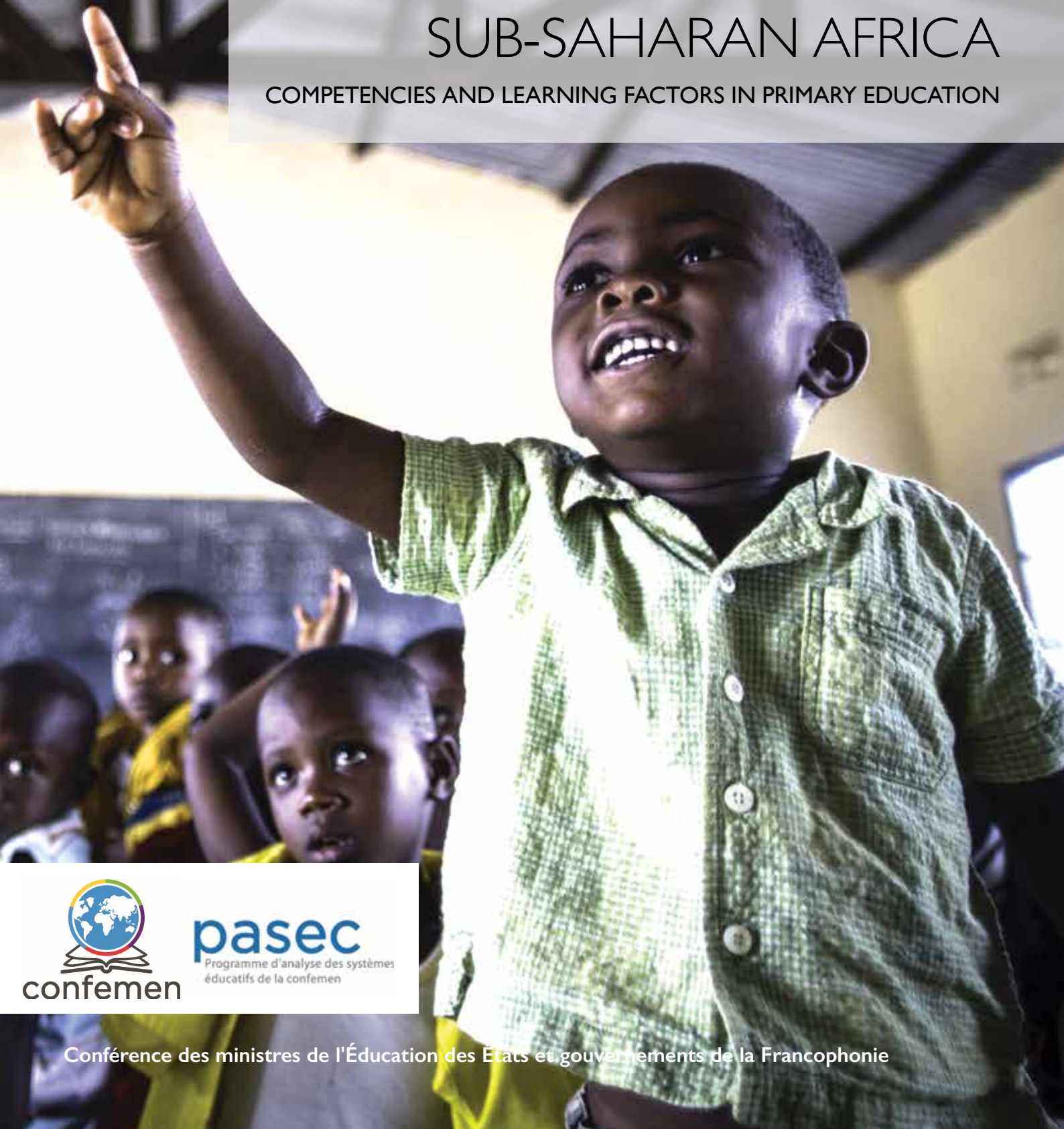Executive summary

PASEC*2014*
EDUCATION SYSTEM
PERFORMANCE
IN FRANCOPHONE
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING FACTORS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

confemen

pasec
Programme d'analyse des systèmes
éducatifs de la confemen

PASEC*2014*
EDUCATION SYSTEM
PERFORMANCE
IN FRANCOPHONE
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING FACTORS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Foreword

The international community renewed its commitment towards inclusive and quality education for the post-2015 era, through the Education 2030 Framework of Action. This commitment requires the sustained mobilization of all players to build education systems that are solidly integrated into nations' sustainable development processes.

CONFEMEN, in its capacity as a Francophone Ministerial Conference for Education, having adopted the Incheon Declaration in 2015, has reasserted its wish to assist countries towards these goals by promoting a forum of francophone expertise and solidarity, through its Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC). This programme has produced data and analysis on the performance of education systems and the factors that contribute to education quality, through large-scale surveys of primary-level pupils' learning outcomes.

In two decades, PASEC has carried out close to forty national assessments in twenty odd countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and South-East Asia.

Since 2012, PASEC's missions have evolved to better respond to the expectations of countries and the international community, who want more measurement of learning outcomes. The added value of the new approach adopted is to focus on the comparability of results across national assessments. The measurement of different countries' pupil competencies on a common scale, at the beginning (Grade 2) and end of primary (Grade 6), now enables better analysis and understanding of the effectiveness and equity of education systems, in line with other international programmes such as PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS or SACMEQ.

The assessment of the last year of primary responds to the need to measure pupils' key competencies at the end of primary education and before their access to lower secondary. Adequate mastery of basic competencies in the selected subject areas will impact academic trajectories and schooling, working life and social integration.

The option to assess early primary Grade 2, in addition to late primary Grade 6, will provide decision-makers with relevant indicators and information on performance in reading and mathematics from the very beginning of schooling, to be able to provide the remediation required to improve the quality of teaching and learning, at the earliest possible opportunity.

PASEC launched its first international assessment in 2014 in ten countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal and Togo). The sample includes close to 40,000 pupils overall, surveyed in over 1,800 schools. Named PASEC2014, this assessment will be followed by a series of regular international assessments. The comparison of performance will be enriched over the years by a broader participation of CONFEMEN countries, and through the monitoring of trends thanks to successive assessments.

Furthermore, linking the background information collected during the PASEC surveys with pupils' success at the PASEC tests will provide some points of reference that may contribute to the public debate on the factors that have an impact on the quality of learning outcomes, and guide action in education.

Despite the progress achieved and countries' commitments, education quality remains a tremendous challenge for most Francophone countries of the South. The results of the first PASEC*2014* international assessment underline and analyze the findings in terms of the weaknesses of Francophone education systems in the South, describing a situation that is of concern overall and alarming for some countries.

This stage of communication of the PASEC*2014* international assessment results will be complemented by other publications in the course of 2016. The data collected and the procedures used will be described in a technical report and a data usage manual. The international database will be made available to researchers and the general public. In parallel, in the course of 2016, each of the ten countries assessed in 2014 will produce, in collaboration with PASEC, a national report to further the reflection on national issues and to place the results in local context.

This work carried out by PASEC has been the fruit of permanent collaboration between the team of Technical Advisors based in Dakar and the national PASEC teams responsible for the assessments in each participating country. It was supervised by the PASEC's Scientific Committee, which validated each stage, from the implementation of the survey to the write-up of the assessment report.

The CONFEMEN Permanent Technical Secretariat facilitated the implementation of this ambitious project in collaboration with CONFEMEN's main technical and financial partners, the Agence Française de Développement, the World Bank and the Swiss Cooperation.

Finally, the PASEC*2014* assessment would not have been possible without the contribution of school teachers and headmasters during the field operations. The ministers of the ten participating countries supported the execution of the survey by facilitating the work of national teams and that of PASEC. To all these people, whose cooperation was paramount for the production of this first PASEC international report, CONFEMEN extends its deepest thanks and shares its warmest congratulations.

Boureima Jacques KI
CONFEMEN Secretary-General

The PASEC*2014* Survey Context, Goals and Methodology

Strong demographic growth, combined with sustained economic growth, demands that education systems mobilize significant means to adapt supply to the increasing challenges of education quality and access. In quantitative terms, African countries have achieved very significant progress over the past thirty years, in responding to education demand, extending school coverage and maintaining as many children as possible in primary school. However, the low literacy rate of the population aged 14 to 24 years reflects the difficulties these education systems face in bestowing the basic competencies on all youth and guaranteeing that these competencies are sustained over time.

PASEC's methodological model is based on the measurement of pupils' basic competencies in the language of instruction and mathematics, at the beginning and at the end of the primary cycle. These results provide benchmarks of the effectiveness and equity of education systems. The PASEC*2014* assessment also collected considerable information on pupils, classes, schools, local communities and education policies, to appraise levels of resource distribution, understand pedagogical practices and relate them to pupil performance.

The tests and questionnaires used are standardized across all countries. The survey and data analysis procedures are also standardized, throughout the assessment process.

On average, the PASEC*2014* sample covered close to 900 early primary pupils and 3,000 late primary pupils in each country. These samples are representative of the school-aged population of each country.

The 2014 edition of the PASEC assessment involved the participation of ten countries of Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

To facilitate the understanding and interpretation of pupils' competencies, PASEC has developed competency scales for each subject, for both early and late primary, on the basis of the PASEC*2014* score scales. Each scale is divided into several levels, on the basis of statistical characteristics and the knowledge and abilities required in answering different questions.

The PASEC*2014* competency scales show the average percentage of pupils that attain a given level. Thus, the pupils at a given competency level are able to correctly answer a majority of the questions for that level and for lower levels, but will face great difficulty in performing the tasks set for higher levels.

For each competency scale, a "sufficient" threshold has been set, that makes it possible to determine the share of pupils who face a greater probability of mastering (above the threshold) or not mastering (below the threshold) the knowledge and abilities deemed necessary to pursue their schooling in good conditions.

The "sufficient" thresholds in language-reading and mathematics are materialized by a red line in the tables below. The thresholds are defined on the basis of the concepts assessed in the PASEC tests and according to the priority goals of school curricula in language-reading and mathematics, at the beginning and the end of the primary cycle.

The following tables present, for the entire country sample, the distribution of pupils according to the language-reading and mathematics competency scales, at the beginning and the end of primary. The distribution of pupils for each country is provided on pages 11 and 12.

Table 1: *PASEC2014 Language Competency Scale – Early Primary*

Levels	Minimum Pupil Scores	Distribution of Pupils throughout the Levels of the Scale	Description of Competencies
Level 4	610,4	14,1%	**Intermediate reader: enhanced reading autonomy is bolstering their understanding of sentences and texts** Pupils have acquired written language decoding and listening comprehension competencies which enable them to understand explicit information in words, sentences and short passages. They can combine their decoding skills and their mastery of the oral language to grasp the literal meaning of a short passage.
Level 3	540,0	14,5%	**Novice reader: gradual improvement of written language decoding, listening comprehension and reading comprehension skills** Pupils have improved their listening comprehension and decoding skills and can concentrate on understanding the meaning of words. In listening comprehension they are able to understand explicit information in a short passage containing familiar vocabulary. They gradually develop links between the oral and written language and thus improve their decoding skills and expand their vocabulary. In reading comprehension, they are able to identify the meaning of isolated words.
"Sufficient" Competency Threshold			
Level 2	469,5	28,7%	**Emerging reader: gradual development of written language decoding skills and reinforcement of listening comprehension skills** Pupils have improved their listening comprehension skills and are able to identify a lexical field. They are in the process of developing the first basic links between the oral and written language and can perform basic graphophonological decoding, recognition and identification tasks (letters, syllables, graphemes and phonemes).
Level 1	399,1	30,3%	**Early reader: first contact with the oral and written language** Pupils are able to understand very short and familiar oral messages to recognize familiar objects. They have great difficulty decoding written language and performing graphophonological identification (letters, syllables, graphemes and phonemes).
Below Level 1	126,0	12,4%	Pupils at this level do not display the competencies measured by this test. These pupils are in difficulty when it comes to Level 1 knowledge and competencies.

Table 2: *PASEC2014 Mathematics Competency Scale – Early Primary*

Levels	Minimum Pupil Scores	Distribution of Pupils throughout the Levels of the Scale	Description of Competencies
Level 3	577,7	23,2 %	Pupils master the oral number sequence (counting up to sixty in two minutes) and are able to compare numbers, complete logical series and perform operations (sums and subtractions) with numbers over fifty. They can solve basic problems with numbers under twenty using reasoning skills.
Level 2	489,0	29,7 %	Pupils can recognize numbers up to one hundred, compare them, complete logical series and perform operations (sums and subtractions) with numbers under fifty. They have developed awareness of spatial orientation (below, above, beside). They begin to develop an ability to solve basic problems with numbers under twenty using reasoning skills.
"Sufficient" Competency Threshold			
Level 1	400,3	30,9 %	Pupils progressively develop their knowledge of the mathematical language and master the first concepts of quantity (quantification, comparison) with objects and numbers under twenty. They can appraise the relative size of objects, recognize simple geometric shapes and they develop an awareness of the first concepts of spatial orientation (inside, outside).
Below Level 1	66,9	16,2 %	Pupils at this level do not display the competencies measured by this test. These pupils are in difficulty when it comes to Level 1 knowledge and competencies.

Table 3: *PASEC2014 Reading Competency Scale – Late Primary*

Levels	Minimum Pupil Scores	Distribution of Pupils throughout the Levels of the Scale	Description of Competencies
Level 4	595,1	17,1%	Pupils can gain an overall understanding of narrative passages, informative texts and documents. Pupils are then able to interpret several implicit ideas in these texts while drawing from their experience and knowledge. When reading literary texts, pupils are able to identify the author's intention, determine implicit meaning and interpret characters' feelings. When reading informative texts and documents, they can connect information and compare data prior to using it.
Level 3	518,4	25,6%	Pupils are able to combine two pieces of explicit information from a document or can carry out simple inferences in a narrative or informative text. They can extract implicit information from written material while giving meaning to implicit connectors, anaphora or referents. Pupils locate explicit information in long texts and discontinuous documents.
"Sufficient" Competency Threshold			
Level 2	441,7	27,7%	Pupils draw on their orthographic decoding skills to identify and understand isolated words taken from their everyday lives. They are also able to locate explicit information in short and medium length texts by identifying clues in the text and questions. Pupils can paraphrase explicit information from a text.
Level 1	365,0	21,2%	Pupils have developed decoding skills and can draw on them to understand isolated words taken from their everyday lives but are in difficulty when it comes to understanding the meaning of short and simple texts.
Below Level 1	72,1	8,4%	Pupils at this level do not display the competencies measured by this test. These pupils are in difficulty when it comes to Level 1 knowledge and competencies.

Table 4: *PASEC2014 Mathematics Competency Scale – Late Primary*

Levels	Minimum Pupil Scores	Distribution of Pupils throughout the Levels of the Scale	Description of Competencies
Level 3	609,6	14,7 %	Pupils are able to answer arithmetic and measurement questions, usually presented in the form of a short text of two or three lines, requiring them to analyze situations and then decide on the appropriate approach. In arithmetic, they can solve problems involving fractions or decimal numbers; in measurement they can solve problems involving surface area or perimeter calculations. Pupils can find data on a diagram prior to calculating distances while abiding by the constraints set out in the wording of the exercise. They are also able to perform calculations and conversions involving hours, minutes and even seconds.
Level 2	521,5	26,3 %	Pupils are able to answer brief arithmetic, measurement and geometry questions by resorting to the three assessed processes: knowing, applying and reasoning. Some questions call on factual knowledge or a scientific approach; others require analysis of a situation prior to determining the appropriate approach. In arithmetic, pupils perform operations with decimal numbers and can also solve familiar problems by analyzing the wording of the question or extracting data from a double-entry table. They know how to complete logical series with decimal numbers or fractions. In measurement, pupils can tell the time and convert units of measurement with or without a conversion table. They are also able to solve arithmetic problems involving operations with days, hours and minutes, or units of length. In geometry, pupils know the names of certain solids, basic geometric shapes and some characteristic lines (diagonal, median).
"Sufficient" Competency Threshold			
Level 1	433,3	31,8 %	Pupils can answer very brief questions by calling upon factual knowledge or a specific procedure. In arithmetic, they are able to carry out the four basic operations with whole numbers which might require writing down the operation using regrouping. In measurement, they recognize the length measurement unit: the meter. In geometry, they are able to orientate themselves in space by identifying directions and positions and by reading coordinates on a graph.
Below Level 1	68,1	27,2 %	Pupils at this level do not display the competencies measured by this test. These pupils are in difficulty when it comes to level 1 knowledge and competencies.

Competency Levels

A vast majority of pupils do not display the competencies expected in primary school. For some countries, this situation is alarming.

Practically all the primary education systems assessed in 2014 show major shortcomings, foreboding learning difficulties for pupils in the future. For some countries, the diagnosis is worrisome for entire age groups.

Over 70% of early primary pupils have not achieved the "sufficient" level in language, and over 50% in mathematics. At the end of the primary cycle, close to 60% of pupils are below this level in both subjects.

The education systems achieving better results at the beginning of the primary cycle are generally more successful at the end of the cycle, and conversely.

© Dominic Chavez World Bank

In early primary school, many pupils' learning achievements are very fragile.

In almost all countries, the weakest pupils after at least two years of primary education experience great difficulty in understanding even short and familiar oral messages. In mathematics, the pupils of these same countries do not master the basic notions of quantity.

70 %
of early primary pupils are below the "sufficient" threshold in language

© UN Photo/Marco Dormino

Burundi is an exception, as:

• the language of the test, which is also the language of instruction (Kirundi) is familiar to pupils, and

• almost eight in ten pupils achieve the "sufficient" threshold in language, and seven in ten pupils achieve the mathematics threshold. Furthermore, Burundese pupils who do not reach the thresholds all reach at least Level 1, in both language and mathematics.

In Congo and Burkina Faso, although approximately two-thirds of pupils do not achieve the language threshold, close to 60% of pupils have "sufficient" competencies in mathematics.

In Cameroon, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, 70% to 80% of pupils do not reach the "sufficient" threshold in language, although half the pupils do reach it in mathematics.

In Chad, Togo, Benin and Niger, close to 80% of pupils do not reach the "sufficient" threshold in language, and 60% to 70% encounter difficulties in mathematics.

Chart 1 : *Pupil Competency Levels in Language and Mathematics – Early Primary*

Benin
- 15,5 | 46,6 | 28,3 | 6,3
- 28,0 | 38,5 | 25,1 | 8,4

Burkina Faso
- 8,1 | 24,1 | 32,3 | 20,2 | 15,2
- 9,9 | 30,9 | 40,9 | 18,3

Burundi
- 17,6 | 23,0 | 23).
- 28,9 | 34)4

Cameroon
- 8,9 | 29,9 | 31,6 | 18,7 | 11,0
- 10,5 | 34,2 | 37,1 | 18,2

Congo
- 28,6 | 28,6 | 21,4 | 16,6
- 25,6 | 37,7 | 33,2

Côte d'Ivoire
- 7,6 | 37,5 | 37,6 | 11,7
- 17,5 | 48,7 | 24,2 | 9,6

Niger
- 32,6 | 37,0 | 20,6 | 6,4
- 38,7 | 33,5 | 17,2 | 10,6

Senegal
- 13,9 | 29,3 | 27,9 | 12,5 | 16,4
- 12,6 | 25,1 | 32,2 | 30,1

Chad
- 11,0 | 36,3 | 34,7 | 13,1
- 17,6 | 34,4 | 27,8 | 20,2

Togo
- 21,5 | 30,4 | 28,0 | 11,6 | 8,5
- 23,9 | 34,8 | 25,9 | 15,4

Average
- 12,4 | 30,3 | 28,7 | 14,5 | 14,1
- 16,2 | 30,9 | 29,7 | 23,2

"Sufficient" Competency Threshold

| PASEC*2014* Language Scale | level <1 | level 1 | level 2 | level 3 | level 4 |
| PASEC*2014* Mathematics Scale | level <1 | level 1 | level 2 | level 3 |

Chart 2 : *Pupil Competency Levels in Reading and Mathematics – Late Primary*

	Reading					Mathematics			
Benin	17,5	26,2	29,0	22,7		24,6	35,6	29,0	10,8
Burkina Faso	11,0	29,8	35,5	21,4		12,5	28,5	36,9	21,9
Burundi	38,7	49,1	7,4			46,8	46,8	39,9	
Cameroon	6,0	20,3	24,9	24,7	24,1	29,8	34,8	23,7	11,8
Congo	22,6	32,2	23,5	17,1		28,1	42,9	23,1	
Côte d'Ivoire	19,3	28,0	25,6	22,4		28,7	44,4	23,7	
Niger	31,7	42,3	17,5	6,4		68,4	24,0	6,3	
Senegal	13,5	21,3	26,3	34,8		14,7	26,5	29,7	29,1
Chad	20,3	36,9	27,1	12,8		43,7	37,2	16,1	
Togo	6,2	23,9	31,5	22,6	15,8	20,9	31,6	27,9	19,7
Average	8,4	21,2	27,7	25,6	17,1	27,2	31,8	26,3	14,7

"Sufficient" Competency Threshold

PASEC2014 Reading Scale: level <1 | level 1 | level 2 | level 3 | level 4

PASEC2014 Mathematics Scale: level <1 | level 1 | level 2 | level 3

Pupil competency levels are highly variable, in almost all countries, from the first years of primary school.

In mathematics, Burundi is the only country of the ten where the gaps in pupil performance are modest. In language, Benin, Chad and Côte d'Ivoire have limited performance gaps, but on a backdrop of weak scores.

Senegal displays the most pronounced performance gaps, despite being one of the countries whose share of pupils above the "sufficient" thresholds is greatest, in language and mathematics.

The results also reveal a close link between pupils' performance in language and their performance in mathematics, regardless of any particular difficulties or disparities at the country level. The analysis shows a strong and positive relationship between early primary pupils' performance in language and their mathematics results, in all countries. Thus, whatever the country, pupils and schools that are successful in language achieve high scores in mathematics, and vice-versa.

Performance at the end of primary is unsatisfactory, mirroring that displayed at the beginning of the cycle.

© Nestlé Côte d'Ivoire

50 % of early primary pupils are below the "sufficient" threshold in mathematics
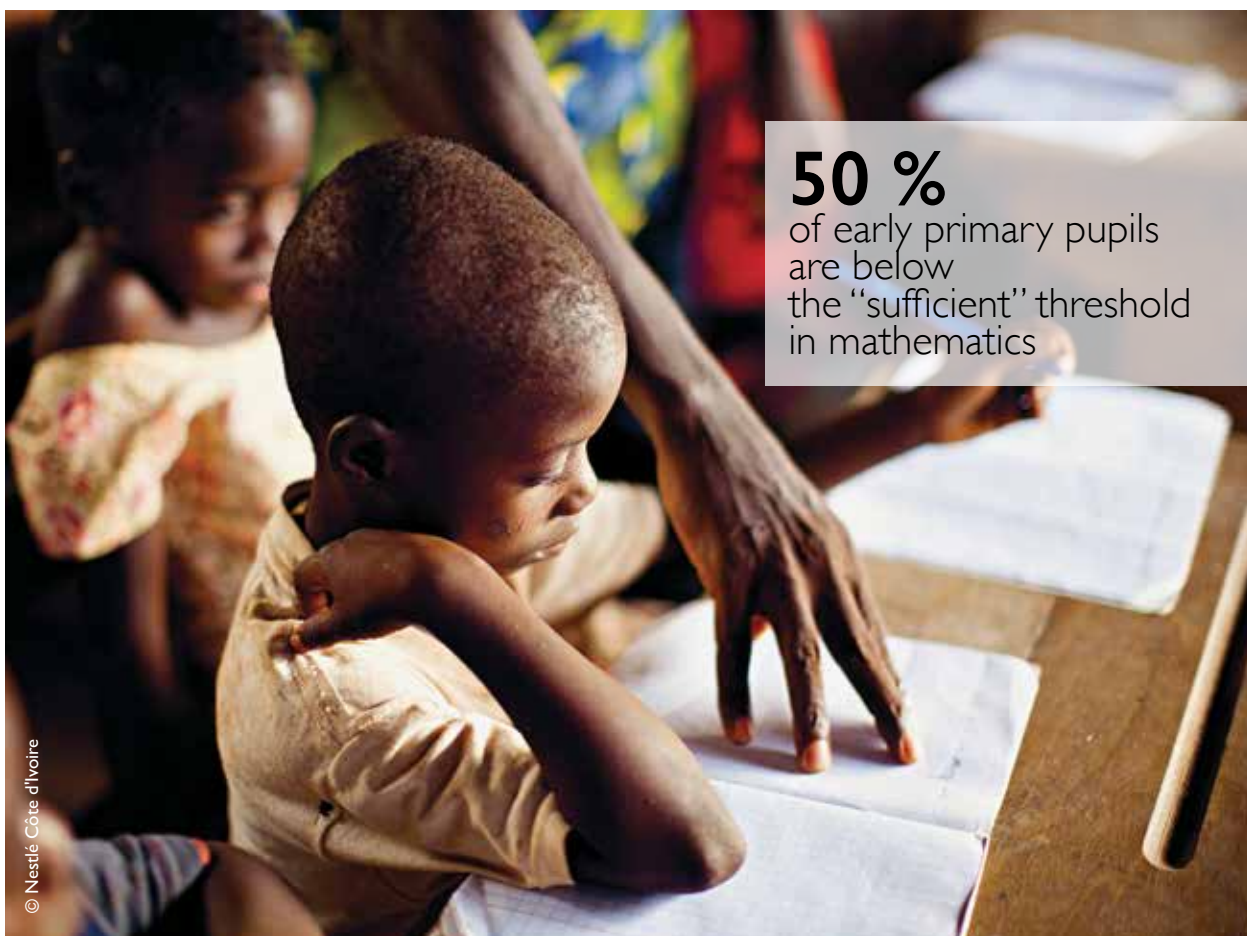
In Burundi, by the end of primary, close to nine in ten pupils reach the "sufficient" threshold of knowledge and abilities in mathematics, and over one in two pupils reach it in reading. However, in the latter subject, only 10% of pupils achieve the highest level of the competency scale (Level 4).

In Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, at least one in two late primary pupils reach the "sufficient" threshold in reading. The share of very competent pupils (Level 4) varies between 20% and 35%. In mathematics, in Senegal and Burkina Faso, close to 60% of pupils reach the "sufficient" threshold. In Benin, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire on the other hand, over 50% of pupils do not. Moreover, this share is above 70% in Côte d'Ivoire.

In Togo and Congo, 60% of pupils do not reach the "sufficient" threshold in reading, and 50% and 70% of pupils do not have sufficient competencies in mathematics, respectively.

In Chad and Niger, over 85% of late primary pupils do not have the knowledge and abilities required to read and understand texts. Furthermore, between 80% and 90% of pupils in these two countries fail to reach the "sufficient" threshold in mathematics.

The analysis of late primary pupil performance confirms the strong positive relationship between language and mathematics results.

At the end of primary, the competency gaps displayed are considerable. The best pupils are able to read texts whereas the weakest pupils are still at the stage of decoding words.

60 %
of late primary pupils
are below
the "sufficient" threshold,
in reading and mathematics

© GPE - Stephan Bachenheimer

Of the ten countries, the performance gap at the end of primary between the weakest pupils and the best is the slightest in Burundi.

Senegal, that obtains the highest average reading score of all participating countries, and one of the highest scores in mathematics, is the country where the performance gaps between pupils are the greatest, whatever the subject.

The countries with the best early primary performance are also those where national scores for late primary are the highest, overall.

Of the ten countries, Burundi, Senegal and Burkina Faso stand out as having greater shares of pupils whose competency levels are satisfactory, both at the beginning and at the end of primary.

Conversely, education systems where pupils are in greatest difficulty at the beginning of the primary cycle (Chad, Niger) are also those that are least successful at the end of primary. Primary education is not successful in overcoming the difficulties displayed by pupils in their early years of schooling.

However, the link between early and late primary performance does not seem to be systematic. Indeed, Benin, whose scores in language and mathematics are below the ten-country average at the beginning of primary, display late primary scores that are above average in reading and close to the average in mathematics.

Conversely, despite early primary scores that are above average in Congo, in both subjects, in late primary the reading score is close to the average and the mathematics score is below the average of the ten participating countries.

The performance gap between girls and boys is relatively modest in early primary, but tends to widen at the end of the cycle in several countries.

The primary gross enrollment and completion rates highlight terms of access to primary school that are inequitable for girls, in the majority of the countries assessed. Three countries (Burundi, Congo and Senegal) display access rates that are more advantageous to girls, and girls' primary completion rates are lower in most countries. Girls' completion rates are higher than boys' in Burundi, Congo and Senegal.

Early primary performance gaps by gender are slight in most countries. Boys are more successful in Chad and Côte d'Ivoire in language of instruction, as well as in Cameroon, Chad and Côte d'Ivoire in mathematics.

At the end of primary, the performance gaps between boys and girls in reading are not significant. In mathematics, the difference in scores is more pronounced: boys are more successful in mathematics in five countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal), whereas in Burundi girls achieve better results than boys.

Factors of Learning Achievements

Overall, socioeconomic disparities and pupils' schooling (repetition, preprimary education) translate into different performance levels, both at the beginning and at the end of the primary cycle.

The PASEC*2014* assessment results indicate that children whose parents are literate tend to perform better at school. In nine countries in ten, pupils at least one of whose parents can read display higher scores.

Among other factors, pupil performance is related to the availability of books at home. In early primary, the performance of pupils whose families do not own any books is significantly lower, in all ten countries except Burundi in language, and in six countries in ten in mathematics.

Furthermore, pupils who participate in agricultural work or petty commerce, be it regularly or intensively, obtain weaker results, be it in reading or in mathematics. The performance gaps are generally greater in reading, and are significant for all countries.

In almost every country, pupils who attended preprimary achieve better results, particularly in language. The performance gaps in mathematics related to preprimary attendance are less important in early primary, although significant in seven countries.

The analysis also shows that the school performance levels of pupils who never repeated a grade are higher than those of pupils having repeated at least once in the course of the primary cycle.

Generally speaking, late entry to school is linked to weaker pupil performance.

Pupils' performance at school also varies according to school characteristics and resources.

The assessment shows that the performance of schools in rural areas is poorer than that of schools in urban areas. However, where the territorial planning indexes for the schools' location are equivalent (this measures the availability of a bouquet of infrastructure, social and government services, and goods and services) performance in urban and rural areas is comparable.

Private education tends to produce better results than public education. In eight countries in ten, private schools achieve better results. The performance gaps observed may in part be derived from differences in the socioeconomic status of families or the level of territorial planning.

Generally speaking, schools benefitting from better teaching conditions (infrastructure, pedagogical resources, health and hygiene conditions) tend to produce better results. For instance, pupils of classes having only one textbook for three pupils are generally less successful than those of classes offering each pupil a textbook, in both reading and mathematics. These resource endowments tend to be of a better level at the beginning than at the end of primary.

Almost 20% of pupils are taught in multigrade and double-shift classes. The results show that generally, the performance of pupils of multigrade or double-shift classes is weaker than that of pupils attending standard classes.

In general, in early primary, teachers are less qualified and experienced than in late primary.

In order to better understand pupils' school performance as analyzed by the tests, the report also aims to describe education system contexts. The teacher issue was the object of specific interviews with pupils, teachers, headmasters and ministerial officers, some of whose findings are related here.

In a majority of countries, women are underrepresented in late primary teaching and headmaster posts. On average, over 75% of pupils at the end of primary are in classes held by male teachers.

In most countries, at both the beginning and the end of primary, the teachers of a vast majority of pupils have followed at least one year of pre-service teacher training. However, the assessment shows that the proportion of pupils whose teacher has received no pre-service teacher training is still considerable, in all countries. It is more pronounced at the beginning of primary.

© GPE - Educate a Child

Teachers with greater seniority in their profession are generally assigned to late primary grades, whereas the earlier grades are entrusted to teachers with less experience.

Teachers have an unfavorable opinion of school curricula and of their working conditions.

At the beginning of primary in almost all countries assessed, the teachers of over 30% of pupils declared that the quality of their school curriculum was "average" or "bad." Many teachers also declared their dissatisfaction with the availability of school supplies and the quality of school buildings.

Salary levels are deemed unsatisfactory by a vast majority of teachers (68% to 95%, according to the country). Likewise, the teachers of over half of the pupils declared that they are not satisfied with their opportunities for promotion or training in the course of their careers.

However, for the sample of countries assessed, the teachers of a majority of pupils declared that they have a favorable opinion of their school management, and that they entertain good relationships with their colleagues and the community.

© UNICEF Burundi/Krzysiek

Avenues for Reflection

1. Promote preprimary education

Access for all to preprimary education can be a factor of improvement of the effectiveness and equity of education systems. In contexts where the language of instruction is often not children's mother tongue, preprimary school can, among others, enable children to familiarize themselves with the learning process and the teaching language before their arrival in primary school.

2. Reflect on the articulation between the teaching language and mother tongue in the early grades of primary

The level of competencies achieved in early primary plays a decisive role on children's later schooling. Consequently, it is worth reflecting on the articulation between pupils' mother tongue and the language of instruction during the first years of primary, that constitute a critical period for their future schooling, in order to facilitate them acquiring adequate basics in reading and in mathematics.

3. Strengthen the support provided to early primary pupils, especially in reading

Countries should devote particular attention to the pedagogical support and monitoring of pupils that cumulate difficulties in both reading and mathematics from the beginning of their primary education.

The weakness of these pupils' competencies should engage countries with respect to the nature of the learning difficulties encountered, to consider the pedagogical practices required in oral and reading comprehension activities, from the early grades of primary.

4. Rethink assessment and promotion policies and implement support measures for pupils in great difficulty

Repetition as it is currently used is not an effective pedagogical practice that enables pupils in difficulty to attain the expected competency levels. This finding calls the related practices into question, as well as the selection criteria of pupils who are made to repeat and the remediation mechanisms offered.

The weak competency level of the majority of late primary pupils also raises the question of the quality and appropriateness of intra-cycle assessment and promotion policies.

5. Improve the quality, availability and allocation of school equipment and pedagogical resources

Countries should critically appraise the availability of school equipment and resources, as well as their equitable distribution among schools nationwide.

It is however important to note that the availability of resources is not a sufficient condition in itself to achieve good pupil performance, and that such resources should be accompanied with appropriate use and quality teaching.

6. Strengthen teacher training and upgrade teacher status

The quality of teacher training is paramount to pupil performance. It would be helpful to appraise the performance of teacher training systems and to propose avenues for their improvement.

A thorough reflection should also take place over improving teacher motivation. Some of the points to consider include working conditions, remuneration and career prospects.

7. Stimulate girls' interest in mathematics

Specific measures could help to encourage girls in scientific subjects. Teacher training could also include modules on the gender stereotypes projected by schools, so that teachers gain awareness of the practices and attitudes that can encourage or discourage girls or boys in given subjects.

8. Implement family sensitization and support mechanisms

Children whose parents are literate achieve better performance levels. This finding advocates in favor of the implementation of support mechanisms for families from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as literacy classes for parents, or the pedagogical support of children whose parents can't read.

Family sensitization and support mechanisms should also be implemented to encourage enrollment and contribute to reduce the time devoted by children to agricultural work and petty commerce.

9. Consider the situation of pupils not achieving satisfactory results by the end of primary

The PASEC*2014* findings call for the adoption of emergency measures in order to support pupils leaving primary without the required competencies to pursue their education.

Since its creation in 1960, the Conference of Ministers of Education of French-Speaking Countries (CONFEMEN) has worked for the promotion of education and vocational and technical training. It is a forum of shared values, expertise and active solidarity. Today it has forty four state and government members.

The CONFEMEN Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) is a tool to support the steering of CONFEMEN member states' and governments' education systems, to improve education quality. Created in 1991, it aims to provide information on the evolution of education system performance, to contribute to the determination and monitoring of education policy.

Ten countries participated in the PASEC2014 assessment: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Niger, Senegal and Togo. This assessment has enabled the measurement of pupil competency levels at the beginning and the end of primary school, in their language of instruction and mathematics. It has also analyzed the factors related to education system performance in the countries assessed, by the collection of contextual data from pupils, teachers and school headmasters, through questionnaires.

This report presents the first results of the PASEC2014 assessment. The report is available for download at www.pasec.confemen.org