

# **Reading Failure in Early Primary Grades: A Serious Challenge to Equity in Primary Education**

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Room to Read

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# **Children are not learning to read well in grades 1 & 2**

**Evidence from Room to Read assessments:**

***India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and South Africa***

# Assessment Outline

- Within 2 months of start of the academic session (except Bangladesh)
- Grade 1 & 2 students tested

## **Sample Size:**

**India:** 4432 students in 240 schools in 3 states (Rajasthan, Uttaranchal and Delhi)

**Bangladesh** (dipstick): 400 students across 20 schools in 1 district

**Sri Lanka:** 400 students in 40 schools in one district

# Test Description

- 10 sub-tests in ascending order of difficulty roughly corresponding to grade 1 & 2 levels. Adapted from EGRA and Pre-PIRLS tests
- Skills required to read and understand texts and basic writing:
  - ❖ Listening comprehension
  - ❖ Reading letters
  - ❖ Reading simple words correctly and with speed
  - ❖ Reading simple text with comprehension questions
  - ❖ Dictation of simple words
  - ❖ Writing about a picture

## Grade 2 (beginning) literacy assessments in South Asia

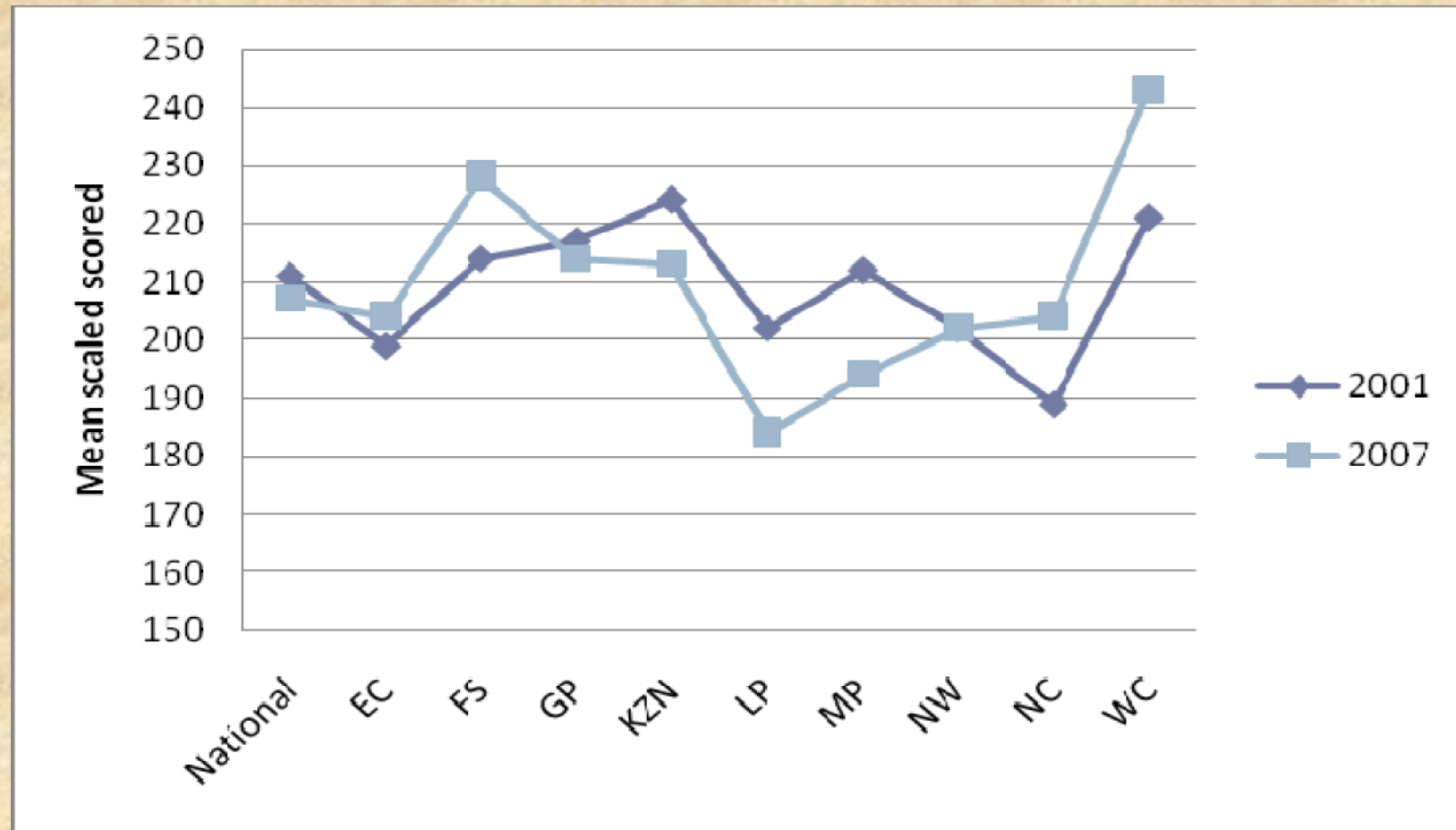
Competency	Sri Lanka	Nepal	Bangladesh	India
<b>Naming letters (per minute)</b>	48 <b>(21.1)</b>	41 <b>(19.6)</b>	37.4 <b>(13.1)</b>	16.33 <b>(13.87)</b>
<b>Familiar word reading (pm)</b>	25 <b>(12.8)</b>	20 <b>(10.5)</b>	14.1 <b>(9.9)</b>	6.13 <b>(10.41)</b>
<b>Oral reading accuracy (60 words)</b>	39 <b>(22.3)</b>	38.8 <b>(15.9)</b>		10.24 <b>(19.59)</b>
<b>Oral Comprehension (6 questions)</b>	3 (1.7)	3.3 (1.8)		0.77 (1.61)
<b>Dictation-simple words</b>	3 (out of 13)	3.4 (Out of 13)	4 (Out of 9)	1.18 (Out of 11)

## Achievement of 19 school in a state in India (6 months in to school year)

	% In Cumulative	
	Grade 1	Grade 2
Cannot read	14.6	3
Can read all Simple Letters	85.4	<b>97</b>
Can read all letters (Incl. complex)	51.9	<b>88.6</b>
Can read Simple word	41.1	<b>86.4</b>
Can read more difficult words	15.9	<b>62.4</b>
Can read simple sentence	4.5	<b>33.6</b>

# **Literacy Assessments in South Africa for Grade 3**

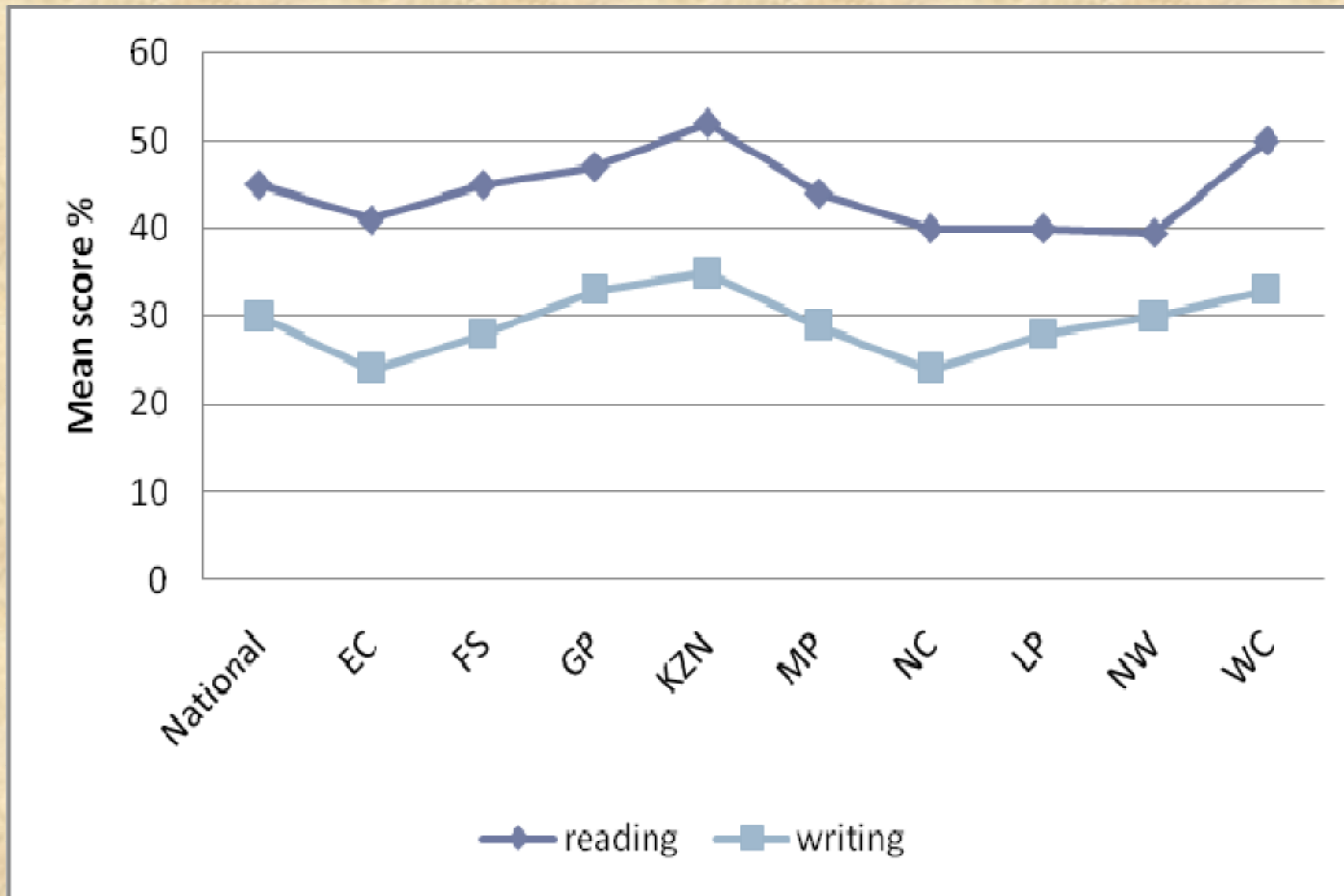
# National Systemic Evaluation: 2001 & 2007



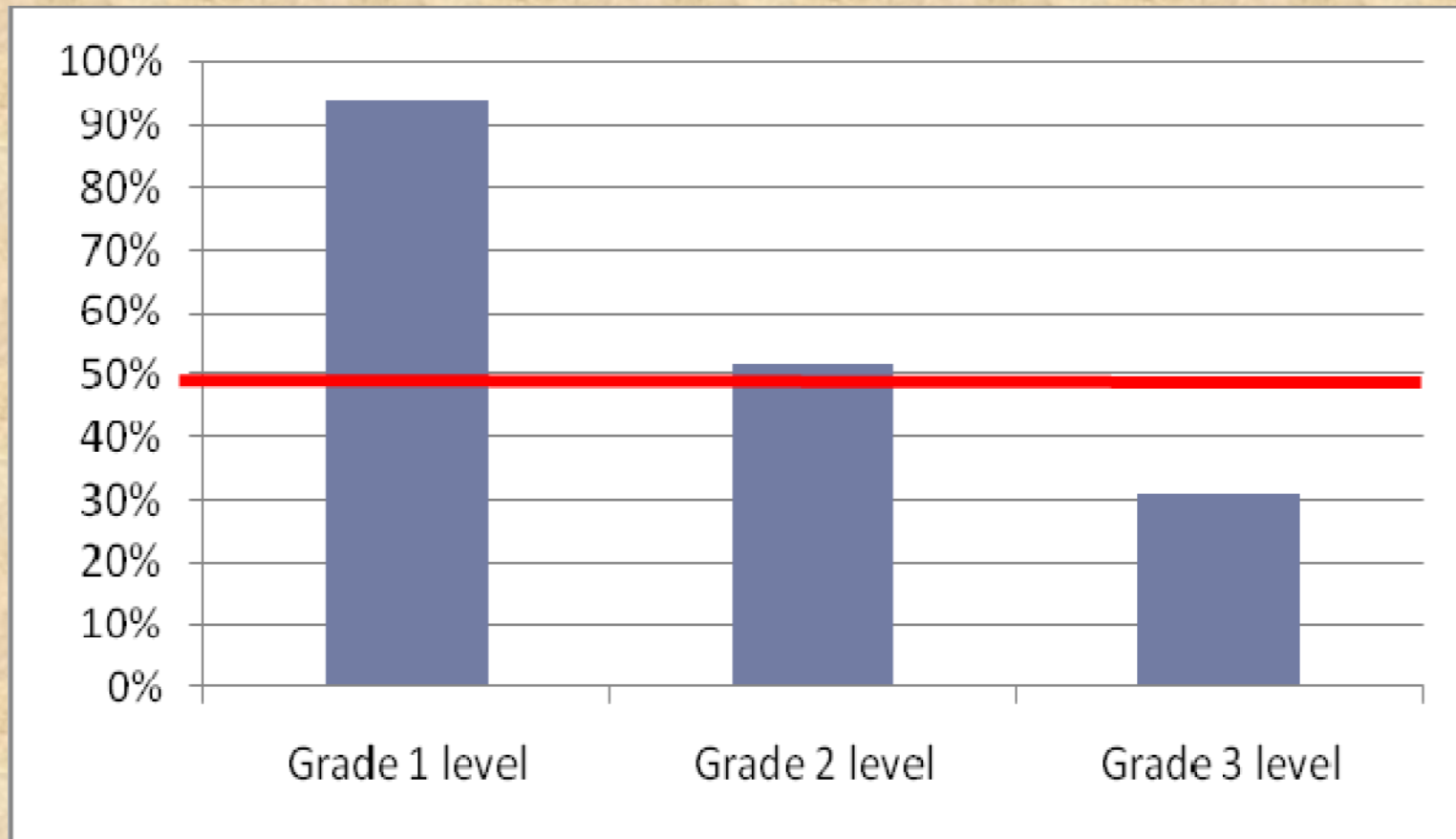
**2007: Overall Literacy Score: 35.9%. Reading: 44.2%. Writing: 33.6%**



# Writing Performance significantly Lower than Reading



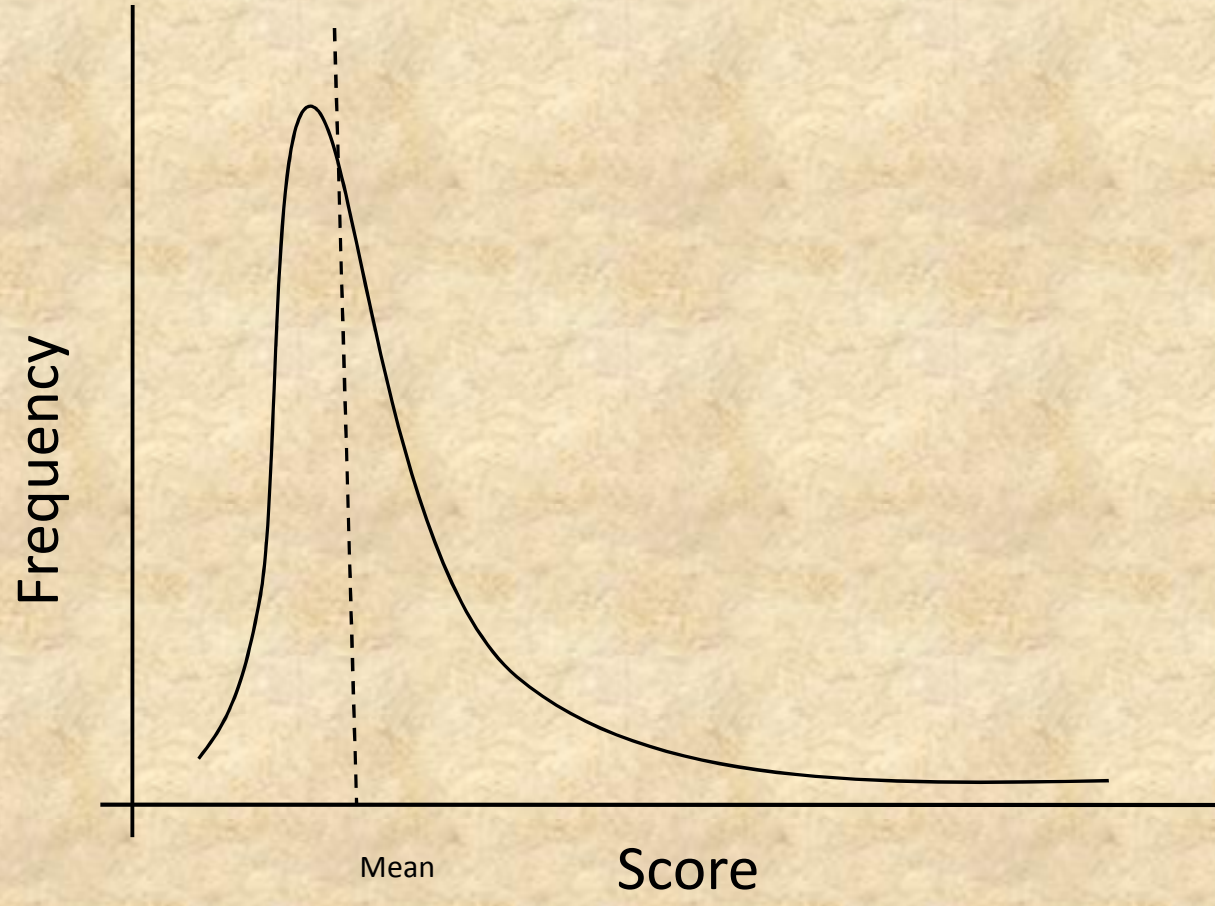
## Level of Mastery of Grade 3 Students: 2009 (Eastern Cape)



**Mean Literacy scores: 38-44%**

# Reading Achievements in South Africa

- In the PIRLS 2006 assessment, only 13% of Grade 4 students (22% of Grade 5) could achieve the “Low International Standard” that corresponds to basic skills
- Performance drops significantly when assessments are made in English in grades 4 & 5.



# Common Issues

- In South Asia (not Sri Lanka) a majority of students are not learning to read even simple sentences by grade 2.
- In no country do children reach grade level expectations
- Writing ability is very low in all countries (including South Africa)
- In Sri Lanka, several pockets with low reading achievements. Also Tamil scores significantly lower than Sinhala.

- **High disparity within the classroom in reading levels from grade 2 onwards**
- **In South Africa, reading levels are better, but writing is an issue. Transition to English in grade 4 is problematic**
- **Comprehension on inferential questions low**

# Learning to Read: School Barriers

- ❖ Effective early grades language teaching strategies not in place
- ❖ Time on learning task low
- ❖ Focus on content and memorization in teaching and assessment

## Learning to Read: School Barriers...

- ❖ Revision, reinforcement and remediation not stressed
- ❖ Inadequate time allocated to reading/language instruction. Lowest in Bangladesh and India



## Learning to Read: School Barriers...

- ❖ No simple, graded books/reading materials
- ❖ Textbook content and language difficult
- ❖ Language of Instruction

# Why is reading a crucial equity issue?

- EFA has become synonymous with high enrollment and completion rates
- Crisis of learning needs to be the focus now
- The most basic expectation from primary education: *The child should be able to read and write*
- If a child is not able to read (well) in time, she is denied an equal opportunity to learn

## Why is reading a crucial equity issue?..

- Reading is a foundational skill on which all formal education depends (Good reading skills help a child access the rest of the curriculum).  
*Reading → Comprehension → Learning*
- Any child who doesn't learn to read *early* and *well* will not easily master other skills and knowledge—cannot do well in school

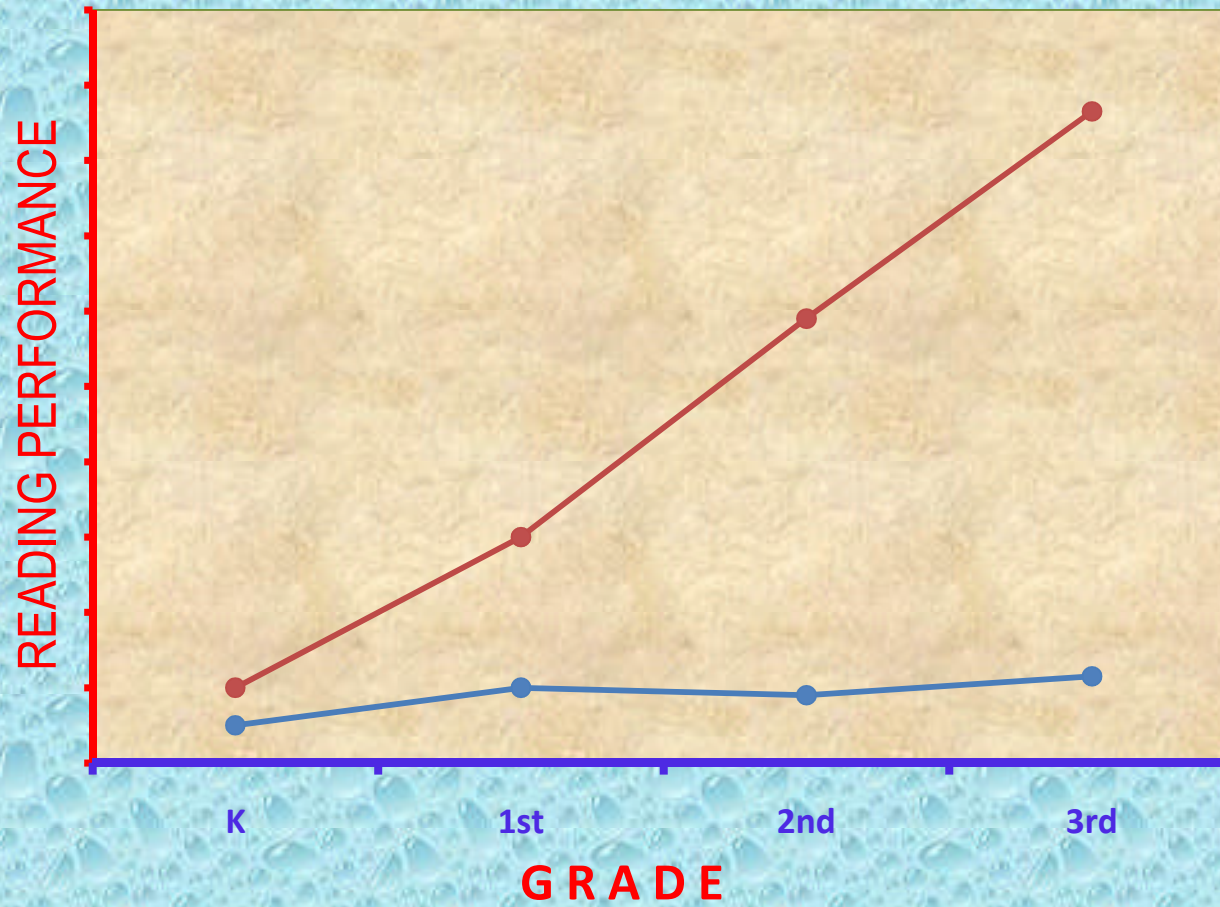
## **Why is reading a crucial equity issue?.....**

- Significant differences in reading/ learning levels within the same classroom in developing countries.
- Children below a certain level by the end of Grade 1, stay behind forever, and the gap widens

## **Why is reading a crucial equity issue?...**

- 90% chance that a poor reader at the end of grade 1 will continue to be a poor reader at the end of grade 5.
- And, if children cannot read well, they fall behind in everything else
- Reading deficits start building up from grade 2

# Matthew Effect in Reading



# **Children who learn to read late or read slowly**

- ✓ Read and write less, may avoid reading
- ✓ Do not learn skilled, advanced reading
- ✓ Cannot understand the textbooks of their grade
- ✓ Develop negative attitudes about reading and school
- ✓ Are less likely to complete school



**Thank You**