

PASEC2024

DATA COLLECTED IN 2025



EDUCATION POLICY NOTE

BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Sub-Saharan Africa



pasec
Programme d'analyse des systèmes
éducatifs de la confemen



Key takeaways

Purpose of this note

With four years to go before the deadline for the Education 2030 Agenda, the question is no longer whether children are going to school. The question now is what they actually learn there. Education systems in sub-Saharan Africa have made a considerable effort to increase enrolment, and the PASEC2024 assessment once again shows that this effort has not translated, everywhere and for everyone, into real learning outcomes, as already demonstrated in the PASEC2019 assessment.

This note is intended for decision-makers and presents what the assessment establishes, what these findings call for, and the courses of action that result from them.

An assessment such as that of PASEC is only useful if it changes something in educational policies. PASEC has chosen not to rank countries but rather to allow each system to know where its difficulties lie, who bears the burden, and which levers deserve to be worked on. Moreover, the results are not intended to decide on behalf of States. The purpose of the following pages is, therefore, to make this decision easier and to equip decision-makers with evidence-based findings.

It is important to note that the differences presented are statistical associations, not cause-and-effect relationships. The assessment observes students at a given time, without an experimental design. When one group performs better than another, this note describes an observed difference.

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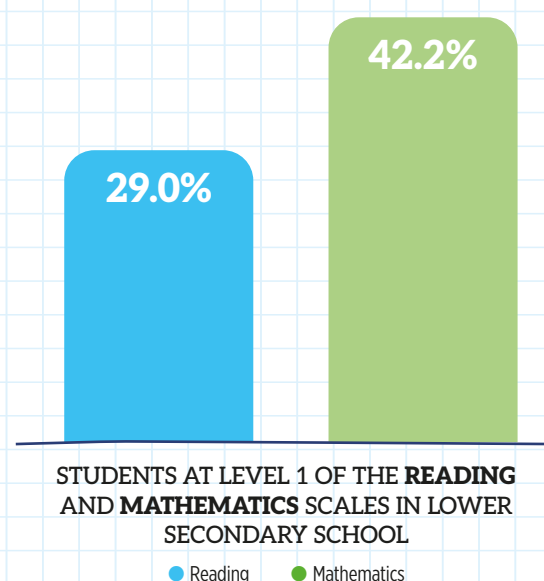
One in three students achieves the minimum proficiency level in reading and fewer than one in four in mathematics.

At the end of nine or ten years of education, the majority of students therefore do not have the necessary learning outcomes.

A significant proportion of these students have not consolidated what was expected at the end of primary school: 29.0% are at level 1 on the reading scale and 42.2% at level 1 on the mathematics scale. The difficulties observed in lower secondary school, therefore, did not originate in lower secondary school.

These overall figures cover very contrasting situations.

And the diagnosis is not the same from one discipline to another. The correlation between national scores in reading and mathematics is only 0.43: Burundi is 63 points below the mean in reading and 82 points above the mean in mathematics; Gabon, which ranks first in reading, exceeds the mean by only 16.8 points in mathematics. A system can succeed in one discipline and fail in the other.



Key messages

- 1 At the end of nine or ten years of education, only one in three students masters the minimum skills in reading; fewer than one in four in mathematics.**

32.7% of students reach the threshold in reading and 22.6% in mathematics; 67.3% do not know how to make the inferences required by the lower secondary curricula and 77.4% do not know how to use multiple mathematical concepts in a less direct situation.
- 2 From one country to another, the gap reaches two standard deviations: more than 200 points separate the extremes in reading and more than 180 points in mathematics.**

In reading, mean scores range from 631.6 points in Gabon to 428.8 points in Chad, a gap of 202.8 points, the equivalent of two standard deviations on the scale. In mathematics, they range from 590.9 points in Benin to 410.5 points in Guinea-Bissau, a gap of 180.5 points.
- 3 At the end of lower secondary school, a large proportion of students have not consolidated the outcomes expected at the end of primary school.**

In reading, 29.0% of students are at level 1, below the minimum skills expected at the end of primary school; they are 57% in Mali and Chad, 52% in Burundi and 50% in Madagascar. In mathematics, 42.2% of students are at level 1, and five countries (Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Sao Tome and Principe, Chad) have a majority of their students at this level, including 79% in Chad and 87.5% in Guinea-Bissau.
- 4 Success in reading and success in mathematics are two separate problems.**

The correlation between the two disciplines is only 0.43, and 5 out of 14 countries change their position depending on the discipline. The diagnosis and priorities must be established discipline by discipline.
- 5 Within the same country, an average of 250 points separates the weakest 10% of students from the strongest 10%.**

The gap between low-performing and high-performing students reaches 256.7 points in reading and 249.6 in mathematics. The weakest 10% of Gabonese students (530 points) do better than half of the students in the 14 countries, while those in Chad are capped at 336 points.
- 6 The school attended and the social background have a significant impact on outcomes, especially in reading.**

In reading, the gap between the most advantaged 20% of students and the most disadvantaged 20% ranges from 22 points in Chad to 120 points in Congo, and exceeds 100 points, or about one standard deviation, in four countries (Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Togo). In mathematics, the gap narrows by an average of one-third (from 74 to 49 points) in the 14 countries. On average, girls are 5.6 points ahead of boys in reading and boys are ahead of girls by 3.0 points in mathematics. These gaps are small, but in the seven countries where the gap in mathematics is significant, it is always unfavourable to girls, up to -31.8 points in Burundi.
- 7 School location and status remain important.**

The urban advantage in reading is significant in 11 out of 14 countries and the private sector is ahead of the public sector in 10 out of 13 countries, but these gaps decrease sharply under comparable conditions of infrastructure and resources.
- 8 Nearly one in two students follow mathematics lessons without a textbook, and more than one in two are in a class of more than 40 students.**

Across all countries, only 61.1% of students say they have a reading textbook and 52.9% a mathematics textbook. More than one in two students are taught in a class of more than 40 students and one in ten in a class of more than 80 students.
- 9 Teaching resources accumulate with students who are already advantaged instead of compensating for inequalities.**

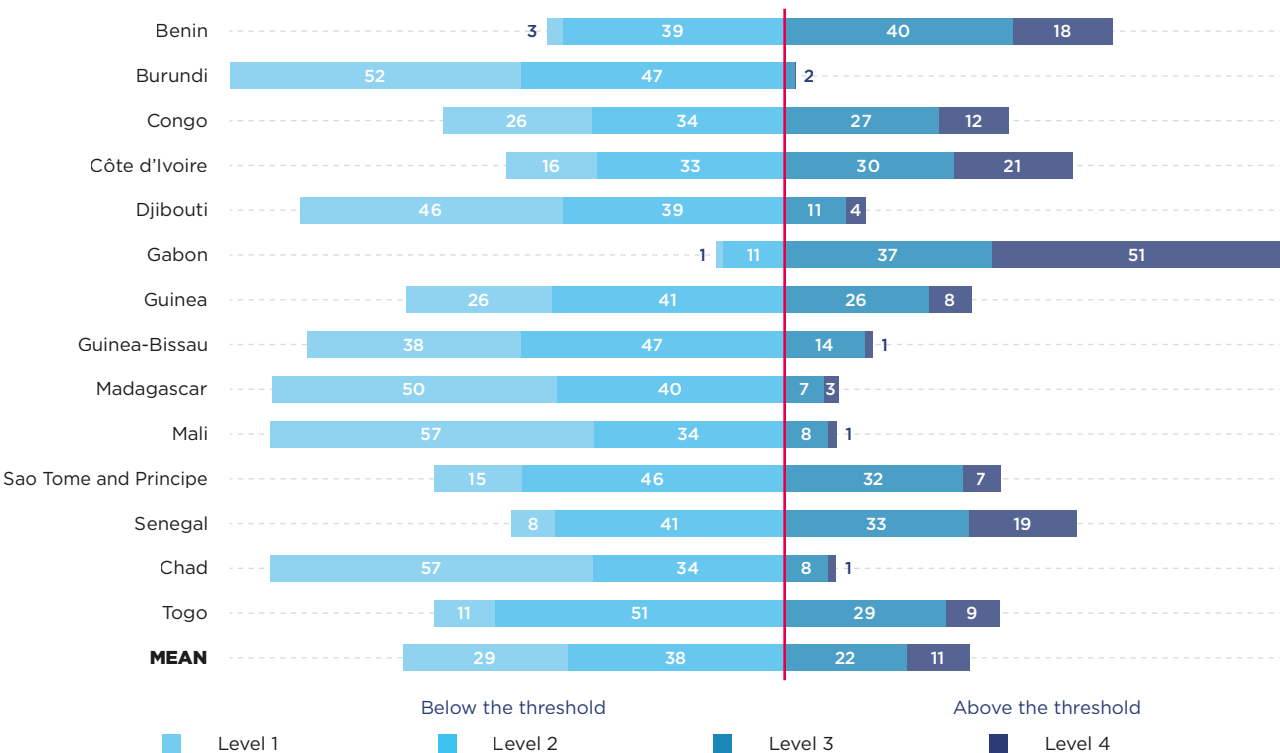
43.8% of students have a reading teacher whose pre-service training lasted less than six months or did not take place; the advantage of the university degree (+27.6 points) falls to +2.8 points when contexts are comparable.
- 10 Spending more is not enough: how resources are used matters as much as their volume.**

Benin and Togo score high with moderate expenditure per student (PPP US\$343.6 and PPP US\$190.5), while Burundi and Mali spend at least 4% of their GDP on education with less than 10% of students above the reading threshold.

Snapshot of proficiency levels by country

Figure 1

Distribution of students by proficiency level in reading, end of lower secondary school (%)



How to read: the bars are aligned with the red line, which represents the baseline level of proficiency. On the left are the students who do not reach it (levels 1 and 2); on the right, those who reach it or exceed it (levels 3 and 4).

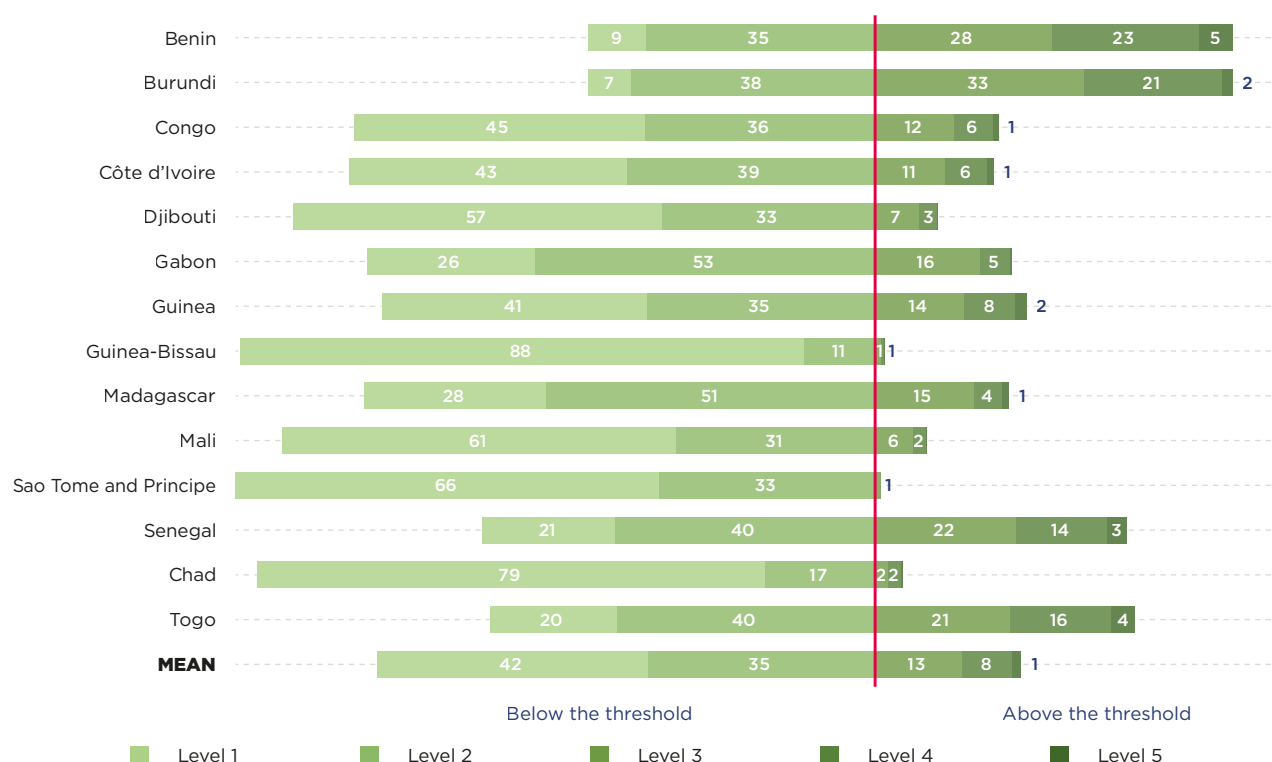
In reading, 29.0% of students are at level 1, below the minimum skills expected at the end of primary school.



All figures are taken from the International Report “PASEC2024 – Student skills at the end of Lower Secondary School in Sub-Saharan Africa” available online: <https://pasec.confemen.org/en/results/pasec-24-report>

Figure 2

Distribution of students by proficiency level in mathematics, end of lower secondary school (%)



How to read: the bars are aligned with the red line, which represents the baseline level of proficiency. On the left are the students who do not reach it (levels 1 and 2); on the right, those who reach it or exceed it (levels 3 and 4).

42.2%

of students are
at level 1

5 countries

(Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Sao Tome
and Principe, Chad) have a majority of
their students at this level



Paths for reflection and action

Building continuous action throughout the student's school pathway

Treat lower secondary school as the continuation of primary school, and not as an autonomous cycle. The difficulties observed at the end of lower secondary school cannot be dealt with solely at this level of education. They are largely part of the continuity of fundamental learning that is insufficiently consolidated during the previous stages of education, particularly in primary school. These weaknesses then limit the students' ability to use the more complex knowledge and skills expected in lower secondary school.

The challenge is, therefore, to build continuous action throughout the student's school pathway by making the effective mastery of fundamental learning a priority for steering education systems.

This means better coordination between primary and lower secondary school, diagnosing what has been learned at the start of lower secondary school and intervening quickly when difficulties are identified.

Remediation must thus become an ordinary component of the school's operations, articulating prevention, targeted support and reinforced assistance based on the extent of the difficulties.

This approach also requires changes in how education systems are steered. Improving learning depends not only on the volume of resources used, but also on their allocation and their ability to produce effective learning.

Policies must therefore jointly seek **quality of learning, efficiency in the use of resources and equity in their distribution**, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable students, schools and territories.



Further paths for reflection

The following paths stem from the previous observations.

Secure fundamental learning and the transition from primary to lower secondary school.

Education systems would benefit from clearly establishing the essential outcomes expected at the end of primary school, regularly monitoring their mastery and organising better continuity with lower secondary school. A diagnosis of fundamental skills at the start of lower secondary school would make it possible to quickly identify difficulties and guide pedagogical responses.

Implement early remediation in the ordinary functioning of schools.

Diagnostic assessments must lead to tangible responses: consolidation periods, needs-based groups, differentiated teaching, tutoring, individualised support. The objective is to move from late remediation to a logic of prevention and early intervention.

Strengthen learning in reading and mathematics.

In reading, teaching should make the processes of comprehension more explicit, in particular identifying important information, inferences and the articulation between explicit and implicit information. In mathematics, interventions should target the content and prerequisites that are actually lacking in each system.

Improve the quality of teaching and support for teachers.

Pre-service and in-service training should strengthen the teachers' ability to identify students' prerequisites and mistakes, differentiate their teaching, use diagnostic assessments and implement appropriate remediation strategies.

Better allocate resources and target them according to needs.

The results call for moving beyond an approach focused solely on the volume of expenditure. Resources should be more oriented towards factors directly related to learning, including teacher training and effective presence, pedagogical support, essential textbooks and resources, and effective learning time. Their allocation should also take into account the differentiated needs of students, schools and territories.

Make equity an explicit objective of steering.

Performance monitoring should include the proportion of students below the minimum proficiency level as well as the differences related to socio-economic background, schools and territories. The most vulnerable students and contexts must be supported in proportion to their needs.

Better steer policies based on data and contexts.

National and international assessments should feed into a continuous cycle of diagnosis, response, monitoring of progress and policy adjustment.

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Assessing learning to transform education policies

Established in 1991, CONFEMEN's Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) has become the reference instrument for steering the education systems of CONFEMEN member States and governments. Its purpose is to inform public decision-making by measuring changes in the performance of education systems, in order to guide the design, monitoring and evaluation of education policies and, through them, the improvement of the quality of education.

Its work goes beyond measurement. PASEC strengthens national assessment capacities, promotes the ownership and effective use of results by education stakeholders, and supports the development of education research. Through its assessments and analytical work, it provides decision-makers with reliable and comparable data as well as rigorous analyses, levers for higher-performing, more equitable and more efficient education.

Finally, PASEC contributes to the production of knowledge by supporting researchers and making its data and assessment frameworks available to them. It feeds into work that is useful both to education systems and to the academic community.

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