



Education Digest

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Literacy Failure

The 2021 *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*, released last week, found that 81 per cent of South African Grade 4 pupils (10 – 11 years old) could not read for meaning. The Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, noted that a lot of learning time had been lost over the last few years due to COVID-19. However, in the equivalent study in 2016, long before COVID, the figure was almost as bad – 78 per cent.

<https://tinyurl.com/ftzdura7>

<https://tinyurl.com/4v9ahjtc>

The economic consequences of illiteracy are far-reaching. One report puts the annual cost to our economy at over R300 million per day.

<https://mg.co.za/education/2023-04-04-illiteracy-costs-south-africas-economy-r119-billion-report-says/>

In this article Stellenbosch University's Professor Nic Spaull highlights five main concerns emerging from the study: we are back at 2011 levels of performance; our outcome is the worst out of 33 countries that have data for both 2016 and 2021; our Grade 4s are 3 years behind Brazilian Grade 4s; the decline was pronounced in African-language schools; and, outside of the Western Cape, there is no plan or budget to address the problem.

<https://tinyurl.com/5n7bukk7>

The Centre for Development Enterprise's Anne Bernstein argues for widespread reform of the education system, including a new minister and national management team, better teacher training, and the elimination of what she terms "SADTU's stranglehold on education departments". She also describes how some Latin American countries are tackling similar crises in education.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-04-04-its-time-for-outrage-about-the-quality-of-learning-in-sas-schools/>

In an article from The Conversation website, four education researchers argue that a large part of the problem stems from a 'technicist' approach to how children are taught to read. They propose a number of relatively simple interventions that should be within reach of almost all schools. And there is a supportive role for community members to play, too.

<https://tinyurl.com/2p9f3ekk>

Mike Pothier
Programme Manager
mike@cplo.org.za

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