

UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

PERU

Assessing children's reading in indigenous languages

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Peru is an extremely diverse country with over 40 different languages. This rich cultural heritage means that 1,000,000 children-aged children speak indigenous languages at home. Spanish is a second language, which means there are equity-related gaps in learning outcomes. For example, an estimated 80 *per cent* of Shipibo children in Grade 4 score in the lowest level of Spanish as a Second Language while only 50 *per cent* of Quechua-speaking children reach a satisfactory level.

In 2007, the Government of Peru adopted a new assessment policy. Under the policy, the schools in indigenous areas are designated as intercultural and bilingual. A growing number of students in such schools have their reading skills assessed in Grade 4 both in their indigenous language and Spanish as a Second Language. This approach reflects the body of evidence that shows children learn to read more easily in their home language, and it serves to recognise and value indigenous culture and language and ensure its centrality in the country's education system. Thus far, bilingual assessment is offered in the six most spoken indigenous languages: Quechua Chanka, Quechua Collao, Aymara, Shipibo-Conibo, Ashaninka and Awaun. The overarching aim is to ensure that children are bilingual by Grade 6, when they leave primary school.

RESULTS

- **The vast majority of indigenous learners in Peru are reached.** Although reading assessment is currently offered in six indigenous languages, the policy covers around 90 *per cent* of all indigenous learners enrolled in primary school.
- **Indigenous language and culture are squarely at the heart of Peru's education system.** Ensuring that indigenous children can not only study in their home language but also have their core

learning assessed in that language is a critical policy decision that puts intercultural, bilingual education on the agenda at the highest level and signals the value placed on indigenous culture and language.

- **Data from bilingual assessment informs pro-equity and inclusive education policy.** The results from the bilingual reading assessment informs key aspects of education policy, including the development of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials as well as teacher training and professional development. Tailored education services are critical to improving the quality of education on offer to Peru's diverse population and overcoming educational inequities.
- **Results show the need for a long-term approach.** The data from bilingual reading assessments do not yet show consistent trends in reading skills, highlighting the need to take a long-term approach. Nevertheless, there are some promising findings.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Inclusive dialogue is key to improving learning and overcoming inequities faced by indigenous learners in Peru.** The opening of dialogue on intercultural, bilingual education and assessment between the Government of Peru and its diverse indigenous communities was a watershed moment in overcome long-standing barriers to indigenous children. UNICEF played a critical role in fostering an inclusive approach.

- **Change will turn on linking assessment results with teachers and other key stakeholders at the local level.** The data from national learning assessments in Peru, including the expanded bilingual reading assessments, are geared for technical decision-makers at the central ministry level. While this is important, there is still more work to do to bridge that information down to teachers and other key members of the school community who interact with learners day-to-day, as transformational change depends on what happens in the classroom.

NEXT STEPS

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning across the world, likely only exacerbating learning loss and inequities. It has also disrupted national standardised learning assessments, including in Peru.

Among next steps, UNICEF Peru will continue working with the Ministry of Education and education partners to ensure indigenous children are properly taken into account in the country's learning recovery plans. This includes for formative assessment to measure where individual children are at upon reopening, so that teachers can tailor remedial and catch-up programmes.

Cost effectiveness: UNICEF Peru, with the support of Finland in the first four years and Canada for the other seven years, invested more than US\$14 million to improve intercultural and bilingual education. UNICEF used these valuable resources to contribute to the development of comprehensive policy on teacher training, on textbooks and other educational materials and on improving dialogue with indigenous organizations and communities. Assessing children's reading in indigenous languages has been key to monitoring, improving and ensuring the right to education for approximately 1,000,000 indigenous learners in Peru.

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