

Long Path to Achieving Education for All: School Access, Retention, and Learning in 20 Countries.

The last decades have seen an impressive growth in school participation in developing countries. As countries have made remarkable progress towards universal primary school completion, the focus in the development community has shifted to reaching the most disadvantaged populations, and improving the quality of education. Is school access truly universal? And now that most children are in school, do we know whether they are actually learning?

In 2005, Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) published *Educating the World's Children: Patterns of growth and Inequality*, where historical trends observed in 70 low-income countries were used to forecast an approximate year when they are likely to reach universal completion. The report recognized that even though universal completion is a major milestone for these countries, the quality of their education systems cannot be assessed exclusively by their ability to enroll and retain students. Most importantly, school should teach valuable skills that will help children achieve their full potential in life. To emphasize this, the report published a set of *learning pyramids* – visual tools showing the cumulative achievement of the school system by demonstrating how many children enroll in school, whether they remain enrolled until they reach grade 4 or 5, and what percentage of them learn how to read.

Today, eight years later, EPDC re-creates the learning pyramids for the school systems for 20 selected countries: Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Peru, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, using the most recent data on

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school access, school progression, and learning. We find that although access to education is close to universal in most countries, not all of the students that enter a school system reach upper primary grades. Grade repetition is a common experience for a vast majority of primary students, creating large inefficiencies and added strain on education systems. Finally, a significant proportion of those who reach the upper primary grades never gain basic literacy skills, the lowest benchmark of a standardized learning assessment.

Data and methodology

Learning pyramids are an invaluable visual tool for understanding the relationship between school access, progression through the education system, and learning. The shape of the pyramid illustrates various aspects of a school system and exposes both its strengths and weaknesses.

The pyramids presented here were constructed using country-level statistics on school access, survival to a given grade (varies by country) and available data on learning outcomes. The data needed to create each pyramid came from household surveys, international achievement tests, and in a few cases, administrative sources. While household survey data are widely available for a large part of the developing world, student achievement information is fairly scarce. Ultimately, countries were selected for the study based on two main criteria: 1) availability of a household survey conducted by either the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) or Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) no earlier than in 2006, 2) availability of an international assessment test administered in the country no earlier than 2006. All selected countries are shown in Table 1 which groups them by income group. We aimed to use the most recent data possible; 2006 became

a cutoff point to ensure that countries that participated in the third round of MICS, and for which survey data are not otherwise available, could be included in the study. We hope that as new standardized international achievement measures are developed, the number of countries for which learning pyramids can be created will steadily increase.

Figure 1 shows each component of the learning pyramids included in this report. In short, the pyramids aim to provide a snapshot

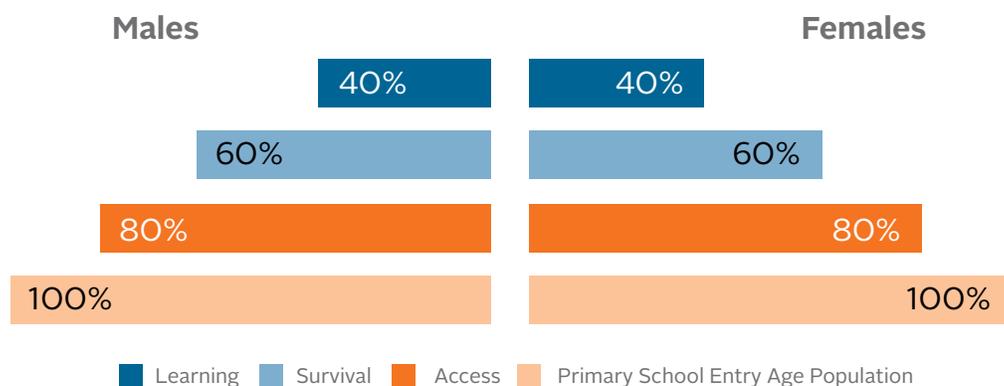
Table 1: Countries included in the study by income group

COUNTRY	INCOME GROUP
Burkina Faso	Low Income
Burundi	
Kenya	
Malawi	
Mozambique	
Tanzania	
Togo	
Uganda	
Zimbabwe	
Cote d'Ivoire	Lower-middle income
Indonesia	
Lesotho	
Swaziland	
Zambia	
Azerbaijan	Upper-middle income
Colombia	
Dominican Republic	
Namibia	
Peru	High-income
Trinidad and Tobago	

of a country's progress in providing universal school entry (access), keeping students in school (survival), and finally, teaching them at least minimum reading skills (learning). The methodology and assumptions behind each of

the components of the learning pyramid are described in detail below. The first bar, marked in light orange, is always 100% and represents a hypothetical cohort of children who should be entering school.

Figure 1: Foundations of the Learning Pyramid



Entering the education system: School access

As a measure of school entry, or access, EPDC uses the percentage of 14-year olds who have ever entered school. The selection of this age group is based on a recommendation first put forth in a recent EPDC report, *Out of School Children: Data Challenges in Measuring Access to Education* (2013), suggesting that ages 7-14 is the appropriate age bracket for measuring school exclusion. This recommendation is rooted in international normative documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, and the ILO Minimum Age Convention of 1973, and is based on the assumption that until children reach 14, they should not be allowed to work, be part of the military, or marry. Instead, they should be provided with high quality schooling that will allow them to reach their full potential in adult life.

Data on school access were extracted from household surveys (DHS and MICS) which

include a variable describing a respondent's educational attainment. Educational attainment is calculated based on responses to the following pair of questions: "What is the highest level of school NAME has ever attended?" and "What is the highest grade NAME has completed at that level?" An individual who has never entered school will have education attainment marked 'no schooling'. An individual who entered primary school but has not completed the last grade of primary has 'primary incomplete,' an individual who has completed the last grade of primary school but has not completed any grades of secondary school has 'primary complete,' and so on. EPDC uses each country's national definition of the duration of each school level as the basis for these calculations, as described in the 7th Edition of the World Data on Education series from UNESCO International Bureau and Education (IBE). The list of data sources used for collecting information on school access is shown in Table 2.

The level of access is defined as the difference between 100% and the proportion of 14 year olds who reported never having been to school. Please note that values of access presented here may differ from official enrollment or access statistics. For example, values presented in the report may be higher than what is reported as a net intake rate (NIR) – the number of new entrants to the first grade of primary school who are of primary school entrance age, divided by the entire population of that age. While NIR includes only children who enter school “on time”, the indicator used in this report to

illustrate access is more inclusive. A 14-year old who reported ever attending school might have been any age when they entered school, including their current age. Such an inclusive measure of access is likely to be higher than the NIR, unless there has been a significant improvement in on-time entrance. Discrepancies in values representing access in this report and access indicators from administrative sources may also stem from various characteristics of different data collection instruments (see EPDC (2007) for an in-depth analysis of differences between administrative and household survey data sources).

Table 2: Sources of data on access

COUNTRY	SOURCE
Azerbaijan	DHS, 2006
Burkina Faso	DHS, 2010
Burundi	DHS, 2010
Colombia	DHS, 2010
Cote d'Ivoire	MICS, 2006
Dominican Republic	DHS, 2007
Indonesia	DHS, 2007
Kenya	DHS, 2009
Lesotho	DHS, 2009
Malawi	DHS, 2010
Mozambique	MICS, 2008
Namibia	DHS, 2007
Peru	DHS, 2008
Swaziland	MICS, 2010
Tanzania	DHS, 2010
Togo	MICS, 2006
Trinidad and Tobago	MICS, 2006
Uganda	DHS, 2011
Zambia	DHS, 2007
Zimbabwe	MICS, 2009

Progressing through the end of primary school: Survival rates

Once children enter school, they should be able to advance their learning by timely progression through each consecutive grade of schooling and mastering the learning content associated with each grade. In many countries, however, children take many more years to complete primary education than the structure of the education system assumes. They repeat multiple grades and reach the final grade of primary school at an age much older than the official age of the last grade of primary education. The calculation of survival rates, performed by EPDC using a reconstructed cohort method, takes this into account. It estimates the percentage of pupils in grade 1 who eventually reach a given grade, regardless of how many times they repeated all preceding grades. In this method, survival rate calculations assume that grade specific school flow rates (i.e. promotion, repetition, and dropout) remain constant while a cohort of students progresses from grade 1 to the final grade of primary education. In most cases, school flow rates used to calculate the survival component of the pyramid come from the same household surveys as the access indicators.

However, indicators of school flow are not as easily accessible from household surveys as indicators of educational attainment, as their construction requires questions regarding a child's school attendance in two consecutive years. Surveys for Burkina Faso, Burundi, Indonesia, Lesotho, Peru, Tanzania, Togo, and Trinidad and Tobago did not have sufficient data to calculate survival rates; for these countries, EPDC calculated survival rates based on administrative data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

Given that the final component of the pyramid illustrates learning, measured by assessment tests administered in different grades, this report aligns the survival and learning components of the pyramid for each country by calculating survival to the grade in which a given assessment test was administered. As such, the survival rates vary across countries but generally all represent upper primary/lower secondary levels.

Data sources used for the survival rates, as well as the grades to which survival rates were calculated, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Sources of data on survival

COUNTRY	SOURCE	GRADE TESTED
Azerbaijan	EPDC (based on DHS), 2006	Grade 4
Burkina Faso	EPDC (based on UIS), 2011	Grade 5
Burundi	EPDC (based on UIS), 2010	Grade 5
Colombia	EPDC (based on DHS), 2009	Grade 6
Cote d'Ivoire	EPDC (based on MICS), 2005	Grade 5
Dominican Republic	EPDC (based on DHS), 2007	Grade 6
Indonesia	EPDC (based on UIS), 2010	Grade 4
Kenya	EPDC (based on DHS), 2007	Grade 6
Lesotho	EPDC (based on UIS), 2010	Grade 6
Malawi	EPDC (based on DHS,) 2009	Grade 6
Mozambique	EPDC (based on MICS), 2007	Grade 6
Namibia	EPDC (based on DHS,) 2006	Grade 6
Peru	EPDC (based on UIS), 2010	Grade 6
Swaziland	EPDC (based on MICS), 2009	Grade 6
Tanzania	EPDC (based on UIS), 2009	Grade 6
Togo	EPDC (based on UIS), 2010	Grade 5
Trinidad and Tobago	EPDC (based on UIS), 2009	Grade 4
Uganda	EPDC (based on DHS), 2005	Grade 6
Zambia	EPDC (based on DHS), 2006	Grade 6
Zimbabwe	EPDC (based on MICS), 2008	Grade 6

Gaining basic reading skills: Learning outcomes assessments

There is a growing body of learning assessments used to ascertain the extent to which students are gaining the fundamental reading skills needed to succeed in the middle and upper grades of basic and secondary education. Used as a metric of achievement, these assessments can be used to gain a sense of relative academic skills of middle grade students in more than 100 countries. EPDC collects learning outcomes data focusing on assessments that are designed to measure the extent to which students are obtaining the basic reading skills needed to succeed in the middle and upper grades of basic and secondary education (see www.epdc.org).

Learning assessments provide performance scores, but can also be used to determine whether test-takers meet, exceed, or fall below learning benchmarks set at a national, regional, or international level. Assessment data can provide a sense, for example, of the percentage of students who are reading at a basic level, advanced level, or are struggling to read at all. There are limits to the comparability of scores and learning benchmarks across assessments because each assessment uses different constructs, tools, and procedures. Additionally, assessments vary in the standards for each learning achievement benchmark as well as the number of benchmarks according to which students can be evaluated.

Rather than attempt to catalogue the range and diversity of benchmarks used by different assessments, the EPDC uses learning outcomes benchmarks to organize students into three broad categories:

1. Percentage of pupils who demonstrate *less than a low level of learning*, according to the standards and benchmarks of the assessment used to evaluate them.
2. Percentage of pupils who demonstrate *at least a low level of learning*, according

to the standards and benchmarks of the assessment used to evaluate them.

3. Percentage of pupils who demonstrate *more than a low level of learning*, according to the standards and benchmarks of the assessment used to evaluate them.

In this report, the second category, **percentage of pupils who demonstrate at least a low level of learning**, is used as a measure of learning achievement. In the four tests included in the analysis: PASEC, PIRLS, SACMEQ, and SERCE, this benchmark is defined differently, and the specifics of the definitions used in each of the achievement tests used in this report are explained in Table 4.

Please note that the tests are not age specific and are administered among students attending a certain grade of primary school, regardless of age. A complete list of assessment tests used to illustrate reading capabilities in the learning pyramids, as well as an explanation of which grades were tested, are presented in Table 5.

In order to determine the final measure used in the pyramids - learning - the percentage of students who reached the basic proficiency as defined by a given achievement test is applied to the percentage of students who eventually transition to the tested grade. Comparing the length of the dark blue bar to the bottom light orange bar representing the entire cohort of children who are of the school entrance age provides a measure of the final inefficiency that the pyramids aim to illustrate: the percentage of 6-year olds who gain basic reading skills by the time they reach a given grade and the percentage of them who do not obtain such reading abilities due to either never entering school, dropping out early or scoring low on the test despite having attended at least several grades of primary schooling.

Table 4: Definitions of “low level of learning” in assessment tests used in the study

TEST NAME	DEFINITION OF “LOW LEVEL OF LEARNING”
Programme d’Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la Confemem (PASEC)	Students at this level are not considered to be failing scholastically, but also did not reach the minimum performance threshold of 40% which PASEC defines as the possession of knowledge (reading, writing and counting).
Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)	Fourth grade students reaching level 400 in the PIRLS reading achievement scale displayed basic reading skills. They were able to recognize, locate, and reproduce explicitly stated details from the texts, particularly if the details were close to the beginning of the text. Students reaching the low international benchmark also demonstrated success with some items requiring straightforward inferences.
The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ)	Interprets meaning (by matching words and phrases, completing a sentence, or matching adjacent words) in a short and simple text by reading on or reading back. These elementary competencies are considered to be mechanical in nature.
Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE)	Locate information with a single meaning, in a prominent part of the text, repeated literally or synonymously, and isolated from other information.

Calculations used to produce the final learning estimates are based on several important assumptions. For example, **they assume that children who never enter school do not gain basic reading skills.** However, some of these children may attend non-formal schooling and attain some level of literacy. Regardless of the extent to which this remains a possibility, it is not likely to affect a large percentage of children who never enter school. The measure that the report uses to represent access is already quite broad and includes all who enter school as late as at the age of 14. Moreover, the pyramids are a measure of inefficiencies within the formal education system and as such, these children can still be counted as “lost” to the formal education system that failed to enroll them

or keep them in school. **A similar hypothesis is made about children who enroll but drop out before reaching the tested grade. The pyramids assume that these children never gain basic reading skills.** If the main reason children leave school early is their inability to keep up with school work, this assumption is likely to be accurate. In some cases, however, children may leave school for reasons unrelated to their school performance. Nevertheless, the likelihood that these children gain basic skills before reaching the tested grade, and subsequently leave school, is relatively low.

Table 5: Sources of data on learning

COUNTRY	GRADE TESTED	ASSESSMENT TEST
Azerbaijan	Grade 4	PIRLS, 2011
Burkina Faso	Grade 5	PASEC, 2007
Burundi	Grade 5	PASEC, 2009
Colombia	Grade 6	SERCE, 2006
Cote d'Ivoire	Grade 5	PASEC, 2009
Dominican Republic	Grade 6	SERCE, 2006
Indonesia	Grade 4	PIRLS, 2011
Kenya	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Lesotho	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Malawi	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Mozambique	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Namibia	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Peru	Grade 6	SERCE, 2006
Swaziland	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Tanzania	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Togo	Grade 5	PASEC, 2010
Trinidad and Tobago	Grade 4	PIRLS, 2011
Uganda	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Zambia	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007
Zimbabwe	Grade 6	SACMEQ, 2007

Results: Learning pyramids for 20 countries

Because learning pyramids are an analytical tool demonstrating the efficiency of an education system, in an ideal scenario, all bars of the pyramid are equal to 100%, in which case the graph would be a rectangle, not a pyramid. Shorter bars signify loss in efficiency across the respective dimension.

It must be noted that the pyramids are not comparable across all countries. In certain cases, such as Uganda and Tanzania, one can draw comparisons based on the dimensions of the countries' pyramids because the same assessment test was used and consequently, survival was calculated for the same grade. To facilitate comparisons across countries, the pyramids are grouped according to the test that

was used to determine the reading abilities. The only test used in this study that has been deemed non-comparable across countries in which it was administered was PASEC; the other assessment tests were designed with a specific goal to enable such comparisons. In case of countries that participated in PASEC, only the access and retention components of the pyramids can be compared.

We have chosen the gender breakdown to be the main line of within-country comparison; however, it is not the only potential measure of disaggregation, as disparities exist across the urban/rural divide, language lines, economic wealth, and more. The learning pyramids presented here, however, can serve as an initial snapshot of the country progress against EFA goals as we approach 2015.

Figure 2: Learning Pyramids

PIRLS



SACMEQ

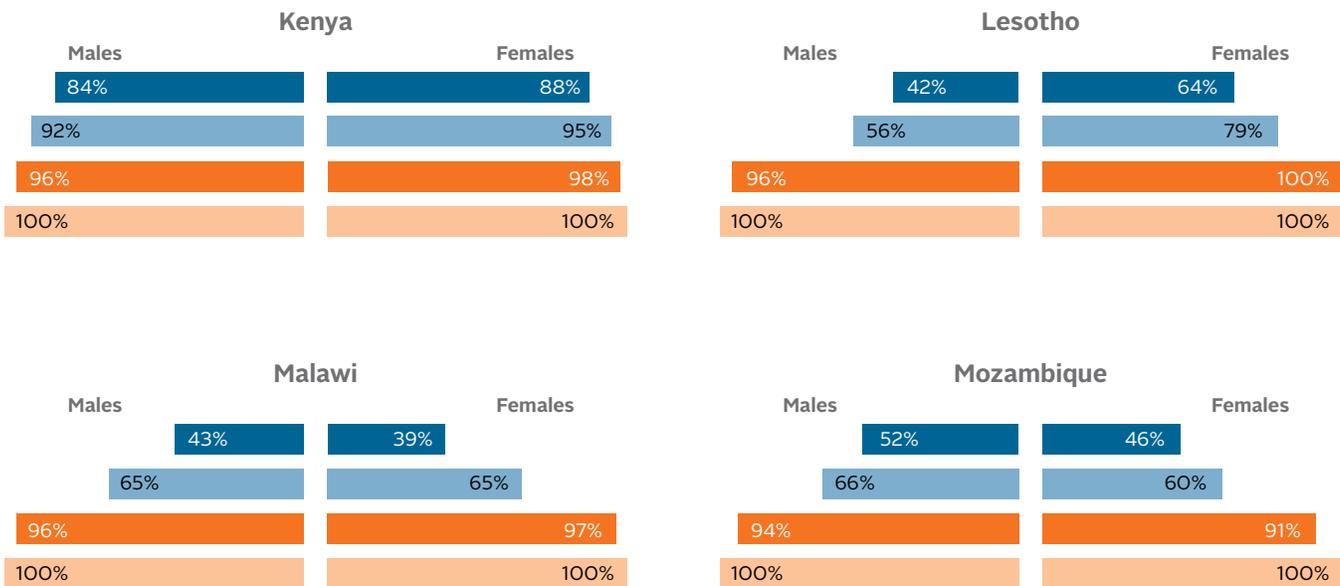


Figure 2: Learning Pyramids (continued)

SACMEQ (continued)

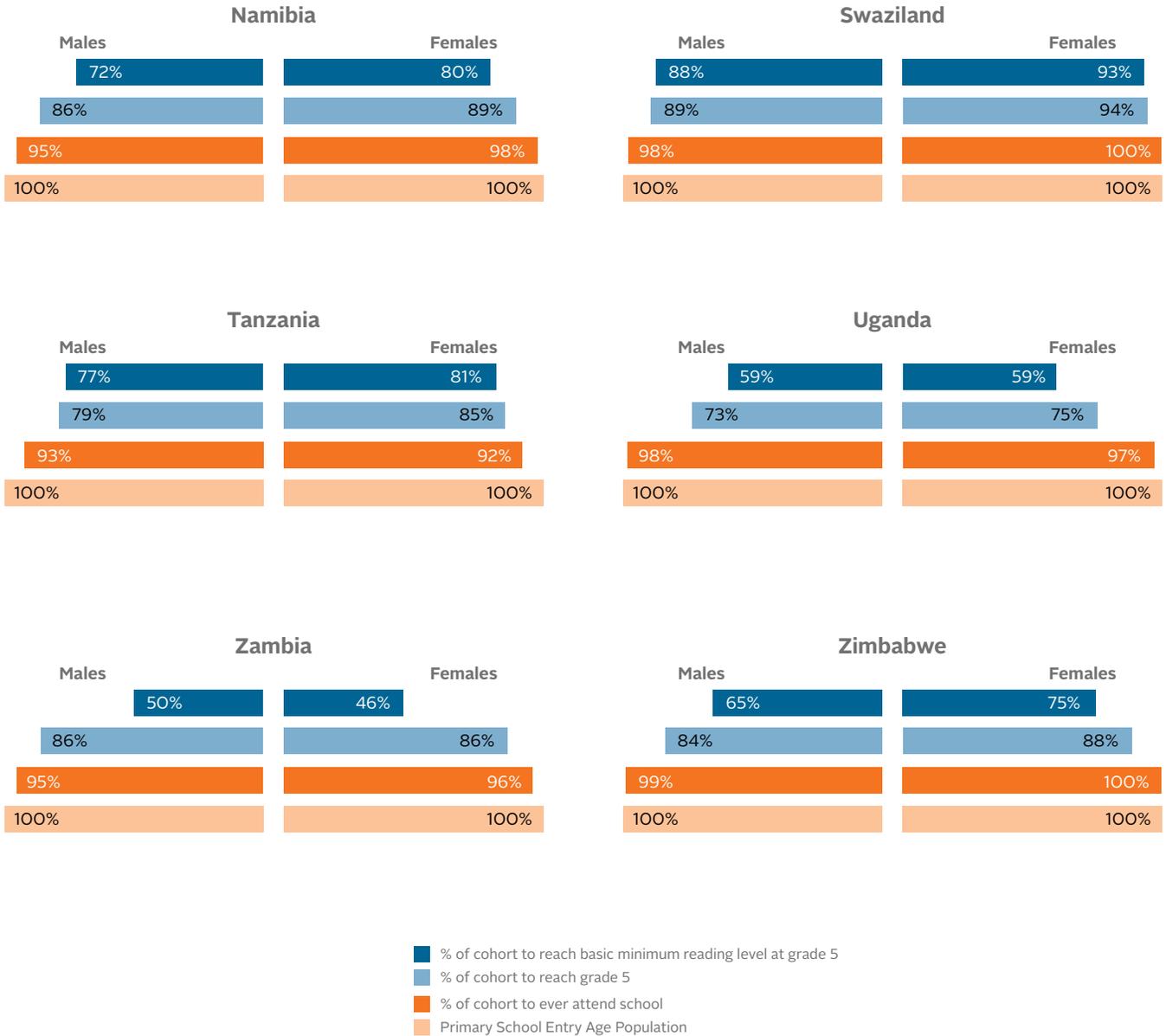
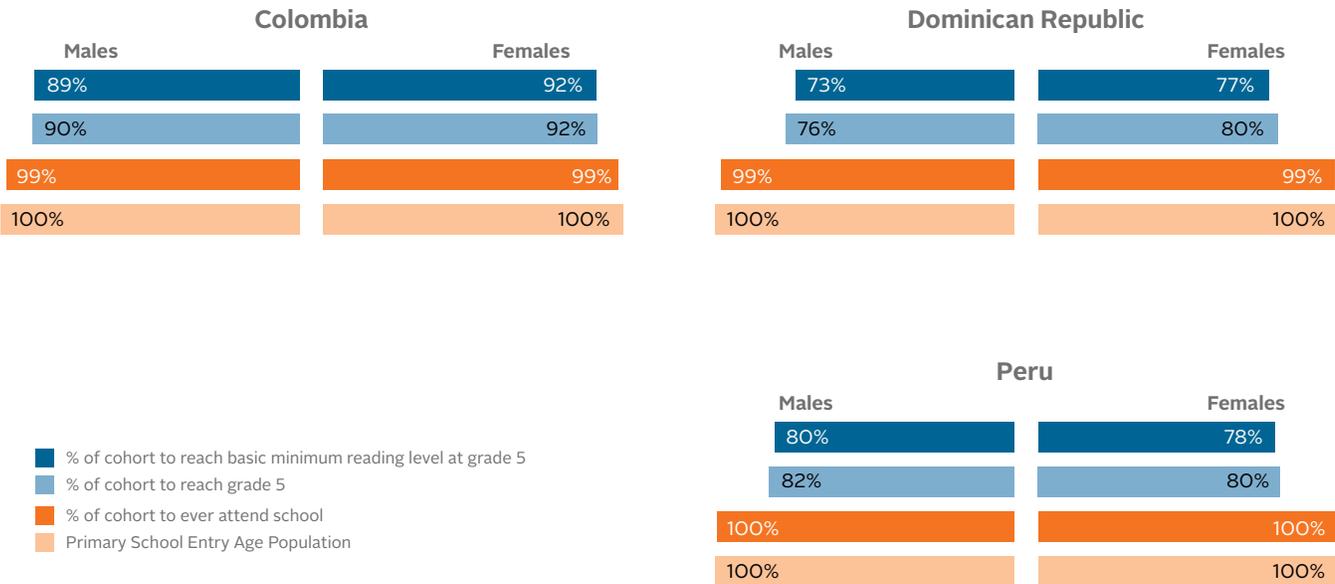
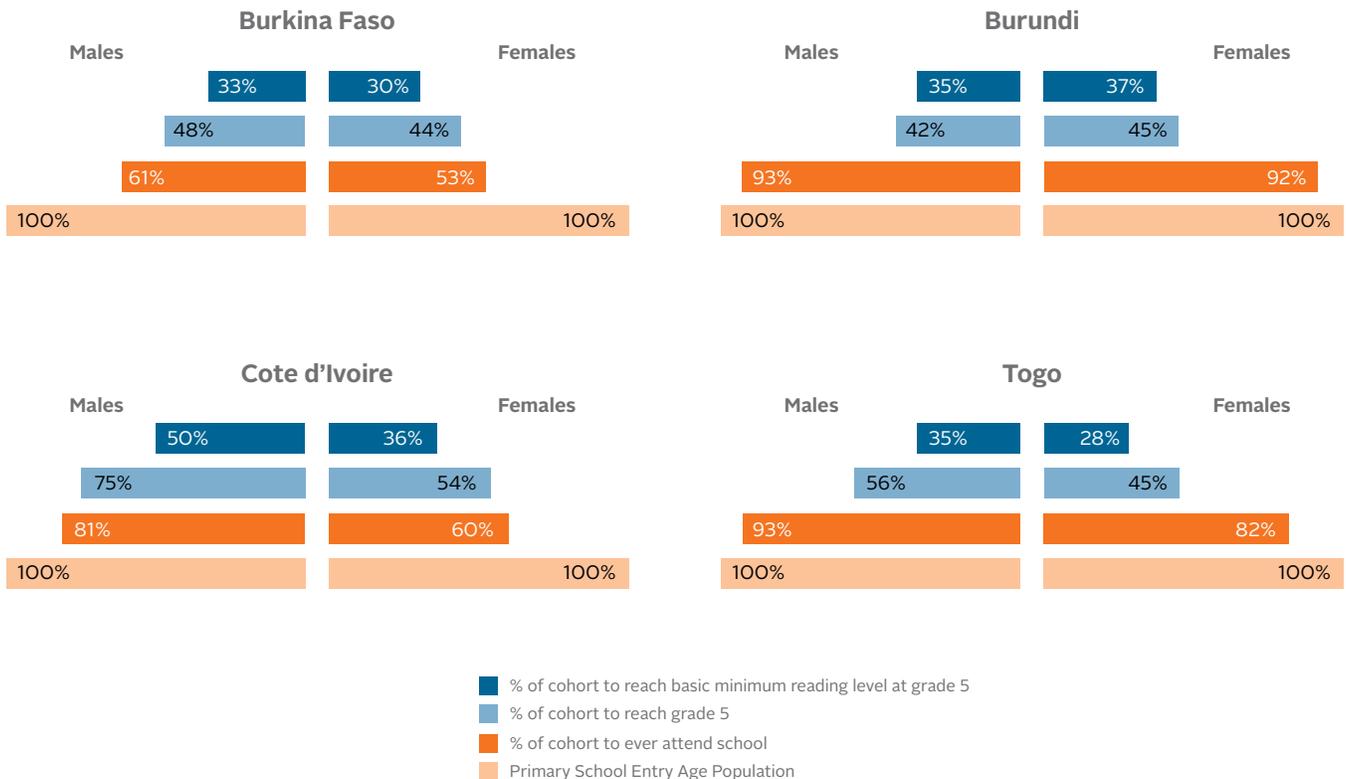


Figure 2: Learning Pyramids (continued)

SERCE



PASEC



The set of 20 pyramids presented above illustrates well the progress that low-income and lower-middle income countries have made in terms of providing children with access to education and keeping them in school; and highlights the gaps in learning still so prominent in many countries.

The dark orange bar representing access is close to 100% in most of the pyramids, with only two countries with significantly high percentages of children who never enter school. Combining both genders in case of Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire shows that 43% and 29% of children in these countries, respectively, never get enrolled in school. In addition, Cote d'Ivoire has the highest gender disparity in access among all countries: 22 percentage points more boys enter school than girls. Nonetheless, in most countries, nearly everyone reaches school eventually.

The difference between the dark orange bar (access) and light blue bar (survival) shows how many children drop out of school before reaching a certain grade (4, 5 or 6, selected to match the grade in which students reading abilities were tested). In quite a few countries, particularly in Azerbaijan, Kenya, and Trinidad and Tobago, almost everyone who enters school can be expected to eventually reach upper primary or lower secondary levels. Among these countries, however, the number of years that it takes for a child to move through primary school grades may vary significantly. In Azerbaijan, for example, children rarely repeat a grade; in Kenya, on the other hand, average repetition rates in primary school range from 5% to 13% depending on the grade. And yet, the two countries have similarly high survival rates. The issue of high repetition hidden behind high levels of survival is further discussed in the next section.

Two countries stand out as having particularly low survival rates: Burundi and Togo (47% and 58%, respectively, for both genders combined). In these two countries the difference between the dark orange bar representing access and the light blue bar demonstrating survival is most striking, suggesting that children are quite likely to drop out of school instead of being promoted or even repeating a grade multiple times. Gender disparity is most prominent in Lesotho, with girls being much more likely to stay in school than boys.

The top dark blue bar represents learning and demonstrates what percentage of a hypothetical cohort of children entering school stays in school until reaching a given grade, and obtains basic reading skills.

Among the countries participating in PASEC – Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire and Togo – between 31% and 43% of children can be expected to reach grade 5 and gain basic reading skills as defined by the test. Such low percentages are in large part due to inefficiencies that happen before children have an opportunity to take the test. In Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire, many children never get a chance to enter school; in Burundi and Togo, children enroll in school but many of them drop out before reaching grade 5. As a result, even if 5th grade students perform well on the reading test (such as in Burundi, where 84% of children taking PASEC reached the low level of reading), the overall inefficiency of the education system is still high.

Azerbaijan, Indonesia, and Trinidad and Tobago participated in the 2011 edition of PIRLS, one of the largest international reading assessments administered among 4th grade students. None of the three countries show major challenges

related to access or survival to grade 4, but they do seem to show challenges in providing all their 4th grade students with basic reading capabilities. Indonesia ranked low on the test as compared to other countries participating in PIRLS, which were mostly high income economies. The pyramid shows that 61% of children in Indonesia can be expected to reach basic reading skills in grade 4. In Trinidad and Tobago, the only high income country included in the study, as well as in Azerbaijan, the percentage is higher (75% and 80% respectively), suggesting that a quarter to a fifth of children do not gain basic reading skills, as defined by PIRLS, by the time they reach grade 4.

In three of 10 countries participating in SACMEQ - Swaziland, Tanzania and Kenya - over 90% of grade 6 students demonstrated basic reading abilities, as defined by the test. Access to school is high: between 93% (Mozambique) and 99% (Swaziland, Zimbabwe) of children enter school. School survival is more of a challenge, especially in Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique, where about a third of children enrolled in school never make it to grade 6. The same countries were in the bottom four in terms of their performance on SACMEQ suggesting that both survival and learning are major challenges for their educational systems. A country with the lowest score, Zambia, demonstrates high survival (about 90%), but low learning, as merely a half of children are expected to gain basic reading skills by the time they reach grade 6.

Countries participating in SERCE – Colombia, Dominican and Peru – enroll close to 100% of children in school. Among students who participated in the test, 95%-100% demonstrated basic reading skills. The data suggests that the main challenge lies in keeping children in school in both Dominican Republic and Peru, where about a fifth of students who

are enrolled in school do not reach grade 6 in which SERCE was administered.

The long road to primary completion

One of the inefficiencies that the pyramids describe is captured by survival rates. As a measure of retention, survival shows how likely a child is to reach a higher grade of schooling. High survival rates, however, can be produced by a system with extensive repetition. This is important since high repetition rates can be a significant burden on the school system, even though keeping children in school is much better than losing them entirely.

In many education systems of the developing world, children enter school later than they are supposed to, and struggle to progress through subsequent primary school grades; yet they do not drop out completely. In countries with high repetition rates and low dropout rates many students eventually reach upper primary grades, but it may take them many more years than the structure of the school system assumes. In our calculation of survival rate, the number of times that a student repeated grades is not relevant, as long as he or she eventually reaches the final grade. This means that a system characterized by high repetition rates and low dropout rates will have similar survival rates to a highly efficient system in which both repetition and dropout rates are very low.

To examine the extent to which high repetition rates are a major challenge in the education systems of the countries analyzed in the study, *survival rates* to the last grade of primary for the 20 countries were compared to *on-time completion*. The latter was defined as the percentage of children who are two years older than the official age of the last grade of primary school and who have answered two questions

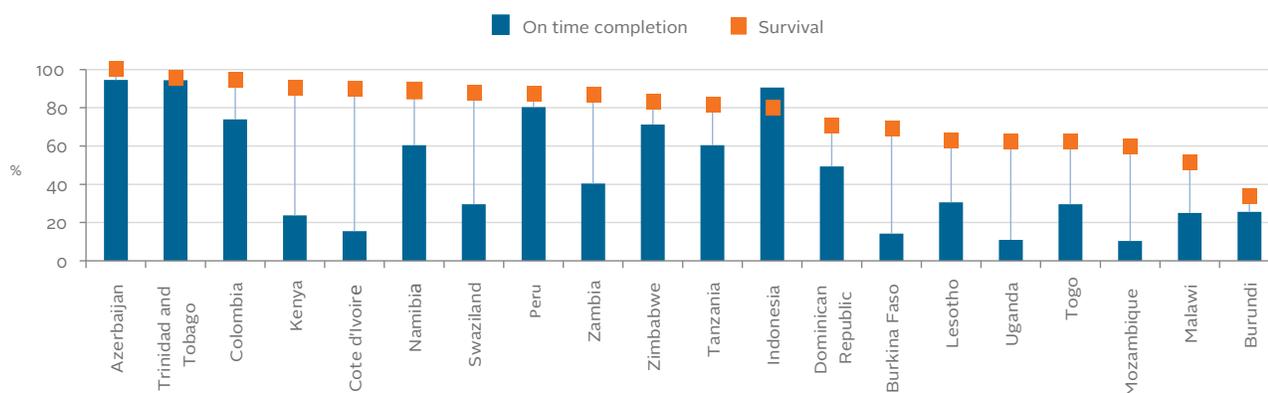
in a household survey: “What is the highest level of school NAME has ever attended?” and “What is the highest grade NAME has completed at that level?” by pointing to the last grade of primary school or higher. Two additional years are allowed to include children who enter school slightly later or repeat just once or twice, assuming that low repetition is not a major problem but rather a correcting measure used to help students who need some extra time to master a given grade’s content.

Figure 3 demonstrates the results of the comparison. Countries are sorted by their school survival rate, and the difference between survival (orange squares) and on time completion (blue bars) is represented by a light blue line. As demonstrated in this figure, high repetition is a major challenge in about a half of the countries described in this report. In Cote d’Ivoire, Kenya, and Swaziland the difference between on time completion and survival rates is the largest, suggesting that children either enroll much later than they should or repeat multiple times before they reach the last grade of primary school. In these countries, survival rates in primary school are about 90%, but only 16% (Cote d’Ivoire) to 30% (Swaziland) of children who are two years older than the official age of the final grade of primary have completed primary school. In

Azerbaijan and Trinidad and Tobago, on the other hand, over 95% of children reach the last grade of primary, most of whom appear to be close to the official age of students in that grade. Nonetheless, a small difference between survival and on time completion is not always a sign of a properly functioning school system. In Burundi survival is about 8% higher than completion - one of the smallest differences across all countries; however, both completion and survival are quite low. This suggests that instead of high repetition, Burundi’s education system can be characterized of very high dropout rates, i.e. children who enroll are likely to leave school before reaching upper primary grades and gaining basic reading skills.

The comparison between survival and on time completion demonstrates that behind high survival rates are sometimes hidden very high repetition rates, and suggests that many children struggle to master educational content in primary school. Having an opportunity to repeat a grade instead of leaving school is, however, a much preferred scenario for a struggling student whose chance of eventually reaching basic reading abilities is much higher in school than outside of it.

Figure 3: Survival versus on time completion



Conclusion

In most countries, a child should enroll in school at the age 6 or 7 and progress through the system, after mastering each grade's content, to complete primary education between the ages of 11 and 13, depending on the school system. Upon reaching the last grade of primary education, he or she should be able to read and write.

Learning pyramids presented in this report show that education systems often do not provide children with sufficient opportunities to learn. Furthermore, they demonstrate that looking at just access or survival or learning in isolation may not tell the whole story about why children are not learning. To understand the main challenges that education systems face it is critical to look at several aspects of education provision, starting from school entry, through retention, and finally, the quality of education that is being offered in schools.

The weaknesses of the education systems that the pyramids expose are helpful in establishing areas in which interventions are most needed. In some countries improving learning is clearly the most urgent need, but in others the main focus may still be access and retention. Devoting all our energy to a single aspect of the education system may take us further away from the goal that education ultimately aims to accomplish: making sure that every child learns.

While the learning pyramids provide a rather generous framework for looking at children's school access and progression, allowing them to enter school as late as at the age of 14 and repeat grades multiple times, the comparison between on time completion and school survival serves as an important reminder of how much inefficiency there is even in systems that manage to keep children in school. The percentage of children completing primary school on time in most developing countries included in this overview seldom reaches 50%. Ensuring that children not only stay in school but progress through subsequent grades at a reasonable pace is a critical challenge that will have to be addressed to improve the cost efficiency of resources spent on providing education to all children.

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EPDC, a research and analysis unit within FHI 360's Global Learning Group, serves as a resource for education policy makers and the development community, providing a wealth of education data at national and subnational levels, dynamic data visualization, ready-made resources such as country education profiles, and in-depth research on issues and challenges facing education in developing countries.