

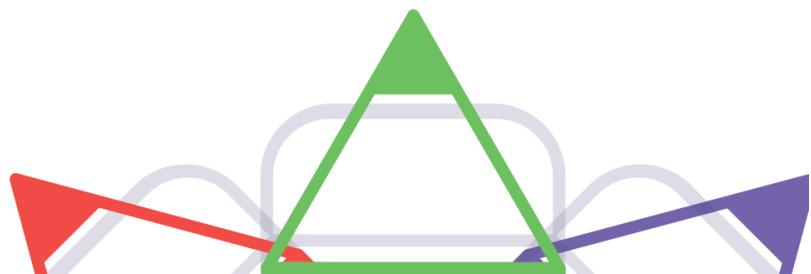
The All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD) partner agencies are supporting projects meant to improve the teaching of reading in the early grades of primary school in less developed countries. Reading is a skill, and, as with any other skill, improvement of reading requires practice. Unfortunately, most early-grade students do not have access to the supplemental reading materials (materials that supplement their textbook and classroom instruction) needed for practice. In some cases this shortage of reading materials is caused by problems in publication and distribution, but, in many cases, children are learning how to read in languages that have little or no published literature, at least no literature that is at the reading level and of interest to early-grade students.

Children learn to read most efficiently in a language they speak and understand, but most students living in the poor rural communities where ACR GCD partner agencies work speak languages that do not have appropriate reading materials for young children. In these countries, writers who know the languages children speak could draw on local folk tales or stories from children’s books in other languages, such as English and French, or could translate nonfiction children’s books into local languages. One barrier in this path is authors’ lack of skill and experience in writing for early-grade students.

Early grade students need supplemental materials, both fiction and nonfiction, that are written at their reading level and are interesting for children. The reading level starts at a point where children have yet to learn all of the letter and letter combination sounds, and so books for these students must be limited to those letters and letter combinations that they have learned. Every language has some letters and syllables that are easier to learn than others. For example, single consonants, “t” for example, are easier to learn than double consonants, “tr” for example. [See pp.9-10 *The Reading Teacher’s Book of Lists* for the suggested phonics teaching order in English, as an example] Books at this level are called “decodable”, indicating that they only contain letters and letter combinations that students have already learned.

After students have learned all of the letters and letter combinations, the vocabulary and sentence length become the limiting factors on whether or not they are appropriate for students at a specific level. In addition, several formatting conventions, including type size and the number of words on a page, can determine whether or not a material is written at an appropriate level of difficulty.

The ACR GCD partners are seeking software that will automatically limit writers to the letters, words, sentence length, and formatting that is appropriate for different levels of student skill. At the same time, this software would make it easier for writers, who know what they want to write, to write more effectively for children in the early grades and to draw on existing books in another language to write materials in a language children do understand.



Since some possible prize contestants do not have experience with teaching children to read, the following are sources of information on reading acquisition.

1. Examples of decodable readers: <http://www.readinga-z.com/books/decodable-books/>
2. Examples of early-grade readers: <http://www.clarkness.com/>
3. Fry, E. & Kress, J. (2006). *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists Grades K-12*. Jossey-Bass.
4. Adams, M.A. (1990). *Beginning to Read*. MIT Press.
5. Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. National Academy Press.
6. Clay, M. (1991). *Becoming Literate: The Construction of Inner Control*. Heinemann.
7. The National Reading Association. www.reading.org
8. Most schools or departments of education have a reading program that trains teachers how to teach reading.

