

# A NOVEL APPROACH BOOSTS LITERACY IN DOMINICAN SCHOOLS



Literacy skills are essential building blocks for success in primary education and advancement to secondary schooling. Yet schools in the Dominican Republic still struggle to impart basic literacy skills to their students, despite institutional and policy reforms.

To address this issue, the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Read Program** created an approach for primary students in Dominican public schools, successfully combining teacher training and mentoring with tailored practice materials designed to meet children at their individual reading levels.

Not only did students' reading precursor skills<sup>1</sup> improve within two years, but a subsequent national evaluation of sixth graders showed that students with the highest reading comprehension levels were more likely to have participated in the USAID Read Program.

## USAID Read Program's Effective Literacy Intervention

The USAID Read Program, funded by USAID and implemented by Universidad Iberoamericana in Santo Domingo, conducted a five-year reading and writing intervention in 378 Dominican public schools to improve reading ability. The program included annual reading comprehension and cognitive ability assessments. The program's approach built off the existing structure of the national curriculum and incorporated evidence-based approaches to improve students' reading skills and strengthen teachers' instruction:

### • MULTI-LEVEL MENTORING STRATEGY

The unique multi-level teacher training approach consisted of teacher training, mentoring, and modeling to foster a more personalized and tailored learning experience for teachers, allowing them to better address the specific needs of their students.

### • TAILORED READING MATERIALS FOR EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

The program provided classroom libraries with two types of short, simple reading practice materials designed to meet individual children at their reading levels: (1) decodable books (which target early reading skills) and (2) leveled books (which target sentence structure). The decodable books are divided into six stages that progress by difficulty, help teachers identify the reading level of each student, and help students practice and improve progressively.

>3,000  
TEACHERS



378  
SCHOOLS



>200,000  
STUDENTS



READ PROGRAM'S REACH

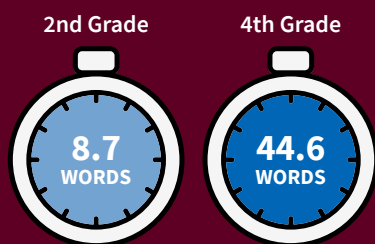
## Finding Success With a Novel Approach

Although teacher training and mentoring are critical components of most quality literacy projects, the USAID Read Program's unique approach combined these components with decodable and grade-leveled reading practice materials. The USAID Read Program also created a robust monitoring system, which included rapid evaluations of reading precursors in the early primary grades to track students' annual performance. Continuous learning and assessment of this data contributed to effective and timely decision-making by the project team, educational policy leaders, and teachers in the classroom.

After two years in the USAID Read Program, students saw their average reading speed increase significantly more than non-Read Program participants. Students in the USAID Read Program also outperformed non-Read Program students in reading comprehension. Data from the 2018 National Diagnostic Evaluation allowed comparison of students who had entered the USAID Read program in third grade with students not exposed to the program. Results showed that sixth grade students who scored in the highest levels in reading comprehension were 13% more likely to have participated in the USAID Read Program.

### WORDS READ PER MINUTE

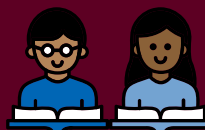
AMONG THE USAID READ PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



### STUDENTS SCORING HIGHEST IN READING COMPREHENSION

# 13%

More likely to have participated in the USAID Read Program



## Taking USAID Read Program's Success Nationwide

The USAID Read Program's literacy intervention is an innovative, impactful approach to improving reading comprehension among primary school-aged children. The Ministry of Education can ensure improved reading comprehension among primary school students in the Dominican Republic by taking the following steps to adopt the USAID Read Program's strategy:

- Increase the number of primary school teachers trained in evidence-based strategies, such as the USAID Read Program's approach, to promote reading comprehension.**
- Incorporate the use of the USAID Read Program's tailored reading materials in classrooms to help teachers identify student reading levels and help students improve their reading at an appropriate pace.**
- Institute national rapid evaluations of reading precursors in early primary grades.**

Improving child literacy can positively impact the social, cultural, and economic progress of individuals and communities. Projects like the USAID Read Program prove that evidence-based innovations in primary education can improve the performance of students and teachers and provide a foundation for lifelong literacy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ENDNOTE

1 Precursor skills develop prior to reading and are functionally related to later reading skills.

## REFERENCES

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