

Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS)

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Department of Basic Education

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basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



FRAMEWORKS & PLANS

GOAL: Reading Attainment in the Early Grades

State of the Nation (SONA) Commitments

- “If we are to ensure that within the next decade, every 10-year-old will be able to read for meaning, we will need to mobilise the entire nation behind a massive reading campaign.” – 2019
- “We will focus on ensuring that every child can read for meaning in the foundation phase to set them up for success in later years” – 2025

Action Plan to 2029: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030

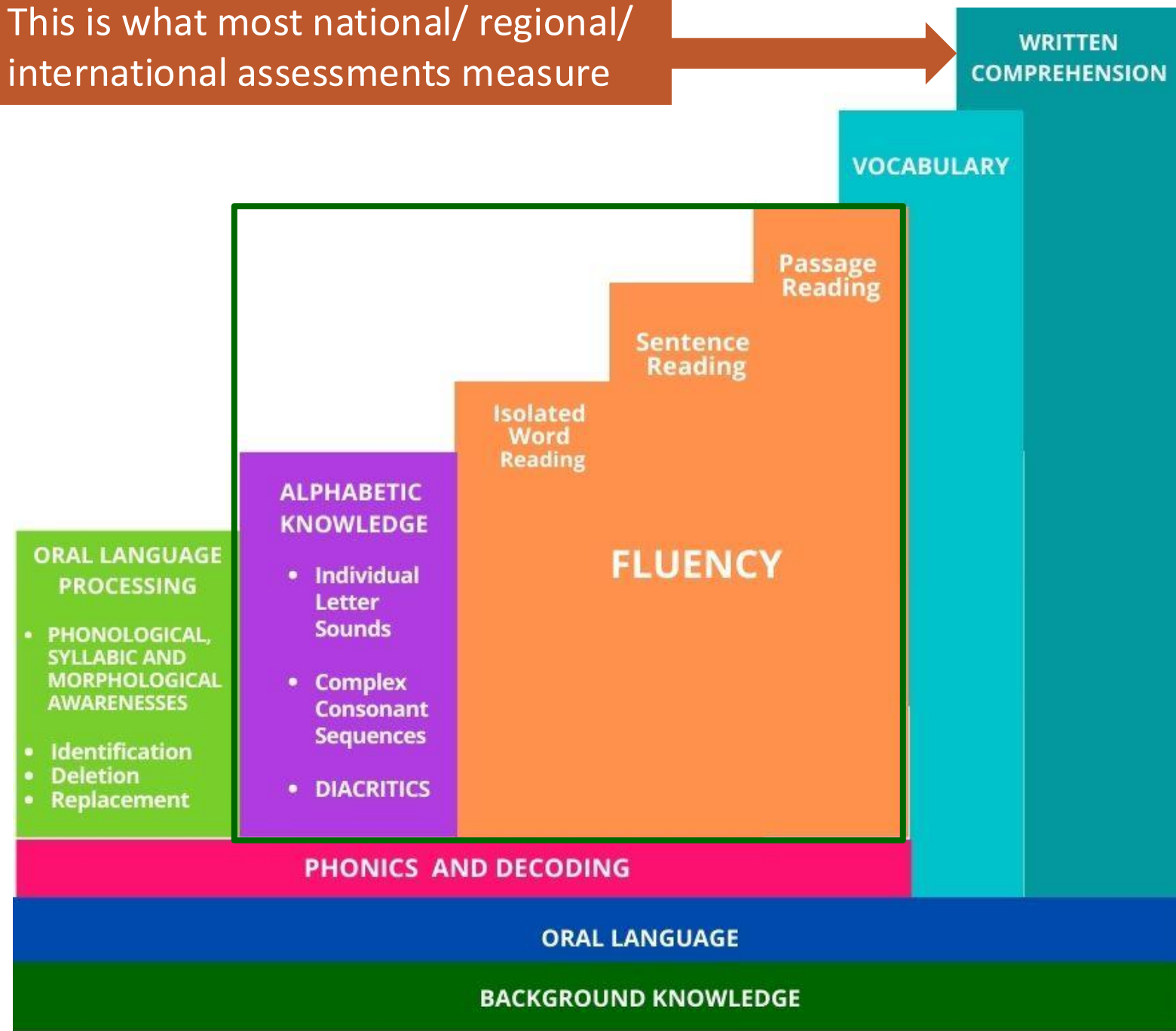
- **Goal 1:** Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3



SETTING EARLY GRADE READING BENCHMARKS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

BENCHMARKS: Development Approach

This is what most national/ regional/ international assessments measure



Letter-sound knowledge which refers to alphabetic knowledge of the written code

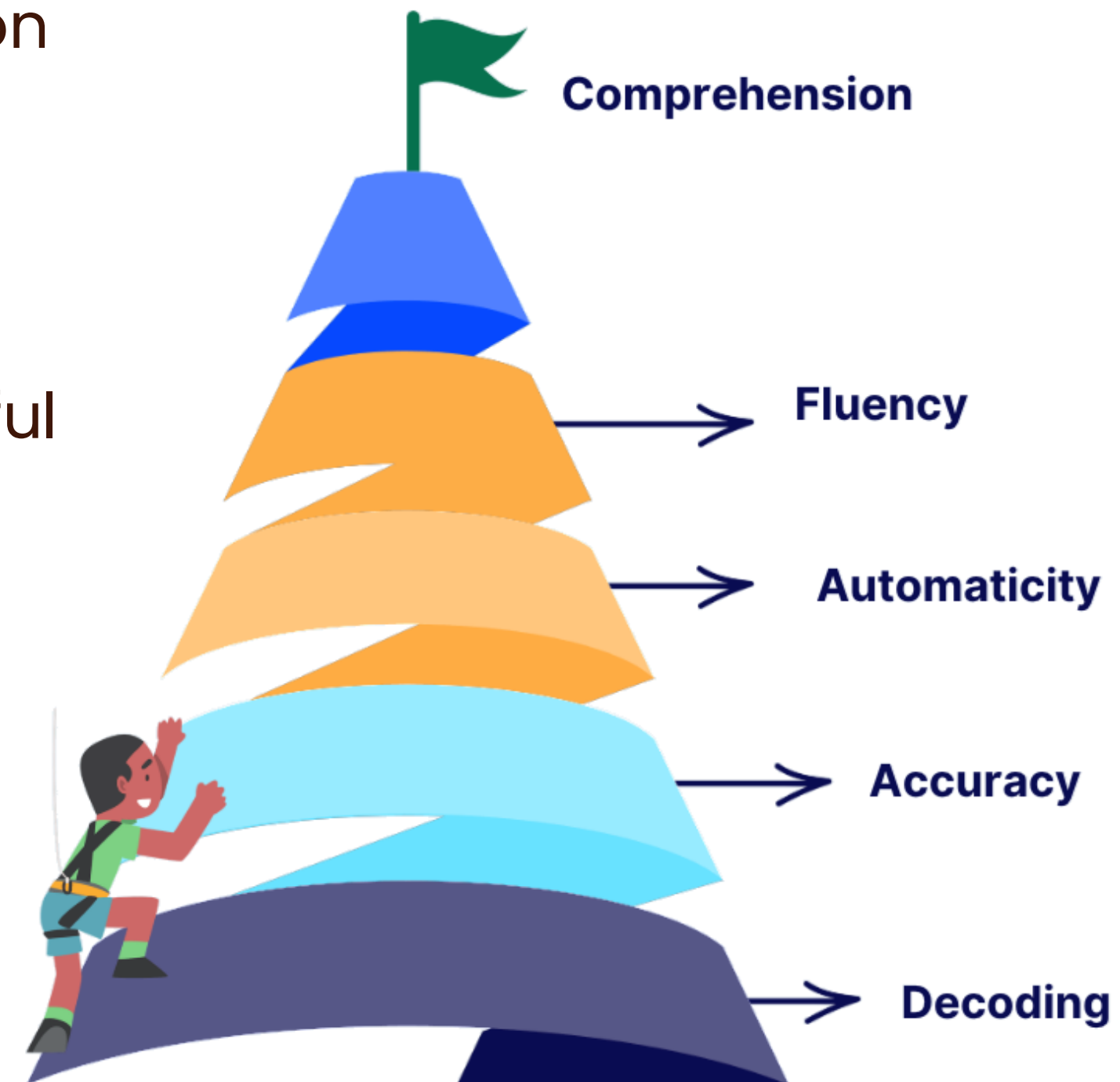
Oral reading fluency (ORF) refers to the ability to read words in context with speed, accuracy and prosody.

Accuracy*	Speed	Prosody
The percentage of words that are read correctly	The number of words that are attempted in a time period	How natural reading sounds (how it conforms to speech rhythms & intonation patterns & reflects punctuation conventions)



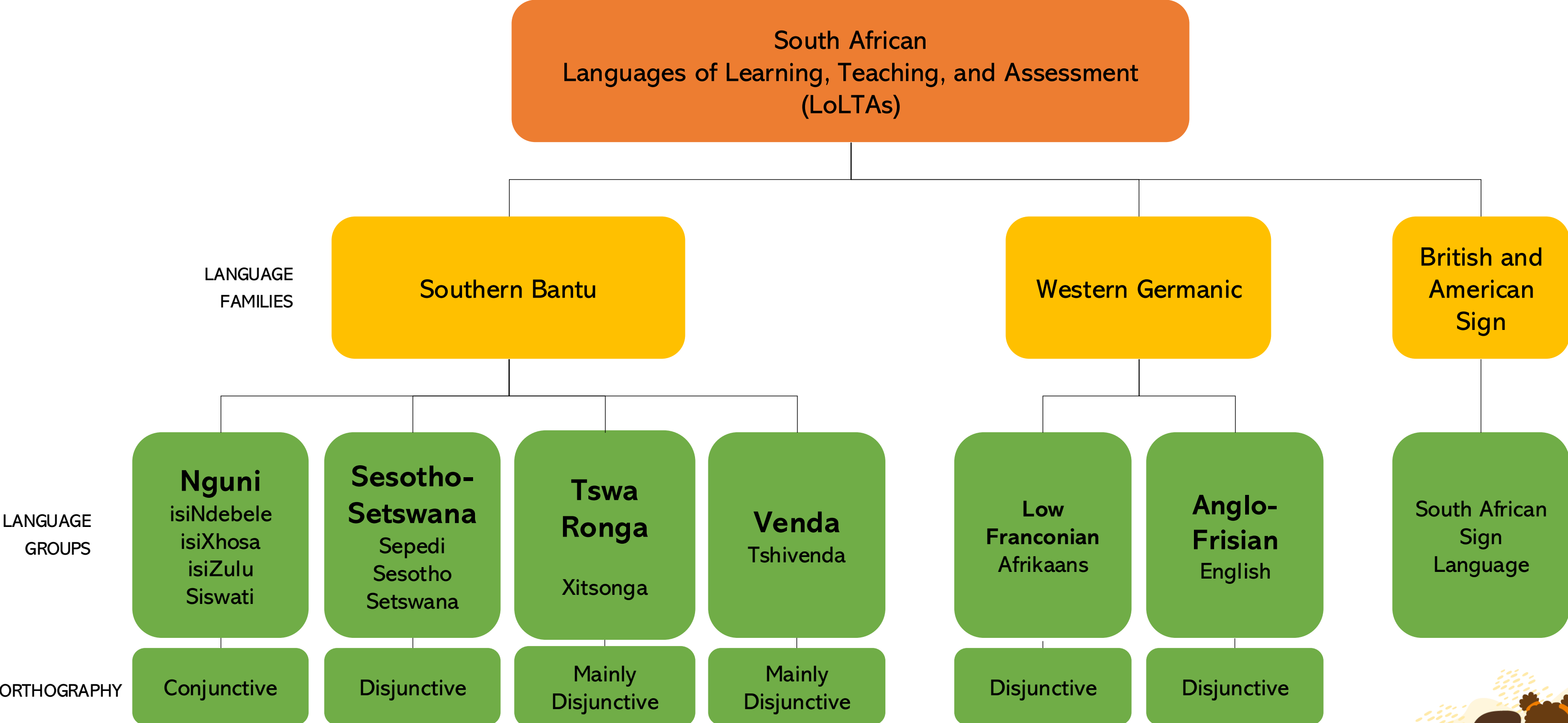
Early Grade Reading Assessment Development in 11 Languages

- Predicts/facilitates later written comprehension
- Explicitly taught and attainable – constrained skill – in the Foundation Phase
- Metric that is readily understandable and useful for different users
- Appropriate across South African educational context (e.g. linguistic diversity and socio-economic landscape)
- *Lessons from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda*



SETTING EARLY GRADE READING BENCHMARKS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

BENCHMARKS: Necessity of Language Specific Benchmarks



LANGUAGE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

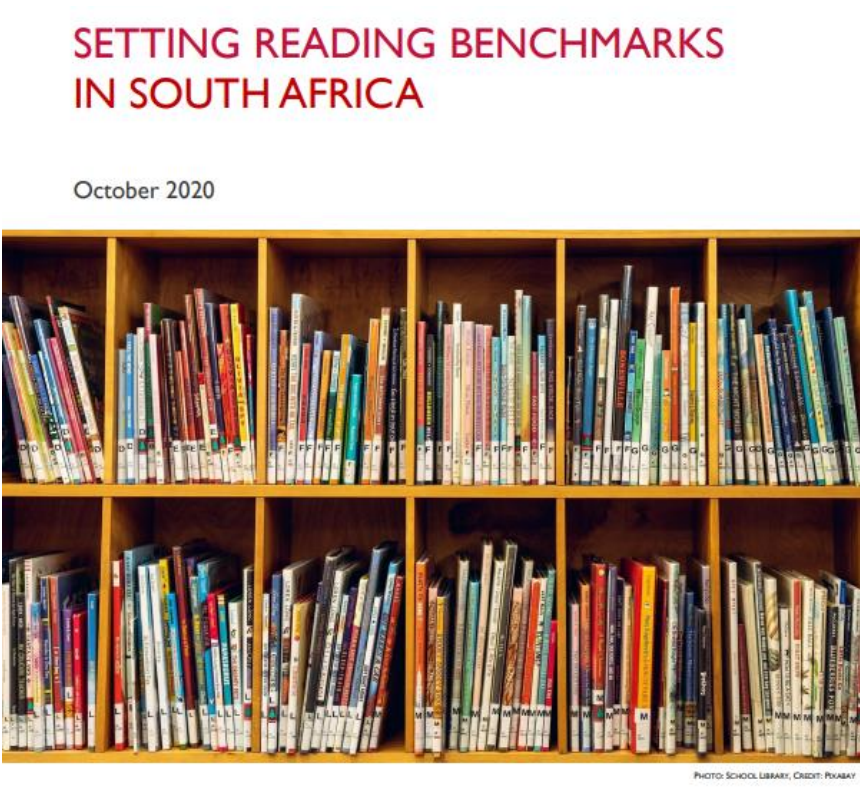
Linguistic Differences in South African LoLTAs

Language	Learner Text			
Sepedi	Go be go na le mosepedi yo a bego a na le tlala.			
Xitsonga	A ku ri ni mufambi loyi a ri na ndlala.			
isiZulu	Kunesihambi esasilambile kakhulu.			
English	There was a stranger who was very hungry			
	Words in Sentence	Words per sentence	Letters per word	Total single syllable words: v/ CV
Sepedi	13	11	2.9	23
Xitsonga	10	8.7	3.4	17
isiZulu	3	3.3	8.5	0



SETTING EARLY GRADE READING BENCHMARKS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

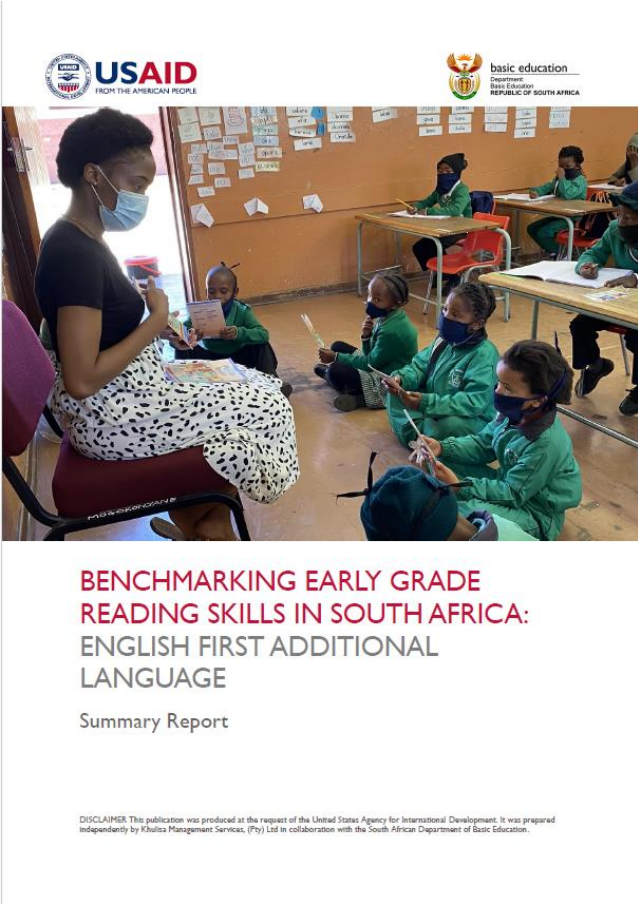
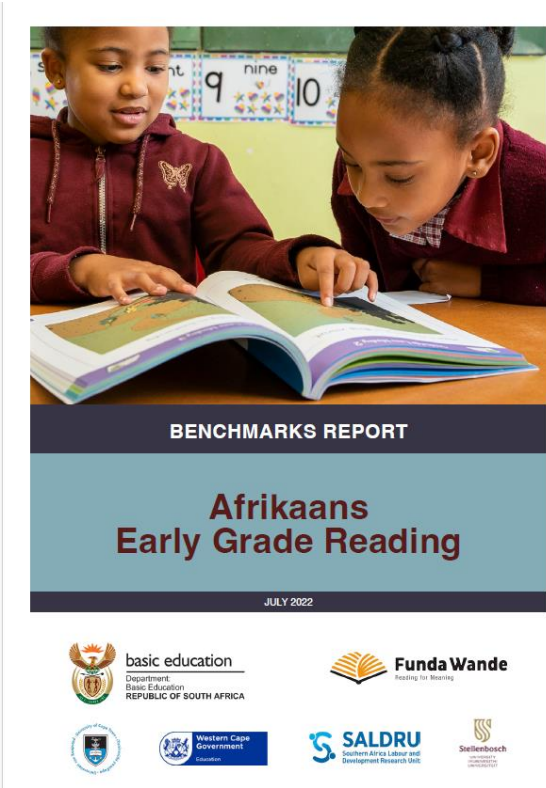
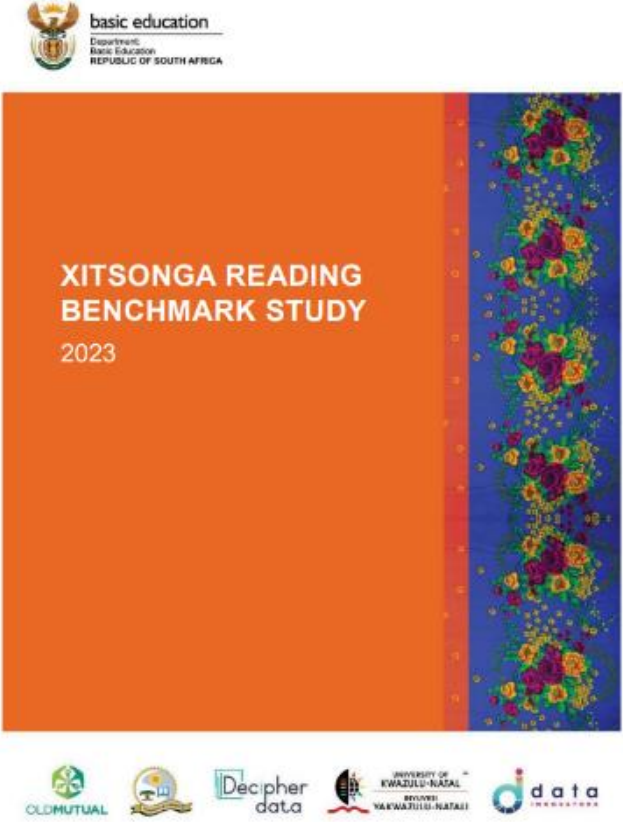
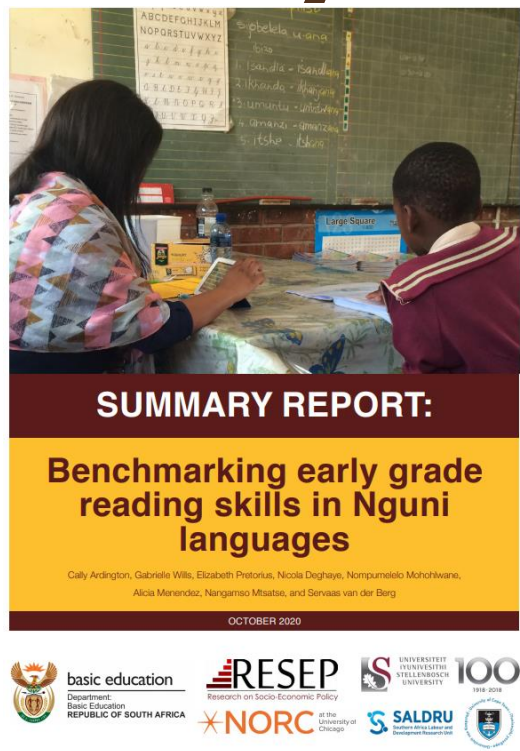
BENCHMARKS: Necessity of Language Specific Benchmarks



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All the reports are available on <https://www.education.gov.za/ResearchMonitoringEvaluationReports.aspx>



Funda Uphumelelele National Survey of South Africa



SAMPLE DESIGN

Number of schools sampled by province-language combo

LOLT	EC	FS	GP	KZN	LP	MP	NC	NW	WC	Total
Afrikaans	2	5	5				31	5	20	68
English	5	5	19	8	4	5	6	5	23	80
IsiNdebele					6	53				59
IsiXhosa	49		2	2					16	69
IsiZulu		3	10	49		5				67
Sepedi			7		42	10				59
Sesotho	3	43	8					5		59
Setswana		3	3				22	44		72
Siswati						59				59
Tshivenda					59					59
Xitsonga			5		39	15				59
Total	59	59	59	59	150	147	59	59	59	710

After removing schools in blank cells and small schools, 3.8% of the population of learners in public ordinary schools were excluded.

27 830 learners in Gr 1 to 4



REALISED SAMPLE

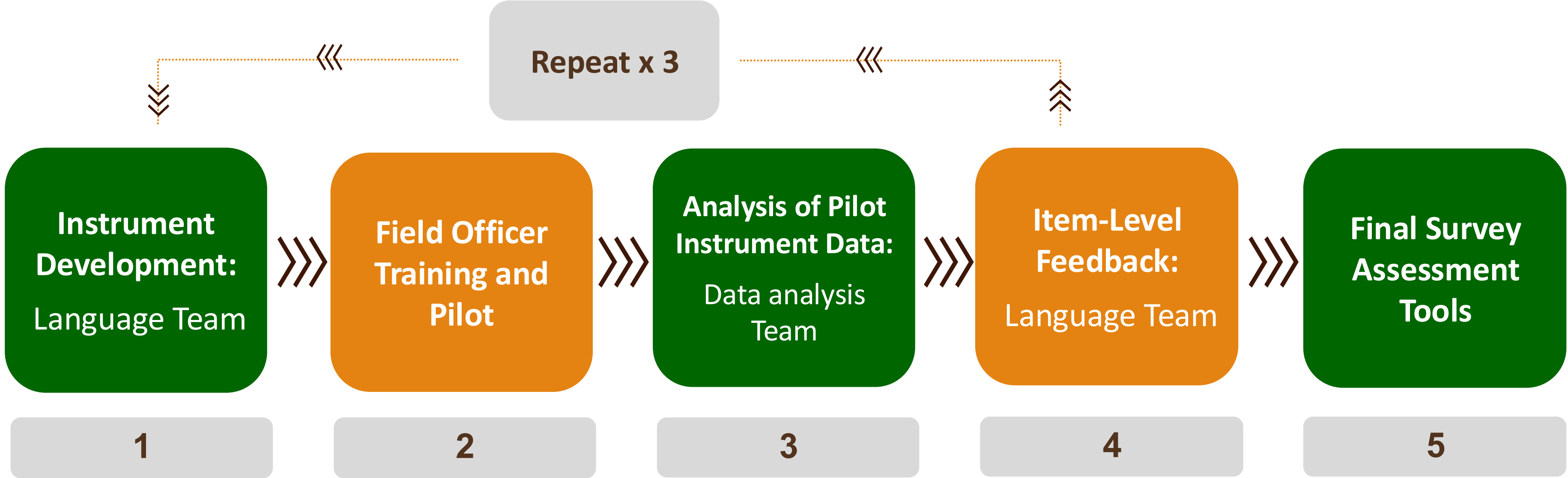
Percentage of learners in no-fee schools (Quintile 1-3) by language and province

Language	% No-fee		Province	% No-fee
English	18%		Eastern Cape	94%
→ Afrikaans	56%		Free State	87%
Tshivenda	100%	→	Gauteng	28%
Xitsonga	97%		Limpopo	96%
IsiNdebele	84%		Mpumalanga	68%
IsiZulu	94%		North West	86%
IsiXhosa	99%	→	Western Cape	45%
SiSwati	81%		KwaZulu-Natal	73%
Sepedi	92%		Northern Cape	75%
Setswana	99%			
Sesotho	95%			
Total	68%		Total	68%



ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Piloting



ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

Letter Sound Knowledge

	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Notes
	How many vowels appear in this row?	Which consonants should appear in this row?	Which vowels and consonants should appear in uppercase?	How many uppercase letters in this row?	When are these sounds taught?
Row 1	3 (lowercase)	b, m, l, d, f, b, t, p, k, j, n, f, g, s, c, h	B, D, G, H, L, N, Q, R, T	3	Single Letter Sounds taught in Grade 1 Term 1 and 2 (NEEDU Phonics Progression)
Row 2	remaining 2 (lowercase)			4	
Row 3	A, E, I (uppercase)	v, r, q, x, w, y, z AND any unused consonants in row 1 and 2	A, E, I, + 2 unused uppercase consonants from row 1-row 2	5/6	Single Letter Sounds taught in Grade 1 Term 1 - 4 (NEEDU Phonics Progression)
Row 4	O, U (uppercase)		O, U +2 unused from row 1-3	4	
Row 5	None	uncommon consonant sounds + unused from row 3-4	uncommon consonant sounds + unused from row 3-4	5	Single Letter Sounds taught Grade 1 Term 3- 4 (NEEDU Phonics Progression) remaining. Sounds that are uncommon and no existent in language that are not explicitly taught
Row 6	None	non- existant + unused from row 4-5 + repeats	non- existant + unused from row 4-5 + repeats	5	

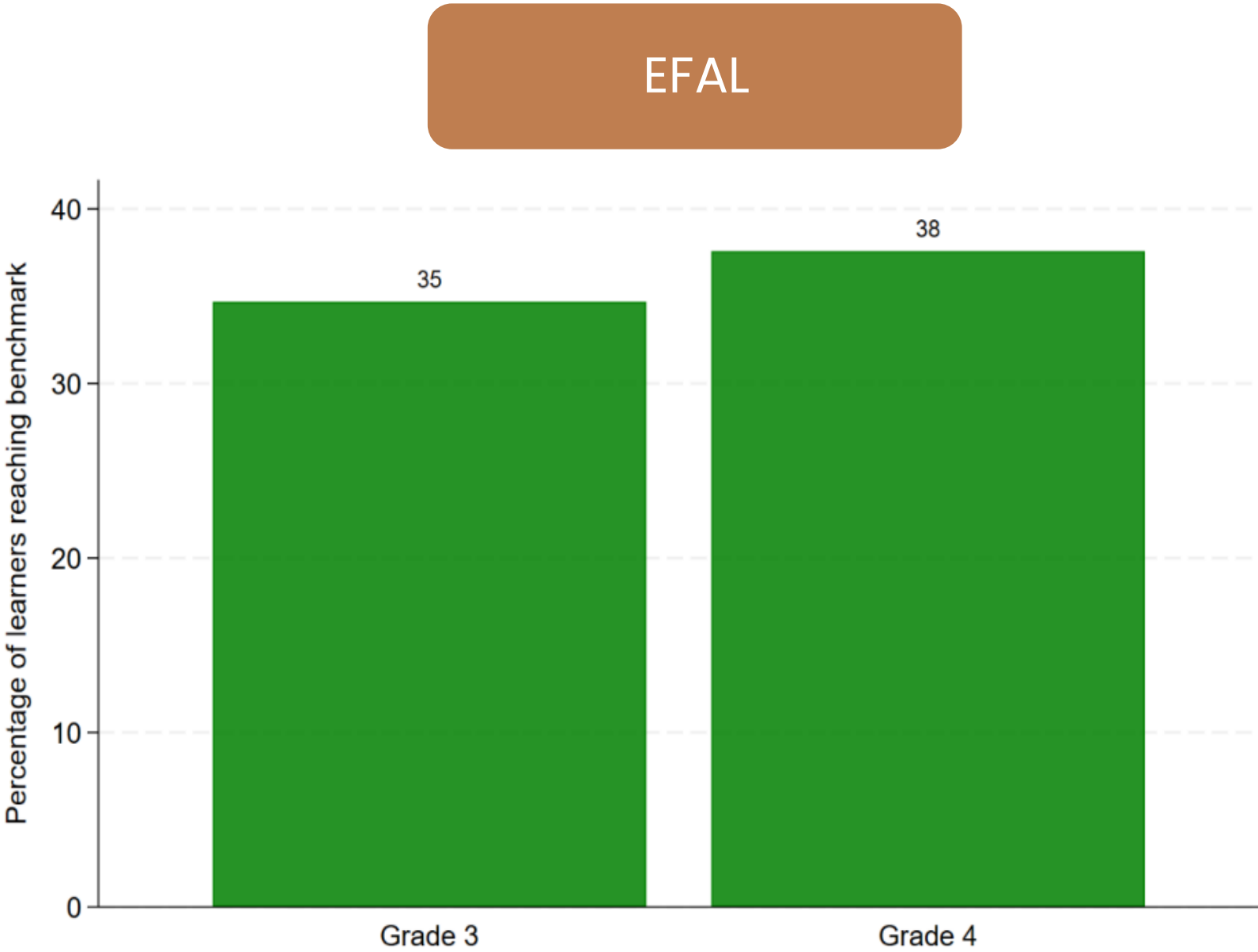
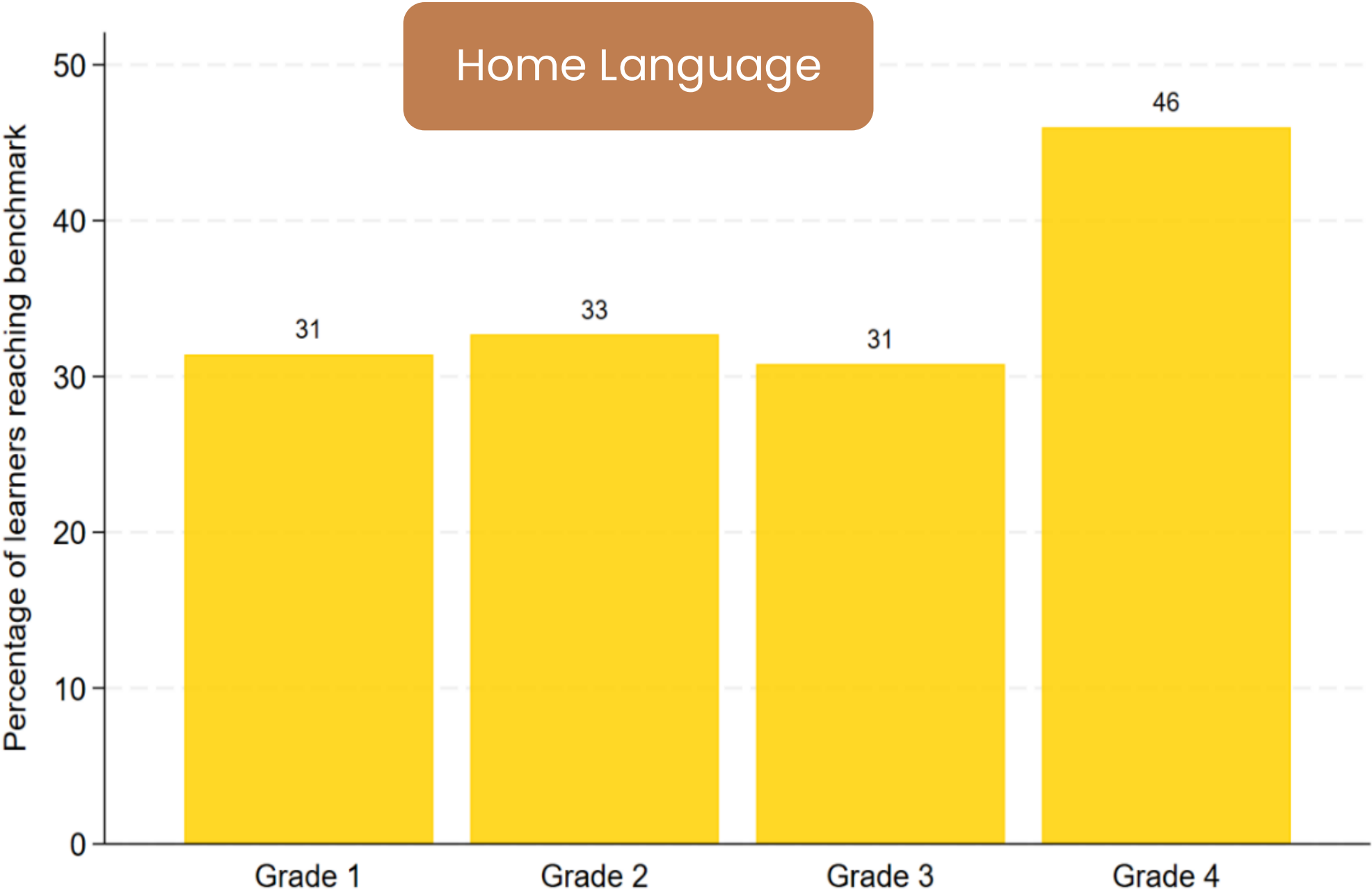


MAIN RESULTS

Percentage of learners reaching Benchmarks

Based on Grade-specific benchmarks Gr 1 to Gr 3

Gr 4 results based on the Gr 3 benchmark



MAIN RESULTS

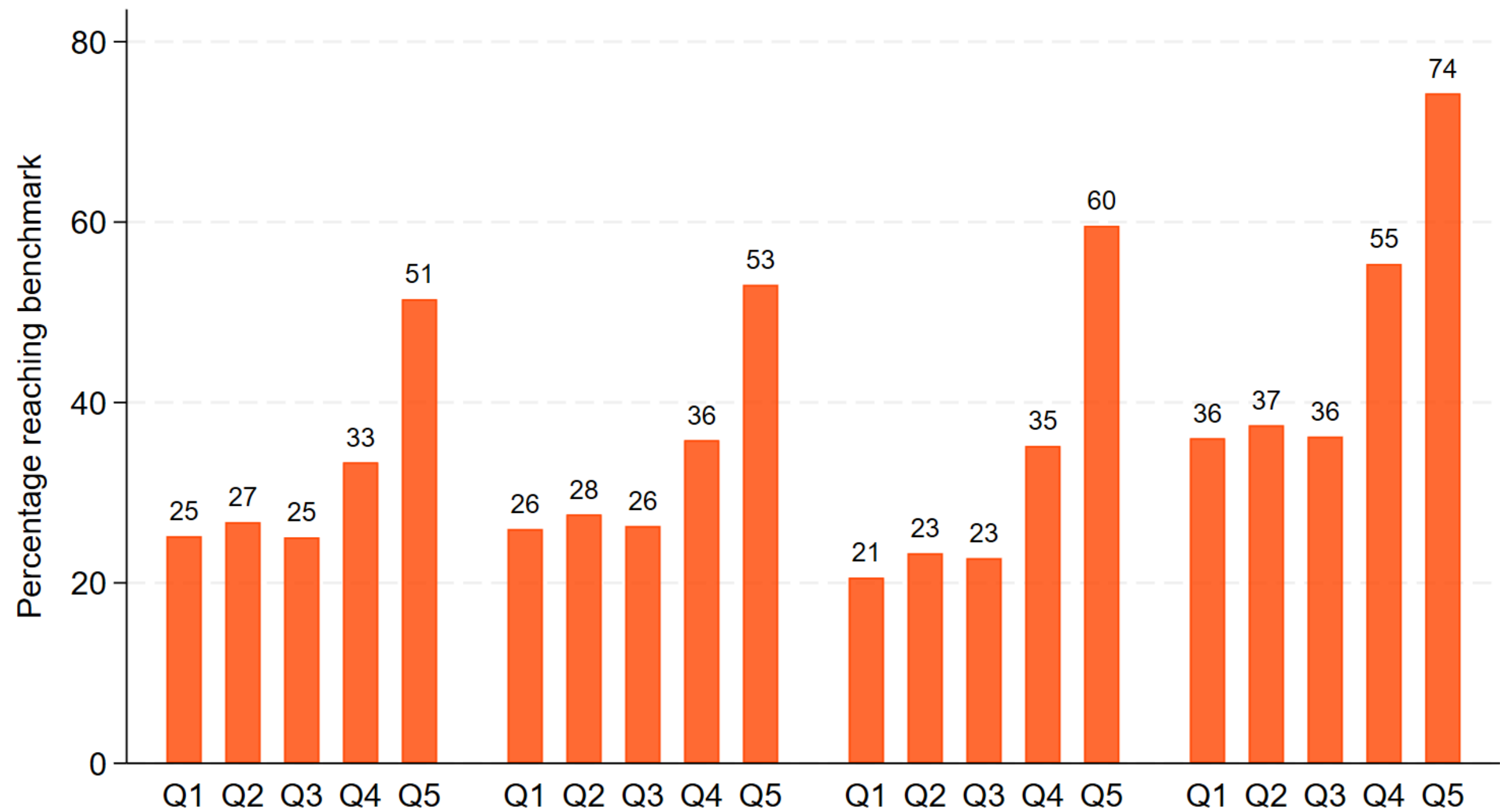
Percentage of learners reaching HL benchmarks by language and grade

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
English	40	42	48	64
Afrikaans	→ 47	32	26	49
Tshivenda	28	44	33	45
Xitsonga	25	22	16	31
IsiNdebele	17	33	14	36
IsiZulu	→ 12	23	31	44
IsiXhosa	37	36	19	29
SiSwati	21	33	27	41
Sepedi	30	30	11	26
Setswana	26	26	26	45
Sesotho	36	21	18	38



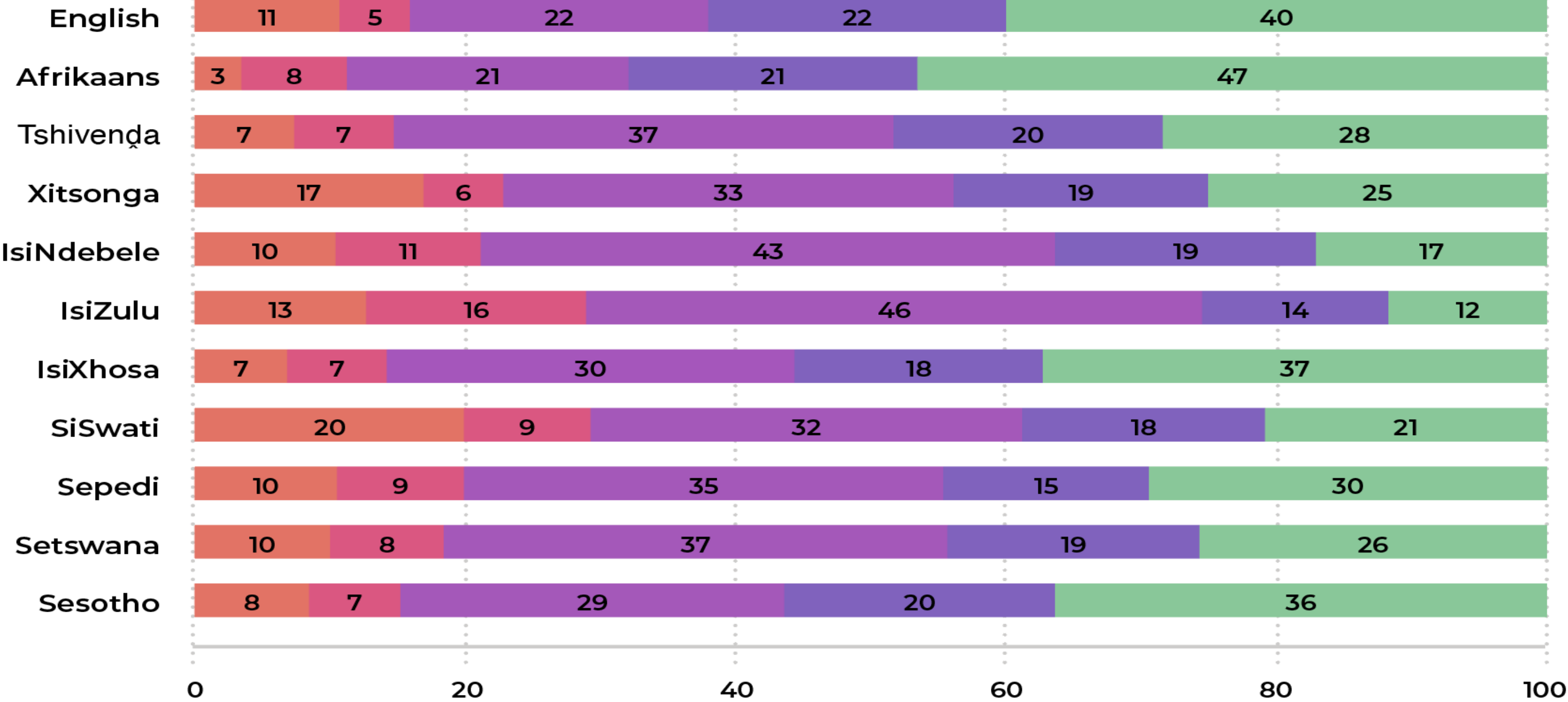
MAIN RESULTS

Percentage of learners reaching HL benchmarks by quintile and grade



CATEGORIES OF READING FLUENCY

Grade 1

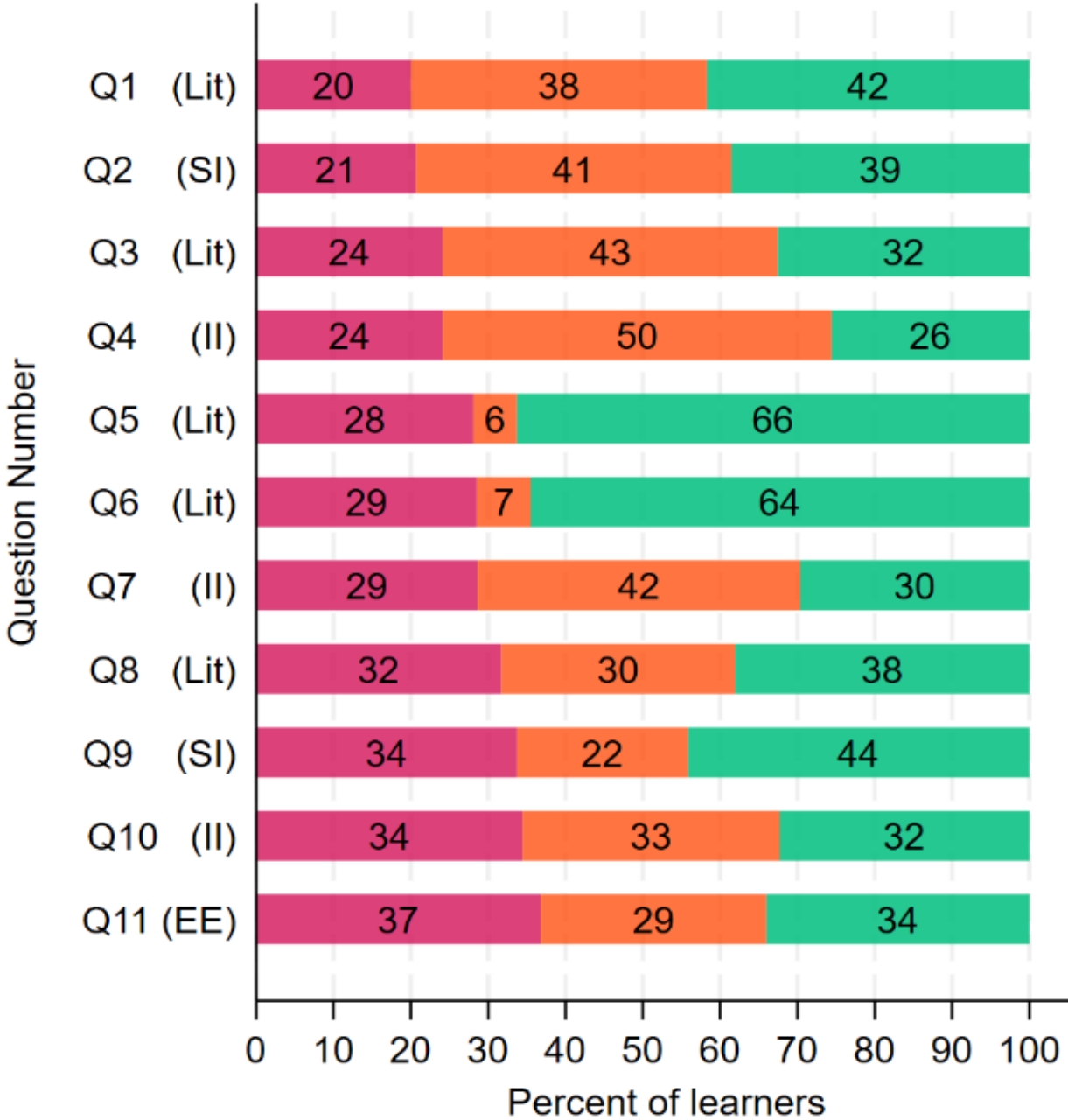
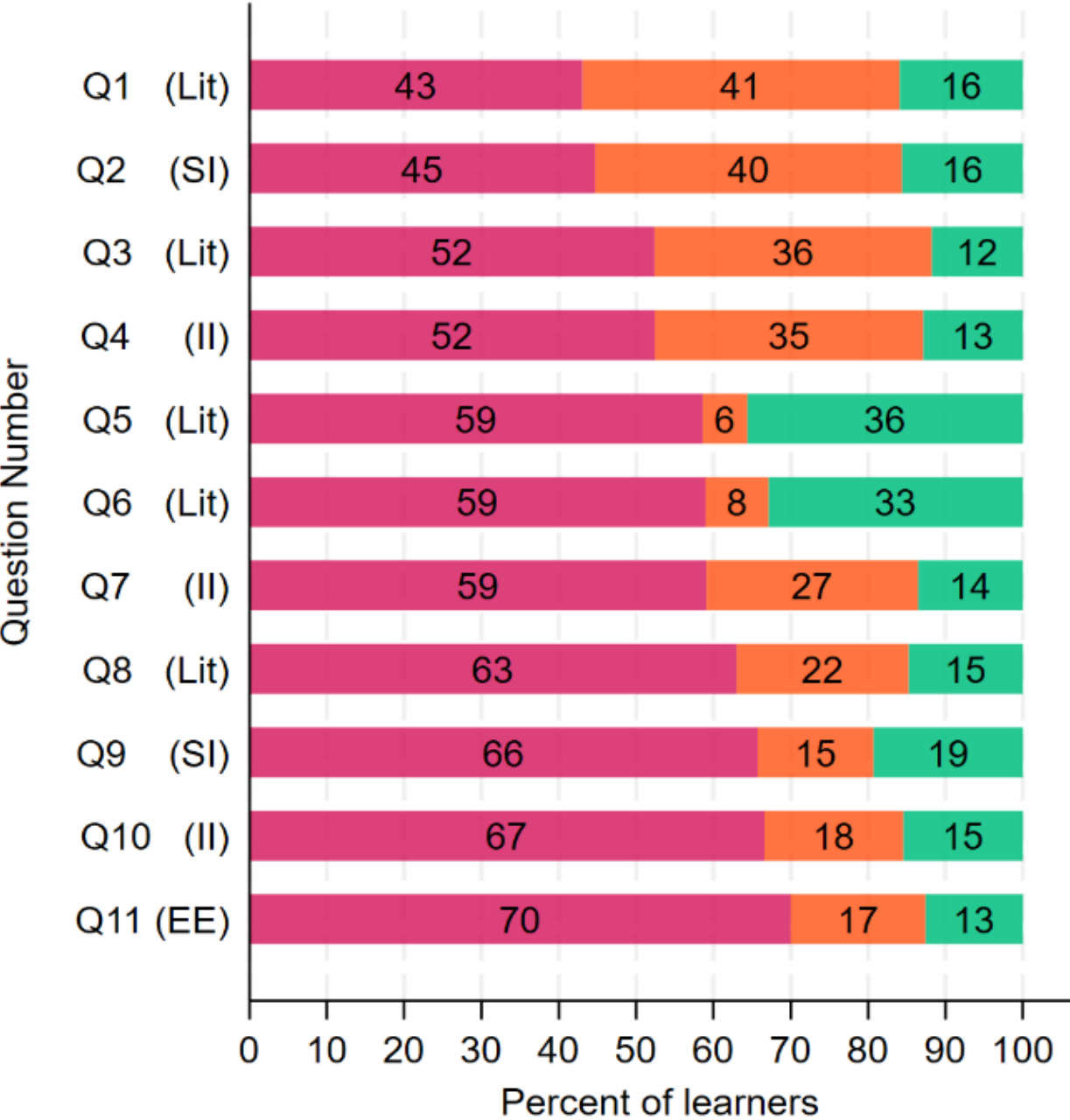


Benchmark Category



COMPREHENSION

Item outcomes for Grade 1 (LHS) and Grade 2 (RHS) on the same ORF comprehension

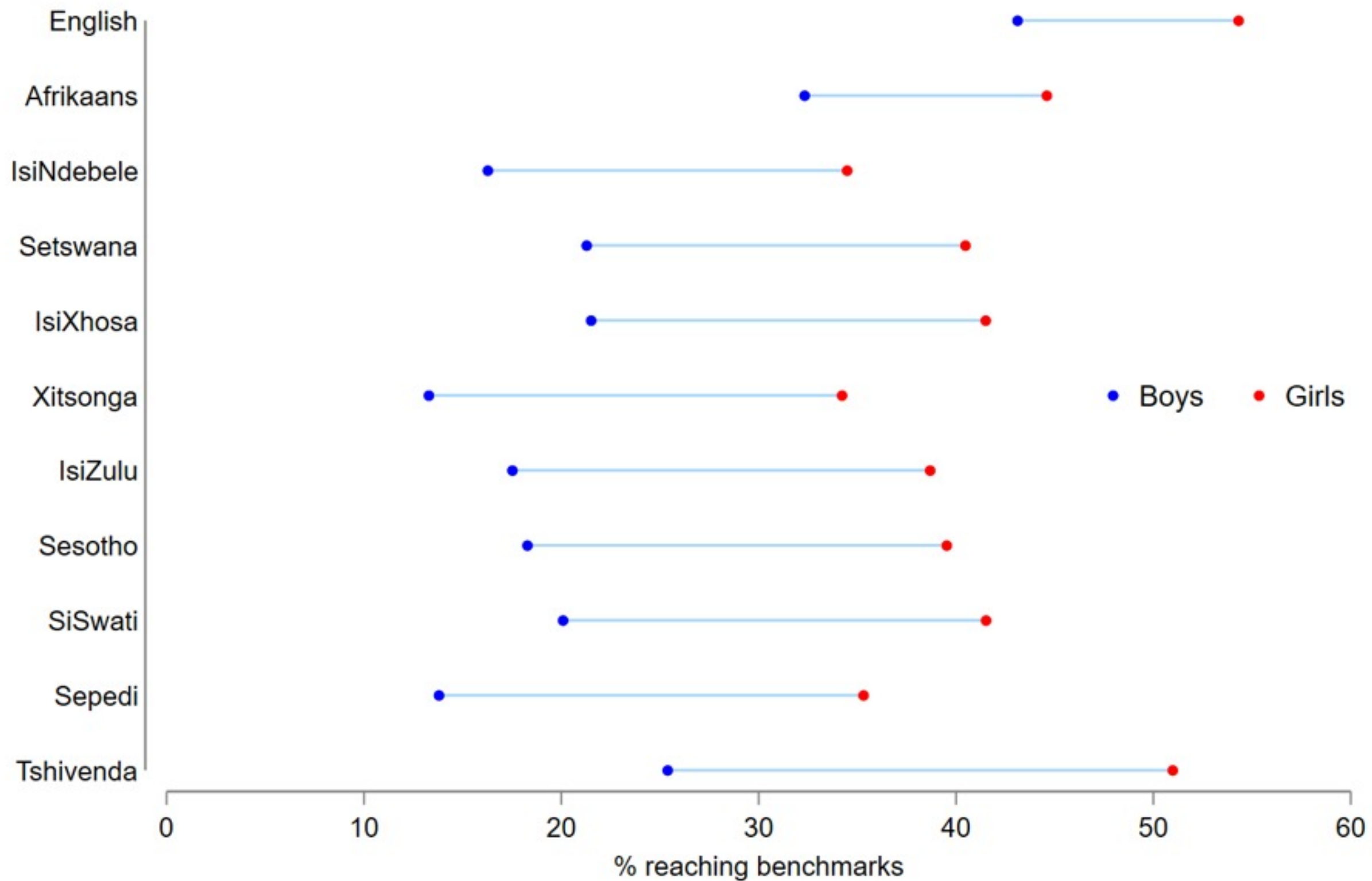


Lit = Literal questions;
SI = Straightforward inference;
II = Interpret & Integrate;
EE = Examine & Evaluate

Not administered Incorrect Correct



Percentage of boys and girls meeting the benchmarks by language

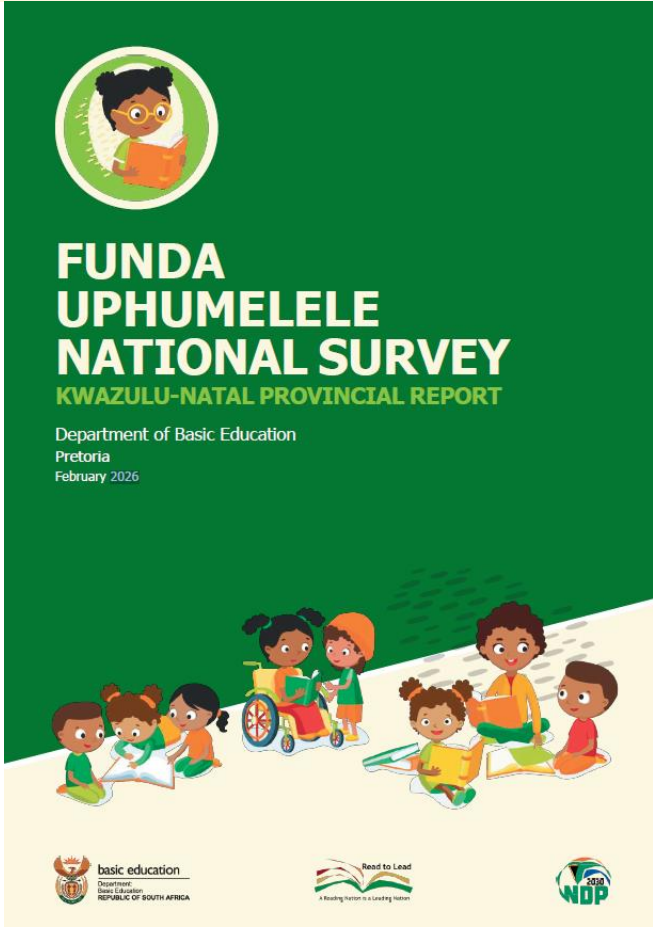
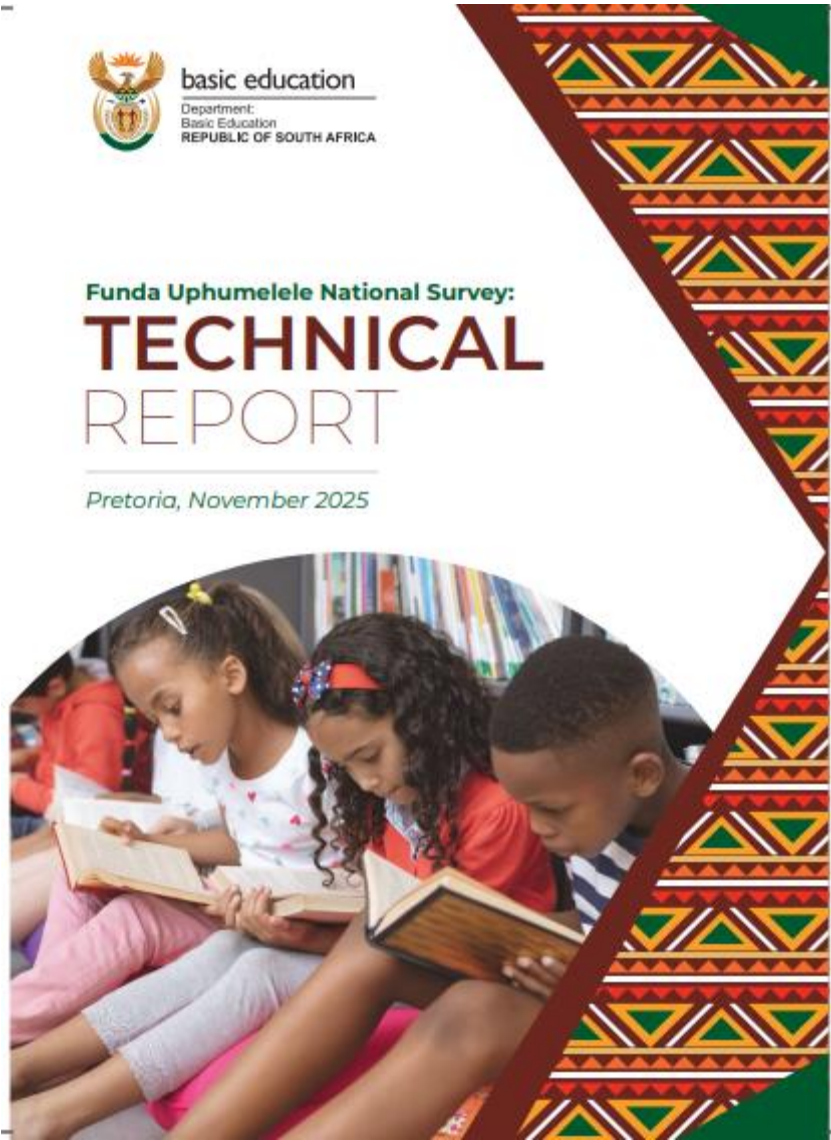


More girls meet the reading benchmarks relative to boys, across all languages and grades



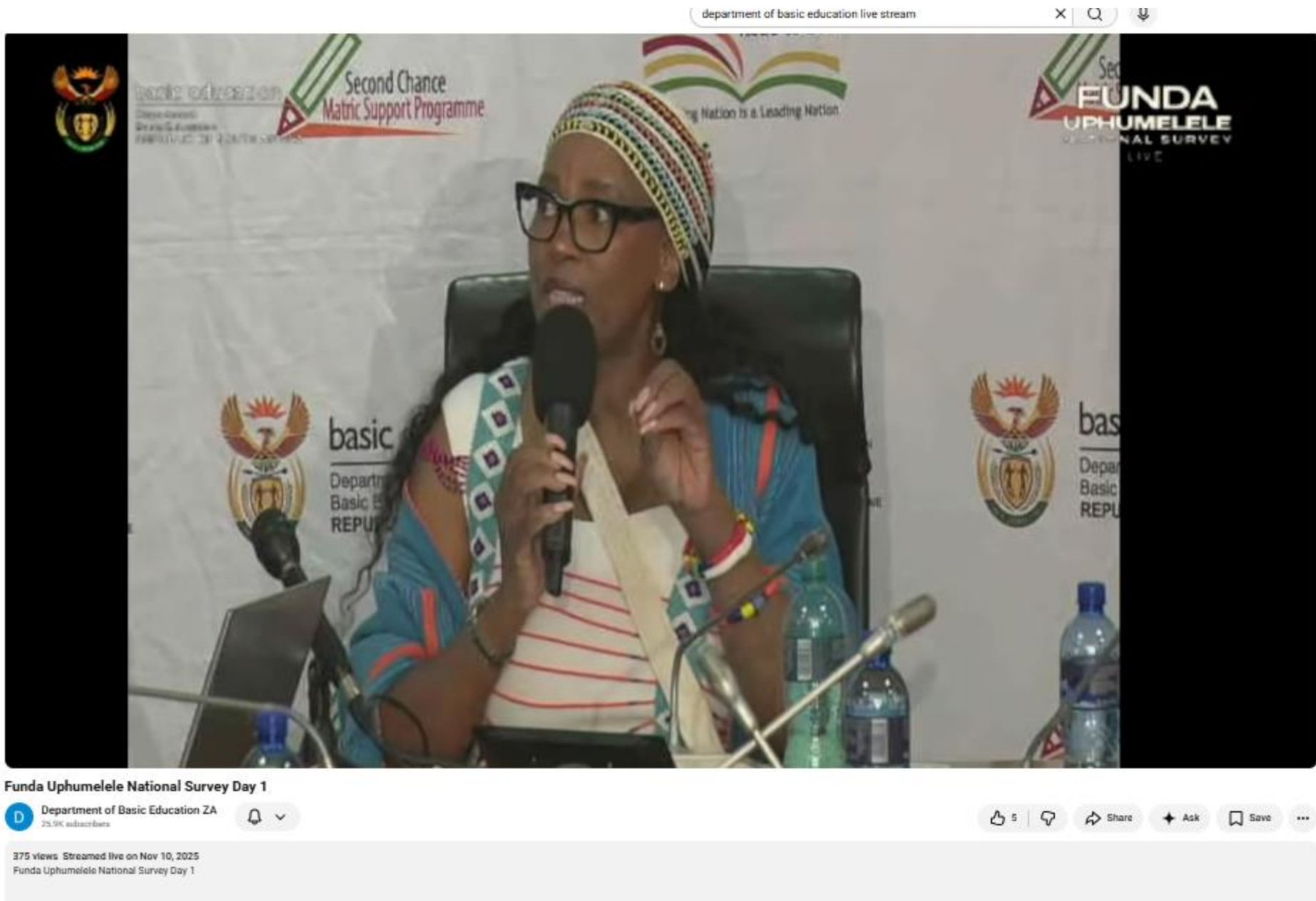
DISSEMINATION

FUNDA UPHUMELELE NATIONAL SURVEY



DISSEMINATION

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DISSEMINATION

FUNDA UPHUMELELE NATIONAL SURVEY

1	Category	Outlet	Program / Section	Title / Headline	Reach Source			
2	Radio	702 / CapeTalk	Early Breakfast with Africa Melar	DOE's Funda Uphumelele Survey reveals deep reading crisis	Public audience estimate (702 ~775k + CapeTalk ~143k)			
3	Radio	919 FM	News Bulletin (6am)	News Bulletin of 11 November 2025 – FUNS launch mention	Estimated local/regional audience			
4	Radio	919 FM	News Bulletin (9am)	News Bulletin of 11 November 2025 – FUNS launch mention	Estimated local/regional audience			
5	Newspaper / Online	Eyewitness News	News	Study: 70% of children from Grade 1 to 3 can't recognise letters or read	Primedia news network reach estimate			
6	Newspaper / Online	SABC News	Education	Gwarube lauded for launching Funda Uphumelele National Survey	National news platform estimate			
7	Newspaper / Online	Central News South Africa	Education	Minister Gwarube Reveals Home Language Teaching Boosts Literacy as	Online news estimate			
8	Newspaper / Online	Orange Farm News	Local	From policy to practice: These Johannesburg South schools are turning	Community media estimate			
9	Newspaper / Online	Globe Post	Local	Sandpits and Story Circles – How Lenasia South and Orange Farm pre-s	Community media estimate			
10	Newspaper / Online	Joburg ETC	News	Study reveals 70% of South African learners in Grades 1–3 can't read fl	Online publication estimate			
11	Newspaper / Online	African Insider	Education	Home language holds the key, says minister in landmark literacy launch	Magazine/online estimate			
12	Media Advisory	Government of South Africa	Official Advisory	Minister Siviwe launches South Africa's first national early grade readi	Government portal estimate			
13	Radio	Jacaranda FM	News	Minister of Basic Education Siviwe Gwarube has launched the Funda U	Published digital audience metric			
14	Radio	truFM	Current Affairs – 30 Minutes Live	Discussion on Funda Uphumelele National Survey launch	Regional radio audience estimate			
15	Radio	Capricorn FM	Capricorn Talk (Placeholder)	Coverage of FUNS launch – Limpopo perspective	Regional radio audience estimate			
16	International Covera	International Parliamentary	News & Views	South Africa's 2030 Reading Panel launches new literacy report	Specialist international network estimate			
17	International Covera	EIN Presswire	Press Release Distribution	Minister Siviwe Gwarube launches South Africa's first national early gr	Global press release distribution estimate			
18	Conference	2030 Reading Panel Confere	Keynote and Report Launch	FUNS evidence used in 2030 Reading Panel Conference	Conference attendance estimate			
19	Conference	Department of Basic Educat	FUNS National Launch Event	Launch of the Funda Uphumelele National Survey	Launch event attendance estimate			
20	Research / Project Di	Zenex Foundation	Project Profile	Funda Uphumelele National Survey Project	Stakeholder dissemination estimate			



SYSTEM INTEGRATION

BENCHMARKS & FUNS

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION	DISTRICTS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT	CLASSROOM
Establish common definition of reading proficiency	Use standardised tools and reading assessment practices across and within schools.	Provide standard against which to measure learners' reading skills
Communicate standards and benchmark targets to aim for.	Identify schools and classrooms needing support.	Identify <i>early on</i> learners at risk of not learning to read.
Monitor system's progress towards set targets.	Provide targeted support to schools and teachers	Adapt instruction to meet learner needs.



SYSTEM INTEGRATION BENCHMARKS & FUNS

National and Provincial Administration

- Establishes definition of reading proficiency
- Clearly communicates standards and targets
- Monitor progress

FUNDA UPHUMELELE
NATIONAL SURVEY ✓

FURS DEVELOPMENT OF
INSTRUMENTS ✓

National Foundation Phase Minimum
Resource Package ✓

Updates to Curriculum Documents incl.
Annual Teaching Plans ✓

Whole School Evaluation ✓

SurveyCTO and Data Management
Training ✓





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Dankie
Enkosi

Ha khensa
Re a leboga

Ro livhuha
Siyabonga

Siyathokoza
Thank you



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