

Our children are in school But can they read

SHAHIDUL ISLAM and JOHN RICHARDS

BANGLADESH can celebrate the International Literacy Day with pride. Since 2000, we have significantly increased enrolment and now nearly all children of an age to be in an early primary grade are in school. Everyone—parents, teachers, officials and political leaders—can take credit for this achievement. But enrolment is not enough. Can our children read?

Bangladesh is unfortunately a major contributor to the global total of some 250 million children who cannot read.

Unfortunately, the country's education officials seem content to continue "business as usual." Given these assessments, however, this is not a time for business as usual.

We should not try to make the problem disappear by adopting an unrealistically low benchmark for literacy. Proven early grade reading interventions are available to tackle reading problems. Literacy is ideally conceived as a continuum—from the ability to read road signs in Dhaka to the ability to read Tagore. However, managing school systems requires use of

big advantage over those countries, such as India, where multiple languages are spoken.

Capitalising on the fact that we have one primary language, we can easily adopt better teaching techniques for reading. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board has been working hard to introduce supplementary reading materials in primary grades. It is important to note here though, the supplementary reading materials must match children's reading levels.

We lack two important elements essential for improving children's

non-readers. ASER surveys school students to read grade two curriculum level.

The literacy benchmark with EGRA is reading fluency by the number of words per minute. EGRA is also used in their classrooms for reading diagnostic tool over a nationally representative of early primary grade assessments are of importance adopting better reading

World-renowned researcher Abadzi suggests reading minute as a threshold for primary grades. Some Bangladesh that work school students follow while others use different. Unfortunately, no age number, tested by empirical confidently claim that particular fluency guideline will be able to read well. There is a role for the Bangladesh to determine literacy or reading benchmark. This benchmark be so low as to imply required to become literate be so high as to imply reach high school level school. Settling on an appropriate fluency benchmark while assessing various reading. Of course, the fluency children with disabilities different.

Currently, the Ministry of Mass Education is developing primary education development programme, for the first starting in 2018. It is for the country to develop appropriate literacy benchmark primary grade children commitment that by primary education programme graduating primary be able to meet, or pass this level.

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Over the last two decades, all governments in Bangladesh have given education the highest priority in planning and budgeting exercises. Despite our efforts, adult literacy hovers around 60 percent, and this includes Bangladeshis whose level of literacy is minimal. They can write their names perhaps, but not much more. Using both national and local surveys, assessments of primary students indicate that at grade five no more than one quarter of children can reasonably be classified as able to read "at grade level."

administratively simple criteria that establish acceptable benchmarks at different grades. Without such benchmarks there is always a danger of lowering expectations to the point that children graduate from primary school not able to read and write as adults.

Bangladesh is admittedly faring better than many countries where 50 percent of children cannot read a single word after several years of schooling, partly due to the lack of teaching materials. In planning to improve literacy among Bangladeshi children, the country has a

reading skills—adequate teaching time and testing. Let's not confuse testing with our existing public examinations. More time needs to be devoted to the teaching of reading in early primary grades. Children also need more practice in reading, guided by their peers or teachers. In order to measure the results of teaching activities, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) provides a measure in terms of reading fluency. There are tools to assess reading ability. For instance, ASER in India is a highly popular tool for identifying readers and

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