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MERLA in International Education

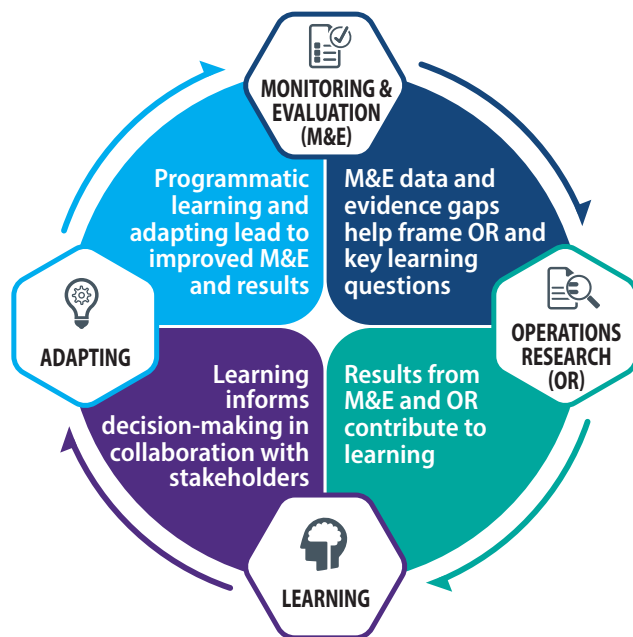
Monitoring, evaluation, research, learning, and adapting (MERLA) experts at RTI International work across the globe to develop innovative and sustainable monitoring methods; collect high-quality, actionable data; measure the impact of education programs; conduct ground-breaking research that contributes to program learning and moves the field forward; and use all data to help adapt and improve program effectiveness while continually striving to build the capacity of our local partners (governmental and non-governmental).

With MERLA, we apply results-focused monitoring, evaluation, and research to inform continuous learning and adaptation. MERLA improves program and system performance when:

- Data collected through M&E systems are timely and high quality, and are used to evaluate program progress and performance;
- Operations research fills gaps in evidence to complement traditional M&E data;
- Key results and evidence from M&E and research are regularly reviewed and synthesized into program learning; and
- Program learning and adaptation are continuously incorporated to improve implementation, communicate results, document lessons and best practices, and inform policy decisions.

Expertise

- Assessment design, development, validation, and implementation
- Survey instrument/questionnaire design, development, validation, and administration
- Measurement and psychometrics: Classical test theory, item response theory
- Complex survey design, cluster sampling, and data analysis
- Project monitoring: Planning, data collection, analysis
- Program evaluation: Formative, process, outcome, and impact



- Research design: Experimental, quasi-experimental, randomized controlled trials, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods
- Learning agenda development and action-oriented research
- Collaborating, learning, and adapting
- Policy engagement and dissemination
- Training and capacity building

Surveys and Assessments

The **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)** is an RTI-developed oral student assessment designed to measure the most basic skills for literacy acquisition: recognizing letters of the alphabet, reading simple words, understanding sentences and paragraphs, and listening with comprehension. Used in more than 75 countries in over 120 languages, RTI has expanded their EGRA offerings by recently developing adapted EGRAs for children with hearing or visual impairments, as well as a self-administered EGRA.

The **Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA)** is an oral assessment RTI designed to measure a student's foundational skills in numeracy and mathematics, including number identification, quantity discrimination, addition and subtraction, word problems, and pattern extension.

The **Group Administered Literacy Assessment (GALA)** and **Group Administered Mathematics Assessment (GAMA)** are orally administered, paper-and-pencil assessments that measure foundational skills similar to those of the EGRA and EGMA. Designed by RTI for routine education monitoring, they can be administered and scored simply, quickly, and cost-effectively at the classroom level.

Social-emotional learning (SEL). RTI has developed assessments of executive function and culturally relevant social and emotional competencies for learning and healthy development in pre-primary and primary school, as well as game-based assessments for adolescents.

Early childhood development assessments. RTI has developed, adapted, and administered a wide array of child development and early learning assessments, including expressive language and emergent literacy and numeracy.

Disability screening tools. RTI uses existing open-source and clinically validated tools on mobile devices to screen children for potential sensory, cognitive, or learning disabilities.

The **Survey of Student Experiences of School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)** assesses the extent to which students ages 8–18 experience all forms of SRGBV, using face-to-face interviews or audio and computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI).

The **Local Education Monitoring Approach (LEMA)** is a simple and sustainable school monitoring approach for local governments using binary indicators and small school sample sizes to quickly collect and process local data on school and student performance.

Learning through Play (LtP). RTI has developed and validated a range of instruments designed to measure the quality and impact of LtP practices in the classroom (including classroom observations, as well as teacher and student interviews).

Highlighted Projects

JORDAN. Beginning with national EGRA/EGMA surveys and a randomized control trial pilot evaluation, RTI has a long history of educational measurement in Jordan. Based on the evidence from these activities, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has taken RTI's intervention to national scale as part of the USAID-funded Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Initiative (RAMP). Most recently, RTI developed a biannual, nationally representative school monitoring approach (based on LEMA), which has been fully transferred to the MoE.

TANZANIA. Actionable data from RTI-led national EGRA and EGMA surveys in Tanzania have been used to inform nationwide teacher and curriculum reforms. Under the USAID-funded Jifunze Uelewe program, RTI is using an innovative "Feedback School" approach as a small-scale testing bed for implementation and research activities to be evaluated prior to scaling. In combination with operational research studies, these efforts have led to continuous data-driven adjustments in training activities, learning support materials, and government-provided pedagogic support to teachers in more than 3,000 schools in five regions.

PHILIPPINES. Learning and adapting are central to the five-year, USAID-funded Advancing Basic Education (ABC+) project. As a response to COVID-related school closures, RTI designed the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) for teachers to classify learners according to reading profiles and identify those in need of additional support. The success of the approach led the Philippines' Department of Education to scale up the CRLA beyond project regions. ABC+ has also incorporated rigorous quantitative evaluations of pilot initiatives, supplemented with in-depth qualitative research, to inform data-driven adaptations in the program's implementation approach.

LEARNING AT SCALE. RTI is leading a multi-country study that examines 14 of the most effective, large-scale early grade reading and mathematics programs in low- and middle-income countries. Under "Learning at Scale," RTI has developed a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments, as part of a mixed-methods approach to explore what makes these programs successful. The findings from this study are being used to inform and guide policy makers on the instructional practice, instructional support, and system support components that are essential for successfully improving learning outcomes at scale.

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