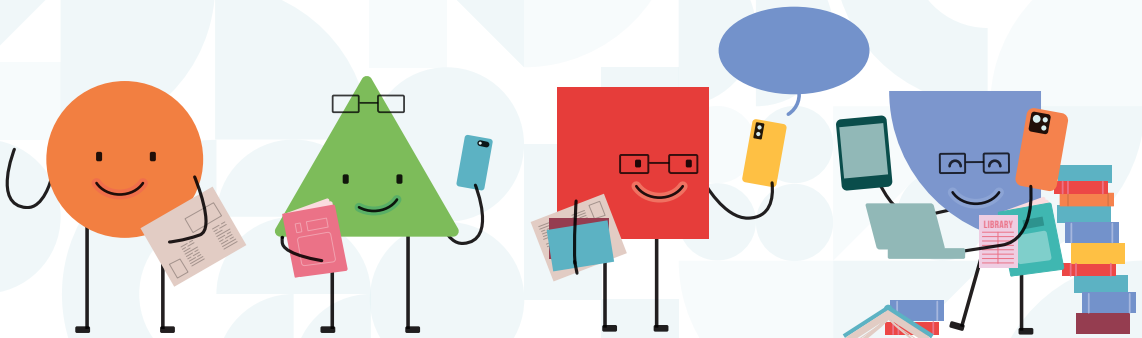


NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SOUTH AFRICA



NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SPECIAL ISSUE BRIEF: READING AND CHILDREN



Special Issue Brief: Reading and Children



Introduction to the National Reading Barometer Project

The National Reading Barometer project describes adult reading culture and the broader reading ecosystem in South Africa. The project was led by Nal'ibali in partnership with the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) and includes two components:

- The **National Reading Survey (NRS)** is a nationally representative survey of the adult population aged 16+. It profiles adults' reading practices, preferences and contexts, and includes questions on reading with children, digital reading, library use and language preferences. The Survey was designed to enable limited continuity with the 2016 National Reading Survey run by the South African Book Development Council (SABDC).
- The **National Reading Barometer (NRB)** is a new compilation of secondary datasets, plus selected data points from the NRS, that collates and tracks changes in the overall health of the South African reading ecosystem.

The National Reading Survey and Barometer will be repeated in 2026 and 2030.

The full Survey findings and Barometer findings reports can be found at www.readingbarometersa.org, along with technical reports on the methodologies used.

This special issue brief summarises the 2023 National Reading Survey and National Reading Barometer findings related to reading and children. This includes adults reading with young children (10 and under) and older children (11-18) reading for themselves.

It is written for institutions implementing programmes in early childhood development, primary and secondary education, and generally working with children and caregivers to improve children's lives and opportunities. This includes government institutions, civil society organisations in the literacy and reading sector and corporate funders of literacy and education activities.

More adults are reading with children, and most adults believe it is important - but they do not have enough books.

National Reading Survey Results

Questions concerning reading and children addressed by the NRS include:

- How many caregivers are reading with children?
- How frequently do caregivers read with children?
- How many older children (aged 10 and above) are reading for themselves at home?
- What are the determinants of whether adults read with children in their households?
- What reading materials do children have access to at home?
- How does reading with children relate to adults' own reading practices?

The survey covers three age groups of children:

- **Young children (0-10):** adults living with young children were asked about reading to and with young children who cannot yet speak/read or who are learning to read. 1592 adults had at least one young child in the household.
- **Older children (11-18):** adults living with older children were asked about the ways in which these children read by themselves. 1273 adults had at least one older child in the household.
- **Teenagers (16-17):** teenagers 16 and above were interviewed as part of the 'adult' sample and therefore provided information about their own reading practices. 183 teens aged 16 and 17 were included in the sample. Teen results are included in the discussion of adult reading practices in other chapters of this report.

This brief also includes findings regarding levels of awareness about and participation in **reading initiatives**. Since most of these initiatives are targeted at children/youth or caregivers of children, these questions were only asked of respondents who live with children.

The survey asked adults questions about all children living in the same household as the interviewed adult, whether or not the adult is the parent or guardian. The survey does not include information on adults reading with children (their own or others) that they do not live with.

National Reading Survey Methods

The National Reading Survey is a nationally representative survey of 4,250 South African adults aged 16 and above. The data was collected in late 2022 and early 2023. Participants were recruited through face-to-face stratified sampling and interviewed by phone or face-to-face. Survey results were weighted by age, race and province for analysis.

The survey relies on self-reporting about adult and child reading behaviour, which can introduce social desirability bias and does not allow for any assessment of reading 'comprehension' or skill, but this is consistent with the NRS (2016) survey approach.

Findings on reading by older children (age 11-15) is reported by adults and not the children themselves.

Key Numbers on Reading and Children

Reading with children

93% of adults agree that reading with children improves school performance

52% of adults who live with children read with them (up from 35% in 2016)¹



What do they read?

40% text books

33% fiction stories

29% readers from school

28% religious stories



35% of homes with children under 10 have at least one picture book

10% have more than 10 picture books

31% of adults said their child owned a book by the age of 5

5% of adults use digital materials to read with children



What would help people read with children more?

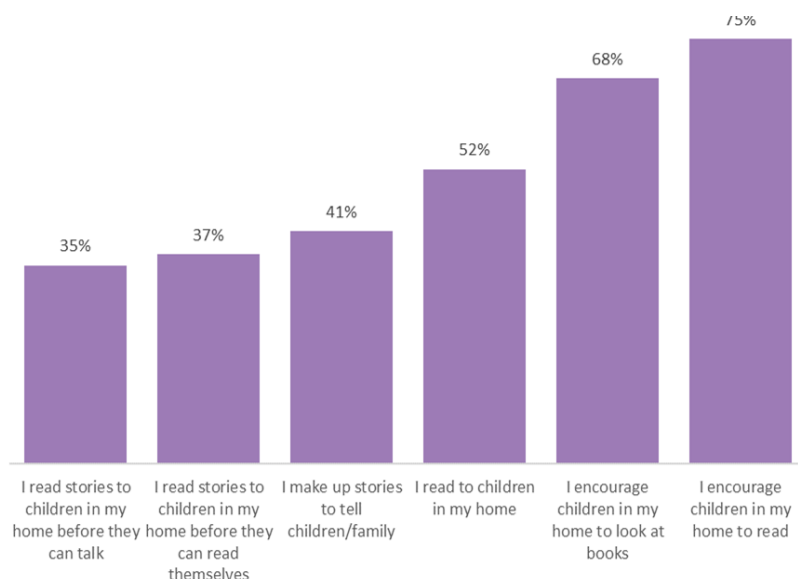
- More time
- More interesting, free, reliable material in preferred languages
- More confidence

¹: National survey into the reading and book reading behaviour of adult South Africans (2016). South African Book Development Council.



How many caregivers read with children?

Figure 1: Agreement with statements about reading with children (N=2071 of adults who live with children)



Reading with children has increased. 52% of South Africans with children in their households have ever read with them. In 2016, 35% of adults with children said they read with their children. Furthermore, three quarters of South Africans who live with children encourage children to read,

compared to 13% in 2016. 68% encourage children to look at books.

However, fewer adults read to small children: **only 35% of South Africans read stories to children in their homes before the children can talk and only 37% read to children before the child can read themselves.** In 2016, respondents were not asked about actual reading practices with small children but only 5% agreed that reading with children before they could talk helps them learn (NRS 2016, page 35).

There is extensive research showing that book sharing

with very young children is beneficial (Dowdall et al 2020, Murray et al 2016, Law et al 2018), so this is an area for advocacy.

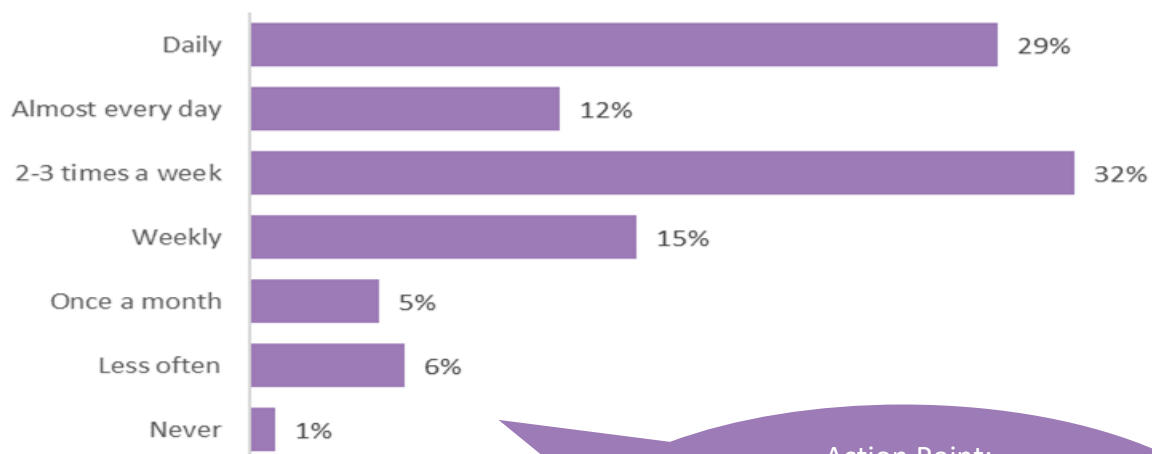
Action Point: Increase awareness about the importance of reading with children from a young age.



How frequently do caregivers read with children?

Out of adults who read with young children (0-9 years old), three quarters (73%) do so frequently (at least 2 or 3 times a week). This suggests that once caregivers start reading with children, most do so frequently. The **advocacy challenge is to get caregivers to 'just start.'**

Figure 2: Frequency of reading with young children
(N=1008 people who live with young children and who read with them at all)



Action Point:
Campaigns to promote reading with children should emphasize that it just takes a few minutes. Reading with a child daily for 5-10 minutes is the target. Reading regularly is more important than reading for long periods.



In what languages do caregivers read with children?

Interest in reading with children in African languages is high.

Of adults with young children who can read and write an African language and who read with their children, 74% currently read with their young children in an African language and 72% would prefer to read with their children in an African language. 73% have reading materials in multiple languages.

When asked about the languages their older children read in, parents report that 75% of older children in African language-speaking households currently read in an African language.

Reading in African languages is not mutually exclusive with reading in English.

When asked whether 'it is important' for children to be able to read and write 'in their parents' language' or 'in English', 95% South Africans with children in their homes (irrespective of home language) agreed with both. When answering questions about actual reading practices, 80% of African-language-speaking adults with young children read with their children in both English and at least one African language.

Adults do not perceive accessibility of reading materials in appropriate languages as a primary barrier to reading with children. Only 5% of adults who do not read with children said it was because they did not have materials in the right languages (most said it was a lack of time). On the other hand, 79% of adults also report that they would read more with children if they could access more materials in their preferred languages. This suggests that adults who are strongly motivated to read with children will do so, irrespective of materials access, but that increasing accessibility to reading materials in the right languages may increase the quality and amount of reading.



What are the determinants of whether adults read with children in their households? How does reading with children relate to adults' own reading practices?

Considering people who live with children (N=2071), what explains the difference between the 52% of adults who read with the children they live with and the 48% who do not? Understanding these differences can help focus advocacy and interventions on relevant change factors.

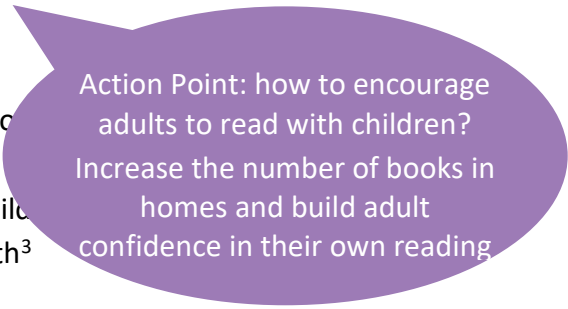
A regression analysis comparing the two groups found that adults who read with children are more likely¹ to:

- **Live in rural villages.** When we compare people who are similar in terms of age, income and education level, people in these areas are more likely to read with children than people in suburbs and townships.
- **Have children's books at home.** Having any picture books or 'readers' (learn to read books) at home increases the odds of reading with children. Those with 11-20 children's books are almost twice as likely to read with children than those with 1-10 books.
- **Have any books at home.** Having more than 10 books of any kind in the home, including books for adults, increases the odds of reading with children.
- **Identify as a reader.** Self-identification as a passionate reader more than doubles the odds of reading with children compared to identifying as an occasional reader. Those who identify as non-readers are only half as likely to read with children than a self-identified occasional reader.

These findings do not mean that people in other groups do not read with children. For example, 19% of adults who live with children and identify as non-readers read with children. They are just significantly less likely to do so than the average.

When all other factors are held constant, the following adult characteristics have no significant effect on whether someone reads with children *:

- Gender
- Age (18+)
- Education level up to completed secondary school
- Number of children in the household
- Whether the adult grew up being read to as a child
- Household income level below R25600 per month³



Action Point: how to encourage adults to read with children?
Increase the number of books in homes and build adult confidence in their own reading

These findings are important in dispelling perceptions that reading with children is a 'culture' reserved for urban families with higher incomes and education levels and intergenerational reading patterns. In fact, in terms of demographics and socio-economic groups, everyone in South Africa reads with children.

Adults' own reading practices are very important predictors of the likelihood of reading with children. The National Reading Survey 2023 included the construction of 'Reader Personas' based on statistical clustering of six adult reading practices: reading purpose (prominence of reading for enjoyment, information or communication), reading habit, reading volume,

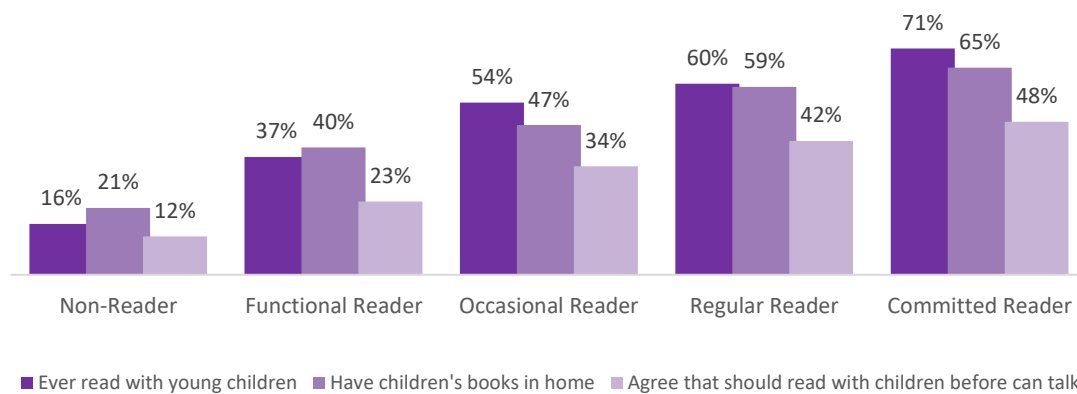
¹ These factors are confirmed through regression analysis at $p < 0.05$ as significant predictors of reading with children.

² The regression results show that adults with tertiary education are less likely to read with children, but this may be because of a relatively small sample size.

³ Adults with household income above R25600 may be more likely to read with children, but the sample size in our survey is too small to find a significant effect.

reading depth (length of texts read), reading identity and reading materials access.⁴ These adult Reader Personas are highly correlated with practices related to reading with children.

Figure 3: Adult Reader Personas and reading with children



What are the barriers to reading with children?

Lack of time is the greatest reported barrier for reading with children. Among all adults living with children, 82% agreed they would read more with children if they had more time. Among those adults who do not read with children, the most prominent reason given was lack of time (47%).

More than three quarters of South Africans with children in their household say they would read more if they had more access to materials that are free, based on interesting topics, based on stories or information that is relatable to them, or available in their

Action Point:

Not having time is one of the top barriers to reading with children. Raise awareness among parents that even small amounts of time spent reading are sufficient (i.e. 5-10 minutes a day), and that one does not need to be highly educated or read much themselves in

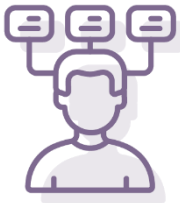
preferred language.

Figure 4: Barriers to reading with children (N=2071 adults who live with children)



Reading
motivati
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barriers

Reading
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barriers



How many older children (11-18) are reading for themselves at home?

South Africa has a policy objective that all children should be able to read fluently and for meaning by age 10. The NRS 2023 includes distinct questions about younger children (0-10) and about older children (11 and above) because the older group should be able to read for themselves.

In practice, however, we know that many children are still learning to read or do not read fluently by age 10 or 11 (DBE 2023). There is therefore still an important role for caregivers in supporting their older children with reading. Even for children who can read for themselves, reading together with adults in the family can be an important social activity, building emotional connection and deeper reading comprehension skills.

The NRS 2023 found that **54% of adults who live with older children (N=1273) read with them.** This may include caregivers supporting children with homework (since commonly used reading materials include school textbooks and readers- see below), as well as reading together for enjoyment.

There are challenges in terms of measuring older children's practices of reading for themselves at home. Caregivers may have less knowledge about their activities than about the activities of younger children. Adults may assume older children are reading when they are not (or that they are not reading when they are). Older children are also more likely to

have their own digital devices, where it may be difficult for caregivers to know if the child is reading on the device or doing non-reading activities (games, videos, etc.). The information about the reading practices of older children presented in this section is therefore based on adults' perceptions of their children's reading practices (1273 adult respondents who live with older children), rather than what children have shared themselves.

72% of adults say that the older children they live with read daily at home on their own. This may include reading related to school as well as reading for other reasons. Only 12% say their older children never read at home.

When comparing these adult-reported findings with what 16-17 year olds report about their own reading practices, 73% of teens say they read frequently (daily or weekly) for information (which includes reading to get information or instructions or learn something for work, study or because you choose to). In addition, 87% of teens report reading frequently to communicate with others, compared with the overall average of 67% of South Africans who read frequently to communicate.

Finally, **teens are more likely to read for enjoyment** (reading for entertainment or relaxation, not work or study) **than older respondents:** 62% read frequently for enjoyment, compared with 52% of 18-35 year olds and 45% over the age of 35.

In terms of the amount of time spent reading for enjoyment, adults report that 84% of their 11-18 year old children spent at least some time each week reading for enjoyment and **40% of older children are spending 11 hours per week or more reading for enjoyment.** When considering what 16-17 year olds report about their own reading habits, the average number of hours per week spent reading for enjoyment is 5 (the same as the overall adult average), but the 75th percentile of teens reads for 20 hours per week, while the 75th percentile of adults only reads for 10 hours per week.⁵

The NRS 2023 findings show that teens (16-17) are not only reading short texts more frequently than older people, but also long texts. 54% of teens read long texts (many pages like a novel or non-fiction book or a religious book), compared to the adult average of 39% who read long texts.



To what extent are caregivers aware of the benefits of reading with children?

Awareness of the benefits of reading with children has increased greatly. High levels of awareness and motivation can be channelled into changing adult behaviour and increasing the demand from caregivers for more materials and support for reading at home.

⁵ Averages are calculated as the mode rather than the mean due to skewed response distributions. The mode is reported for unweighted data as mode analysis is not available for weighted data.

Overall, 94% of South Africans with children in their homes are positive about the benefits of reading with children. This is a big change from 2016, when agreement with positive statements was under 10%.

An average of 93% of adults who live with children see reading with children as improving school performance and learning outcomes by agreeing with the following statements:

- Children do better in school if the children read at home every day
- Children do better in school when adults (parents/ grandparents/ caregivers) read to them
- Telling stories to children before they can talk helps them learn
- Reading to children before they can talk helps them learn
- Children do better in school if the children read for enjoyment

An average of 95% of adults who live with children see reading with children as beneficial for building and preserving culture and identity by agreeing with statements such as:

- Listening to stories is an important way for children to learn about their culture and identity
- Reading is an important way for children to learn about their culture and identity
- It is important that children can read and write in their parent's language (see discussion on languages below)
- It is important that children can read and write in English (see discussion on languages below)
- Reading together is a good way for adults (parents/grandparents/caregivers) and children to bond and build positive relationships with each other

Action Point:

Given that there is high general awareness about the importance of reading with children, move awareness raising to more specific messages about reading frequently, reading with children before they can talk, and reading in African languages. Focus interventions on improving reading material access for anyone who wishes to read with their children.



What reading materials do children have access to at home?

Reading materials access remains a major barrier to reading with children at home.

Considering adults living with young children (under 10), **65% have no picture books.** Only 10% have more than 10 picture books. Only 31% of adults who live with children said their oldest child owned even one book by the age of five.

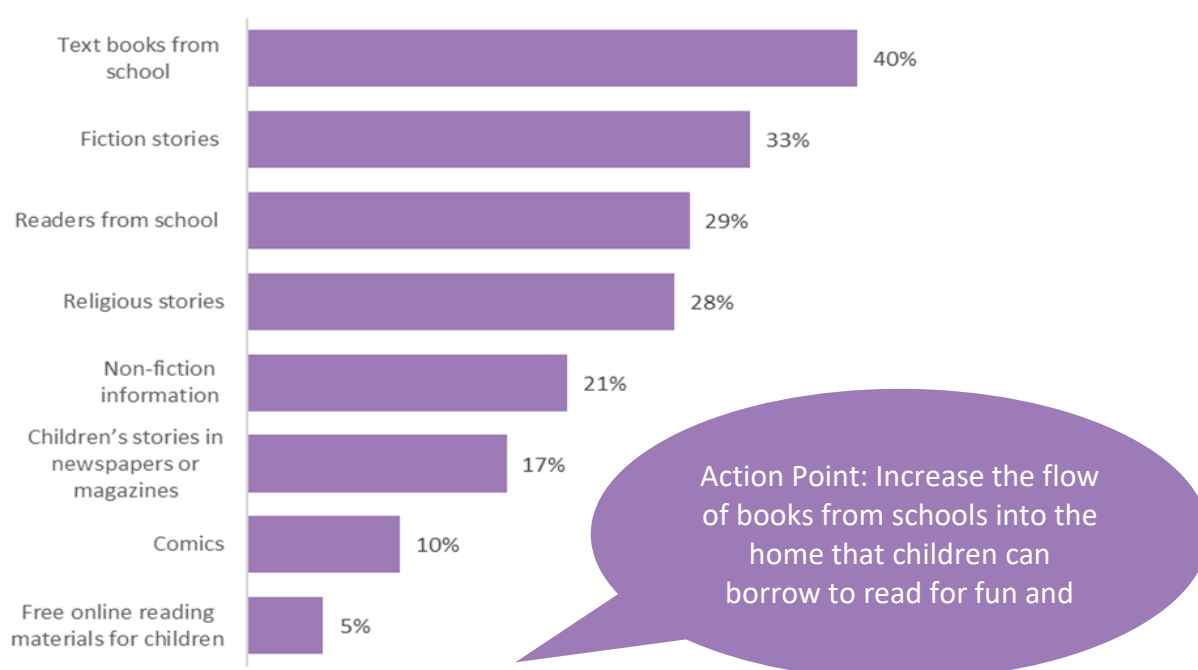
Of adults with older children (11-18), 57% have no age-appropriate books. Only 10% have more than 10 books for older children. Age-appropriate reading materials in a diversity of languages may be less accessible for older children since vastly more attention has been

given to producing African-language picture books and readers for young children than books for progressively older children to read for themselves.

For those who do read with children, **schools are the most important source of reading materials in the home** (Figure 5). Half of South African households with children use school-sourced materials (either textbooks and readers or both) when reading with their children. **13% of households rely solely on materials from school to read with children.**

73% of adults say children bring textbooks and readers home from school daily or several times a week, but only **35% say children frequently bring home books from school that they ‘borrowed to read for fun’.**

Figure 5: Materials read with children in the home (N=2017 people who live with children)



Another important finding concerns **caregiver reading format preferences: only 5% of caregivers read online materials with their children.** This is not a reflection of lack of digital access (75% of caregivers have internet access) nor is it entirely about a lack of awareness of the availability of free reading materials (see below on levels of reading initiative awareness) but seems to reflect a preference for reading with children in print. **77% of adults who live with children believe that it is important for children to read in print** and not on cell phones or digital devices.

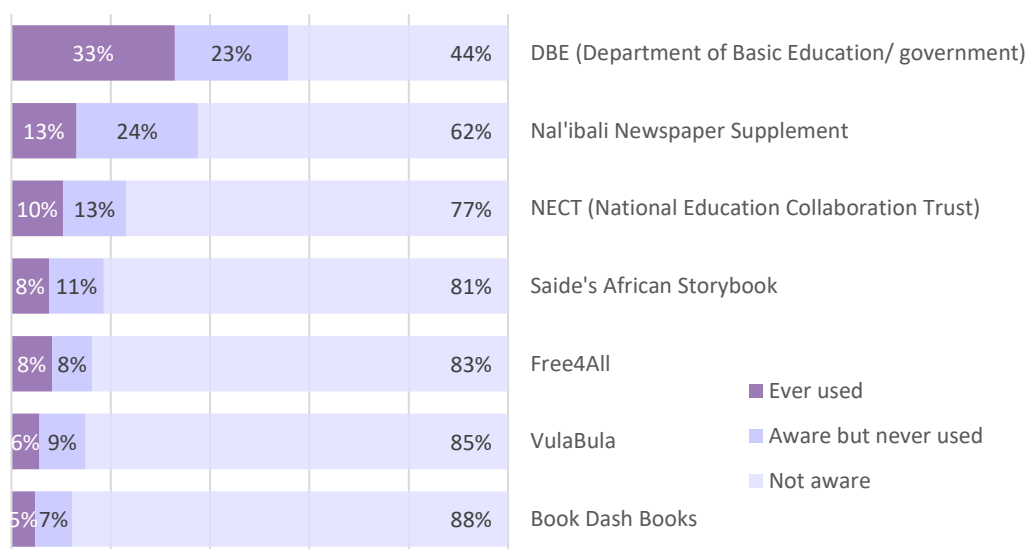


Reading initiative awareness and use

Reading initiatives and free reading materials are reaching many people – and more than in the past. The NRS (2023) asked about three different types of reading initiatives: The highest level of awareness is for free print materials.

- **Free print materials: 70% of adults with children have heard of at least one free print initiative and 42% have used free print materials from at least one source.** Materials produced by the Department of Basic Education are best known (56% aware), followed by the Nal’ibali newspaper supplement (38% aware). Of initiatives included in the survey, only DBE and Nal’ibali resources have ever been used by more than 10% of adults (Figure 6).
- **Free online materials: 21% of adults with children are aware of free online books or stories or mobile story apps.** The most well-known online initiative is Nal’ibali, which is also the most used (13% of adults with children are aware and 4% have used it at least once), followed by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) (7% aware and 3% used at least once).
- **Public reading initiatives: 48% of adults with children have heard of at least one public reading initiative.** The most recognised are Nal’ibali (34%), World Book Day (22%) and National Book Week (19%).

Figure 6: Awareness and use of free print children's stories



National Reading Barometer: the Ecosystem for Children who Read & Reading with Children

National initiatives to improve reading outcomes in the country, including the National Reading Panel among others, focus on early literacy and children learning to read. This is a crucial area of concern, but a holistic approach to improving reading outcomes and reading practices for children, as well as understanding how reading contributes to social and political development in the country as a whole, includes also considering reading by adults. This means portraying the larger enabling environment such as the production and distribution of reading materials as well as the policy environment related to reading. The National Reading Barometer is the first tool that brings together information across the reading ecosystem.

The 2023 National Reading Barometer includes 31 measures (out of a total of 55 measures included in the Barometer) that directly relate to children and young people reading and adults reading with children. Seven measures (out of 8) fall under the Reading Ability dimension, five (out of 18) fall under the dimension of Reading Materials Access, and 14 (out of 19) under the dimension of Institutional Frameworks. Finally, five of the 10 measures representing national reading motivation and practice relate to youth reading and adults reading with children.

These measures do not provide a comprehensive picture of the reading environment for children and teens, but they have been selected, in consultation with the National Department of Basic Education and civil society organisations in the literacy and reading sector, as strategic ‘canary in the gold mine’ indicators. If these indicators improve it means the reading ecosystem is strengthened in ways that enable children and young people to thrive through reading.

National Reading Barometer Methods

The National Reading Barometer was compiled for the first time in 2023 and maps the health of the South African reading ecosystem. It brings together findings from the 2023 National Reading Survey and published secondary data, including data on both adult and child reading, to provide a holistic view of what enables and constrains reading in South Africa.

As an advocacy and awareness-raising tool, the NRB establishes a shared picture of the country’s current condition and trajectory related to reading. This shared picture enables a conversation across the reading and literacy sector concerning relevant dimensions of the reading ecosystem, what targets should be set, and which targets should be prioritised.

Each measure’s status is assessed against a target or standard and rated as:

- “enabling” (green): on or above target to strengthen the reading ecosystem
- “emerging” (amber): slightly below target but trending in the right direction
- “constraining” (red): significantly under target for the optimum contribution to the national reading environment

To establish cutoff points for the ratings, we considered:

- How South Africa compares to other upper- and lower-middle income countries (UMICs and LMICs)
- Targets and objectives set by the relevant government department
- Data owner and expert assessments
- Equity considerations (whether ability or access is evenly distributed geographically and socio-economically)

The measures and ratings were identified through a consultative process. All measures related to children were confirmed through consultations with representatives of the Department of Basic Education and/or civil society organisations in the literacy and

Furthermore, all the other National Reading Barometer indicators contribute to an enabling environment for children and young people, even if they are not directly or mainly targeted at young people. For example, there are 12 measures related to libraries that are not included in the discussion below (see [Publications | National Reading Barometer South Africa \(readingbarometersa.org\)](#) for the full NRB 2023 report and a Special Issue Brief on Libraries) although public libraries provide crucial services for learners and young people. Similarly, measures related to digital access and the publishing industry are not listed here but impact on children and young people being able to access affordable reading materials of various kinds.

Reading Ability Dimension

South Africa has unequal early learning outcomes and extremely poor primary

South Africa has unequal early learning outcomes (RA1 & RA2) and extremely poor primary school literacy (RA5 & RA6) but reaches acceptable levels of basic (functional) youth and adult literacy by international comparison (RA7 & RA8). Currently we do not know as much as we would like to about early literacy skills, but new assessments recently launched by the Department of Basic Education mean more comprehensive data will be available in the next few years (RA3 & RA4).

*Figure 7: National Reading Barometer 2023 Measures
Selection related to children/teens: Reading Ability Dimension*

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
RA1	% of children 'on track' for early literacy at age 4/5 who attend an early learning programme	Thrive by Five Index	2021	55%	Constraining
RA2	Percentage points gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile 1&2 children 'on track' for early literacy at age 4/5	Thrive by Five Index	2021	17%	Emerging
RA3	% of Foundation Phase learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks	FUNS	n/a	n/a	Not yet available
RA4	Degree of inequality in learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks	FUNS	n/a	n/a	Not yet available
RA5	% of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)	PIRLS	2021	19% (score 288)	Constraining
RA6	Change in % of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)	PIRLS	2021	-3% (score -32)	Constraining
RA7	% of youth ages 15-24 who are functionally literate	World Bank	2019	98%	Enabling

Reading Materials Access Dimension

Reading materials access in homes is a major barrier for children learning to read and young people expanding their knowledge of the world through reading. Schools are a crucial source of reading materials, but most schools do not have functioning libraries. Furthermore, the data concerning library availability in schools is currently unavailable, reducing the ability to advocate, plan for and monitor improvements (RM8). The availability of reading materials in appropriate languages is essential, especially for adults reading with very young children before they enter school and young children learning to read, but only 3,7% of the educational titles commissioned by educational institutions and produced by the South African publishing industry are in African languages (RM13).

Lack of access to age and language-appropriate reading materials is a major barrier to children’s reading.

Civil society organisations, in contrast, produced and distributed over 6 million pieces of free printed reading material for children in 2022, a large proportion of which were in African languages. However, when considered in relation to the number of children with a need for reading materials at home (see Annex for calculations on measure RM13) this remains insufficient. Furthermore, in addition to the scale of materials production efforts, distribution of materials is not sufficiently coordinated across government, civil society and the private sector to ensure equitable access by geography, language and income group. While 42% of caregivers accessing some form of free reading material represents a major improvement compared to 2016 (National Reading Survey 2016), it still means that more than half of caregivers have no access (RM14). The lack of access to children’s books is even

*Figure 8: National Reading Barometer 2023 Measures
Selection related to children/teens: Reading Materials Access Dimension*

more severe, with just over a third of children under the age of 10 having any age-appropriate books in the home (RM18).

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
RM8	% of Public Ordinary Operational Schools with stocked libraries and/or classroom libraries	SMS	2022	n/a	Not available
RM10	% of educational titles (print and digital) published in African languages	PASA Survey	2022	3.70%	Emerging
RM13	Number of free printed reading materials for children produced and distributed by civil society	Compiled for NRB	2023	>6,011,130 (0.54 per child <1)	Emerging
RM14	% of adults who live with children that have used free printed reading materials	NRS	2023	42%	Emerging
RM18	% of households with children <10 with any children's books	NRS	2022	35%	Emerging

Institutional Framework Dimension

Figure 9: National Reading Barometer 2023 Measures
Selection related to children/teens: Institutional Framework Dimension

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
IF1	National DBE has policy framework and capacity to hold provinces accountable for reading literacy policy directives and budget use	DBE qualitative assessment	2023	Policy framework and capacity insufficient	Emerging
IF2	Provincial DoEs and Treasuries allocate and use budgets in line with policy directives that prioritise reading literacy	DBE qualitative assessment	2023	Inconsistent allocation, use and reporting	Not yet available
IF3	Provincial LTSM budgets are clearly ringfenced and fully utilised	Treasury data	2023	Difficult to isolate LTSM budget/ spend in most provinces	Not yet available
IF4	Total value and % of CSI funding spent on literacy	Triologue	2022	~R479.6m (4.4% of CSI funding)	Emerging
IF5	LTSM policy is adopted and implemented	DBE	2023	Draft done 2018, waiting for passage of BELA	Constraining
IF6	Benchmarks for reading fluency are established in all languages	DBE	2023	Benchmarks launched, FUNS assessments initiated	Enabling
IF7	National standardised assessments to monitor reading ability developed and implemented	DBE	2023	Thrive by 5, ELNA, FUNS and Systemic Evaluations launched	Enabling
IF8	Inclusive education policy is in place and implemented	DBE	2023	In place, but under-resourced and ineffective	Emerging
IF9	National Reading Plan is developed, regularly monitored and reported on	DBE	2023	MTSF in place, revised plan under development	Emerging
IF10	Zero-rating policy for educational websites is in place and implemented	DCDT, DGMT	2023	In place, but no implementation mechanism	Emerging
IF11	Language in Education Policy is in place and implemented	DBE	2023	In place, but inconsistent implementation	Emerging
IF17	Quality of initial teacher education programmes for teaching reading in African languages	CoPAL	2022	Insufficient	Constraining
IF18	Ratio of new teachers to projected teacher demand	RESEP	2022	69%	Constraining
IF19	Number of institutional Litasa members	Litasa	2023	62	Emerging

The Institutional Framework provides the incentive system within which reading is taught and reading materials are produced and distributed. These incentives are shaped by the priorities defined in government policy, with the associated budgets and institutional capacities, but also by the priorities set by non-governmental actors, including the private sector and civil society organisations. The measures included in the Institutional Framework dimension of the NRB show the extent to which actors across the literacy and reading ecosystem in South Africa have a shared sense of focus on the importance of reading. This

dimension also shows if there is a coherent understanding of how different policies and institutions work together to enable reading throughout a person's life. As with the other dimensions, this issue brief only details those measures in the Barometer that deal directly with children, but other measures, such as policies relating to VAT and import tariffs for books, also impact on children.

When considered holistically and for all age groups, reading has a complex ecosystem with no single institution mandated to guide and oversee all aspects.

- The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is responsible for the teaching of reading in schools, and since 2022 also for pre-school educational activities, but does not have a mandate to engage in depth with caregivers in the home or with teens and adults once they are outside the formal schooling system. Even within the Department, the responsibility for activities within schools lies with provincial departments of education (IF2) - (including the procurement of learning and teaching support materials LTSM (IF3) and the hiring of Foundation Phase teachers (IF18) - while the national department plays a guiding and oversight role (IF1). The oversight role includes developing, monitoring and enforcing policies and standards (IF5, 8, 9, 11) and monitoring reading outcomes (IF6 & 7).
- The Department of Higher Education and Training has a mandate that includes adult education and to a limited extent adult literacy, but this does not extend to encouraging adults outside of educational institutions to read. It also trains teachers, and the way teachers are trained to teach reading (especially in African languages) feeds back into the basic education space (IF17).
- Public libraries are located within the mandate of the national Department of Sports, Arts and Culture and play a crucial role in enabling reading for young people as well as adults but have no mandate or resources to address reading in homes (see the full technical Barometer report under [Publications | National Reading Barometer South Africa \(readingbarometersa.org\)](#) for information about the libraries measures).
- Civil society organisations engaged in literacy work tend to focus on young children and their caregivers, very few target older children/teens and adults, and while there is a coordinating body for work in literacy (Litasa) (IF19), a competitive funding environment makes programme coordination challenging.
- Corporate social investments bring additional resources into the education sector, but not enough of this funding is ringfenced for literacy and reading (see measure IF4) and there is very little collaboration of coordination for how this funding is used.
- The publishing, book sale and educational materials (print and digital) industry is an independent commercial sector with its own incentive structures which can be influenced through government policies such as LTSM procurement processes (IF5), VAT and important tariffs on books (see full Barometer report), and data zero-rating on educational websites (IF10), but otherwise does not fall under government direction.

Overall, there is currently no overarching statement of intent or 'theory of change' for reading in South Africa. The National Reading Plan, which is currently being revised under the auspices of the DBE, is a positive step but is likely to focus mostly on reading by young children with the goal of all 10-year-olds being able to read for meaning by 2030. The National Reading Survey and other studies show that this goal is unlikely to be achieved through the schooling system alone, requiring an enabling home and community environment for reading before schooling starts, in parallel to primary schooling, and

continuing into secondary and further education. The home environment includes adults reading with children but also adults reading for themselves (modelling reading and having a reading identity), having reading materials in the home, and having access to affordable or free reading materials (whether to own or borrow through libraries).

Reading Motivation & Practice Dimension

*Figure 10: National Reading Barometer 2023 Measures
Selection related to children/teens: Motivation & Practice Dimension*

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
MP1	% of adults with a strong 'reader' identity	NRS	2023	35%	Emerging
MP2	% of adults who frequently read for enjoyment	NRS	2023	48%	Emerging
MP3	% of adults who frequently read for information	NRS	2023	53%	Emerging
MP4	% of youth who frequently read for enjoyment	NRS	2023	52%	Emerging
MP5	% of youth who frequently read for information	NRS	2023	59%	Emerging
MP6	% of adults who frequently read fiction or nonfiction books (paper or digital)	NRS	2023	32%	Constraining
MP7	% of adults who read digital materials (excluding social media)	NRS	2023	55%	Emerging
MP8	% of adults living with children who read to them	NRS	2023	52%	Emerging
MP9	% of adults living with children who read to them before they can talk	NRS	2023	35%	Emerging
MP10	% of adults who agree that reading with children at home is valuable for their schooling	NRS	2023	93%	Enabling

The Reading Motivation & Practice Dimension represents the 'outcomes' of the reading ecosystem by summarising key metrics for how South Africans read and feel about reading from the National Reading Survey (2023). The adult metrics (MP1, 2, 6, 7) are retained in the table above because they offer points of comparison with the measures relating to youth and children. We see that more young people (aged 16-34) read frequently (once a week or more) for both information and enjoyment than the adult average (MP 4 & 5 compared with MP 2 & 3). Just over half of youth reading regularly in these ways, however, is insufficient for a country that is socially, politically and economically adaptable.

The measures concerning adults reading with children (MP8 & 9) have improved since 2016 (NRS 2016) but remain 'emerging' rather than 'enabling'. It is encouraging, however, that levels of awareness about the importance of reading with children at home are now very high (MP10).

The measures related to children and young people across all four dimensions of the Barometer are described in more detail in the Annex. This includes how the rating cut-off points are determined and notes on the interpretation of each measure.

Recommendations

The following recommendation emerge from the combined findings of the National Reading Survey and the National Reading Barometer. They are directed primarily at decision-makers in the National Department of Education, given the DBE's ability to not only act within its own mandate but also to convene other actors within government and across civil society on matters relating to children and young people. They are also directed at decision-makers in civil society and funders of education and early childhood development programming as well the publishing industry players that produce reading materials for children and young people. One of the key goals of the National Reading Barometer project is to increase levels of collaboration and partnership in the reading and literacy sector.

1. Implementation of targeted reading campaigns focusing on
 - The importance of reading with children from a very young age, before they can talk
 - Raising awareness among parents that even small amounts of time spent reading are sufficient (i.e. 5-10 minutes a day)
 - Building caregivers' confidence, emphasizing that you don't need to be highly educated, and that it's okay to 'give it a go' without worrying about doing it 'right'
 - Reading with children in African languages
 - Improving reading material access; increase accessibility of free and low-cost print reading materials in African languages at people's preferred pickup points - libraries, post offices, schools, supermarkets/retail stores and clinics
2. Encourage adults to read with children by
 - Increasing the number of books in homes. Large-scale campaigns are needed to get a few books into every home, and homes with a few books need easier, more affordable ways to build their libraries
 - Raising awareness about where to access free and low-cost reading materials
 - Build adult confidence in their own reading identities
3. Increase the flow of books from schools into the home by
 - Ensuring every classroom has a book corner or classroom library
 - Ensuring children borrow books from schools
 - Working towards every child owning an anthology of graded readers and an anthology of storybooks alongside textbooks and workbooks

4. Interventions can work with caregivers who are Non-Readers to
 - Tell stories to children
 - Distribute wordless picture books for small children (which can be “read” by anyone regardless of reading ability), and
 - Build their confidence to read children’s books
5. Libraries already provide crucial services for school-going children and young people. In addition, they can improve their contribution to enabling children to read by
 - Encouraging library users to bring their children to the library or read with them in the library. Few library users currently do so. Public libraries can create campaigns to make existing library users aware that children are welcome and the benefits of reading with children and encourage caregivers in the community to become new library users with their children.
 - Older learners and students are the most avid library users. Develop strategies to retain young library users as they grow older and leave school.

Partnerships and Collective Action

DBE, education/child development funders and/or leading civil society organisations can contribute to and/or convene discussions across the reading and literacy sector towards collective action on strengthening the national reading ecosystem:

6. As a literacy sector, set clearer targets for desirable reading outcomes (beyond Foundation Phase reading benchmarks) and clarify collective pathways to achieving those targets.
7. As a literacy sector, set clear targets for the desirable number of books every child should own by the age of 10, cost the production and distribution of these materials and divide up commitment to meet these targets across government and non-government actors (funders, materials producers, distributors, etc.).
8. Agree on an integrated approach to increasing access to reading materials for adolescents and adults, in appropriate languages, through a combination of incentive publishing (commercial, non-profit and self-publishing) and free materials distribution.
9. Increase the proportion of CSI education funding that is ring-fenced for literacy and materials access, including children’s literacy, adults reading with children and adult reading.
10. Find multi-stakeholder solutions to the challenge of training and retaining sufficient teachers in the coming years, especially teachers with dedicated training to teach reading in African languages.
11. Allocate training, resources and monitoring to improve the implementation of existing policies such as the Inclusive Education Policy, zero-rating of educational websites, the Language in Education Policy and the forthcoming National Reading Plan.
12. Libraries are the top preferred location to pick up free reading materials. Libraries can collaborate with campaigns that give away free reading materials on a large scale, such

as the Nal'ibali campaign, Book Dash and others, to run campaigns and provide routine distribution.

13. Public libraries can explore expanding existing pilots for the joint provision of library services to schools and the public (multi-purpose libraries), in partnership with the Department of Basic Education as well as civil society organisations working to increase the availability of reading materials for children in schools. Similarly, TVET colleges and other further education institutions targeting youth, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training, can be approached for partnerships around multi-purpose library facilities.

Improving the Data

14. Consolidate existing budget and performance data across provincial Departments of Education so that national and provincial budgets, staffing, LTSM procurement and overall prioritisation of resources towards early grade reading and literacy can be tracked and monitored more accurately by National DBE.
15. Ensure better data availability regarding the presence of libraries, classroom libraries and book boxes in all schools so that monitoring can be improved.

Further Research

The National Reading Survey dataset is open source and further research using the dataset is encouraged. Suggestions for further research, based on initial results from the NRS include:

- **Teen Reading and Pathways to Teen Literacy:** Compare teen self-reported reading practices (16-18 year old survey respondents) to caregiver reports about teen reading practices (15-18 year old children living in homes of respondents). Research teen reading practices to understand the degree to which parents' perceptions of these are accurate and the role of digital reading in enabling or constraining comprehension. Interrogate the relationship between poor literacy skills in Grade 4 yet high levels of reported reading activity by older teens.

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Annex

Barometer Measures Relating to Children: Reading Ability

RA1: Emergent literacy and language skills at age 4/5

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	% of children 'on track' for emergent literacy and language at age 4/5 who attend an early learning programme
Data Source	Thrive by Five Index
Data Point Year	2021
Performance	55%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 80-100% of Grade R children are on track / school-ready Emerging: 60-80% on track / school-ready Constraining: <60% on track / school-ready
Notes	The Thrive by Five Index will be repeated every three years from its initial baseline in 2021.

RA2: Inequality in emergent literacy and language skills

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Percentage points gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile 1&2 children 'on track' for emergent literacy and language at age 4/5
Data Source	Thrive by Five Index
Year	2021
Performance	17% gap between Q5 and Q1&2
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 10% or smaller gap between richest and poorest children Emerging: 11-20% gap Constraining: >20% gap
Notes	In addition to a national average level of children 'on track' for early literacy, the Thrive by Five Index shows high levels of inequality in the early education system, as reflected by this measure, which compares scores achieved by children in quintile 1&2 ECD centres versus children in quintile 5 centres.

RA3: Foundation Phase reading skills

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	% of Foundation Phase learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks
Data Source	Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS)
Year	n/a
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Cutoff points will be updated in future Barometers in consultation with the DBE when targets have been set.
Notes	The Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS) will measure outcomes against Grade 1-4 and Grade 6 reading benchmarks on letter recognition and oral reading fluency. The assessment framework and tools were launched in May 2023 and data collection throughout the education system will be implemented from late 2023 onward. Targets are being discussed by DBE as part of the National Reading Plan and revised Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF).

RA4: Inequality in Foundation Phase reading skills

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	Degree of inequality in learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks

Data Source	Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS)
Year	n/a
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Cutoff points will be determined in consultation with DBE, considering inequality between quintiles, provinces and/or languages.
Notes	The Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS) will measure outcomes against Grade 1-4 and Grade 6 reading benchmarks on letter recognition and oral reading fluency. The assessment framework and tools were launched in May 2023 and data collection throughout the education system will be implemented from late 2023 onward. Targets are being discussed by DBE as part of the National Reading Plan and revised Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF).

RA5: Grade 4 reading skills

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	% of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)
Data Source	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)
Year	2021
Performance	19% (288 points)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: PIRLS score of 355 or above (MTSF 2021 target) Emerging: PIRLS score of 320 (2016 level) to 350 Constraining: PIRLS score below 320 (regressing from 2016 level)
Notes	The rating is based on the targets set in the MTSF (2021), which may be revised based on the May 2023 publication of the 2021 PIRLS results.

RA6: Improvement in Grade 4 reading skills

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Change in % of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)
Data Source	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)
Year	2021
Performance	-3% (-32 points)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: improvement at or above DBE target rate Emerging: improvement slower than DBE target rate Constraining: static or worsening
Notes	This measure augments measure RA5 by noting that South Africa's PIRLS score should not only be judged based on its absolute average value but also by the rate of change achieved over time. South Africa had one of the highest rates of improvement between the 2011 and 2016 PIRLS assessments and since the 2021 results are at least partly due to Covid-19 effects, this measure in future iterations of the NRB will show the extent to which an improvement trajectory has been regained. The rating for future iterations of the NRB will take DBE targets for the 2026 PIRLS assessments into account (which have not yet been set).

RA7: Youth functional literacy

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	% of youth ages 15-24 who are functionally literate
Data Source	World Bank
Year	2019
Performance	98%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: at or above average for Upper Middle Income Countries (98% in 2020) Emerging: <3% below UMIC average

	Constraining: >3% below UMIC average
Notes	Global data on literacy only measures functional literacy (the ability to read for basic meaning), not more advanced forms of comprehension that might be comparable with the PIRLS or similar assessments. Nonetheless, for broad functional literacy rates, South Africa is comparable with the rates of other Upper Middle Income Countries. The youth literacy rate is reported separately from the adult literacy rate as it reacts more quickly to changes in the national reading ecosystem.

Barometer Measures Relating to Children: Reading Materials Access

RM8: School libraries

Rating	Not available
Indicator Description	% of Public Ordinary Operational Schools with stocked libraries and/or classroom libraries
Data Source	School Monitoring Survey
Year	2022
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 80-100% of schools have a stocked library or classroom libraries in most classrooms Emerging: 60-80% have a library or classroom libraries in most classrooms Constraining: <60% have a library or classroom libraries in most classrooms
Notes	The data for this measure is not available because the NEIMS data only includes full school libraries, not classroom libraries or book boxes, and the 2021/22 School Monitoring Survey, which should have collected data on classroom libraries, did not result in reliable data for this measure. Future iterations of the NRB should be able to draw on future School Monitoring Survey data for this measure.

RM10: African languages: educational publishing

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of educational titles (print and digital) published in African languages
Data Source	Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) Book Publishing Industry Survey
Year	2022
Performance	3,7%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: The education sector commissions African language publications across primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and at least 5% of titles published are in African languages Emerging: The education sector commissions African language publications for limited grades (mainly primary), and 3-5% of titles published are in African languages Constraining: The education sector commissions few African language publications and <3% of titles published are in African languages
Notes	The publishing industry is divided into two major sectors: educational and trade publishing. Educational publications such as textbooks and 'readers' are generally commissioned by the Department of Basic Education of the Department of Higher Education and Training. The languages of publication are therefore also determined by the commissioning agencies rather than the publishing industry. In 2022, 3,7% of educational publication titles published in South Africa were in languages other than English and Afrikaans, i.e. indigenous African languages. The cutoff points for this measure represent debates on the importance of learners being taught to read in their home languages (requiring reading materials in

	those languages for Grades R-3) but also continuing to read in home languages beyond the Foundation Phase, and studying African languages as subjects throughout primary and secondary school and into tertiary.
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RM13: Free print reading material distribution (civil society)

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Number of free printed reading materials for children produced and distributed by civil society
Data Source	Compiled for NRB
Year	2022
Performance	>6 011 130 (0.54 per child <10)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 1 or more printed materials per year for every child under 10 (11.2m children in 2022) Emerging: 0.5-1 printed materials per child per year Constraining: <0.5 printed materials per child per year
Notes	<p>6,011,130 free publications were distributed in 2022 (materials focus on reading with and by children). This data was compiled for the NRB from seven of the largest reading materials producers in civil society: Nal'ibali, NECT, Book Dash, Free4All, African Storybooks, Room to Read and Biblionef. It does not include printed materials produced by the DBE.</p> <p>The rating cutoff points are based on the calculation that each child under the age of 10 should own a minimum of 20 books or printed materials by the age of 10 (2 books per year). Targets assume reading material provision is not exclusively the responsibility of civil society and that civil society could contribute half of this target (1 material per child per year) with the public sector covering the other half.</p> <p>Given the population of 11,2 million children aged 0-9, this means an annual civil society target of 11,2m printed materials distributed. Currently, many civil society organisations distribute multiple materials to the same children (i.e. collections or monthly distributions) so to truly reach every child receiving one printed material per year, this number would need to be higher.</p>

RM14: Free print reading material access

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who live with children who have used free printed reading materials
Data Source	National Reading Survey 2023
Year	2023
Performance	42%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults who live with children have used free print reading materials Emerging: 33-66% have used free print materials Constraining: <33% have used free print materials
Notes	This measure is based on finding from the National Reading Survey 2023. Adults living with children were asked if they had used free printed materials from a list of organisations including the DBE, Nal'ibali, NECT, African Storybook (SAIDE), Free4All, Vula Bula and Book Dash. 42% had used at least one of these materials at least once.

RM18: Children's books in homes

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of households with children <10 with any children's books
Data Source	NRS

Year	2023
Performance	35%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of homes with children <age 10 have children's books Emerging: 33-66% have children's books Constraining: <33% have children's books
Notes	This measure is based on the National Reading Survey 2023 finding on the % of households with young children (aged less than 10 years) that reported having any picture books or 'readers' (books for children learning to read) in the home. This may include 'readers' brought home from school. While not directly comparable, a 35-country UNICEF survey of more than 100,000 children ages 3-6 found that an average of 52% of children had at least one children's book at home.

Barometer Measures Relating to Children: Institutional Frameworks

IF1: Budget accountability: national DBE

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	National DBE has policy framework and capacity to hold provinces accountable for reading literacy policy directives and budget use
Data Source	DBE qualitative assessment
Year	2023
Performance	Policy framework and capacity insufficient
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: National DBE, supported by National Treasury, has a clear policy framework and monitoring and oversight capacity to hold provinces accountable for consistent implementation of policy directives relating to reading literacy budget allocations and implementation Emerging: National DBE has the mandate and basic policy documents to shape national and provincial practice on reading literacy implementation but lacks full policy clarity and sufficient oversight and monitoring capacity Constraining: National DBE lacks the mandate, policies and capacity to oversee and monitor provincial implementation of reading literacy activities
Notes	The mandate of the national Department of Education is to set policy direction and monitor/oversee Provincial Departments of Education in the implementation of these policies. The measure is rated 'emerging' because national DBE currently has insufficient policy clout related to the prioritisation of reading, even though initiatives such as the revised Reading Sector Plan are underway to address this. Furthermore, the DBE has limited capacity to monitor and enforce compliance by Provinces with such policy directives. Rating of this measure is based on consultation with the DBE.

IF2: Budget allocation and use: provincial Departments of Education

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	Provincial DoEs and Treasuries allocate and use budgets in line with policy directives that prioritise reading literacy
Data Source	DBE qualitative assessment
Year	2023
Performance	Inconsistent allocation, use and reporting
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 7-9 provincial Departments of Education allocate, utilise and report on reading literacy budgets according to or above national policy directives Emerging: 4-6 provincial DoEs allocate, utilise and report on reading literacy

	budgets according to policy directives Constraining: 1-3 provincial DoEs allocate, utilise and report on reading literacy budgets according to policy directives
Notes	Provincial Departments of Education (DoEs) have the mandate to implement education activities including teacher training and staffing, learning and teaching support material (LTSM) purchasing and the daily management of schooling. This measure reflects on the extent to which provincial DoEs prioritise reading in their budgets and programming, especially in the Foundation Phase, by following national policy directives. The measure is currently rated as 'not available' because there is currently no consistent allocation and utilisation of education budgets towards the prioritisation of reading and literacy across provinces, and data on provincial budget allocations and utilisation is not consistently reported on or collated to enable monitoring against national or provincial policies. This measure is based on consultation with the DBE

IF3: LTSM budgets

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	Provincial LTSM budgets are clearly ringfenced and fully utilised
Data Source	Treasury data
Year	2023
Performance	Difficult to isolate LTSM budget and spend in most provinces
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 7-9 provinces have clearly ring-fenced LTSM budgets and they are fully utilised Emerging: 4-6 provinces have clearly ring-fenced LTSM budgets and they are fully utilised Constraining: 1-3 provinces have clearly ring-fenced LTSM budgets and they are fully utilised
Notes	LTSM are not ringfenced in most provincial education budgets and so spend against budget is not transparent.

IF4: CSI funding for literacy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Total value and % of CSI funding spent on literacy
Data Source	Triologue Business in Society Report (2022)
Year	2022
Performance	~R479.6m (4.4% of CSI funding)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Education makes up at least 33% of CSI funding, and dedicated literacy interventions make up at least 33% of education funding (~11% of all CSI funds) Emerging: Education makes up at least 33% of CSI spend, but literacy funding is less than 33% of education funding Constraining: Education and literacy funding are minimal in CSI allocations (education <33% of all spend and literacy <33% of education)
Notes	In 2022, of R10.9 billion in CSI funding, 44% went to education (R4.8 billion), and 10% of education funding went to literacy (est. R479.6 million). This was a 19% increase on the previous year's total literacy investment.

IF5: LTSM policy

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) policy is adopted and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Draft done 2018, waiting for passage of Basic Education Laws Amendment bill

	(BELA)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: LTSM policy is formally adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	A draft LTSM policy has been complete since 2018, but finalisation is dependent on passing of BELA.

IF6: Reading fluency benchmarks

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Benchmarks for reading fluency are established in all languages
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Benchmarks launched and incorporated into new assessment tools (see IF7)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Reading benchmarks are adopted and implemented through regular data collection Emerging: In development or launched but not implemented Constraining: No benchmarks in place
Notes	Policy on reading benchmarks has been developed and most of the research to establish language and Grade benchmarks is complete (launched in 2022). Regular data collection to establish actual learner performance against benchmarks will commence from 2023 onwards.

IF7: National standardised assessments

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	National standardised assessments to monitor reading ability developed and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Thrive by 5, ELNA, FUNS and Systemic Evaluations launched
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Standardised assessment tools to monitor reading ability are adopted and implemented Emerging: Developed or launched but not yet implemented Constraining: No standardised assessment tools
Notes	Multiple standardised assessments were launched as official DBE assessments in 2022-2023, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thrive by Five, which assesses emergent literacy and language of children ages 4-5; - The Early Learning National Assessment (ELNA), which assesses Grade 1s on emergent literacy and numeracy; - The Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS), which assess Grade 1-4 and Grade 6 reading benchmarks on letters and oral reading fluency; - Systemic Evaluations, which assess Grade 3, 6 and 9 in Mathematics and Languages.

IF8: Inclusive education policy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Inclusive education policy is in place and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	In place, but under-resourced
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Inclusive education policy is adopted and implemented

	Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	Inclusive education policy is in place but implementation in most provinces is under-resourced and therefore ineffective. White paper on inclusive education is currently being reviewed.

IF9: National reading policy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	National Reading Plan is developed, regularly monitored and reported on
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) in place, revised plan under development
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: National reading plan is adopted, implemented, monitored and reported on Emerging: Adopted but not implemented, monitored and/or reported on Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	MTSF to 2024 is adopted. Revised Reading Plan is currently in development to support implementation.

IF10: Zero-rating of educational websites

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Zero-rating policy for educational websites is in place and implemented
Data Source	Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), DGMT, Directions on Zero-rating of Content and Websites for Education and Health - Open By-laws South Africa (openbylaws.org.za)
Year	2023
Performance	In place, but not implemented
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Zero-rating of educational websites is adopted, included in mobile network operator (MNO) conditions of license and implemented Emerging: Adopted and included in MNO license conditions but not implemented Constraining: No policy; not included in MNO licenses
Notes	Zero-rating of educational websites is included in mobile network operators' conditions of license but there is no mechanism in place to facilitate this.

IF11: Language in education policy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Language in Education Policy is in place and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	In place, but inconsistent implementation
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Language in Education policy is adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	The policy on language use (languages of teaching and learning and grade of transition to English or Afrikaans) in Foundation and Intermediate Phase is established in the CAPS curriculum, but implementation is unclear and inconsistent

IF17: Initial teacher education for reading in African languages

Rating	Constraining
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Indicator Description	Quality of initial teacher education programmes for teaching reading in African languages
Data Source	Universities South Africa's Community of Practice for the Teaching and Learning of African Languages (CoPAL)
Year	2022
Performance	Insufficient
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Foundation Phase teacher training courses have a core focus on pedagogies and practice in teaching reading in African languages Emerging: Core focus on pedagogies and practice in teaching reading, but African language focus is limited Constraining: Pedagogies and practices for teaching reading are not a core focus in most programmes
Notes	Foundation Phase Teacher training courses do not provide sufficient training to teachers in pedagogies for teaching reading at Foundation Phase in African languages. There is a government framework on teaching reading in African languages , but it is not effectively implemented.

IF18: Teacher pipeline

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Ratio of new teachers to projected teacher demand
Data Source	RESEP
Year	2022
Performance	69%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >90% of projected demand is met by new teachers Emerging: 70-90% of demand is met Constraining: <70% of demand is met
Notes	Projected teacher demand will be rising quickly in the next decade, as calculated based on teacher ages and retirement rates as well as the need for teachers to address current class sizes and other factors. The supply of appropriately trained teachers to fulfil this need is currently insufficient. The 69% datapoint is calculated based on reported actual ~30500 graduates as a proportion of the estimated ~44000 required projected graduates in 2022.

IF19: Civil society literacy sector

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Number of institutional Litasa members
Data Source	Litasa
Year	2023
Performance	62
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >80 members Emerging: 41-80 members Constraining: 1-40 members
Notes	This measure is a proxy for the overall level of capacity of the civil society literacy sector. The number of institutional members of the Literacy Association of South Africa (Litasa) does not capture the full capacity of the sector, since a) not all civil society organisations active in literacy and reading are members and b) membership does not reflect on the level of coordination and effectiveness within the sector. See recommendations.

Barometer Measures Relating to Children: Reading Motivation & Practice

For most of the measures in this dimension there are no established targets, standards or international comparative measures on the proportion of a population that ‘should’ be reading in a certain way. The cutoff points have therefore been set by the NRB team according to two logics:

- For measures related to reading for enjoyment, reading books and reading digital materials (which can be considered personal preferences and choices), the cutoff points are set for thirds of the population. For example, if more than two-thirds read for enjoyment, this is considered enabling.
- For measures related to reading for information (which is reading in the context of study or work), the cutoff points are set for quarters of the population. I.e. if more than three-quarters of the population read for information, this is considered enabling.
- For reading with children, there is some comparative data, as described in the notes for MP 8 and 9 below.
- For attitudes towards reading with children, the cutoff points are set for quarters of the population, as positive attitudes and perceptions are usually more widespread than practice.

MP4: Reading for enjoyment - youth

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of youth who frequently read for enjoyment
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	52%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of youth read for enjoyment frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 33-66% read for enjoyment frequently Constraining: <33% read for enjoyment frequently
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points. Youth are included as a distinct category because interventions in the national reading ecosystem are likely to change youth results faster than overall adult average results. This enables better tracking of the impacts of ecosystem strengthening efforts between iterations of the NRB.

MP5: Reading for information - youth

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of youth who frequently read for information
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	59%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >75% of youth read for information frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 50-75% read for information frequently Constraining: <50% read for information frequently
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points. Youth are included as a distinct category because interventions in the national reading ecosystem are likely to change youth results faster than overall adult average results. This enables better tracking of the impacts of ecosystem strengthening efforts between iterations of

	the NRB.
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MP8: Reading with children

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults living with children who read to them
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	52%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults who live with children read with them Emerging: 33-66% read with children Constraining: <33% read with children
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP9: Reading with young children

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults living with children who read to them before they can talk
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	35%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults who live with children read with them before they can talk Emerging: 33-66% read with children before they can talk Constraining: <33% read with children before they can talk
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP10: Attitudes towards reading with children

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	% of adults who agree that reading with children at home is valuable for their schooling
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	93%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >75% of adults agree that reading with children is valuable for their schooling Emerging: 50-75% agree reading with children is valuable Constraining: <50% agree reading with children is valuable
Notes	See section introduction above for logic on cutoff points.