The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in Haiti

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of recent Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results in Haiti. The brief gives context about Haiti and EGRA, reports summary results of three EGRA applications, and draws conclusions.

Schooling in Haiti

The Haitian education system's defining characteristic is that the overwhelming majority of students are in private schools (80%–90%). In Haiti, private schools are not a planned phenomenon; rather, they fill the void in public schooling. Their philosophy and organization cover the spectrum, from large, well-funded religious institutions (often Catholic) to small Protestant schools for destitute children; and from private business ventures to community-organized rural schools with volunteer teachers. The quality of teaching and teachers' qualifications are quite variable. Because education is grossly underfunded, parents take on the majority of the burden—according to Salmi (1998), between 1996 and 1997 Haitian parents paid 61% of their children's education costs.

In 1978, a major education reform effort called the Bernard Reform provided the basis for using Haitian Creole as the language of instruction in early grades. In 1998, this policy was made official through the National Primary Curriculum (Institut Pédagogique National Ministère de l'Education Nationale, n.d.). Looking at the number of hours dedicated to Haitian Creole and French in the current curriculum (see Table 1), it is clear that (1) reading instruction begins in Creole in grade 1, and in French in grade 2; (2) Haitian Creole is allocated more time than French through all three grades; and (3) among the language categories defined by the National Primary Curriculum (see Table 1), the majority of time for Haitian Creole is dedicated to

reading, while the majority of time for French is dedicated to oral communication.

Table 1. National Primary Curriculum: Hours per grade level for language instruction, by language (Creole and French)

Instructional Category	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3	
	Creole	French	Creole	French	Creole	French
Oral communication	60	120	60	60	30	60
Reading	90		90	30	60	30
Orthography/ vocabulary/ grammar	30		30	15	30	15
Writing	30		30	15	30	15
Total	210	120	210	120	150	120

Use of EGRA in Haitian Schools

In the studies summarized below, the EGRA instrument was used to measure student performance on basic foundational skills needed to become a reader. In general, EGRA results reveal strengths and weaknesses and can be used to indicate the quality of learning taking place in schools. Core subtests include letter reading, phonemic awareness, word reading, nonword reading, and story reading with comprehension questions. Other EGRA subtests may include pre-literacy skills, basic vocabulary, listening comprehension, and sentence or nonword writing. Oral reading fluency, when coupled with comprehension, can be considered as a global measure for basic reading competencies.

A reading rate of 35 to 60 correct words per minute (cwpm) has been suggested by some experts as a minimum rate needed to comprehend the most basic story (Abadzi, 2006). RTI International has found that in low-resourced francophone countries, averages are very low (for example, 8 cwpm in French at the beginning of fourth grade, with data from three provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC]; see Miksic & Messaoud-Galusi, 2011). A startling pattern of zero scores has been found in the same environments. According to Gove and Cvelich (2011), after 2 to 3 years of schooling, 25%–35% of children in

some countries or regions cannot read a single word of text (for example, in Liberia, or in Honduran rural schools); while findings in other countries indicate that 80%–90% of students cannot read a word (for example, in Mali and a particular region of Uganda). More information about EGRA can be found on the USAID EdData II project website at www.eddataglobal.org.

Study 1: Conducted by Save the Children via USAID's Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP2)

Save the Children undertook a community school focused EGRA study via USAID's EQUIP2 project in 2007. Researchers collected information on student performance results, budgets, and school characteristics, including both qualitative and quantitative measures. A sample of 19 schools (15 community and 4 public) was drawn from a group of 54 schools in Maïssade, Haiti, all of which were being supported by Save the Children. In total, 161 third-grade students were assessed in Haitian Creole on three EGRA subtests, including letter reading, word reading, and paragraph reading (of grade 3 text).

DeStefano and Miksic (2007) reported that "On average, third-grade students in the sample schools in Maïssade could recognize 39 letters per minute (LPM), only 11 words in isolation in one minute, but could read 25 words per minute of text." One interesting finding was the high level of variation among schools. The best *and* the worst performing schools were private schools. The best performing community school had 90% of its third-grade students reading at least 30 cwpm, while three of the worst performing community schools had no students reading 30 cwpm. This is indicative of the type of variability found among private schools in Haiti.

Better student performance was associated with schools that focused on teachers' instructional practice and literacy in particular. Better student performance was also found at schools that enjoyed a strong working relationship between the school management committee and the director. The worst performing schools had lower student attendance and days in session, were losing enrollment, and had higher staff turnover. A particularly important factor was student opportunity to learn. Looking at the days schools were open and students present, it was possible to calculate that students only benefitted from 57% of the possible school days in a year.

Study 2: Conducted by RTI International and the Haitian Education Ministry via the World Bank

From 2008 to 2009, RTI worked with Haiti's Ministere de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle (MENFP), Directorate of Basic Educa-

tion (DEF), to implement a World Bank-supported EGRA study. This study assessed the reading performance of children in the departments of Nippes and the Artibonite. The MENFP implemented the study with training from RTI, and results were presented to stakeholders early in 2010.

The EGRA was administered in March 2009 to 2,515 students in 84 schools in the two departments, of which half were World Bank-supported schools. The instrument was applied in French and Haitian Creole across grades 1, 2, and 3. The researchers evaluated on site the language in which students were learning to read, and then administered the assessment in that language. Students in all three grades were assessed using the same instrument—i.e., on the same items—so the difficulty level was constant. About two thirds of the selected schools were private and the rest were government schools. Schools with fewer than 12 students per grade were not included. Twelve students were randomly sampled from each grade.

In grade 3, average reading speed was 23 cwpm for both French and Haitian Creole. An average of 76%, 49%, and 29% of first, second, and third graders assessed in Haitian Creole could not read a single word of connected text (for French, the numbers were 63%, 48%, and 23%). Third-grade students could correctly answer only 10% of questions about the French story they read, and 17% about the Creole story. A very small percentage of students in grade 3 understood 80% of what they read (answering four or more questions correctly out of five)—roughly 2.5% in French and 3% in Haitian Creole. Children who did understand 80% of what they read had averages in oral reading fluency of between 59 cwpm and 87 cwpm. The data collectors assessed listening comprehension by asking questions orally about a short story they had read aloud to the students. The grade 3 students could, on average, answer 20% of the questions from a French story and 51% from a Creole story. A comparison of scores by gender showed no significant differences regarding children's ability to read. Children who had at least one textbook could read between 5 and 12 more words than children without a textbook.

Study 3: Conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR) via USAID's Programme Haitien d'Appui à la Réforme de l'Education (PHARE) Project

The USAID PHARE project, led by the American Institutes for Research, conducted an EGRA study in February–March 2009 (PHARE & AIR, 2007). The project employed the same EGRA instrument developed for the World Bank study referred to previously. The sample included 3,161 students atten-

ding 160 project schools from eight urban centers (six regions: Cap Haitien/Limbe, Les Cayes, Gonaives, Petit-Goave, Port-au-Prince, and St. Marc/Montrouis), and 40% of schools were public. Only one grade level at each school participated, so between 50 and 60 schools were represented per grade level. Given the study design, there was also a control group of 53 schools. EGRA was administered solely in Haitian Creole in grades 1 and 2, and in both French and Creole in grade 3.

Results for oral reading fluency in Haitian Creole were 9 cwpm, 23 cwpm, and 39 cwpm in grades 1, 2 and 3, respectively. In French, for grade 3, the average was 37 cwpm. Reading comprehension for grade 3 in Haitian Creole was around 55%, and in French, 34%. Listening comprehension in Haitian Creole ranged from an average of 53% in grade 1 up to 72% in grade 3. There was a high correlation between French and Haitian Creole scores ($r = 0.9$). Although the data were disaggregated by gender and school type (public and private), no clear patterns emerged that one was favored over another. On the other hand, there were noticeable differences among the regions, with Les Cayes scoring highest, followed by Port-au-Prince.

Additional EGRA Studies

Other studies have been conducted by Save the Children in Haiti; however, those results are not publicly available at this time.

Summary, Conclusions, and Further Study

The following is a summary of findings, with some discussion.

- Generally, students in Haiti are not able to read at a sufficient speed with comprehension to understand a simple text until grade 3 or later. This is the case despite the fact that Haitian Creole has a relatively transparent orthography which should translate into students learning it more quickly than a language such as English or French. As a case in point, the score of the grade 1 student in the World Bank study with the highest reading speed was over 80 cwpm.

- Based on listening-comprehension results, children appear to understand Haitian Creole significantly better than French in grade 3, regardless of the curricular objective of developing students' oral French ability in the early grades. However, comprehension scores are low in both languages and may call for investment in instructional solutions (support for comprehension skills, vocabulary and appropriate pedagogy) as well as noninstructional solutions (books, and health, for example).

- The studies found high variability in performance. There was no clear pattern of public or private schools teaching better, as a group. However, within the private school classification, some were doing much better than others.

- Student outcomes were quite similar across the three studies. However, the PHARE study results were higher. One theory could be that urban–rural differences exist and that they favor urban schools. This would need to be studied to be verified.

- Regional differences were highlighted in the PHARE study, pointing to further inequities in the education system.

- Factors affecting student performance included teacher support in reading instruction, resources, and school management. This might imply the need for a comprehensive system and school-level approach that engages the community. It also builds the case for teacher training and coaching in reading instruction.

- Finally, the studies revealed that the curriculum was not being implemented in a standard way. Both the World Bank and PHARE data collectors found some schools favored French reading while others favored Haitian Creole. Official policy appears to have been loosely followed or ignored in some cases.

Given the current inequities among schools in Haiti, it would be valuable to continue to expand the assessment of student performance. However, the cost of assessment should be balanced against the cost of the program itself, and there is sufficient evidence that teachers and students need better support for teaching and learning of reading skills (paired with an improved learning environment and education systems). Potential future uses of EGRA could be in classroom assessment or monitoring of school performance for transparency and accountability. It could be used for investigation, for example, to conduct a qualitative study of what good schools in resource-poor areas are doing right. Additionally, a longitudinal randomized controlled trial could be paired with one or more reading programs to generate strong evidence regarding the success (or lack thereof) of the programs.

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