Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019: Language and Learning Gaps

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SEA-PLM is a Regional Learning Assessment by and for Southeast Asian Countries
Better learning outcomes through regional collaboration

SEA-PLM is a regional large scale assessment and capacity building programme designed by and for Southeast Asian countries to improve relevant and equitable learning outcomes for students in basic education.

Supporting member countries in developing robust learning assessment systems, enabling to monitor student learning outcomes, and to develop improved policies.

Contributing to a more equitable and meaningful education for all children across the region.
Regional Relevance and Realization of SDG 4

SEA-PLM supports the acceleration of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities.

The regional context and inclusive of skills, attitudes, and ASEAN values that embrace the needs of the 21st Century are at the core of the SEA-PLM programme and tools.
Assessment for Quality Education in the Region: Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)

Assessment framework that reflects national curriculum standards in primary education in the region

Technical activities that engaged countries in item writing, review, translation, and questionnaire and test development

First ever regional assessment for Southeast Asia. 6 SEA countries participated in 2019 cycle.

Developed standardized assessments that measures foundational skills and literacy (e.g. reading, writing, and mathematics) and non-cognitive domain (e.g. global citizenship)
SEA-PLM Proficiency Skills

Reading literacy is understanding, using and responding to a range of written texts, in order to meet personal, societal, economic and civic needs.

Writing literacy as ‘constructing meaning by generating a range of written texts to express oneself and communicate with others, in order to meet personal, societal, economic and civic needs.

Mathematical literacy is a person’s capacity, given a problem in a context that is of interest or importance to them, to translate the problem into a suitable mathematical formulation, to apply mathematical knowledge and skills to find a solution, and to interpret the mathematical results in relation to the context and to review the merits or limitations of those results.
Assessing Children’s Proficiency

• SEA-PLM has developed its own proficiency scales in reading literacy, writing literacy and mathematical literacy to enable countries to report overall student performance across contexts and over time.

• SEAPLM 2019 proficiency scales enable education stakeholders and systems to monitor learning growth for students with different profiles, which in turn allows for sustainable improvement in curriculum achievement and literacy.
Main official first language of instruction in reading at primary level in participating countries

In all countries, SEA-PLM 2019 assessed children in the official language of instruction in schools at Grade 5. In early grades, some of the countries provide multilingual education in the national language(s) as part of their multilingual education (MLE) policy and introduce a second and/or other language in parallel. Context-specific factors are not presented here, as countries have different challenges and responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Khmer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese, Malay, Tamil</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Mother tongue$^{12}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Filipino and English$^{13}$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: data based on official documentation
SEA-PLM 2019 reveals stark differences between students’ learning outcomes according to various profiles and characteristics, such as gender, socioeconomic status, language spoken at home, preschool experience and early developmental skills.

Some of these disadvantages may be combined, hence, the most vulnerable children face multiple deprivations and factors that negatively affect their learning (for example, boys from poorer households in remote rural areas are more likely to be in a disadvantaged position in learning than other characteristics).
### SEA-PLM Reading Proficiency Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Description of what students can typically do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band 6 and above</td>
<td>Understand texts with familiar structures and manage competing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 5</td>
<td>Make connections to understand key ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 4</td>
<td>Understand simple texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 3</td>
<td>Read a range of everyday texts fluently and begin to engage with their meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 2 and below</td>
<td>Identify relationships between words and their meanings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading Proficiency across countries

Percentage of Grade 5 children in each reading band, by country
Characteristics of low-performing readers

Students have higher risk of being low performer

Students have lower risk of being low performer
Speaking language of instruction at home

Figure 3.8: Percentage of children by whether the language of instruction is spoken at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average six countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Children speak the language of instruction at home most of the time
Children don’t speak the language of instruction at home most of the time

Figure 3.9: Differences in average reading, writing and mathematics scores by whether the language of instruction is spoken at home

- Children don’t speak the language of instruction at home most of the time
- Children speak the language of instruction at home most of the time
School environment and teachers’ profiles

The majority of children attended schools where teachers in charge of the language of instruction had attended pre-service or in-service reading training. However, in almost all countries, a non-negligible percentage of children were in class with teachers who had received no training in reading (in the language of instruction used for the SEA-PLM assessment) before or during their service.
Reading teachers’ training and instructional practices

- Effective professional development and preparation of teachers should span pre-service and in-service education and be continuous so that teachers’ skills evolve throughout their careers.

- On average, only 35% of children were in language lessons with a teacher who had received both pre-service and in-service training in reading instruction, with the highest rates reported in Vietnam (56%), followed by Malaysia (41%), and Cambodia (41%).

- In 5 out of the 6 countries more than 10% of Grade 5 children were in a classroom with a teacher who had not received any training related to reading instruction. In Lao PDR 36% of children had a teacher with no training in reading instruction; in the Philippines and Cambodia the figure was around 20% and in Malaysia and Myanmar around 12%.
Key insights and Recommendations

• Establish clear and consistent policies about the language of instruction. Children who are taught in the same language throughout their primary education years perform better in reading, writing and mathematics.

• Support the introduction of learning intervention strategies in the early years of education. Interventions should include specialized training programmes for teachers to assist all children to develop strong reading comprehension skills, especially children from linguistically diverse communities.

• Prioritize and adequately finance pre-primary education programmes for all children, but especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Programmes should incorporate strong parental involvement in children’s early learning, with a focus on language development.
Thank you very much!

www.seaplm.org
References

