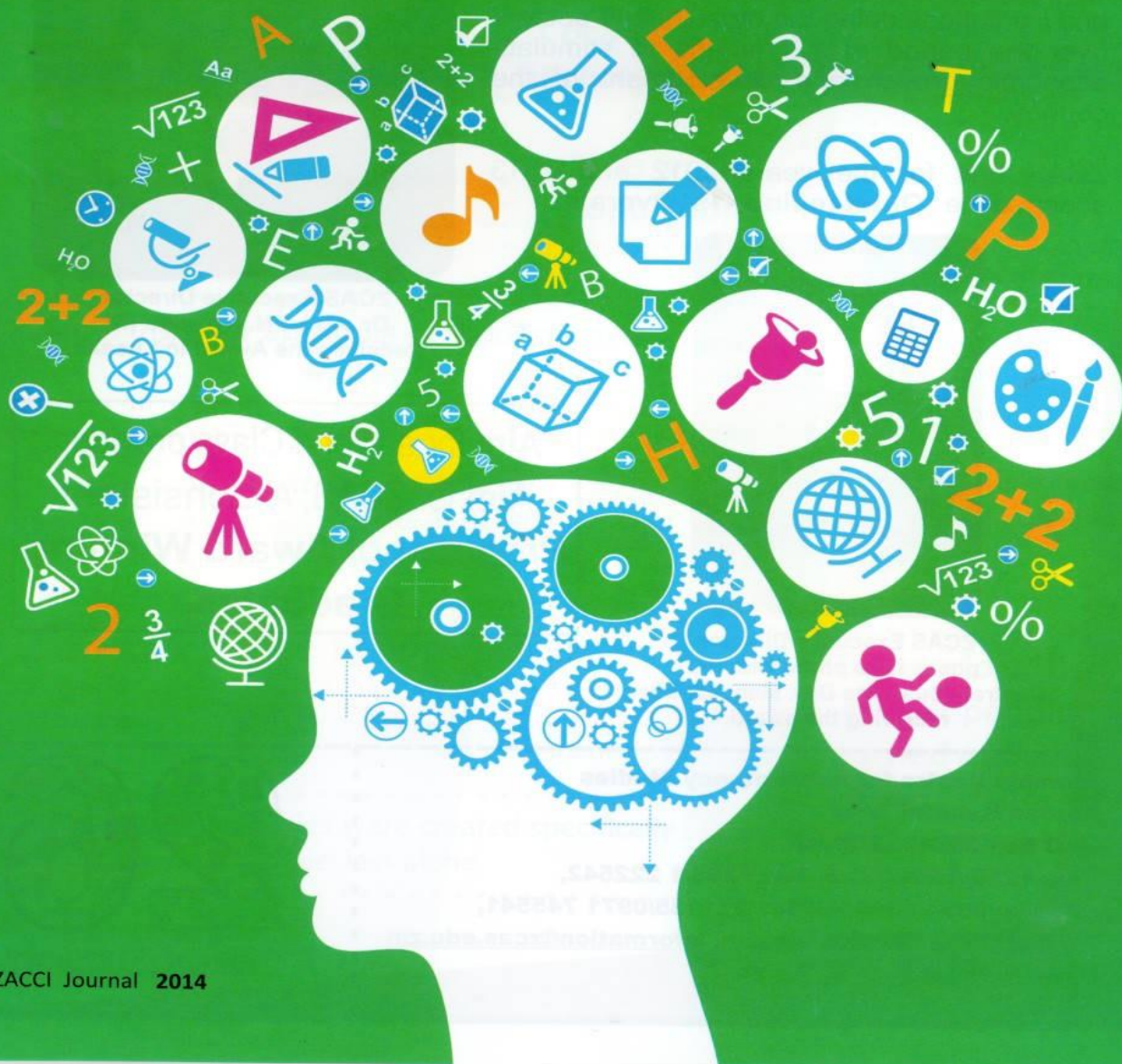


Let's Read Zambia campaign: Learning to Read so our Children can Read to Learn





When seven year-old Haward Kachula finished Grade 1 in 2012, he was one of the first students to benefit from Zambia's improved education curriculum and teaching methods. As Ministry administrators looked on, Haward carefully wrote his name on the board and demonstrated his reading skills. In that moment he proved he could spell his name and in the process gained the confidence and motivation that will likely keep him coming to school and succeeding in early primary years. Examples such as Haward's are at the heart of Zambia's education challenge and opportunity.

In the fast growing economies of southern Africa, Haward's success is a promising start for the new generation of Zambians that will need to compete with their peers in the region and beyond. But Haward represents only the start: the road to acquiring necessary skills is long yet essential if our children are going to be able to compete in today's world.

Haward's primary school, located in Mwinilunga District in North-Western Province, shows how schools across Zambia are addressing the challenge. They are focusing on the basics of reading through familiar sounds and words in the language

spoken locally instead of rote learning in English. The approach is based on a growing body of research which shows that children grasp concepts better through a common medium of communication, and that it's easier to transfer literacy skills from a familiar language to another one, such as English. Early local language instruction also makes sense because it's often the language children experience at home. Parents then have a critical role to play in their child's education to understand and support learning using their own vocabulary. From a stronger foundation at home and at school, our children will have the confidence and skills to more quickly learn to read, enabling them to then learn other subjects through reading.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, with the support of USAID, has initiated a national Let's Read Zambia campaign to support provincial and district education teams to promote and track early grade reading, holding schools accountable for learning targets through local learner performance improvement plans. The campaign is anchored on four messages: **(1)** Children learn best through familiar language instruction; **(2)** Read with your children: Early reading translates into future reading and success; **(3)** Strong local educators and schools produce today's readers, tomorrow's leaders; **(4)** Education is everyone's business if we want a prosperous nation.

“ A productive, growing Zambia requires an educated workforce; developing the skills for that workforce begins when our children enter the classroom. ”



“Education is everyone’s business if we want a prosperous nation.”

From January of this year, Let’s Read Zambia began to mobilize educators, communities, parents and the private sector through local awareness campaigns involving public service announcements, phone-in radio shows and TV documentaries that highlight the importance of early grades as a foundation for a quality education as measured through reading and comprehension.

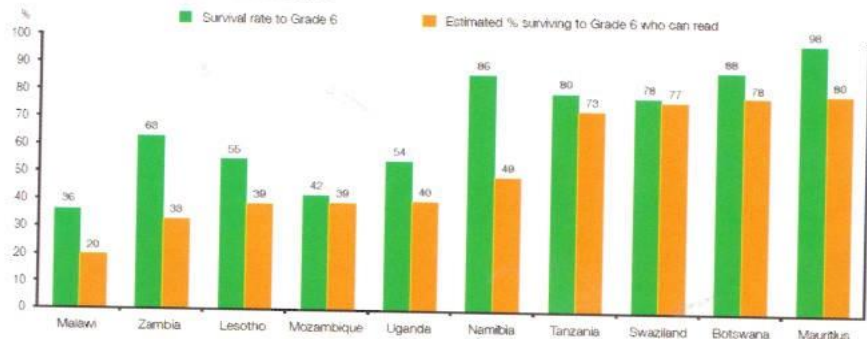
In Haward’s area, Ms. Jessica Mpasela is in charge of Mwinilunga’s District Resource Centre. There she uses reading assessment data to come up with informed strategies on how to help schools which have the largest number of students in the red reading level (not able to read). Armed with evidence, she follows up with the school heads of lower performing schools to come up with a learner performance improvement plan. The plan identifies why the schools are behind and how she can help them meet their needs through training, better orientation on new teaching methods and scripted lessons for teachers.

Campaigns such as Let’s Read Zambia are needed to bridge gaps of communication with the public, encouraging grassroots level conversations about education between schools and their local communities. **This message has not gone unnoticed by national and international banks, mining companies and other service providers in Zambia. They are beginning to respond to this call through support of teacher training, procurement of library books and reading materials for schools, mobile libraries and awards for best performing schools in each province.** Change is happening and businesses are recognizing that quality learning, achieved through better literacy in primary and secondary schools, is essential for Zambian children to succeed in the modern economy.

In Mwinilunga District, the Let’s Read Zambia campaign seeks to move public demand from mere access to education to quality of learning in the classroom. An increasingly competitive international marketplace means that Zambia’s aim is no longer just to get children to come to school but to help them learn effectively once there. **Preliminary results from Term 1 of 2014 suggest a coming sea change in Zambian schools.** From those results, the Ministry and cooperating partners were able to see that schools are now more frequently assessing and prioritizing reading as a key skill that children are required to master in order to continue to higher primary grades.

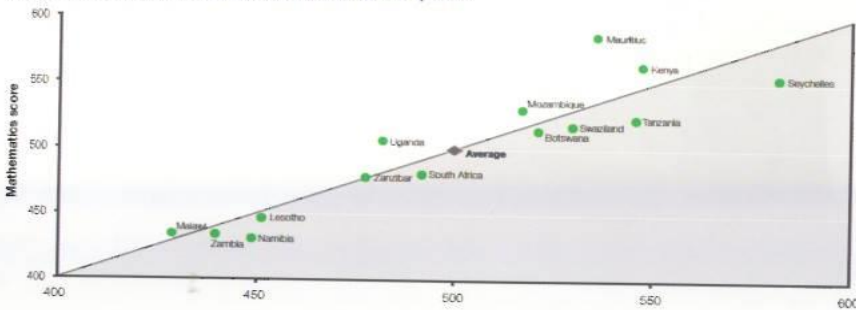
The renewed focus on quality learning as the next frontier in education is based on evidence from both international and national education assessments and studies. **The National Assessment Survey conducted every two years at Grade 5, for example, showed that less than half of our children are able to read simple phrases expected of an average fifth grader.** Moreover, both attendance and literacy rates in Zambia are low when compared to other countries in southern Africa. This is the conclusion of both the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality studies and UNESCO’s comparative research pointing out that Zambia’s children are lagging behind compared to neighboring countries of the region.

ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO SURVIVE TO END OF PRIMARY EDUCATION AND WHO ARE ABLE TO READ IN SACMEQ COUNTRIES



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates based on SACMEQ data (2005) and estimated survival rate (2009 or most recent year). Figure 5.1

SACMEQ SCORES IN READING AND MATHEMATICS, 2005



If public and private sector unite, and through that partnership a culture of reading with habits can be born in the early grades, the impact on learner performance will be dramatic. Every year a child is able to read and remain in school doubles the probability of completing primary and transitioning to secondary school, especially with girls. Early reading truly translates into future learning and success, and that trickles up through classrooms, schools, communities and beyond. Haward’s success must become the norm in our country, repeated in every school.

A productive, growing Zambia requires an educated workforce; developing the skills for that workforce begins when our children enter the classroom.