2021 findings highlight significant and multifaceted disparities in reading competencies that require immediate, tailored interventions. The data uncovers systemic inequities across geographic regions (communal vs. non-communal schools), socioeconomic groups, language contexts (Arabic vs. French), and levels of family engagement. These disparities are not incidental but reflect structural challenges embedded within Tunisia's educational framework.

To address these inequities effectively, interventions must be both context-specific and equity-focused. Rural and disadvantaged communities would benefit from intensive family literacy programs complemented by the provision of essential resources such as books and reading materials. Conversely, more advantaged areas may require enrichment programs designed to enhance existing engagement levels.

- ***The Transformative Power of Data-Driven Educational Reform.*** Tunisia's experience with the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) highlights that systematic assessment is not merely a tool for measurement but serves as a powerful catalyst for transformation. The value of EGRA extends far beyond generating statistics; it establishes a shared evidence base that brings educational challenges into sharp focus, making them both undeniable and actionable. By revealing that over 90% of Tunisian students lack foundational literacy support at home, EGRA transforms anecdotal concerns into quantified national priorities that demand a policy response.

The diagnostic strength of EGRA lies in its precision. It goes beyond identifying poor reading outcomes and pinpoints specific areas of weakness, such as phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, or the lack of home support. This detailed data enables more effective resource allocation. Rather than distributing limited budgets uniformly across all schools, Tunisia can strategically invest in high-need areas, such as communal schools and regions with low family engagement, where interventions are likely to yield the greatest impact.

Tunisia's example highlights that the true impact of EGRA extends beyond merely conducting assessments. Its effectiveness lies in embedding data-driven decision-making into the education system. This requires establishing feedback mechanisms where assessment results directly influence teacher training, curriculum design, resource allocation, and policy reforms. By integrating assessment data into the foundation of educational planning and practices, institutions can unlock the potential for meaningful and transformative change.

- ***Enhancing Cultures of Evidence and Equity in Education Systems.*** The Tunisian experience provides valuable insights for education systems worldwide. First and foremost, it highlights the critical importance of early intervention. Foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension, as measured by EGRA, are not merely academic benchmarks but essential prerequisites for all future learning. Students who fail to achieve reading proficiency by the age of 10 face escalating disadvantages that become increasingly difficult to address over time.

Second, Tunisia's case emphasizes that school-based interventions alone are insufficient to drive sustainable improvement. The significant deficit in family literacy engagement, where over 90% of students rarely or never read at home, demonstrates the need for holistic, system-wide approaches. These must actively involve families, communities, and society at large in fostering literacy development.

Third, the disparities revealed through EGRA underscore the necessity of embedding equity into the design of educational interventions. Without targeted support for disadvantaged populations, reforms risk deepening existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, Tunisia demonstrates that assessment without corresponding action is ineffective. The true utility of EGRA lies in translating data into tangible initiatives: teacher training programs informed by assessment findings, curriculum reforms tailored to address skill gaps, family engagement efforts targeting low-support communities, and resource allocation prioritizing high-need schools.

Recommendations

Based on a thorough analysis of Tunisia's EGRA 2021 results, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed to address the identified challenges and improve early grade reading skills:

1) Improving Reading Competencies

To enhance student performance in reading, it is essential to develop both decoding and comprehension skills. This includes:

A. Early Interventions (Preschool Level)

- **Introduce pre-reading/literacy skills** in preschool (ages 3-5).
- **Promote oral comprehension** and shared reading at this level.
- **Affirm that all children can and must learn to read.**
- **Develop early language awareness** through play-based activities and storytelling.

B. Vocabulary and Comprehension Development

- **Develop vocabulary instruction** linked to reading texts (before, during, and after reading)
- **Expand the range of reading-related activities** to foster immersion in language structures and vocabulary
- **Develop paraphrasing skills**, highlight text progression, and identify reading objectives with diverse text types
- **Adapt grammar instruction** to improve comprehension in both Arabic and French, simplifying terminology
- **Teach explicit comprehension strategies** including predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing

C. Continuity of Reading Instruction

- **Continue Arabic reading instruction in third grade** and beyond; do not assume decoding is already mastered in the early grades
- **Revisit the same text over two or three sessions**, especially for struggling students
- **Differentiate between texts** for independent reading and those for guided reading
- **Provide systematic phonics instruction** alongside whole language approaches
- **Ensure progression** from simple to complex texts with appropriate scaffolding

D. Centrality of Reading in the Curriculum

- **Emphasize the centrality of reading** in official texts and methodological guidelines by rewriting documents and evaluation frameworks to make reading the primary objective of primary education
- **End the approach** that instrumentalizes reading as merely a tool for studying writing mechanics
- **Make reading a daily, varied activity** in terms of materials and objectives
- **Integrate reading across all subject areas** to reinforce its importance and provide practice opportunities

E. Reading Culture Development

- **Foster a culture of personal reading** and read-aloud sessions in class, at school, and at home
- **Revitalize teacher read-aloud practices** with engaging, age-appropriate materials
- **Encourage parents to read stories** to their children every night from a young age and to engage their children in reading activities
- **Create classroom libraries** with diverse, culturally relevant, and engaging books
- **Organize reading events** such as book fairs, author visits, reading competitions, and celebration of reading achievements
- **Establish community reading spaces** in neighborhoods lacking resources

F. Best Pedagogical Practices

- **Adopt best practices for organizing reading sessions:**
 - Link sessions to build on prior learning
 - Announce clear learning objectives
 - Summarize learning at the end of each session
 - Expand perspectives through research and consolidation activities
- **Implement rapid support systems**, especially in rural schools, leveraging EGRA methods (fluency and comprehension)
- **Use flexible grouping strategies** to meet diverse student needs
- **Provide immediate corrective feedback** during reading practice
- **Balance whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction**

G. Teacher Professional Development

- **Consider international standards** in ongoing training for teacher educators regarding reading instruction
- **Ensure continuous professional development** for in-service teachers through:
 - Evidence-based reading instruction methods
 - Using EGRA diagnostic data to inform teaching
 - Differentiated instruction techniques
 - Effective assessment and progress monitoring
 - Classroom management strategies that maximize reading time

- **Establish teacher learning communities** for peer support and best practice sharing
- **Provide ongoing coaching and mentoring** rather than one-time workshops
- **Create demonstration classrooms** showcasing effective reading instruction

2) Strengthening Home Literacy Environment

Addressing the 90%+ Gap in Home Support

- **Launch national family literacy campaigns** to raise awareness about the importance of reading at home
- **Distribute age-appropriate reading materials** to families, particularly in underserved communities
- **Develop parent education programs** teaching:
 - Simple reading activities to do with children
 - How to support homework and reading practice
 - The connection between home literacy and academic success
 - Dialogic reading techniques
- **Create parent associations at schools** to involve the community more actively in student monitoring and support
- **Provide multilingual resources** to support families whose home language differs from the school language
- **Organize parent workshops** on supporting early literacy development

3) Addressing Geographic and Socioeconomic Disparities

Equity-Focused Strategies

- **Prioritize resource allocation** to communal schools and disadvantaged regions showing lower performance
- **Provide additional support** including:
 - More qualified teachers in underserved areas
 - Enhanced learning materials and library resources
 - Infrastructure improvements (quiet spaces, adequate furniture, etc.)
- **Implement a rescue plan for rural schools**, requiring:
 - Thorough examination of their distribution and close monitoring
 - Measures to reduce territorial inequalities
 - Establishing "learning vacations" and "summer camps"
 - Mobile literacy programs for remote communities
- **Offer incentives** to attract and retain quality teachers in challenging locations (housing, professional development opportunities)

4) Strengthening Assessment and Monitoring Systems

Data-Driven Decision Making

- **Institutionalize regular EGRA assessments** (every 2-3 years) to track progress at the national level

- **Implement classroom-based formative assessments** that teachers can use for ongoing diagnosis and instructional adjustment
- **Establish comprehensive data management systems** to:
 - Track individual student progress over time
 - Identify schools and regions needing support
 - Monitor intervention effectiveness
 - Generate actionable reports for different stakeholders
- **Train administrators and teachers** in data interpretation and use for instructional planning
- **Create feedback loops** ensuring assessment results inform policy and practice at all levels
- **Establish an evaluation system** that clearly indicates success criteria and expected competencies for teachers, students, and parents, particularly in reading
- **Implement a comprehensive learning assessment system** encompassing policies, institutions, tools, and evaluation practices for data-driven educational management (classroom assessments, exams, large-scale evaluations)
- **Develop early warning systems** to identify at-risk students before they fall too far behind
- **Use assessment data** to allocate resources and target interventions effectively

5) Increasing Instructional Time for Reading

Time Allocation Optimization

- **Ensure adequate time** is dedicated to reading instruction daily in early grades
- **Protect reading instruction time** from interruptions and competing demands
- **Extend learning time** for struggling readers through:
 - After-school programs with qualified instructors
 - Summer reading camps focused on skill development
 - Weekend literacy initiatives
 - Peer tutoring programs
- **Maximize engaged learning time** by improving classroom management and reducing transitions
- **Provide intensive intervention blocks** for students significantly below grade level

6) Policy and Systemic Reforms

Structural Changes

- **Develop a national early literacy strategy** with clear goals, timelines, accountability mechanisms, and indicators of success
- **Increase education budget allocation** for early grade literacy programs, ensuring sustainable funding
- **Establish quality standards** for early grade instruction and learning outcomes with clear benchmarks
- **Create coordination mechanisms** across ministries (Education, Social Affairs, Culture, Women's Affairs) for comprehensive support
- **Implement evidence-based policies** on:

- Class size reduction in early grades (maximum 25-30 students)
- Reading material provision standards and procurement processes
- Minimum instructional time requirements
- **Address training needs of educational staff** as a priority, alongside updating official teaching tools, including textbooks
- **Create a working group** to review programs, textbooks, and training materials for alignment with best practices
- **Leverage the recent rejuvenation** of the teaching workforce to prepare for qualitative changes
- **Value innovative pedagogical initiatives** and provide a wealth of teaching resources through a dedicated online platform

7) Leveraging Technology and Innovation

Digital Solutions and Innovative Approaches

- **Explore educational technology** for:
 - Adaptive learning programs for personalized reading practice
 - Teacher professional development via online platforms and webinars
 - Parent engagement through mobile messaging and apps
 - Digital libraries and e-books accessible to students
- **Pilot innovative approaches** such as:
 - Reading buddy programs (peer tutoring and cross-age mentoring)
 - Community volunteer reading mentors
 - Public-private partnerships for resource mobilization
 - Gamification of reading activities to increase engagement
- **Ensure digital equity** by providing devices and internet access to disadvantaged students

8) Evolving Roles and Responsibilities of Educational Staff

Professional Culture and Accountability

- **Evolve teachers' perceptions** of their roles and those of students in the classroom toward a more student-centered, facilitative approach
- **Encourage teachers to feel accountable** for ensuring all children learn and progress, not just covering curriculum
- **Provide early support and monitoring** for struggling children through systematic screening and intervention
- **Redefine priorities for school leaders** to fully assume their pedagogical responsibilities, ensuring student growth and academic success
- **Open school director positions** more to women and youth to diversify leadership
- **Establish clear performance expectations** for all educational staff linked to student learning outcomes
- **Create supportive supervision systems** that provide constructive feedback and professional growth opportunities

- **Foster collaborative professional cultures** within schools focused on continuous improvement

9. Curriculum and Instructional Materials Reform

Content and Resource Enhancement

- **Review and revise curriculum** to ensure alignment with:
 - Scientific research on reading acquisition
 - EGRA assessment framework and benchmarks
 - Developmental appropriateness for early grades
 - International best practices
- **Update official teaching tools**, including textbooks, to reflect current understanding of effective reading instruction
- **Develop high-quality, engaging reading materials** including:
 - Leveled readers for progressive skill development
 - Diverse genres and topics to build interest and background knowledge
 - Culturally relevant materials that reflect students' experiences
- **Ensure adequate supply** of textbooks and supplementary materials in all schools
- **Create teacher guides** with detailed lesson plans and instructional strategies
- **Develop assessment tools** aligned with curriculum objectives

10. Dissemination of Survey Results and Knowledge Sharing

Transparency and Evidence Use

- **Disseminate survey results** through multiple media channels (television, radio, newspapers, social media) to reach diverse audiences
- **Share results** with higher education authorities and the Ministry of Women for cross-sectoral coordination
- **Incorporate findings from this study** into the initial training of future teachers in teacher education programs
- **Make data accessible** for researchers for secondary analyses and further investigation
- **Organize stakeholder workshops** to discuss findings and develop action plans
- **Publish accessible reports** in Arabic and French for different audiences (policymakers, educators, parents, general public)
- **Create infographics and visual summaries** to communicate key findings effectively
- **Establish a knowledge management system** to document lessons learned and best practices
- **Participate in international forums** to share Tunisia's experience and learn from others.

Conclusion

Early grade reading assessments (EGRA) is far more than administrative tool. They are pivotal instruments for driving educational transformation and promoting equity. As evidenced throughout this study, particularly through Tunisia's experience with EGRA 2021, systematic diagnostic

evaluation is not merely an option but a necessity for any education system dedicated to ensuring that every child acquires the foundational skills essential for lifelong learning and success.

The strength of tools like EGRA lies in their ability to illuminate hidden challenges. Without rigorous, standardized assessments, educational issues remain debated and unresolved. These assessments provide a clear picture of learning gaps, revealing, for example, that over 90% of Tunisian students lack sufficient home literacy support, that geographic disparities leave students in communal schools significantly behind, and that language-specific difficulties hinder Arabic literacy despite it being the mother tongue. This diagnostic precision transforms abstract concerns about educational quality into tangible, measurable challenges that can be systematically addressed through evidence-based interventions.

The early identification of weaknesses is critical. Research consistently highlights that foundational skills in reading are the strongest predictors of future academic success. Early competencies have cascading effects throughout a student's educational journey and beyond. Children who struggle with decoding, fluency, or numerical understanding in the early grades face mounting disadvantages that become increasingly difficult to overcome as time progresses. Early diagnostic assessments open critical windows for intervention when neuroplasticity is highest and when targeted support can prevent learning difficulties from becoming entrenched.

Furthermore, the oral, straightforward, and efficient design of EGRA makes them particularly suitable for resource-constrained environments where comprehensive evaluations might otherwise be unfeasible. Their accessibility ensures that diagnostic insights extend beyond privileged settings and can inform improvements in areas where needs are often most acute. By providing actionable data on specific skill deficits, whether in phonemic awareness, reading fluency, comprehension, or mathematical operations, these tools empower educators and policymakers to move from broad aspirations to targeted, evidence-driven strategies that address students' actual learning needs.

The transformative potential of these assessments extends beyond individual learners to entire education systems and societies. When assessment data uncovers systemic patterns, such as the relationship between socioeconomic status and learning outcomes or the influence of teacher training on student achievement, it lays the groundwork for comprehensive reform. Tunisia's approach demonstrates that sustainable change requires multi-faceted interventions: teacher professional development informed by assessment results, curriculum reforms aligned with diagnosed needs, family engagement initiatives to improve home literacy environments, and equitable resource allocation targeting the most vulnerable learners. The ripple effects of such reforms include reduced dropout rates, increased economic productivity, and the disruption of intergenerational cycles of poverty and educational disadvantage.

Ultimately, the significance of early grade reading assessment lies in their ability to transform educational aspirations into tangible realities. These assessments serve as a compass to guide improvement efforts, a mirror reflecting current performance, and a foundation upon which effective interventions can be built. As countries worldwide strive to ensure quality education for all children, the lessons from Tunisia and other nations implementing EGRA are clear: meaningful change begins with the courage to diagnose challenges honestly and continues with the determination to act decisively on the evidence presented. The tools are available, the methodologies are proven, and the path to improvement is well-defined. What remains is the collective will to ensure that every child, regardless of background or circumstance, masters the foundational skills that unlock future learning and opportunities.

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