

CEA Newsletter

Centre for Evaluation and Assessment



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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BASIC EDUCATION MINISTER RELEASES THE PIRLS 2021 RESULTS

CEA collected the PIRLS 2021 data amid COVID-19 challenges



From left: Prof Surette van Staden, Mr Mishack Tshele, Prof Chika Sehoole, Mr Gabriel Mokoena, Prof Funke Omidire, Minister Angie Motshekga, Dr Joyce West, Prof Ronel Callaghan, Dr Karen Roux and Prof Ruth Mampame at the PIRLS 2021 press release

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2021 (PIRLS 2021) is a trend study undertaken every five years to measure trends in reading comprehension of children in Grade 4. International large-scale assessments, such as PIRLS, allow participating countries to make international comparisons across education systems and monitor trends and indicators of growth in the early phases of children's education. South Africa's first

participation in PIRLS dates back to 2006 and it has subsequently participated in the 2011, 2016 and 2021 studies. The South African studies were conducted by the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) at the University of Pretoria. The South African PIRLS 2021 study has a nationally represented sample of Grade 4 (all 11 official languages) and 6 learners (English and Afrikaans only) across the different provinces. PIRLS 2021 has found that

81% of South African Grade 4 learners are struggling to read for comprehension at the age of 10. Its findings, which also highlighted a drop in South Africa's score point average since the previous report in 2016, were presented to Minister Angie Motshekga. It shows that South Africa ranks the lowest out of 57 countries that participated in PIRLS 2021. During the National Seminar on Reading Literacy, held on 16 May 2023, which featured...

Media Links

Progress in International
Reading Literacy
Study 2021

PIRLS 2021 Main Report

Progress in International
Reading Literacy Study 2021

PIRLS 2021 Highlight Report



Dr Roux explores
the PIRLS 2021
results

IEA TIMSS & PIRLS
BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education and Human Development

PIRLS 2021

PIRLS 2021
International
database
available

CEA's Data Manager attends PIRLS NRC Meeting in Amsterdam

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA) held its 9th and final PIRLS 2021 National Research Coordinators' (NRC) meeting in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. This three-day meeting started on Monday 13 February 2023. With over 50 countries worldwide in attendance, Prof Surette van Staden (National Research Coordinator), Dr Mark Chetty (Department of Basic Education) and Mr Mishack Tshele (CEA's Data Manager) represented South Africa. This meeting focused on describing the contents and release of the PIRLS 2021 results and database. The first NRC meeting for the 2026 cycle followed immediately on 16 February 2023. The purpose of this meeting was to



Mr Mishack Tshele (CEA) and Dr Mark Chetty (DBE) at the NRC meeting in Amsterdam

introduce the next cycle of PIRLS and to describe plans for the implementation. South Africa's Grade 4 learners across all provinces were among their international counterparts in over 60 other countries worldwide who participated in the PIRLS 2021 cycle.

BASIC EDUCATION MINISTER RELEASES THE PIRLS 2021 RESULTS

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.... the theme 'Understanding literacy levels in the South African context – taking a deeper dive', Minister Motshekga said it was worth noting that South Africa was one of only three African countries that had participated in the study, along with Egypt and Morocco, which also scored below the study's international centre point. It should be noted that PIRLS 2021 represents the first international large-scale assessment report after successfully collecting data during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PIRLS trends in grade 4 reading show a negative impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.



From left: Prof Ruth Mampane, Prof Ronel Callaghan, Dr Karen Roux, Prof Surette van Staden, Prof Funke Omidire, Mr Gabriel Mokoena, Ms Taslima Ahmed and Mr Mishack Tshele

Prof Surette van Staden and Dr Karen Roux from the CEA presented the findings of PIRLS 2021. The study found that South African Grade 4 learners obtained an average of 288 score points, which is significantly below the PIRLS centre point of 500. Learners who were tested in English (382) and Afrikaans (387) scored above the national average (288). Learners who completed the assessment in African languages scored below the national average, for example Xitsonga (223), Sepedi (216) and Setswana (211). This finding highlighted historical factors – such as the socio-economic environment of the learner, limitations on resources at home and/or at school, and guardians' interest in reading books – that could explain the better performance in Afrikaans and English.

It was also found that for Grade 6 learners who were tested in English (377) and Afrikaans (456), 56% struggle to read for comprehension. A total of 12 426 Grade 4 learners from 321 schools and 9 317 Grade 6 learners from 253 schools participated in PIRLS 2021. Prof Funke Omidire, the CEA Director, says that the way forward is to focus on supporting teachers and learners, and looking at innovative ways of improving reading literacy and developing a reading culture among our children.

CEA DIRECTOR ATTENDS THE 2023 EASA CONFERENCE



From left: Prof LW Chia, National Institute of Education, Singapore, Prof Ingrid Gogolin, University of Hamburg, Germany, Prof Ruth Mampane, University of Pretoria, Prof Funke Omidire, University of Pretoria, Prof Geovana Mendes, State University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, and Prof Liesel Ebersöhn, University of Pretoria

The Director of the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA), Prof Funke Omidire attended the 2023 Education Association of South Africa (EASA) Conference held at the Century City Hotel & Conference Centre in Cape Town from 8 to 11 January. Prof Omidire presented the Chairperson's Report for 2022 at the EASA Annual General Meeting. As Outgoing Chair, she presented the Emerging Researcher Award and Postgraduate awards. She also delivered the welcome address at the Gala Dinner and received the Outgoing Chairperson's award.

The 2023 conference's theme was 'Oceans of wisdom, mountains of knowledge, winds of change' and was the first in-person conference held by EASA since the national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The keynote speakers included Prof Thuli Madonsela from the University of Stellenbosch, Prof Mbulungeni Madiba from the University of Cape Town, Prof Irma Eloff from the University of Pretoria and Prof Piet van Avermaet from Ghent University in Belgium. Prof Omidire also chaired a session where the first presentation entitled 'Bininj education in the Warddeken homeland of Northern Australia: turning points and new directions' co-presented by JG Guenther from the Batchelor Institute, DY Yibarbuk and TJ Guymala from the Nawarddeken Academy. The second presentation 'Teachers' perceptions about leadership: towards an innovative collaborative teacher leadership development framework for schools' was co-presented by NJP Smith from the Sol Plaatje University and ED de Klerk from the North-West University and, lastly, 'Micro-aggressions and the South African teacher' was presented by CR Karrim from the Management College of Southern Africa.

Professor from Carl von Ossietzky University visits CEA



*Seated: Prof Funke Omidire and Prof Ines Oldenburg from the Carl von Ossietzky University, colleagues
Back: Mr Mishack Tshela, Mrs Taslima Ahmed, Dr Karen Roux, Ms Thembi Matlou, Ms Prudence Shai and Ms Etinosa Izevbigie*

The CEA is looking for possibilities to extend its international collaborations to the Carl von Ossietzky University.

Prof Omidire had an opportunity to meet with Prof Ines Oldenburg from the Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, and discussed possibilities of creating collaborative research projects between the CEA and Carl von Ossietzky University.

Prof Ines Oldenburg is on a two-week visit at the University of Pretoria and is hosted by the Deputy Dean, Prof Human-Vogel in the Faculty of Education.

DATA COLLECTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES



The team from the University of Pretoria included the members of the CEA and colleagues from the Educational Psychology and Early Childhood Education Departments

The Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) team at the University of Pretoria was part of the data collection process at the Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre in Boksburg on Sunday, 10 September.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE), through its National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), commissioned the development of the developmental trajectories with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that school children need to thrive in a fast-changing environment as part of its consideration to strengthen basic education, to equip learners in South Africa.



Educators, grouped according to the phases they teach, participated in a PRA session and responded to the activities

The University of Pretoria has been tasked with providing research expertise on developing 21st-century competencies to inform the DBE's national curriculum-strengthening process. This process intends to build on the work done to produce and implement the Recovery Framework 2021–2024 by conducting more comprehensive curriculum strengthening that will take cognisance of the competencies learners need to thrive, socially and economically, in a fast-changing world.



CEA News in brief



Members of the CEA with Prof Bhukala and his colleague from Masina Muliro University of Science and Technology

Masina Muliro University of Science and Technology Professors visit the CEA

The members of the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) joined Prof Omidire in welcoming Professor Peter Bukhala and his colleague from Masina Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) in Kenya. The visitors were on a benchmarking visit to the University of Pretoria. Part of the conversation between the two entities included strategies to establish and strengthen relations and forge future collaborative projects.

CEA staff members attend a virtual IEA IDB analyser workshop

Three CEA staff members, Mr Mishack Tshele, Ms Thembisile Matlou and Mr Gabriel Mokoena, were among attendees from countries around the world who attended the IEA IDB analyser workshop hosted virtually by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA) on 14 and 15 March 2023. The IEA International Database Analyzer (IDB Analyzer) is a tool developed by the IEA Data Processing and Research Center (IEA-DPC) that can be used to analyse

international large-scale assessment data such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data, among others. The aims of the workshop were to develop methodological skills for analysing PIRLS data and reproducing results from the international exhibits, to familiarise attendants with IEA's IDB Analyzer and allow them gain hands-on experience analysing data through tutorials.

Imperial and Motus Community Trust library usage programme training

The team from the CEA conducted the data collection training with the library assistants. The training is in preparation for the pilot study of the library usage programme initiated by the Imperial and Motus Community Trust. The trust assists selected schools in providing learners with well-balanced education by being involved in the establishment of school libraries in under-resourced schools across southern Gauteng.



From left: Mr Gabriel Mokoena, Ms Shine Aung and Ms Etinosa Izevbogie from the CEA with Ms Jane Mabaso and the library assistants at the fieldwork training for the library usage programme

The reading literacy crisis in South Africa

What can the Academy of Science do?

Two representatives from the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA), Prof Funke Omidire and Mr Gabriel Mokoena, attended a round table discussion hosted at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies on 19 June. Professor Jonathan Jansen invited academics to the Academy of Science of South Africa's (ASSAF) presidential round table discussion on reading literacy in South Africa. The discussion, with the theme 'The reading literacy crisis in South Africa – What can the Academy of Science do?', was chaired by the ASSAF president, Prof Jonathan Jansen. The discussion follows the recent release of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 results. The study, conducted by the CEA, showed that 81% of South Africa's Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning. Presenters included Prof Crain Soudien, a sociologist and an emeritus professor in Education and African studies at the University of Cape Town, and Ms Nangamso Mtsatse the current CEO of Funda Wandé and an experienced



Prof Funke Omidire: Director of the CEA

education leader. Presenters pointed to some of the challenges facing education in South Africa and referred to factors such as poor teaching practice, massive inequality in education (with a massive gap between highest and the lowest achievers), and children switching the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in Grade 4 without proper transition mechanisms in Grade 3. Among proposed solutions to the

literacy problem in the country were the addressing of structural inequalities and the literacy problem as a holistic challenge, building mother-tongue literacy culture (since very little mother-tongue fiction and non-fictional literature is published), raising the level of content that learners are exposed to, raising the skills and knowledge that teachers bring to that content and also increasing the level of student active learning content. The Director of the CEA, Prof. Funke Omidire, added that 'While support is required across the grades in the different phases, additional efforts and resources have to be invested in the Foundation Phase. We have to get teaching and learning right in the Foundation Phase as success in future learning depends on that. The teachers have to be supported to develop the competencies required to teach reading especially in the home languages. It is also important that only teachers whose first choice of career is teaching and are passionate about teaching are the ones posted to the Foundation Phase.'

Welcoming the new Head of the SMTE Department



Prof Ugorji Ogbonnaya, Head of the SMTE Department

The staff members of the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) joined Prof Funke Omidire in welcoming Prof Ugorji Ogbonnaya as the newly appointed head of the Science, Mathematics and Technology Education Department. After a brief reflection on the CEA's research foci, Prof Omidire expressed the centre's commitment to continue supporting the Department in its research endeavours.

Professor Ogbonnaya joined the Department of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria as a Senior Lecturer in October 2016. Since being appointed, he has been promoted to the position of Associate Professor in 2021 and Full Professor in 2023.

Improving reading in the Foundation Phase

The University of Pretoria and the READ Education Trust have joined hands in a ground-breaking reading and translanguaging project. Over the next year, Prof Funke Omidire and Dr Joyce West will be coordinating the project alongside Drs Roux, Combrinck, Genis, and members of the CEA, such as Mr Mokoena and Mr Tshele, who will all contribute to the success of the project. Reading is an essential skill that needs to be developed in the Foundation Phase. However, the latest PIRLS results showed a decline in our learners' reading skills, with 81% being unable to read for meaning. Reading for meaning is the ultimate goal of the teaching of reading.

However, reading comprehension is a complex skill to develop as fundamental reading skills such as phonological awareness, decoding, word recognition, and reading fluency need to be in place. The purpose of developing reading skills in the Foundation Phase is to ensure that learners can 'read to learn' in the successive phases. Major contributors to the reading challenges of South African children are the emphasis on using subtractive and immersion strategies for developing English reading skills, a lack of understanding as to how multilingual learners develop their reading skills, and a paucity of multilingual reading material.

The University of Pretoria and the READ Education Trust will thus be conducting an intervention pilot study in Gauteng schools, where translanguaging and the science of reading (SoR) will be used as pedagogically sound approaches to teaching reading in

English to multilingual learners. A major focus of the project will be on developing learners' knowledge of English phonics to increase their decoding skills and, as a result, improve their reading fluency and reading comprehension. The SoR and translanguaging will serve as the theoretical framework for this project. The SoR is scientific knowledge regarding the most effective teaching methods for young children. It emphasises the systematic, sequential, and explicit teaching of reading skills, such as phonics. The SoR aligns with reading research on African languages, as both the SoR and translanguaging highlight the importance of considering the orthography of a language (i.e., opaque vs transparent) and developing learners' phonological processing, phonemic skills, and phonics knowledge. As this project's focus will be on developing multilingual learners' English reading skills, translanguaging, which views the development of language as a single linguistic repertoire, will view all the languages a learner speaks as resources rather than hurdles.

The team working on this project are passionate about the teaching of reading and promoting multilingualism. They are excited about this project, as they are aware of the urgent need for quality reading education in the Foundation Phase. They also advocate for the use of translanguaging as they believe it can make a vast difference in developing Foundation Phase learners' reading skills. Keep an eye open for further developments. These are exciting times!

CEA hosts Faculty of Education Research Day



From left: Prof Funke Omidire (CEA), Prof Mbulungeni Madiba (Stellenbosch University), Prof Saloshna Vandeyar (Deputy Dean: Research and Postgraduate Education), Ms Nangamso Mtsatse (foundational literacy and numeracy advocate), Prof Chika Sehoole (Dean of Faculty of Education)

The Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) had the pleasure of hosting this year's Faculty of Education's Research Day on 10 October at the Groenkloof Campus auditorium. The theme of the research event was 'Reading for meaning: charting a new course for intervention'. Keynote speakers were Prof Mbulungeni Madiba, the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the Stellenbosch University and Ms Nangamso Mtsatse, a foundational literacy and numeracy advocate who is in the final stages of completing her PhD in Education Language Policy at the Stellenbosch University.

The Faculty Research Day serves as a platform for researchers in the Faculty to showcase their research and was led by the Deputy Dean of Research and Postgraduate Education, Prof Saloshna Vandeyar. Among the presenters were Dr Karen Roux of the CEA who presented on the equivalence of the PIRLS informational passage, the Amazing Octopus across two languages, and Elsamarie Uys who presented on teacher perceptions about Early Graded Reading Assessment implementation.

Utilising results from PIRLS 2021:

How can teacher practice be informed?



Members of the CEA with the members of LITASA and other seminar attendees of the seminar at the Groenkloof Campus

The Literacy Association of South Africa (LITASA) and the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) co-hosted a seminar entitled 'Utilising results from PIRLS 2021: How can teacher practice be informed' on 24 October at the Centre for Visual Impairment Studies (VISUP).

In a foreword address, the director of the CEA, Prof Funke Omidire, welcomed the guests and expressed delight in the CEA co-hosting the event with LITASA. Prof Omidire gave a brief overview of the CEA and outlined the importance of literacy for personal growth, academic achievement, and well-being. In light of the country's performance in PIRLS 2021, she called for the understanding of the unique multilingual nature of Sub-Saharan Africa in the planning of reading instruction and interventions.

Prof Omidire also called for collaborative interventions through evidence-based practices. She expressed interest in appropriately using contextual information, assessment data and feedback from in-service teacher

professional development and training activities. Dr Karen Roux from the CEA presented the overall achievement results of South African Grade 4 and Grade 6 learners in the 2021 PIRLS cycle. The presentation delved into learner achievement, examining gender, language, and provincial variations. Dr Roux also showcased assessment items from one of the PIRLS passages, 'The Amazing Octopus', which tested various cognitive skills.

Dr Roux's presentation spotlighted effective reading comprehension practices from five PIRLS participant countries: Chile, Chinese Taipei, England, Spain, and the Republic of Georgia. These practices serve as inspiration for educators to enhance their reading lessons. For instance, in Chile, activating prior knowledge is emphasised to foster comprehension, while Chinese Taipei provides a multilingual environment for learners beyond their home language.

In England, a daily 10-minute session introduces new vocabulary from diverse languages. The presentation highlighted recommended reading strategies for teachers and learners, including distinguishing between authentic and test-related questions, recognising text structures, making predictions and setting goals, verbalising how to summarise a story, employing schemes with keywords and visuals, relating content to learners' experiences, acting as role models, creating reading-friendly spaces, celebrating reading achievements, and exploring various genres and formats.

The seminar featured a hybrid format, with both in-person and online participants. Notable in-person attendees included Nadeema Musthan, LITASA's National Chairperson, Sandra de Bruyn from the Gauteng Education Department, Glenn Allies of the British Council, Elinor Sisulu from Puku Children's Literature, and Pearl Khumalo from SA Books Online.

CEA and the Department of Basic Education hosts the Capacity Building Workshop for the officials

The CEA and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) hosted a four-day capacity building workshop with the education officials from 18–21 September at the DBE offices. The purpose of the workshop, facilitated by the Technical Advisory Group members, Prof Anil Kanjee and Dr Qetelo Moloi, was to support education officials, at the different levels of the system, to enhance their capacity in effectively using assessment evidence to improve teaching and learning for all learners, especially learners from poor and marginalised backgrounds.

A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of international and local experts was formed to review the IEA's data analysis methodology regarding PIRLS 2021, and to conduct secondary analyses on the data. Findings of the TAG will be



From left: Mr Gabriel Mokoena, Ms Thembi Matlou, Prof Marien Graham, Ms Taslima Ahmed, Dr Karen Roux, Ms Etinosa Izevbigie and Mr Mishack Tshele at the Capacity Building Workshop

presented and mediated through training workshops.

Among international presentations were the 'Educational assessments and inclusive education' by Christian Ydesen of Aalborg University, 'Using assessment data' by David Rutkowski from Indiana University, 'Use of assessment data to support decision making in Uganda' by Lutalo Bbosa

Serunkuuma of the Uganda National Examinations Board, 'Data-driven decisions: using assessment data for equity-based policy' by Prof Joanne Baird, Director of the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment, and 'The real impact of evidence from international surveys' by Prof Montse Gomendio, Professor at the Spanish Research Council (CSIC).

Staff wellness in Open Distance eLearning in times of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity



Mr Gabriel Mokoena and Prof Funke Omidire

Prof Funke Omidire and Mr Gabriel Mokoena attended the panel discussion at the Open Distance and eLearning (ODeL) Conference 2023, hosted by UNISA at Emperor's Palace on 17 August 2023. The conference focused on the staff wellness in the ODeL in times of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The panel members included Ms Thobeka Msengana from the University of Fort Hare, Prof Christine Ofulue from the National Open University of Nigeria, Mr Hugo van der Walt from the University of South Africa and Prof Funke Omidire from the University of Pretoria. Prof Omidire's presentation was based on the findings of a study conducted among academic staff from five higher education institutions. One of the study's aims was to explore how the disruption to the education system during the pandemic affected staff well-being. The study's findings, which corroborate earlier studies, include the effect of isolation, including trauma, fatigue, and other physical ailments due to long screen hours and the inconducive home environment for working for academics due to the lack of boundaries.

The recommendations from the study included the fact that institutions should be interested in the well-being of their staff, a balance between work-life and self-care should be promoted, boundaries should not be blurred to the detriment of staff well-being, emotional support for health and well-being must be prioritised, institutional policies should mandate wellness activities, dialogue should be encouraged where staff members can share their experiences, and self-paced wellness programmes should be offered. Lunch-hour sessions should also be planned to discuss specific topics around well-being.

THE CEA IN PICTURES



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