



# How well are Ni-Vanuatu children learning to read in French?

Around the world more children have access to basic education. However, while many more children are now enrolled in school than ever before, evidence from developing countries suggest increases in enrollment are not being accompanied by improvements in learning outcomes. In the case of Vanuatu, results from the 2007 and 2009 VANSTA assessments of literacy and numeracy revealed that a large share of students in Grade 4 and 6 are failing to reach the reading comprehension and writing outcomes expected at their grade level.

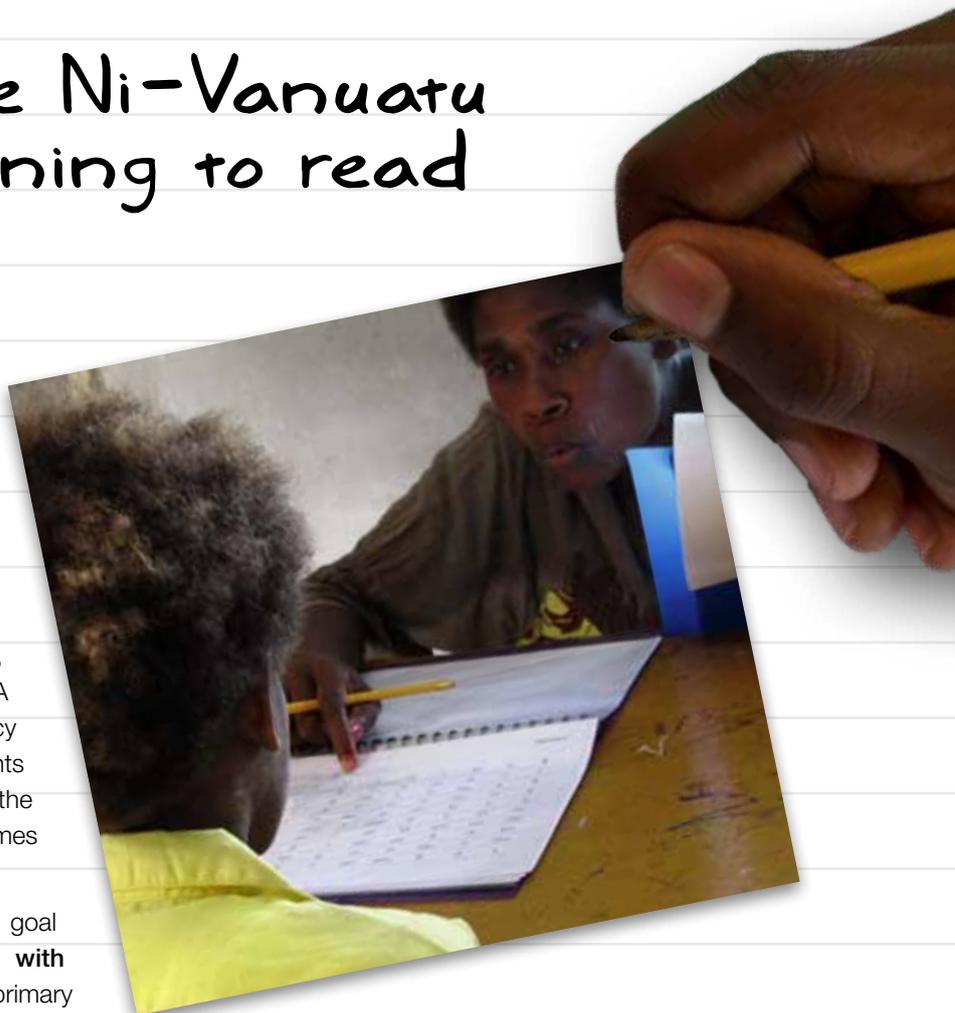
Growing evidence suggest that the goal of ensuring all children read **fluently with comprehension** after 3 years of primary education, is not only possible but feasible, even in low-literacy contexts. As a first step towards this goal, countries around the world have started to assess children in the first grades of primary education to identify instructional gaps and reading deficits. A Vanuatu early grade reading assessment (VANEGR) was conducted in November, 2009 to measure how well children in Francophone schools are learning to read in the French language in the early grades of primary education. The aim of VANEGR French was to help educators develop local knowledge about the specific *skills* students are struggling with and the *factors* that appear to contribute to reading development in the Anglophone stream of the education system.

The VANEGR French assessment consisted of seven modules covering basic reading skills such as the sounds of letters, word reading, listening comprehension and reading comprehension of two independent short stories about several experiences typical to Ni-Vanuatu children. VANEGR French results suggest that while students develop some basic foundational skills, most of them lack the ability to distinguish the sounds of letters in the context of a word. A poor understanding of how letters and sounds

go together to make words, appears to be one of the main reasons why beginning readers in Francophone schools in Vanuatu struggle to read fluently with comprehension.

In particular, VANEGR French results suggest that

- **There are low levels of even basic knowledge.** After three years of schooling, almost 20% of the students were unable to provide a single correct answer in sub-test measuring their ability to match letters and sounds to create words.
- **Most students could not read fluently for comprehension.** Despite increases in oral reading fluency across grades, only 2 in 10 Grade 3 students were able to read fluently to understand most of the text they read. Achieving fluency in reading is crucial to improve reading comprehension among students: fluent readers achieved an average comprehension of 63% of the text compared to the less-than-fluent for whom the average comprehension was only 13%.



# Pacific Early Reading Assessments Series

- **More girls are fluent readers than boys.** Although there is variation on the number and type of sub-test in which girls perform better than boys, girls in Grades 2 and 3 move faster into reading fluency with 16% of the girls and only 10% of the boys able to read at the country-defined reference standard of 45 correct words per minute.
- **Teachers that know how to promote reading regularly in their classroom are helping develop essential basic reading skills for Ni-Vanuatu students.** Teachers that read aloud to students, had a reading corner in their classrooms, and who made use of the recommended school texts had a positive effect on the reading of both boys and girls.
- **Family literacy plays an important role on the reading outcomes of Ni-Vanuatu students.** Students who have a literate mother or sibling, have books at home, attended kindergarten, and speak French at home demonstrated better reading outcomes. In particular, students who reported having a literate family member that reads with them at home showed better outcomes in most sub-tests of VANEGRA.

## Moving forward

VANEGRA French results call for immediate attention to the way reading instruction takes place in Vanuatu. Given that only 2 in 10 students are able to read fluently with comprehension by the end of Grade 3, it is unlikely that the majority of students will be able to cope with an increasingly difficult curriculum in later grades.

In order to improve reading outcomes in the first grades of primary education, it is recommended that educators and policymakers in Vanuatu re-examine the way reading instruction is implemented in most classrooms around the country. Teachers working in the early grades need to understand the essential components of reading instruction

and be able to put into practice effective teaching and assessment of each component. Classroom instruction that makes regular use of assessment to inform teachers and that makes use of reference reading standards could help teachers monitor reading development in their students to determine whether or not they need to adjust instruction accordingly. Additionally, more grade-appropriate reading books and other reading materials should be made available for children to read at school and at home to ensure they have enough texts to practice and master reading. Support from families and the community to ensure children practice reading outside school will be crucial. Only when Ni-Vanuatu students in Anglophone primary schools have *learned to read* can they begin to *read to learn*.

*This note summarizes selected results from the 2010 Vanuatu Early Grade Reading Assessment (French) Survey carried out with technical assistance from the World Bank and financial support from the Global Partnership for Education, the Australian Program for International Aid (AusAID) and the New Zealand Aid Program (NZAP). Currently, the World Bank, in partnership with AusAID, assists Pacific island countries administer, analyze and disseminate early grade reading and mathematics assessments under the scope of the Pacific Early Education Advisory Services Program (PEEAS). The purpose of PEEAS is to provide countries with evidence on the state of policies and programs promoting school readiness and instructional deficits in foundational reading and mathematics. The evidence collected is aimed to help governments and development organizations design and implement the most appropriate and effective policies in ECE/ECD and basic reading and mathematics.*

*For more information about PEEAS, contact Kris McDonall ([kmcdonall@worldbank.org](mailto:kmcdonall@worldbank.org)) or Sarah Harrison ([sharrison@worldbank.org](mailto:sharrison@worldbank.org)). The Pacific Early Reading series is produced with the generous support of the Global Partnership for Education.*

