Read Liberia DEMA/GALA Legacy Brief

How Read Liberia Trained District Education Officers to Monitor School, Teacher, and Student Performance Using Innovative Assessment Tools

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is deeply committed to building capacity in host governments to improve and sustain quality and equitable education. Central to this commitment is a focus on enabling everyone in the education system to use data to monitor progress and to hold the system accountable for meeting education benchmarks. Read Liberia adopted this focus on assessment and data use—not only to improve classroom-based instruction and equip school leadership with the knowledge and tools they need to foster quality education but also to build the capacity of county and district officers in USAID’s six priority counties.

Read Liberia’s goal is to improve early grade literacy levels and kindergarten oral vocabulary by strengthening the capacity of Ministry of Education (MOE) staff and the Liberian education system. It is essential that the Government of Liberia has the skills and resources to monitor and assess their schools, students, and teachers as part of an evidenced-based education system on the road to self-reliance.

In its first year, Read Liberia collaborated with the Liberian MOE to develop an institutional capacity development plan. This plan included efforts to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation capacity of the MOE at all levels of the education system. To fulfil the objectives of this plan, Read Liberia and the MOE adapted two tools and trained and equipped MOE District Education Officers (DOEs) to administer them.

The following two tools were adapted and adopted by the MOE:

• **District Education Monitoring Approach (DEMA)**, which captures information such as teacher attendance, the presence of teacher instruction guides and student learning books, and the use of various teacher instructional practices (Figure 1).

• **Group-administered Learning Assessment (GALA)**, which measures student reading performance (Figure 2).

**Assessment Tool Selection**

Understanding the classroom environment is key to understanding what learning is happening in those classrooms. For students to learn, they and their teachers must be present; teachers should be using effective, intentional teaching strategies; and both teachers and students must have basic resources, such as teaching and learning books. The DEMA is designed to simply and quickly capture salient information about the classroom environment with little disruption to the teacher or students.

More specifically, the DEMA assesses teachers’ practice and school inputs on 11 indicators. For example, student engagement is essential for learning, and to monitor this, the DEMA captures the extent to which teachers include all students in activities throughout the lesson. Using participatory methods and involving students in peer or small group activities keeps students motivated to learn and encourages active participation. The DEMA captures the amount of time spent on reading lessons and the use of activities that have a large, positive impact on student reading performance. If teachers are not conducting reading lessons for the length of time set by the curriculum or their lessons are off-topic, students cannot be expected to perform at the levels expected by the education system, and the DEMA captures time on task data as well.
In addition to capturing data about what is happening in the classroom, it is necessary to evaluate student performance levels. To understand just how students are performing academically, a tool is needed that allows a sample of students to be assessed quickly and reliably. For this purpose, researchers at RTI International developed the GALA, which Read Liberia and the MOE were able to adapt for Liberia. This tool captures student proficiency in four foundational reading skills, and because it can be administered in a small group, rather than requiring students to be assessed individually, it can be done more quickly and cost-effectively than other reading assessments that are commonly used in resource-constrained contexts.

### Implementation

In 2018, Read Liberia piloted the use of the DEMA-GALA instruments, and in 2019, the Activity began training MOE DEOs on how to administer them and use the data to inform MOE planning and activities. In each year’s administration, Read Liberia also facilitated the DEOs’ field work in collecting the data and helped analyze the data and write reports.

In 2021, the third DEMA-GALA activity was implemented by the MOE and Read Liberia, and in 2022, DEOs assumed full responsibility for training assessors and conducting the data collection fieldwork.

Read Liberia has facilitated a consistent process across each DEMA-GALA implementation to aid its transition to the MOE. This process is outlined below:

- Each year, DEOs attend 5 days of training led by the Read Liberia Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (ME&L) team on how to administer the DEMA-GALA across a selection of sampled schools. In its final year, the Read Liberia ME&L team trained selected DEOs as master trainers who subsequently trained the remaining the DEOs, while the ME&L team provided technical support.
- Trained DEOs then complete a county data collection plan in which DEOs are paired and deployed for data collection across the 61 Read Liberia districts.
- DEOs conduct data collection activities immediately after the training with the support of Read Liberia’s ME&L team and the MOE’s Monitoring and Evaluation team, who jointly visit schools with the DEOs.
- After each day’s activities, the Read Liberia ME&L team provides detailed feedback to DEO assessment teams, and in conjunction with the DEOs, the ME&L team conducts summary analyses and provides immediate feedback to school principals.
- Also at the end of each day’s work, the ME&L team holds daily feedback and experience-sharing sessions for the DEOs at their respective County Education Offices; for DEOs too far in the field, feedback sessions are conducted via mobile phones the following day to inform subsequent data collection.

**Figure 2. The 4 GALA performance indicators**

![Read Liberia Activity Book](Image)

Children reading their Read Liberia Activity Book. Margibi County. Photo credit: RTI.
of 10, while the sentence comprehension subtask requires a score of 16 out of 20.

Findings from the DEMA-GALA assessment are then distributed during district- and county-level meetings. At these meetings, experiences and lessons learned are shared, short- and long-term plans to improve students reading performance are developed, and the challenges of school inputs and teacher practice are addressed.

Since 2019, Read Liberia has provided capacity building to DEOs, enabling them to take ownership of and manage this annual data collection activity. Notably, in Years 4 and 5, the DEOs led the DEMA-GALA administration, with technical support from Read Liberia and the MOE Department of Planning. This local ownership resulted in successful data collection, with over 100% completion rates each year (Figures 3 and 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Year 1 2018</th>
<th>Year 2 2019</th>
<th>Year 3 2020</th>
<th>Year 4 2021</th>
<th>Year 5 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of schools</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Covid-19</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of schools</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>Covid-19</td>
<td>102%</td>
<td>106%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of students</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>Covid-19</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>1,469</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Takeaways /Road to Self-Reliance

From its inception, Read Liberia has worked with the MOE to gradually institutionalize components and functions of the Read Liberia model and transfer their ownership to MOE counterparts. The 2022 DEMA-GALA activities were fully led and owned by the MOE. The number of DEOs who participated in the DEMA-GALA training and data collection has increased each year, and the results from the training pre- and post-tests provide evidence of DEOs’ increased knowledge of the DEMA-GALA concepts, skills, and tools. In fact, the highest-performing DEOs from 2021 were trained as master trainers to facilitate DEMA-GALA training in Year 5. The DEMA-GALA complements information gathered by the MOE’s school census, and DEOs have presented DEMA-GALA findings to the MOE Senior Management Team to inform education decisions and policies.

Importantly, the MOE has expanded the use of the DEMA-GALA beyond Read Liberia–supported schools, which is further evidence of the scalability and sustainability of this important initiative beyond Read Liberia.
REFERENCES

1. School Resources and Academic Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa | Comparative Education Review: Vol 55, No 3 (uchicago.edu)
3. Teacher Quality and Student Achievement | Education Policy Analysis Archives (asu.edu)
4. https://shared.rti.org/content/addition-toolbox-measuring-literacy-skills-youngest-students-group-administered-literacy
5. The MOE did not conduct the 2020 DEMA-GALA due to COVID-19 school closures

More Information:

The USAID Read Liberia Activity is a five-year (September 2017–September 2022) program that aims at improving early grade reading skills for Liberian students in 640 public schools in grades one and two. Read Liberia also pilot tested a program to develop emergent literacy skills for Liberian students in 60 public kindergarten schools. The Activity is implemented in six targeted counties—Lofa, Bong, Grand Bassa, Nimba, Margibi, and Montserrado. Read Liberia is funded by USAID and implemented by RTI International with Another Option, Brattle Publishing Group, and DEEP subcontractors through direct partnership with the Liberian MOE.

USAID/Liberia
Read Liberia Activity
Chief of Party: Trokon Wayne

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Read Liberia Activity. The contents are the responsibility of RTI International and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.