



**Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
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How successful are textbook provision programmes?

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It is widely accepted that well-designed textbooks can provide a platform for effective teaching and learning in schools because they offer: a systematic plan for the curriculum, learning material that engages and motivates pupils, and exercises that enhance and sustain important knowledge and skills.

When pupils have textbooks their teachers can make more effective use of class time by avoiding tasks such as copying text onto a chalkboard. This results in more time being available for pupils to spend on active learning. Textbooks also permit teachers to utilize a wider range of teaching strategies such as: assigning reading exercises to the whole class while providing more focussed teaching to slower learners, stimulating classroom discussions about material that has been read by all pupils, and providing reading homework and associated questions that reinforce classroom lessons.

Textbooks are especially important in developing country contexts because many schools lack material resources (such as age-appropriate and culture-appropriate reading materials for children) and human resources (with some teachers having obtained only a limited amount of academic and professional training). In these schools textbooks can play a central role in defining a more structured approach to what subject matter is taught and how it is taught.

For the research programme conducted by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) it was accepted that the capacity to read well was not only an essential life skill – but also represented the main gateway to further learning in all other school subjects. For this reason the SACMEQ research teams agreed that each SACMEQ country should strive to maximize pupil access to reading resources by working towards a situation whereby as many pupils as possible had sole use of a reading textbook.

The Grade 6 pupils who participated in the SACMEQ II Project (2000) and the SACMEQ III Project (2007) were asked whether: (a) they used a reading textbook by themselves, (b) they shared a reading textbook with one other pupil, (c) they shared a reading textbook with two or more pupils, or (d) no pupils had a reading textbook.

The percentages of Grade 6 pupils that reached each of these four textbook access levels have been presented in the Table below for the SACMEQ countries. The figures in this table refer only to access levels for reading textbooks because similar figures were obtained for mathematics textbooks. Note that the percentages for Zimbabwe in 2000 were derived from an earlier (1995) data collection conducted by SACMEQ.

Access to reading textbooks for Grade 6 pupils in the SACMEQ countries

Country	Reading Textbook Access for Pupils in SACMEQ II and SACMEQ III Projects							
	% at Each Access Level in 2000				% at Each Access Level in 2007			
	No Text	Share 2+	Share 1	Sole Use	No Text	Share 2+	Share 1	Sole Use
Botswana	2.3	5.7	14.6	77.4	3.8	11.1	21.7	63.4
Kenya	2.8	46.1	24.3	26.8	2.2	58.6	21.5	17.8
Lesotho	12.1	16.3	16.3	55.3	7.2	17.4	19.5	55.9
Malawi	4.5	23.8	14.7	57.0	7.9	55.5	9.5	27.1
Mauritius	0.0	5.2	3.3	91.5	5.2	4.2	2.9	87.7
Mozambique	6.3	20.3	20.2	53.2	8.2	24.9	14.1	52.8
Namibia	5.1	18.1	30.1	46.6	5.6	31.1	31.3	31.9
Seychelles	8.0	17.0	28.1	47.0	3.6	6.7	47.4	42.3
South Africa	16.6	17.1	20.7	45.5	10.7	16.1	28.2	45.0
Swaziland	5.8	4.1	15.9	74.2	0.0	0.6	0.2	99.2
Tanzania	35.9	48.2	9.9	6.0	23.1	63.7	9.7	3.5
Uganda	20.6	52.8	11.9	14.7	20.4	47.6	14.5	17.4
Zambia	14.0	44.2	27.5	14.2	17.2	39.4	20.3	23.1
Zanzibar	24.6	62.3	9.2	3.8	2.2	32.9	16.8	48.1
Zimbabwe	7.5	48.5	19.6	24.3	19.3	47.0	19.0	14.7
SACMEQ	11.1	28.7	17.8	42.5	9.1	30.5	18.4	42.0

The final row of percentage figures in the Table provided textbook access profiles for Grade 6 pupils across SACMEQ countries in 2000 and 2007. These profiles were remarkably similar on both occasions - and they indicated that textbook access levels for Grade 6 pupils were generally quite poor across southern and eastern Africa, and that these access levels were not improving.

For the SACMEQ countries overall during both 2000 and 2007, only a little over 40 percent of pupils had sole access to a textbook, and around 40 percent of pupils were either in classrooms with no textbooks or shared a textbook with two or more other pupils.

At the individual country level the textbook access profiles displayed two kinds of variations.

Firstly, there were **large variations in textbook access levels across countries.**

For example, in 2007 almost all Grade 6 pupils in Mauritius and Swaziland had sole use of a textbook; and, in contrast, very few Grade 6 pupils in Tanzania had sole use of a textbook. The other SACMEQ countries had textbook access levels in 2007 that ranged between these two extremes: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zanzibar had moderate levels of textbook access (around 40 to 60 percent sole usage); and Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe had much lower levels of textbook access (around 15 to 30 percent sole usage).

The textbook situation in Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe during 2007 was of great concern because around one in five Grade 6 pupils was in a classroom in which no pupils had a textbook.

Secondly, there were **large variations in textbook access trends across time points.**

The trends between 2000 and 2007 have been summarized in the final column of the Table by colour coding the 2007 percentages according to the following rules:

Green = a substantial improvement (of around 10 percent or more) in the percentage of Grade 6 pupils having sole use of a textbook between 2000 and 2007;

Red = a substantial deterioration (of around 10 percent or more); and

Black = negligible change.

Unfortunately, only three countries (marked with green) registered improvements of around 10 percent or more in sole usage of textbooks between 2000 and 2007: Swaziland (with a very impressive 25 percent increase to effectively 100 percent coverage in 2007), Zambia (with almost a 10 percent increase), and Zanzibar (with the largest improvement of nearly 45 percent).

Five countries (marked with red) registered deteriorations of around 10 percent or more in sole usage of textbooks: Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The result for Malawi was particularly worrying because this country registered a fall of almost 30 percent in sole usage of textbooks between 2000 and 2007.

There was negligible change in sole usage of textbooks for seven countries: Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

These research results provided a rather bleak outlook with respect to the numerous large-scale initiatives and associated high levels of funding that have been devoted over many years to designing, producing, and distributing school textbooks in southern and eastern Africa. The general message was that textbook access levels for Grade 6 pupils in many SACMEQ countries were rather poor – and that these access levels had tended to either stagnate or deteriorate in many SACMEQ countries between 2000 and 2007.

It would be very tempting to simply ignore this message by blaming problems in textbook access levels on the increased enrolments that have occurred in all SACMEQ countries over the past decade due mainly to the Education for All (EFA) campaign.

However, perhaps a more enlightened approach to this challenge would be to spend some time reflecting upon the following supplementary research question: “How did Swaziland and Zanzibar make substantial improvements in Grade 6 pupil access to textbooks between 2000 and 2007 – and at the same time accommodate increases in their Grade 6 enrolments by around 20 percent and 40 percent, respectively?”

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