

PASEC2024

DATA COLLECTED IN 2025



EDUCATION POLICY NOTE BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE **PRIMARY** **SCHOOL** ASSESSMENT

Sub-Saharan Africa



pasec
Programme d'analyse des systèmes
éducatifs de la confemen

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.

1

Key takeaways

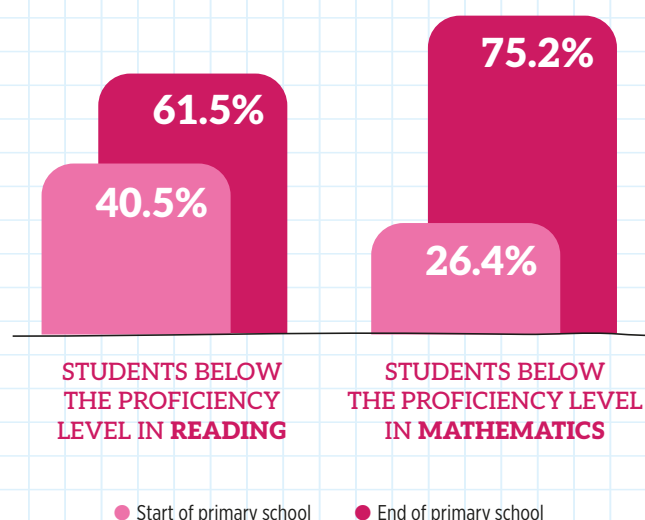
The difficulty does not diminish over the course of education; it worsens.

Two figures summarise the state of learning.

At the start of primary school, six out of ten students have mastered the expected learning outcomes in the language of instruction. In mathematics, nearly three out of four have mastered the expected learning outcomes. At the end of primary school, only four out of ten students have mastered the expected learning outcomes in reading, and one in four in mathematics. In other words, the difficulty does not diminish over the course of education, it worsens.

These overall figures cover very contrasting situations, because the gap between countries is considerable (see figures on pages 4-5).

The trend diverges depending on the stage of schooling. Between 2019 and 2025, 5 out of 11 countries made significant progress in reading at the start of primary school and none declined. At the end of primary school, the trend is reversed; no country makes progress and seven decline. The efforts made in the first years produce results, but they do not carry over to the rest of the cycle. In other words, the longer students stay in school, the less their learning outcomes are consolidated.



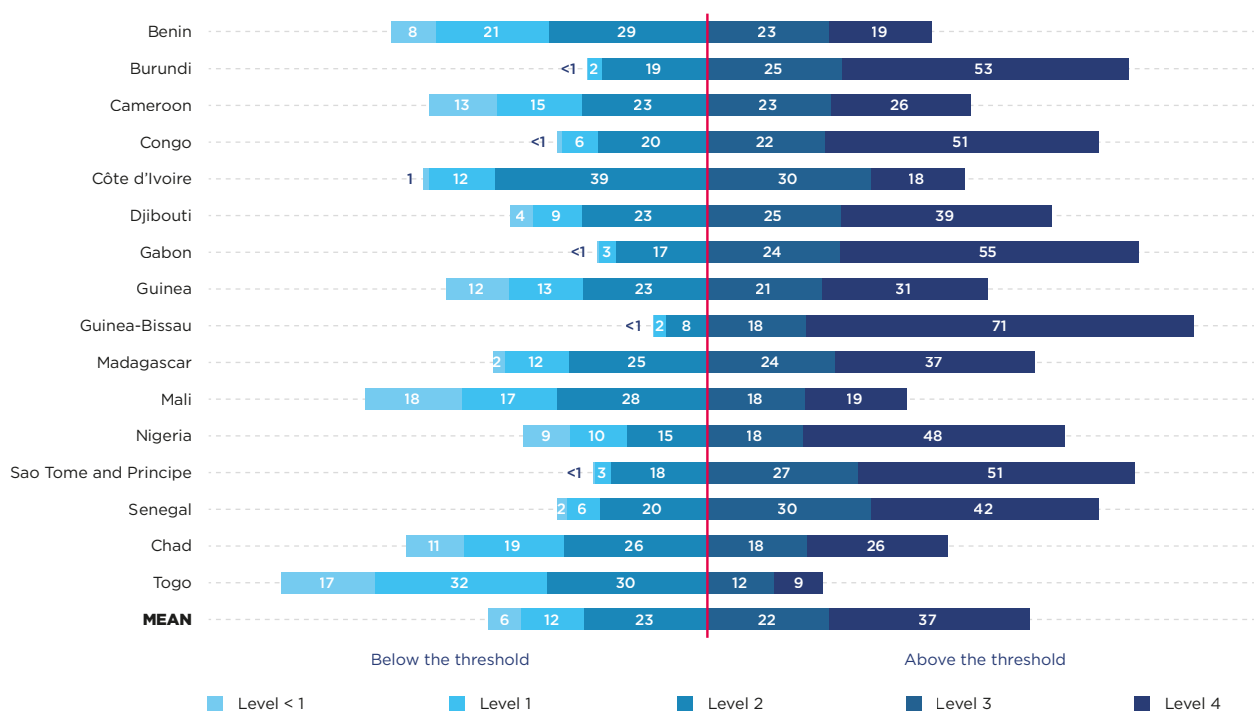
Key messages

- 1 The majority of students complete primary school without mastering foundational skills.**
38.5% of students are above the minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of primary school; in mathematics, 75.2% are below the minimum level.
- 2 The level improves at the start of primary school and declines at the end.**
Between 2019 and 2025, in reading, 5 out of 11 countries made progress at the start of primary school and none declined; at the end of primary school, none of them made progress and seven declined. This is one of the most worrying results of PASEC2024.
- 3 The differences between countries are sometimes considerable.**
The proportion of students achieving the minimum proficiency level varies from 21% in Togo to 90% in Guinea-Bissau in language at the start of primary school, and from 1.3% in Guinea-Bissau to 59.6% in Senegal in mathematics at the end.
- 4 Within each country, there is a high dispersion of results.**
The average interdecile gap reaches 314.3 points in language at the start of primary school, from 201.6 points in Côte d'Ivoire to 392.1 points in Nigeria.
- 5 Difficulties appear very early on for the most basic content.**
At the start of primary school, 23% of students read fewer than six letters of the alphabet in a minute, one in four students cannot read any familiar words, and 42% cannot reach the number 61 when counting aloud.
- 6 One in two students cannot work with a textbook at home.**
At the start of primary education, seven out of ten students have a reading textbook in class, but only 51.1% can take it home (from 6.0% in Benin to 91.4% in Djibouti).
- 7 The urban advantage is first and foremost a social advantage, and that of the private sector is confirmed.**
The urban-rural gap, 57.3 points in reading at the start of primary school, drops to 26.3 points after controlling for other factors; the advantage of the private sector remains significant in 14 out of 16 countries at the end of primary school.
- 8 The language spoken at home is significant, but for different reasons depending on the country.**
The advantage of students who speak the language of instruction at home is 56.4 points in reading, of which 32.7 points remain after controlling for social origin.
- 9 The weight of social origin varies greatly from one country to another.**
The gap between the extreme quintiles (the 20% of students whose parents are the richest and the 20% whose parents are the poorest) exceeds 120 points in reading in Cameroon, Togo and Madagascar; it is only 41 points in Gabon, the country with the highest socio-economic index.
- 10 Funding is insufficient, but it does not explain the differences in results on its own.**
In 5 out of 16 countries, at least 4% of GDP is spent on education; 6 out of 15 countries are on the efficiency frontier, including Guinea-Bissau, where funding per student is the lowest.

Snapshot of proficiency levels by country

Figure 1

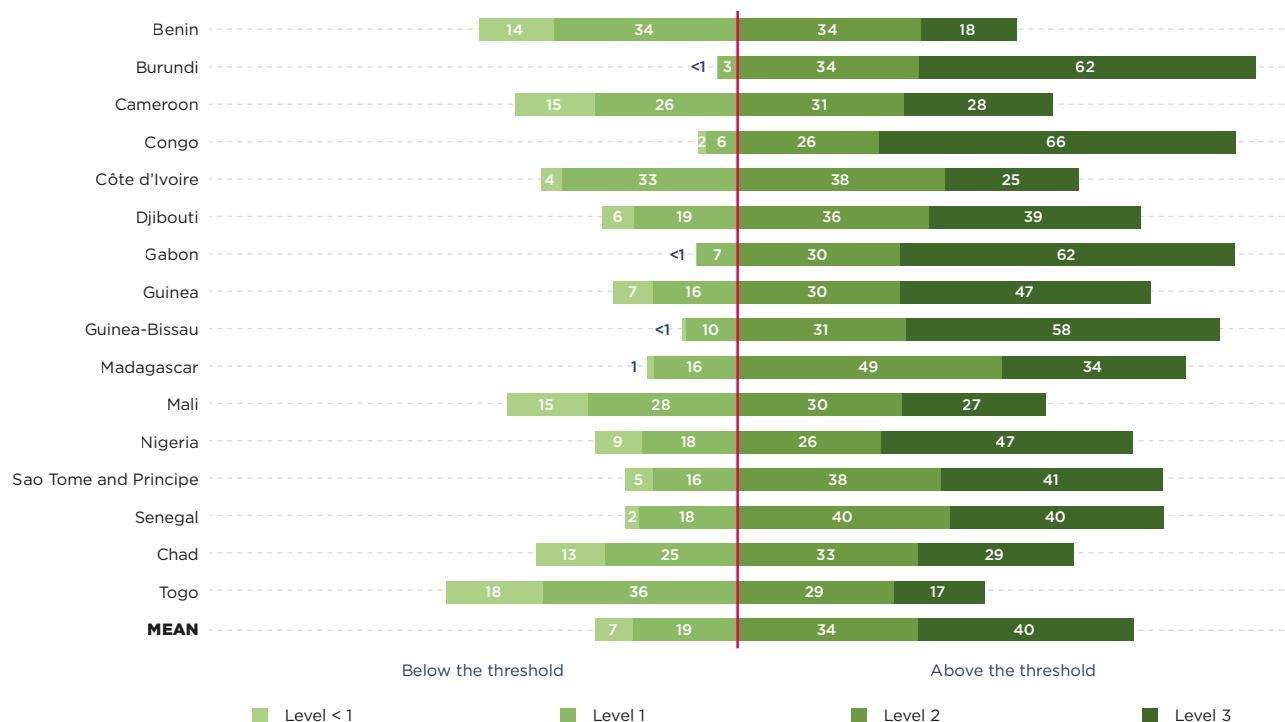
Distribution of students by proficiency level in the language of instruction, start of primary school



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

Figure 2

Percentage of students by proficiency level attained in mathematics at the start of primary school



How to read: The bars are aligned with the red line, which represents the proficiency threshold. On the left are students who do not reach the expected baseline level of proficiency, i.e. those at levels below level 1 and at level 1. On the right, those that reach it or exceed it, i.e. those at levels 2 and 3.



All figures are taken from the International Report "PASEC2024 – Primary Education Learning Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa", available online: <https://pasec.confemen.org/en/results/pasec-24-report>

Figure 3

Distribution of students by proficiency level in reading comprehension at the end of primary education (%)

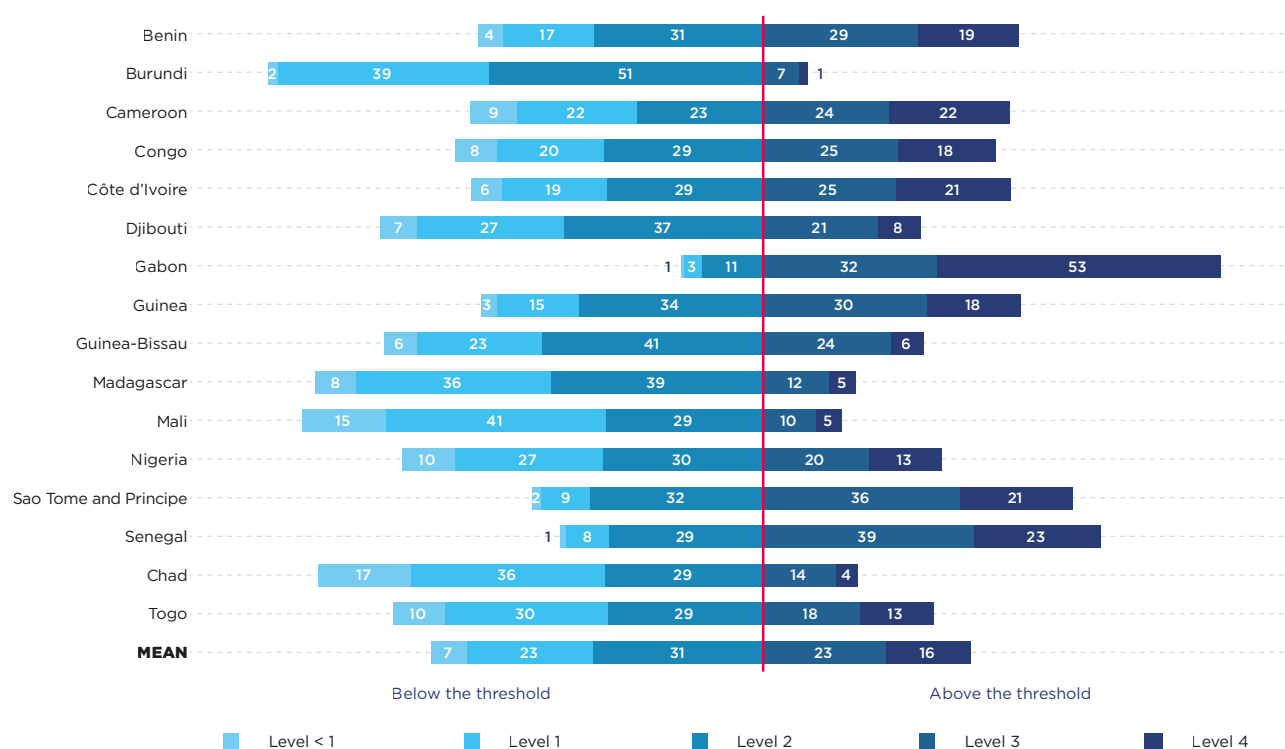
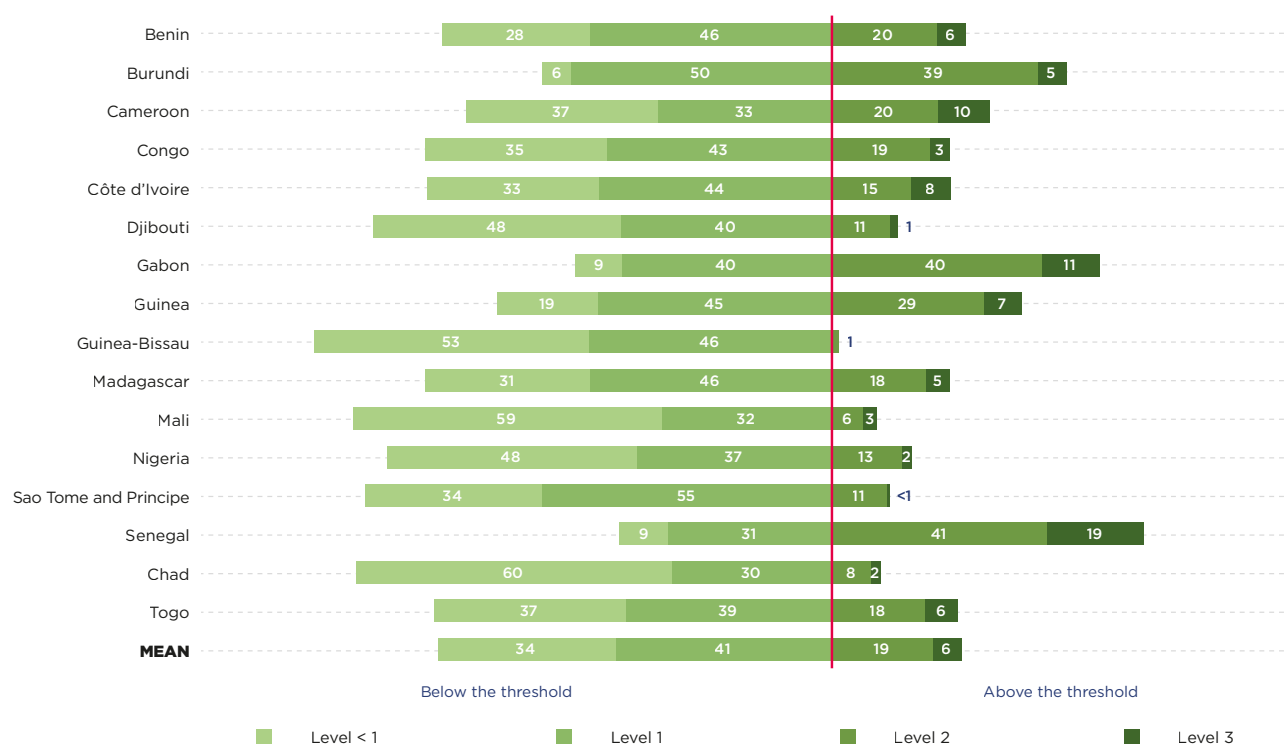


Figure 4

Distribution of students by proficiency level in mathematics at the end of primary education (%)



2

Paths for reflection and action

4 measures to drive change

1

Act before the gap widens.

The difficulties are visible from the start of primary school, in decoding letters and counting. They do not correct themselves. The proportion of students below the proficiency level increases between the start and the end of the cycle. Waiting until the end of primary school to intervene means acting on gaps that have already been established. It is urgent to invest in quality pre-primary school in order to prepare all children to reap the benefits of this level of education.

2

Target rather than spread equally.

Most of the inequity is borne by schools that are rural, public and socially disadvantaged. A uniform allocation of resources between all schools perpetuates the gap. Only an allocation that takes vulnerabilities into account can reduce it. Therefore, more resources and staff must be given to schools serving the most vulnerable communities.

3

Treat reading and mathematics differently.

In mathematics, the average level of all students is falling in almost all countries. In other words, a major reform must be considered (curriculum, teacher training, instructional time for mathematics). In reading, it is the dispersion of results that dominates, and it relates to families' familiarity with the language of the school. The two challenges call for separate responses.

4

Link budgets to learning.

Countries with comparable resources for education have very different outcomes. The question is, therefore, not only how much an education system spends, but what this expenditure produces in learning.



Further paths for reflection

The following paths stem from the previous observations. They open up reflections and levers for action rather than prescribing specific measures. Their relevance is assessed in light of the specific context of each education system.

Ensure the availability of textbooks at the student's home.

In Benin, 87.8% of students have a textbook in the classroom and only 6.0% can take it home; in Togo, 88.2% and 23.5%. It is, therefore, not a problem of allocation but a policy of conservation of the stock, which can be reviewed.

Guarantee minimum material conditions.

A reasonable number of students per class, a seat, a suitable classroom, a reading textbook and a mathematics textbook form a baseline that is not taken for granted everywhere.

Provide pedagogical supervisors with means of transport.

Inspectors, pedagogical advisers and school principals cannot support rural schools without transport, fuel or means of communication.

Consolidate the public provision of pre-primary in rural areas.

Pre-primary school remains the preserve of privileged families in cities. The private sector will continue to play a central role, but the public provision must develop where it is practically absent today, otherwise the gap will be perpetuated even before the start of primary school.

Strengthen teacher training in the teaching of reading and reform the teaching of mathematics.

In several countries, this involves a revision of the methods of learning to read and write themselves, and not just the addition of in-service training sessions. In mathematics, it is relevant to draw inspiration from countries that obtain high scores to implement in-depth reforms.

Steer the budget through learning, not through executed expenditure.

The cost per student reaching the minimum proficiency level, which relates the expenditure to the number of students who effectively learn, is a simple indicator that leads to this. Its introduction in the sectoral plans shifts budget management from the volume of appropriations to their educational return.

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Assessing learning to transform education policies

Established in 1991, the 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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