

Proportion of children aged 7–14 and children in grades 2 and 3 achieving minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics in Zimbabwe



Key points

- A higher proportion of girls than boys demonstrate foundational skills in reading across the two categories: children aged 7–14 and children in grades 2 and 3.
- With regard to foundational numeracy skills, girls aged 7–14 slightly outperform boys at the same ages, while boys marginally outperform girls in grades 2 and 3.
- Regional disparities are apparent in the distribution of proficiency levels among children, with children in the predominantly urban provinces of Bulawayo and Harare showing higher levels of proficiency in both reading and numeracy.
- Functional difficulties have an effect on children's performance; the proportion of children who demonstrated reading and numeracy skills was higher among children without functional difficulties than it was for children who had functional difficulties. While girls' advantage in reading was also visible among children with difficulties, their advantage over boys in numeracy skills was less significant.

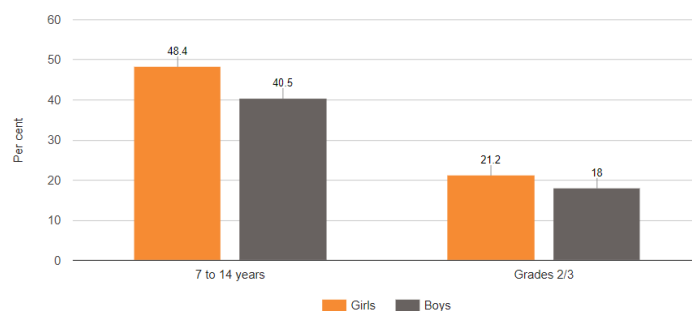
Background

Gender differentials in employment levels, in terms of participation rates and job types, have often been attributed to the education that women and men acquire at secondary and tertiary levels, yet the foundational education received in the early years of life are key determinants of skills obtained later on. In basic economic terms, the education of young children is the most cost-effective way to ensure their success throughout their lifecycle.¹ In Zimbabwe, possession of a pass in English and mathematics in lower secondary schooling is a requirement for enrolment in certain tertiary studies and for employment.

A higher proportion of girls than boys demonstrate foundational skills in reading across the two categories: ages 7–14 and in grades 2 and 3

In 2019, **foundational skills in reading** were higher among girls than boys (see figure I) across the two categories, by a measure of 8 percentage points among children aged 7–14 and by 3 percentage points among children in grades 2 and 3.

Figure I: Proportion of girls and boys aged 7–14 and in grades 2 and 3 demonstrating foundational reading skills: 2019

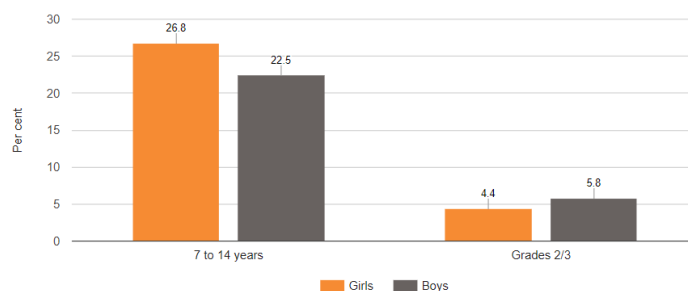


Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Snapshots of Key Findings, Harare, 2019.

With regard to **foundational numeracy skills**, girls outperformed boys aged 7–14 (by 4 percentage points), while boys slightly outperformed girls in grades 2 and 3 (by 1.4 percentage points) (see figure II).

National examinations administered by the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council at the end of primary schooling confirm that girls outperformed boys, with a gender parity index (GPI) of pass rates ranging from 1.10 (110 girls to 100 boys) to 1.13 (113 girls to 100 boys), during the period 2014–2018. However, data on learning outcomes (pass rates) at the end of lower secondary schooling show that boys performed better than girls.²

Figure II: Proportion of girls and boys aged 7-14 and in grades 2 and 3 demonstrating foundational numeracy skills: 2019

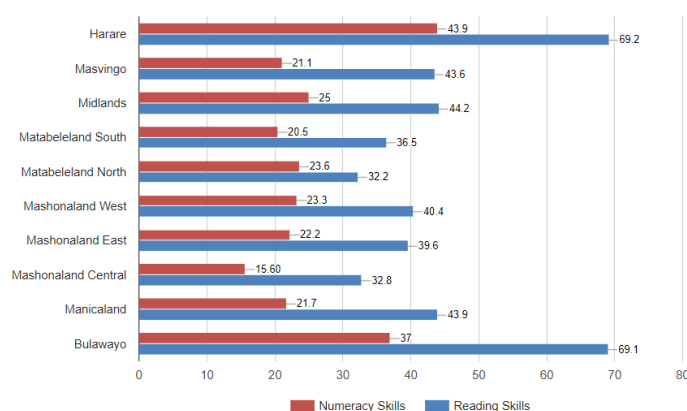


Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Snapshots of Key Findings, Harare, 2019.

Regional disparities are apparent in the distribution of proficiency levels among children

High levels of proficiency in reading and numeracy have been observed in Bulawayo and Harare, the two predominantly urban provinces in Zimbabwe (see figure III). These rates can be attributed to the broader access to early childhood education in Bulawayo and Harare compared to other, predominantly rural, provinces. In 2019, the net attendance rate in primary schooling was 95% in Bulawayo and 94% in Harare. It is noted that the province with the lowest proportion of children with foundational learning skills, Mashonaland Central, is the province with the lowest literacy rates among women and men aged 15–49.

Figure III: Proportion of girls and boys demonstrating foundational reading and numeracy skills by province: 2019



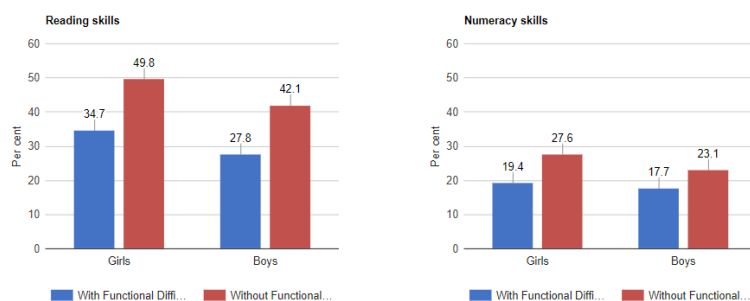
Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Snapshots of Key Findings, Harare, 2019.

Functional difficulties have an effect on children's performance

The proportion of children aged 7–14 who demonstrated foundational reading and numeracy skills was higher among children

without functional difficulties³ than it was for the children who had functional difficulties (see figure IV). In terms of the gender gap, while girls' advantage in reading was also visible among children with difficulties (6.9 percentage points compared to 7.7 percentage points among children without difficulties), their advantage over boys in numeracy skills was less significant (1.7 percentage points among children with difficulties compared to 4.5 percentage points among those without).

Figure IV: Percentage distribution of children aged 7-14 demonstrating foundational learning skills in reading and numeracy by functional difficulties: 2019



Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Snapshots of Key Findings, Harare, 2019.

About the data

Definitions

The indicator measures foundational reading and numeracy skills among children aged 7–14 and children in grades 2 and 3. The ability to read and understand simple statements is a skill that, when acquired at early ages, shapes learning outcomes in future grades. This also extends to the acquisition of basic numeracy skills, which are crucial for success in the sciences and mathematics. The methodological development of the Foundation Skills Assessment Tool can be accessed in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) Methodological Papers, No. 5 ⁴ and No. 9. ⁵

Coverage

Children aged 7–14 years and children in grades 2 and 3.

Availability

Data, by national and provincial levels and by functional difficulties, are from the Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 carried out by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency. ⁶

Footnotes

1. Van der Gaag, J. and Tan, J.P, The Benefits of Early Child Development Program: An Economic Analysis, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 1998 and Barnett, W. S. and Masse, L. N., "Early childhood program design and economic returns: Comparative benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian program and policy implications", *Economics of Education Review* 26, 2007.
2. Government of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Harare, 2018 .
3. Functional domains covered in the questionnaire for children ages 5–17 in the Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Survey 2019 included: seeing, hearing, walking, self-care, communication, learning, remembering, concentrating, accepting change, controlling behaviour, making friends, anxiety and depression.
4. Hiroyuki, H., Cardoso, M. and Ledoux, B., "Collecting Data on Foundational Learning Skills and Parental Involvement in Education", *MICS Methodological Papers*, No. 5, Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Research and Policy, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) New York, 2017 .
5. Gochyyev, P., Mizunoya, S. and Cardoso, M., "Validity and reliability of the MICS foundational learning module", *MICS Methodological Papers*, No. 9, Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Research and Policy, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York, 2019 .
6. Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Snapshots of Key Findings, Harare, 2019.