



Lessons from LAC Reads: *EducAcción* Promising Reading Intervention in Honduras

This brief is one in a series of briefs uncovering lessons learned from four evaluations of promising reading interventions funded by USAID as part of the Latin America and the Caribbean Reads (LAC Reads) project. The evaluations were conducted by Mathematica.

Background

The *EducAcción* Promising Reading Intervention (*EducAcción-PRI*) was designed to improve Honduran students' early grade reading skills by using assessments to better respond to students' needs. Pedagogical advisors supported principals and teachers to develop and carry out action plans based on needs identified in the assessments. Building on over 10 years of its investments in strengthening the use of assessment in Honduras, USAID partnered with the American Institutes for Research to implement the *EducAcción-PRI* model in new sites during the 2015 and 2016 academic years. To better gauge the effectiveness of the model in different settings, the evaluation selected two predominantly rural states (Lempira and Santa Barbara) and two urban areas (Tegucigalpa and LaCeiba) to study.

The evaluation focused on the impact of two specific intervention components:

Support for end-of-grade (EOG) assessments, which included:

- Training teachers and principals to use results from national EOG assessments in math and reading to improve learning.
- A two-day workshop on how to analyze and interpret results, identify needs, and develop a school action plan.
- Twice-monthly coaching with principals on how to effectively implement their action plans.
- Annual meetings with community members to present results, including how the schools' scores compared with those of other schools, areas in which students were lagging, and how parents could help students at home.

Adding support for monthly formative assessments (FAs) to the EOG assessment support, which included:

- Provision of printed copies of monthly reading and math assessments for all students in grades 1 through 3, aligned with national curriculum standards, to be administered by teachers.
- Teacher training on how to pace lessons in step with the national curriculum and interpret results to inform instruction.
- Twice-monthly coaching and ongoing support focused on helping teachers implement, score, and analyze FAs and adjust their plans and strategies based on results.

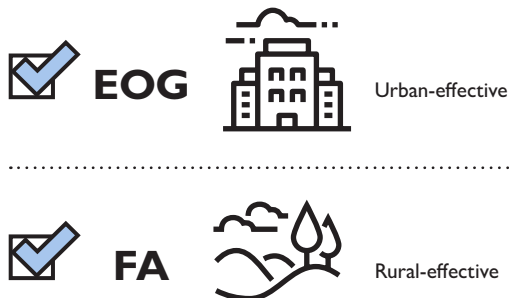
Results

After two years, based on survey results and qualitative findings from a randomized controlled trial, evaluators found that:



Both the EOG and monthly FA components led to improvements in math and reading test scores.

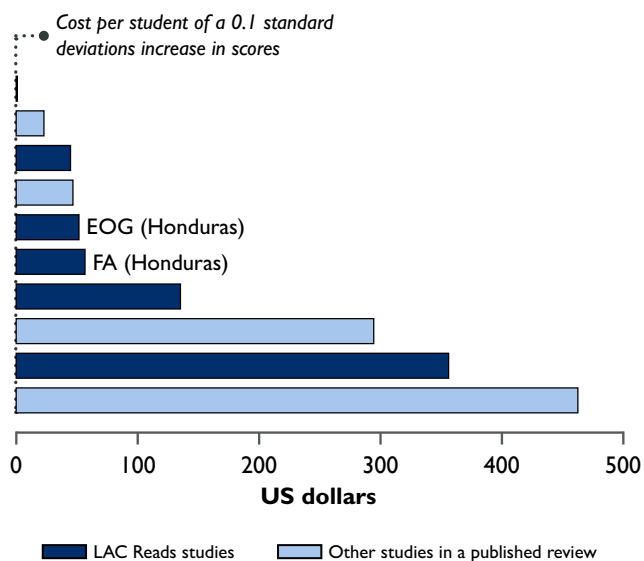
- The EOG assessment intervention increased reading test scores by 0.15 standard deviations, equivalent to a 4 percentage point increase in the reading questions that students answered correctly.
- Adding support for the monthly FA intervention to the support for the EOG assessment intervention increased reading test scores by 0.14 standard deviations, equivalent to moving a student from the 50th to the 56th percentile.
- Impact estimates for math were similar to estimates for reading, but they were less precisely estimated and not statistically significant. Although the intervention included both reading and math, coaches focused on reading, which may have led to larger impacts for reading than for math.
- There were no significant differences in improvement based on gender.



EOG assessment support was more effective in urban schools, while support for monthly FAs was more effective in rural schools.

- The monthly FA component raised students’ reading scores in rural schools by .38 standard deviations but had no impact in urban schools.
- The EOG assessment component raised students’ reading scores in urban schools by .38 standard deviations but had no impact in rural schools.

Cost-effectiveness of LAC Reads Interventions compared to similar interventions in the region

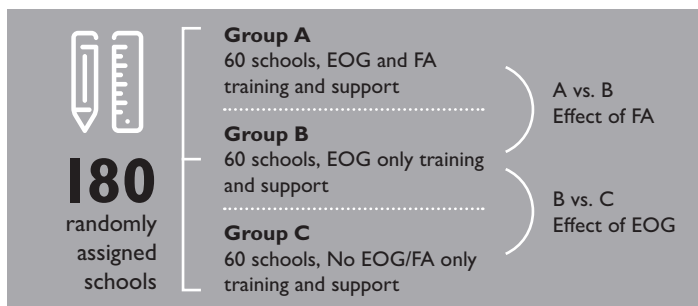


Both support for EOG and monthly FAs cost between \$52 and \$57 per student per 0.1 standard deviations of increased student learning, in the lower range of cost-effectiveness compared to other education interventions to improve student performance that have been rigorously evaluated in LAC.

Cost-effectiveness analyses showed that the cost to raise reading test scores by 0.1 standard deviations is \$52 per student for the EOG intervention and \$57 per student for the FA intervention.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- **Both EOG and monthly formative assessments can change teaching practices and improve learning when coupled with ongoing training and support.** Other LAC countries may wish to consider targeted investments to provide support for principals and teachers to use assessments to improve instruction, particularly in contexts in which assessments are already in place. While support for EOG assessments was more effective in urban areas and FAs were more effective in rural areas in Honduras, these findings are likely due to the different ways that principals are deployed in these settings. Policymakers should test these assumptions in their contexts before implementing at scale. Funders should consider targeting interventions accordingly.
- **As studied, the cost-effectiveness of support to EOG assessments and FAs is \$52 and \$57, respectively, for increasing learning by 0.1 standard deviations.** These interventions fall among the lower cost interventions for similar programs in LAC when compared to findings in a published review of randomized and non-randomized studies of education interventions. Funders can make these interventions more cost-effective by leveraging existing assessments or integrating the use of assessments and action plans into existing coaching arrangements with principals or teachers.



Evaluation Design for Promising Reading Intervention

A three-arm randomized controlled trial was implemented to assess impact and cost-effectiveness (2014–2016). The evaluation assigned 180 eligible schools to one of three groups. Group A received both the EOG and FA components, Group B received only the EOG component, and Group C received training and materials that would be provided anyway in the absence of the *EducAcción-PRI* interventions.

The evaluation followed a cohort of students who were enrolled in grade 1 at baseline and in grade 2 when the intervention began. Outcomes of teachers and students in schools assigned to Group A and Group B were compared to estimate the additional impact of the FA intervention, holding constant the impacts of the EOG intervention, which both groups received. Outcomes of teachers and students in schools assigned to Group B and Group C were compared to estimate the impact of the EOG support intervention compared to no EOG or FA support other than the prevailing practices of the Ministry of Education and other organizations. The evaluation found that the *EducAcción-PRI* intervention was implemented as planned, and that principals and teachers received the intended materials, training, and support according to their treatment group.