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Egypt Grade 3 Early Grade Reading 2nd National Assessment: Classroom Observations



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Egypt Grade 3 Early Grade Reading 2nd National Assessment: Classroom Observations

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Abbreviations

COP	Chief of Party
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EGRP	Early Grade Reading Program, Ministry of Education
GILO	Girls' Improved Learning Outcomes Project, USAID project
idara	district-level ministry administration, GOE
MOE	Ministry of Education
muderiya	governorate-level ministry administration, GOE
RTI	Research Triangle Institute, a trademark of RTI International
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Executive Summary

This report presents key findings of a national, stratified random sample of classroom observations of Grade 3 reading instruction in Ministry of Education (MOE) schools. Classroom observation was a component activity of the 2nd national Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) for Grade 3 implemented in April 2014. The classroom observations were completed in a random sub-set of 39 schools from the larger EGRA sample of 200 schools: 40 primary schools from each of five sub-national regions encompassing 25 of Egypt's 27 governorates.¹ One Grade 3 class, randomly selected, was observed in each school. Each classroom observation applied a formal instrument to the observation of a full class period of Grade 3 Arabic reading plus separate interviews with the observed teacher, school principal and librarian. All observations were conducted by trained MOE staff with significant experience of both the ministry's Early Grade Reading Program and reading assessment. Schools were not informed in advance of the classroom observation.

These observations provide current, empirical information on: i) the teaching methods, instructional activities and learning resources applied by Grade 3 teachers in their reading instruction; ii) the training experience and understandings of early grade reading of key school personnel; iii) specific challenges to implementing the early grade reading program in schools; iv) the availability and use of Early Grade Reading learning resources in school classes and libraries; and v) the technical support available to Grade 3 teachers for improved reading instruction.

The general finding is significantly positive. The MOE Early Grade Reading Program has established a capable foundation of Grade 3 teachers trained, knowledgeable and technically supported to provide enhanced reading instruction in Arabic.

Key findings include:

1. **All primary schools have EGRP resources:** All observed schools (100%) received EGRP teaching guides and learning resources. With over 16,000 MOE primary schools, this is an outstanding achievement. Not every observed school held a full set of instructional materials developed for Grades 1 to 3, or the correct number of copies. But deficiencies of the most critical EGRP guides were very few.
2. **Early grade teachers trained in EGRP:** Nearly every observed teacher received *some* EGRP training. Only 3 teachers (8%), including one new teacher, had not attended EGRP Grade 3 training. And **more than 75% of teachers trained in *Mastery Monitoring* were applying their training to assess student performance during the observed class.** This too is a very positive finding.

¹ For reasons of security and comparability of findings with the EGRA Grade 3 baselines in 2013, the two governorates of North Sinai and South Sinai were again excluded.

3. **Knowledge of the EGRP:** Just 2 school principals and 6 librarians in this sub-set of 39 schools had no knowledge of the Reading Program. MOE engagement in improved early reading is now widely known.
4. **Ongoing technical support to teachers:** Nearly all Grade 3 teachers enjoy multiple sources of technical and material support for reading instruction. The quality and frequency of technical support varies, but a broad network of technical support for EGRP is active across Egypt.
5. **EGRP learning resources are actively used:** The large majority of observed teachers (87%) had the *EGRP Lesson Plan* (الدليل الإرشادي) for Grade 3 reading with them in the classroom. And 71% used the Lesson Plan in that class. This is a strongly positive observation and clear indicator of teacher commitment to implementing the MOE curriculum for reading instruction.
6. **Teaching procedures and instructional methods:** Most teachers are applying the 4 procedures for effective reading instruction: i) they begin the lesson with a summary description of the lesson and its objectives, ii) they “model” or demonstrate the reading skills of that lesson, iii) they provide guided practice of the skills, with the teacher and students practicing together, and iv) they provide opportunity for independent practice by students on their own. This is a significantly positive finding.
7. **Classroom practice of reading skills:** The large majority (82%) of observed classes practiced vocabulary learning. Reading comprehension strategies were just as often observed – in 80% of classes. Most classes (82%) provided opportunity for students to *read individually aloud*. This popular practice demands that every student read and offers teachers the opportunity to observe and appraise individual reading proficiency.

Challenges and findings that merit attention:

- **Priority challenges to implementing the EGRP:** Teachers and principals agree that implementing the EGRP faces 4 key challenges: i) the Grade 3 *textbook does not align with the Reading Program*, ii) *classroom overcrowding* (half of observed classes had more than 47 enrolled students, with 6 classes having 60-80 students); iii) the *wide divergence in student reading abilities*. Most Grade 3 classes exhibit the full range of student reading performance, from illiterates to strong readers – a huge challenge to teachers; and iv) *insufficient training*. Significant numbers of teachers and principals call for more EGRP training.
- **Excessive practice of pre-reading skills in Grade 3:** Observations and anecdotal accounts *may* suggest that many Grade 3 teachers give excessive time to instruction and student practice of letter sounds knowledge. These are Grade 1 and Grade 2 pre-reading skills. Yet at the end of Grade 3 (April 2014), half of observed classes practiced one of more exercises in letters sounds and syllable

constructions. This leaves less time for oral reading fluency and reading and listening comprehension. The results of the 2nd national EGRA for Grade 3 are consistent with this observation: strong performance of Grade 3 students in letter sounds identification but weaker oral reading fluency and comprehension skills.

- **Completing EGRP training to early grade teachers:** While nearly all observed teachers received *some* EGRP training, 40% of observed teachers had not been trained in *Mastery Monitoring*; 64% had no training in *Active Learning* and 85% of teachers were not trained in *Classroom Management*.
- **Narrow understanding of the EGRP:** Many teachers and school principals understand the EGRP to be a focus on letter sounds, syllables and phonics. This narrow understanding may foster excessive attention to these skills in Grade 3. A broader understanding of EGRP and appreciation that its priority goal is improved reading *comprehension* is recommended.
- **Additional copies of EGRP resources:** A number of schools reported receiving only a single copy of the *Grade 3 Teacher's Guide*. In some schools, teachers photocopied the Guide at their own expense. In other schools, that single copy has been underused. Additional copies of EGRP resources to all schools may promote greater familiarity and use of the *Teacher's Guide*.

Recommendations: The following recommendations were discussed with and endorsed by the EGRP Coordinators from all 27 MOE muderiyas at the dissemination workshop of EGRA 2014 results held in Cairo on September 15-16, 2014:

- a. Provide **intermediate-level EGRP training to Grade 3 teachers**, senior teachers and supervisors. Nearly all Grade 3 teachers received basic Grade 3 training for EGRP. They now need **intermediate-level** training to: i) refresh basic skills, ii) redirect Grade 3 teaching priorities and instruction to fluency and comprehension skills, and iii) strengthen professional capacities for better reading instruction. Intermediate-level Grade 3 training should emphasize and provide ample time for teacher practice, reflection and exchange of experience on specific skills and strategies during training. Teachers should be provided scripted lessons for the reading strategies now included in the new Grade 3 textbook. Intermediate-level training should not be conceptual. Finally, abridged intermediate-level training in Grade 3 EGRP should also be provided to senior teachers in schools and early grade supervisors to better support reading instruction by Grade 3 teachers.
- b. Develop and test an **advanced-level EGRP training** for Grade 3 teachers to deliver in summer 2015. The *Mastery Monitoring* training that Grade 3 teachers received is an introduction to continuous in-class assessment. It is basic and not sufficient. Teachers need additional training and support to use continuous assessment in their classrooms and apply the information that assessment provides to adjust their reading instruction – take instructional decisions – to

better meet students' needs. These are advanced, not intermediate, teaching skills. *Advanced* Grade 3 training would also: i) address gaps in the *intermediate* Grade 3 training recommended for 2014/2015, and ii) promote effective use of library resources and in-class reading practice.

- c. Provide **targeted reading instruction to nonreaders and struggling readers** for 20 minutes every day. Powerful techniques have been effectively applied in other countries: organize separate reading groups for these priority students *grouped by level of reading proficiency*, not by grade. Provide 20 minutes of directed reading instruction every day, separately to each group: in-school or after-school. If teachers are unavailable, mobilize and train local volunteers (parents, unemployed graduates, NGOs supporting education).
- d. Develop a *new training course on effective Grade 3 reading strategies for **overcrowded classrooms and the wide divergence of reading proficiencies*** in such classes. 15% of classes randomly selected for classroom observation had 60 or more students. In a very few years, 20% or more of MOE classes will be similarly overcrowded. Already, most Grade 3 teachers must teach reading to classes with the *full range* of student reading proficiency: illiterates, strong readers, struggling readers, intermediate readers. Teachers need strategies for such overcrowded classes of students with widely-divergent reading skills.
- e. **Repeat this Classroom Observation in March 2015**. The classroom observations provide valuable insights on the implementation challenges and progress of the MOE Reading Program. The next classroom observation would best: i) comprise a national random sample of 40 Grade 3 classes in MOE schools, ii) use 2-person observer teams and a more refined and detailed instrument to rigorously observe, time and videotape classroom instruction for systematic analysis, iii) assess class proficiency in comprehension skills, iv) include interviews with observed teacher, senior teacher and idara supervisor to appraise their understanding, EGRP training and technical support needs, and v) identify gaps in the *intermediate*-level Grade 3 training and teacher priorities so as to inform the design and content of an advanced course of Grade 3 training recommended for summer 2015.

Background

The Classroom Observations of Grade 3 Reading Instruction

A major addition to the 2nd national assessment of Early Grade Reading skills in Grade 3 in Egypt was the classroom observation of reading instruction conducted in a sub-set of the 200 Ministry of Education schools randomly selected for this EGRA.

These observations of reading instruction and interviews with key school personnel provide current, empirical information on: i) the teaching methods, instructional activities and learning resources applied by Grade 3 teachers in their reading instruction; ii) the training experience and understandings of early grade reading of key school personnel; iii) specific challenges to implementing the early grade reading program in schools; iv) the availability and use of Early Grade Reading learning resources in school classes and libraries; and v) the technical support available to Grade 3 teachers for improved reading instruction.

The classroom observation included separate interviews with the school principal, school librarian or responsible library supervisor, and observed Grade 3 teacher; and observation of a full class period (35-45 minutes) of reading instruction conducted by the sample teacher. The instrument used for the classroom observations (*Annex A*) was first developed for this EGRA. This first use yielded useful insights for future iterations of the data collection instrument.

All observations were conducted concurrent with the EGRA assessments in each sample school during the period April 14-23, 2014. For economy and convenience, observers traveled to sample schools with the EGRA assessors. This period was the last 2 weeks of classroom instruction in MOE primary schools, owing to social and political tensions that significantly delayed and shortened the spring term of this 2013/2014 school year. This was a final period of instructional review conducted between implementation of the delayed mid-term exams in all grades (April 7-14) and the final exams that began May 2 in many schools. Student absenteeism in some sample schools was very high in this period. Altogether, these contextual factors may have impacted teachers' choices of learning activities and pedagogical strategies observed in these classes. But the context would not have altered responses to specific interview questions.

The Sub-set of Sample Schools with Classroom Observations

Forty classes – one Grade 3 class in each of 40 schools, randomly identified during implementation of this 2nd national EGRA in 200 MOE schools – were targeted to provide a statistically valid, national sample of classroom observations. Ten observations were conducted each day for 4 days: 2 classes from among the 8 schools assessed each day from each of the 5 regions of Egypt. The observed classes were randomly selected

by the EGRA Field Director from the implementation schedule of all sample schools visited each day. Only one Grade 3 class was selected and observed in each school. Each observation was conducted by one of 10 trained and experienced Observers. All observers were MOE Arabic language supervisors or master teachers with extensive early grade reading experience and professional development. A total of 39 classroom observations were completed successfully.² Each observation required 1.5 to 2 hours in the sample school.

The 39 observed classes were selected from 18 *muderiya*s. **Table 1** provides basic information on this random sample of observed classes:

Table 1: The National Sample of Observed Grade 3 Classes

Location	# Classes Observed	% of All Observed Classes	# Full-day Schools	# 2-period Schools	Average # G3 classes per school	Average G3 enrollment
Urban	11	28%	5	6	3.8	208
Rural	28	72%	16	12	2.6	121
Total	39	100%	21	18	2.9	146

Findings of the Interviews with School Personnel

Availability of EGRP Learning Resources in MOE Schools

All school principals and operating school libraries (100%) in the 39 schools confirmed receiving EGRP teaching guides and learning resources. With over 16,000 MOE primary schools, this is an outstanding achievement. EGRP instructional materials were delivered to school libraries for teacher use. Not every observed school held a full set of instructional materials developed for Grades 1 to 3. But deficiencies of the most critical EGRP guides were very few and nearly all libraries hold multiple copies for teacher use.³

Deficiencies of *supplemental* supporting resources are, however, more common. Twenty (20%) percent of sample schools did not receive the Student Worksheets (Grade 2); eleven schools (28%) did not receive the Mastery Monitoring guides; eleven schools did not receive the EGRA CD with digital copies of most manuals. Most of the schools that

² The 40th observation could not be completed when teachers and students were absent on the appointed day of the EGRA visit and the observer was unavailable on the rescheduled date.

³ Two of 39 schools did not receive the Grade 1 - Term 2 – EGRP Teacher’s Guide (Lesson Plan) in hard copy. But both schools received the Grade 1, Term 1 guide. Likewise for the Grade 2 and Grade 3 manuals: only 1-2 schools did not receive one or both Term guides for these two grades. All schools that did not receive hard copy guides *did*, however, receive the EGRP Compact Disk (CD) that included these teacher guides in digital format.

did not receive specific resources were in Lower Egypt or al-Giza.⁴ By contrast, nearly all schools in Upper Egypt reported receiving all EGRP resources.

Teachers typically (61% of sample schools) checked out the EGRP resources that they needed from their school library for the entire school term.⁵ Over one-third (38%) of school principals and librarians, however, commented that the number of copies was insufficient for their school. Half of the sample schools reporting insufficient copies made additional copies at the school’s (or teachers’) expense. The other half of schools reporting insufficient copies did not make additional copies.

EGRP Training Received

Teachers: Nearly every observed teacher received *some* EGRP training. Only 3 teachers (8%), including one assistant teacher appointed just one month before the observations, had not attended EGRP training.⁶ Except for these 3 teachers, all observed Grade 3 teachers had attended the EGRP Grade 3 training. This too is a noteworthy achievement.

Table 2 presents both the distribution of observed Grade 3 teachers by the number of different EGRP training workshops they received *and* the percentage of teachers completing specific workshops. Most teachers have attended *multiple* EGRP training

Table 2: Grade 3 Teacher Experience of EGRP Training

Number of EGRP Training Workshops Attended	% of Observed Teachers	Subject of EGRP Training Workshop	% of Observed Teachers Attending
0	8%	Grade 1 Reading	31%
1	15%	Grade 2 Reading	38%
2	26%	Grade 3 Reading	92%
3	13%	Active Learning	36%
4	13%	Classroom Management	15%
5+	26%	Mastery Monitoring	59%
Total	100%	Using the Library	13%
		Classroom Observation	8%
		Effective Supervision	3%

Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

⁴ Sample schools in Sharqiya, Daqahliya and Beheira were typically lacking one or more of these supplemental EGRP resources.

⁵ All but 3 sample schools (8%) had a functioning library with librarian or responsible supervisor.

⁶ One of these 3 teachers had, however, attended training in remedial reading for Grades 4-9.

workshops: an average of 3.2 different workshops per teacher.⁷ This is significant teacher professional training and development in support of early grade reading. This achievement does not, however, obviate the need for targeted and EGRP refresher training for teachers. The majority of observed Grade 3 teachers had not been trained in Active Learning, Classroom Management or Using the Library. Over 40% of teachers were not yet trained in Mastery Monitoring.

School Principals and Librarians: In sharp contrast to the training experience of observed teachers, less than half (41%) of school principals and just 31% of responsible school librarians / supervisors had received EGRP training. Their being trained in effective reading instruction may be a lower priority than teacher professional development. But broad-based and sustained improvement in the reading outcomes of students needs the informed commitment and professional education of key supporting staff.

Current Understandings of the EGRP

Just 2 school principals and 6 librarians in this sub-set of 39 schools had no knowledge of the Reading Program. MOE engagement in improved early reading is now widely known. To better discern *what* they knew, all observed teachers, school principals and librarians were separately asked, “What do you know about the Reading Program?” Observers appraised their responses for mention of any of 5 key understandings of the EGRP. **Table 3** presents these 5 understandings and the shares of respondents⁸ who identified a specific understanding in their response:

Table 3: Current Understandings of the EGRP

#	Key Understanding of the EGRP	% of Teachers who mention	% of Principals who mention	% of Librarians who mention
1	Focuses on 5 components of reading	54%	14%	0%
2	Applies direct, systematic teaching of reading skills	36%	8%	15%
3	Uses a variety of learning resources	39%	19%	33%
4	Tracks student mastery of target skills	28%	11%	0%
5	Provides supportive instruction informed by evaluation	18%	24%	9%
6	Other	46%	41%	67%

Not surprisingly, higher shares of teachers mentioned one or more key understandings. Observed teachers attended significantly more EGRP training than school principals or

⁷ Average is for the 36 teachers who attended at least one EGRP training, i.e. not including the 3 teachers who received no training.

⁸ Percentages are of respondents (e.g. principals / librarians) who *did* have knowledge of the Reading Program.

librarians. But it is also useful to consider the large number of “Other” responses. The large majority of these “Other” responses understood the EGRP to be a focus on letter sounds, syllables and phonics:

“A wonderful program [that] focuses on letters, sounds and breaking down words into syllables and teaches students many things” – Qena teacher.

“[The Reading Program is] an approach to assist students to learn to read through phonics and vocabulary strategies” – Alexandria principal.

This is a narrow understanding of the Program, but one that accurately recalls the principal content of EGRP instruction in Grades 1 to 3 – the grades currently supported by the Program. Collectively, the replies of respondents to this question on knowledge of EGRP were informed and accurate to the scope and content of the Program. Trainers and policy-makers should, however, continue to emphasize key messages that broaden understanding of the EGRP to include a priority for reading comprehension.

“What do you like about the Reading Program?”

Observers also asked teachers and school principals the question: “What do you like about the Reading Program?” Individual responses were again appraised for mention of specific messages. Several messages mirror key understandings of the EGRP. Others point to specific strategies of reading instruction and Program approaches. The results presented in **Table 4** further reveal both current understandings and perceived positives of the EGRP by those knowledgeable of the Program (*see footnote 6*):

Table 4: “What do you like about the Reading Program?”

#	What I like about the EGRP	% of Teachers who mention	% of Principals who mention
1	Provides greater understanding of reading	15%	19%
2	Depends on direct teaching of target skills	8%	8%
3	Helps students towards good reading and writing	62%	78%
4	Aids students to connect sounds with letters	39%	51%
5	Assists students to use skills in vocabulary building	23%	14%
6	Develops skills in reading comprehension	39%	14%
7	Raises teacher performance in teaching	41%	32%
8	Uses varied learning resources, e.g. school library	13%	11%
9	Makes learning fun	39%	32%
10	Other reason	23%	27%

Three important conclusions are suggested by the results in **Table 4**. First, [there is strong agreement on the positive attributes of EGRP between school principals and teachers](#). Both teachers and principals agree closely on the key positive attributes of the Reading Program (#3,4,7,9). Second, significant – and nearly equal – shares of both groups point to EGRP’s impact on teacher performance (#7) and making learning fun (#9) as priority, positive attributes of the program. Third, many teachers (but not principals) readily credit the EGRP with positive contributions to reading comprehension (#6).

And what are the “other” reasons for teacher and principal satisfaction with EGRP? *Teachers* cite: “increases instruction time,” “it is well organized,” “it gives students the chance to participate [in their learning],” “the interaction between students and teachers,” and “it makes reading easier for students to focus, follow and learn.” *Principals* add: “the program was established on scientific and educational grounds,” “it has provided really good training to teachers and at the best time – in summer,” “a targeted approach of the highest quality,” “seeing students love to read,” “the significant improvement seen in reading [mentioned by 3 principals],” and “the ease with which information is presented.” Each reason is a compelling testimonial to the positive impacts of the EGRP.

Technical Support to Teachers

Nearly every teacher (95%) confirmed that they received ongoing technical support for reading. Only two teachers said that they received “none.” A major focus of the Teacher interview was the availability of technical support to teachers for improved reading instruction. From whom, and how often, do teachers receive technical support for EGRP? **Table 5** identifies each of these providers of technical support for reading and how often the observed teachers received that support.

Table 5: “Who provides you support for reading?”
Percentages of observed teachers by their providers of EGRP support

#	Provider of EGRP Support to Teacher	Do You Receive Support from...?		Percentages of All Teachers Receiving EGRP Support by its Frequency				
		No	Yes	Daily	1x per week	1x per month	1x per term	1x per year
1	Senior Teacher	24%	76%	11%	46%	19%	0%	0%
2	School Principal	27%	73%	5%	51%	8%	0%	0%
3	School Training Unit	46%	54%	0%	22%	27%	3%	0%
4	Idara Supervisor	19%	81%	0%	60%	22%	0%	0%
5	Idara Reading Unit	11%	89%	0%	14%	27%	49%	0%
6	Muderiya Reading Unit	57%	43%	0%	0%	16%	19%	8%

The information reported in *Table 5* is useful, but should be interpreted cautiously. This is a normative question. Respondents will often answer a normative question “politely” with the answer that they think the interviewer wants to hear. Many respondents are also reluctant to give truthful answers that might “injure” or “insult” a specific provider of support. This is common where the provider (a principal or idara supervisor) also appraises their work performance. Finally, normative questions typically elicit ideal responses – what *should be* the frequency of support from this source – and not the actual frequency of support. There are few empirical records of actual support provided and none were inspected for the observations.

The priority observations or conclusions to be drawn from *Table 5* include:

1. Nearly all teachers receive their EGRP training⁹ and other technical support from their **Idara Reading Unit**. And the expected frequency of Idara support to most teachers is 1-3 times per year. Idara Reading Units are key providers of occasional Program training to MOE staff: teachers, supervisors, principals. Monthly (or weekly) support to teachers from Idara Reading Units is exceptional or fanciful. But the high percentage (89%) of teachers reporting some support from their Idara Unit is an excellent level of national coverage and strong indication of extensive outreach and activity by Idaras.
2. **Muderiya Reading Units** are generally not significant providers of technical support to teachers. The staffing of Muderiya Units varies from one muderiya to another, with 1 to 4 staff.¹⁰ In large governorates with many idaras (Cairo governorate, for example, has 34 idaras; other large governorates have 9-12 idaras), the Muderiya Units solely support and supervise Idara Units. But in small governorates (e.g. Suez, Ismailiya, Port Said) with only a few idaras, Muderiya Units may supplement Idara Units and provide services and support directly to schools.
3. All school principals (100%) affirmed that their school has a **School Training & Quality Unit**. But not all Units – just 77% – support reading.¹¹ According to principals: 69% of their School Training Units provided teacher training in reading, 46% provided technical follow-up meetings, 20% provided model lesson plans for teachers, and 20% of Units arranged for teachers to observe reading instruction in other classes, typically within their own school. In addition, the majority of principals (60%) whose School Units supported training also reported that their Unit provided 2 or more of these support functions to teachers. These too are normative responses. Just half (54%) of teachers said that their School Training Unit supported reading. No principals attended School Unit training in

⁹ Interviews with Observed Teachers, Question #10.

¹⁰ All MOE muderiyas have a single EGRP Coordinator who is responsible to liaise with the EGRP Early Learning Unit Head (Hanaa Qassem Hassanein) at the Central Ministry.

¹¹ Interviews with School Principal, Questions #25-27.

reading. The conclusion suggested by these results is that School Units in *some* primary schools effectively support the Reading Program. If the actual percentage was half of all primary schools, this would be positive and significant. But that estimate may be high.

4. **Idara Supervisors** and **Senior Teachers** are both identified by teachers as frequent providers of technical support for reading. Indeed, more than half of teachers reported receiving *weekly* support from both their senior teacher *and* their idara supervisor. Frequency is not, of course, a measure of quality.¹² And these “separate” sources of support may actually be jointly supporting and meeting with teachers when the idara supervisor visits the school. But even twice monthly support from one or both of these sources would be active support and attention to reading.
5. Nearly three-quarters of teachers credit their **School Principals** with support for reading. Yet many of these school principals never attended EGRP training. Ancillary comments by some teachers suggest that school principals chiefly support teachers by providing them classroom supplies and learning resources, and possibly encouragement in reading instruction.

The chief conclusion here is that nearly all Grade 3 teachers enjoy multiple sources of technical and material support for reading instruction. The quality and frequency of technical support varies, but a broad network of technical support for EGRP is active across Egypt.

Challenges to Implementing the EGRP

Finally, teachers and school principals were separately asked to identify challenges to implementing the Reading Program in their schools. **Table 6** below reveals general agreement between teachers and principals on the principal challenges. What are the 4 most-cited challenges? “The [Grade 3] *textbook does not align with the Reading Program*” was most often mentioned by teachers and principals. The next most-cited challenge: *overcrowded classrooms*. Half of teachers and school principals point to very large classes. Indeed, average enrollment for the 39 observed Grade 3 classes was 47 students per class, with 6 observed classrooms each having 60+ students enrolled.

Compounding the acute problem of overcrowding in many classes is the *wide divergence in student reading abilities*. Many Grade 3 classes exhibit the full range of student reading performance, from illiterates to strong readers. This is a huge challenge cited by half (49%) of teachers and 38% of principals.

Insufficient training completes the Top 4 challenges. Significant numbers of teachers and principals call for more EGRP training.

¹² Teachers were not asked to rate the value or judge the quality of reading support that they received from the different sources.

Table 6: Challenges to Implementing the EGRP

#	Challenges to Implementing the Reading Program	% of Teachers who mention	% of Principals who mention
1	Overcrowded classrooms	46%	45%
2	School textbook does not align with Reading Program	74%	45%
3	Wide divergence in student reading abilities	49%	37%
4	EGRP Teacher's Guide not available	33%	16%
5	Insufficient training	39%	42%
6	Insufficient technical follow-up from the Reading Unit	27%	18%
7	Insufficient learning resources in the school library	18%	18%
8	Available learning resources are not grade-appropriate	13%	3%
9	Limited school resources to provide students' needs	31%	32%
10	Resistance to change	21%	32%
11	Other	36%	32%

Far smaller numbers of teachers and principals highlighted the other *proposed* challenges.

And lastly, what “Other” challenges did teachers and principals themselves identify? Multiple respondents – both principals and teachers – pointed to *lack of family support for or follow-up of student reading*; several others mentioned *student absenteeism*.¹³ Two principals identified having unqualified, non-specialized teachers of Arabic as a challenge. A small number of respondents mentioned significant delays in receiving the Grade 3 textbooks and EGRP resources.

Findings of the Classroom Observations of Reading Instruction

The Observed Classrooms and Teachers

The *Background* section provides an initial overview of the 35-45 minute observation of reading instruction conducted in a randomly-selected Grade 3 class in each of 39 randomly-selected MOE schools across Egypt. Of particular significance is the late April schedule of these observations, during a final period of lessons review before end-of-year exams in a spring term that was markedly shortened and disrupted owing to social and political circumstances.

¹³ One principal added teacher absenteeism as a challenge: “Because of the distances traveled [by some] teachers, often only the teachers who live in the village are present [at the school].”

Nearly every observed teacher (92%) received some EGRP training and ongoing, follow-up support (95%) for reading instruction.¹⁴ Enrollment in the 39 observed classes ranged from 21 to 78 Grade 3 students with an average enrollment of 47 students. But attendance in the final weeks of any school year is typically reduced; markedly so this year in the week immediately following the delayed mid-term exams. Average attendance across the 39 classes on their respective day of observation was 35 students per class, or 74% of enrolled students. This average rate varied widely, however, across the 39 schools, yet boys' attendance (average 72%) was routinely lower than girls' (average 79%).

Nearly all Grade 3 students (96%) – boys and girls equally – had their Arabic language textbooks with them in class on the day of observation. Another positive finding.

Three-quarters (77%) of the observed teachers were women. Average teaching experience for all 39 teachers was 4.7 years “in their current position”.¹⁵ More than half (56%) of teachers had a Teacher's Diploma as their highest educational qualification, 26% had university degrees in education, and 13% had a General Diploma. Only one teacher held just a secondary school degree. It is not known if the observed teachers reside locally in the same community as the school or commute daily.

The large majority (85%) of observed classes were held in the morning before noon. For the “active learning” of students in classroom instruction, the arrangement of student desks into groups is preferred over the traditional classroom arrangement in rows. In the majority (56%) of observed classes, however, student desks remained in rows. In two classes the desks were arranged in a U-shape. In 38% of observed classes the desks were arranged in groups.¹⁶

Lastly, no schools were informed in advance of the Grade 3 class selected randomly for observation. The class was identified at the arrival of the Observer and EGRA Team at the school on the scheduled day of assessment.

¹⁴ For details, see *EGRP Training Received* (Table 2) and *Technical Support to Teachers* (Table 5) above.

¹⁵ This average figure is ambiguous. It is not clear that this is the average lifetime teaching experience of observed teachers. The wording of this question may have generated different responses from teachers. Some teachers may have answered with the number of years of experience at the particular teacher grade (cadre level) that they were asked to identify in the preceding question. Other teachers may have given their total years of teaching experience. Importantly, this average number of years teaching experience is not specific or limited to teaching Grade 3 Arabic.

¹⁶ It is noteworthy to add that only 3 of the 15 teachers who arranged student desks into groups had attended the EGRP training in *Active Learning* in which classroom arrangement is a specific point of training. Nor there is there any correlation between the arrangement of desks and class size: average class enrollment in classes arranged into rows was 46 students; 49 students in classes arranged into groups.

The Learning Resources Used and Lessons Taught

One-third (34%) of teachers had the *EGRP Teachers' Guide* for Grade 3 in their class but only 5% of teachers actually used it.¹⁷ Most observed teachers (84%) used the school textbook with several teachers writing passages from the textbook on the blackboard for oral reading by students. But the large majority of teachers (87%) had the *EGRP Lesson Plan* for Grade 3 reading and 71% used the Lesson Plan in their class. This is a strongly positive observation and clear indicator of teacher commitment to implementing the MOE curriculum for reading instruction.

Nearly half of observed teachers used the *EGRP Mastery Monitoring* materials to assess student knowledge and practice of the reading skill(s). Yet just 59% of observed teachers received training in Mastery Monitoring (*see Table 2*). This means that more than 75% of teachers trained in Mastery Monitoring were applying their training to assess student performance during the observed class. This too is a very positive finding.

EGRP posters (لوحات) were observed in 68% of observed classes. But other EGRP resources were used only exceptionally: word lists (16% of classes), letter cards (11%) and story books for student reading (18%). In only two classes were *other* learning resources used. Again, the end-of-year timing of this classroom observation may not reflect typical resource use in prior months.

What textbook lessons were taught by the observed teachers? Nearly two-thirds (64%) of teachers taught one of two lessons from Unit 3 in the Grade 3 Arabic textbook: either النجلاء الثلاثة (p.71) observed in 16 classes or زكاء أم (p.64) observed in 9 classes. Another one-quarter (26%) of teachers reviewed one of the Unit 2 lessons: al-Watani, Alexandria, Aswan, or the Pyramids. And two teachers reviewed the Unit 1 (p.2) lesson on *al-haatif* (الهاتف). Many teachers conducted review lessons during the observation week. But one might question the purpose and appropriateness of reviewing Unit 2 and, especially, Unit 1 lessons at the end of the school year. Did these teachers reach Unit 3 in Arabic reading instruction to Grade 3 this year? The observation did not ask teachers or students to identify the last lesson taught this year, or whether the observed lesson was solely review.

The Teaching Procedures and Instructional Methods Observed

Table 7 reports the different teaching procedures and instructional methods for reading instruction observed. Percentages include all teachers demonstrating a specific method or instructional procedure at least once during the class.¹⁸

¹⁷ Many schools apparently received only a single copy of the *Grade 3 Teachers' Guide*, placed in the library. But most schools received multiple copies of the *Grade 3 Lesson Plan*. Might this explain the marked difference in their use by teachers? The *Teacher's Guide* and *Lesson Plan* are complementary resources for Grade 3 teacher use.

¹⁸ Few teachers consistently applied any method to each of the multiple (2-4) activities of their lesson.

Table 7: Teaching Procedures and Methods Used

#	Teaching Procedure or Method	% of Teachers
1	Teacher begins lesson with summary description of lesson and objectives.	62%
2	Teachers provides example of or “models” the skills of this reading lesson.	59%
3	Teacher provides guided practice of skills (teacher and students practice together).	67%
4	Teacher provides opportunity for independent practice (students practice on their own).	64%
5	Teacher properly uses methods of direct teaching.	33%
6	Teacher uses <i>discussion</i> method in reading instruction.	90%
7	Teacher uses <i>role play</i> method in reading instruction.	5%
8	Teacher uses <i>cooperative learning</i> methods in reading instruction.	3%
9	Teacher uses <i>group work</i> methods in reading instruction.	10%
10	Teacher uses <i>other</i> methods in reading instruction.	5%

What general observations are indicated by these findings?

- a. Most teachers – nearly two-thirds – are applying the 4 procedures for effective reading instruction: i) they begin the lesson with a summary description of the lesson and its objectives, ii) they “model” or demonstrate the reading skills of that lesson, iii) they provide guided practice of the skills, with the teacher and students practicing together, and iv) they provide opportunity for independent practice by students on their own. This is a significantly positive result.
- b. Nearly all teachers (90%) use the *discussion* method in their reading instruction.
- c. Few teachers use any other method of reading instruction: not *role play*, not *cooperative learning*, not *group work*.
- d. Only one-third of teachers properly practice **direct teaching** of the targeted reading skill.

Again, it is uncertain whether observations “c” and “d” reflect the end-of-year timing and review objective of the observed lesson. Are these low percentages of practiced methods typical? The results might, however, recommend: i) development and dissemination of model lesson plans for specific instructional methods, and ii) additional teacher and supervisor training and coaching follow-up in the direct teaching of reading skills.

Student Practice of Letter Sounds and Linguistic Aspects

Students practiced letter sounds learning in half (49%) of the observed classes. There was no student practice of letter sounds in the other 51% of classes. Breaking words down into their syllables (letter sounds) was a common practice. Other observed practices of letter sound learning included:

- a. Combining letter sounds to form words..... 21% of classes.
- b. Deleting sounds from words to form new words:.....5% of classes.
- c. Adding one or more sounds to make a new word:.....13% of classes.
- d. Substituting one or more sounds in a word to form a new word: ... 11% of classes.

Moreover, one-quarter of all observed classes – i.e. half of the 49% of classes that practiced letter sounds – gave *extra* attention to letter sounds practice, implementing 2 or more of these different exercises.

Several classes also focused on the pronunciation of specific pairs of letters – e.g. ð and ð – in different words.

What is the significance of these findings? Letter sounds knowledge is a priority skill and objective of EGRP instruction in Grades 1 and 2. But these classes were observed at the end of Grade 3. The observed incidence of classes practicing letter sounds at end of Grade 3 – *half* of all classes – appears high. The *EGRP Grade 3 Lesson Plan* (Sept. 2013) for first semester (Term 1) directs one-quarter of class instruction to letter sounds. But this observation finding, together with anecdotal remarks that many Grade 3 teachers feel most comfortable teaching phonics and observation interviews with Grade 3 students, suggests that Grade 3 instruction in letter sounds may be excessive in many classes. This is important. Excessive repetition of syllable exercises would reduce instruction and student practice of oral reading fluency and reading and listening comprehension. This conclusion is consistent with the 2014 results of the 2nd national EGRA for Grade 3 that showed strong pre-reading skills in letter sounds identification *but weaker comprehension and oral reading fluency*.

Nearly all classes (90%) included instruction in one or more linguistic aspects of Arabic, such as: *tanween*, “*t*” *marbuuta*, verbal and non-verbal sentences. Linguistic instruction was a key learning activity in many classes. In a number of classes, however, teachers were observed reviewing linguistic aspects from the Unit 1 lessons of the EGRP Grade 3 Lesson Plan, i.e. from the **start** of Grade 3. This finding might suggest that overall progress in EGRP Grade 3 instruction in 2013/2014 was stunted and/or some teachers are needlessly drilling students on skills that they have already mastered.

Student Practice of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

The large majority (82%) of observed classes practiced vocabulary learning. This is a **strongly positive finding**: building vocabulary is a reading priority in Grade 3. Teacher training in Grade 3 EGRA introduced 6 strategies for vocabulary learning. **Table 8** reveals how often a specific strategy was observed. Two strategies – word mapping and vocabulary matrix – are clearly the most popular.

Table 8: Vocabulary Learning Strategies Observed

#	Vocabulary Learning Strategy	% of Classes
1	Word mapping – خريطة الكلمات	51%
2	Word family – عائلة الكلمات	8%
3	Vocabulary matrix – شبكة المفردات	44%
4	Multiple meanings - المعاني المتعددة	26%
5	Using contextual clues – مفاتيح السياق	0%
6	Word adding to sentence – الصفة المضافة	5%
7	Other	8%

Student Practice of Reading Comprehension Strategies

Reading comprehension strategies were just as often observed – in 80% of classes. Comprehension is the principal objective of reading and building student skills in comprehension is a lead priority of Grade 3 EGRA. Like vocabulary learning, teachers learned 6 strategies for direct teaching of reading comprehension in EGRA Grade 3 training. But only one strategy – asking direct questions – is currently popular with teachers. The observed frequency of each strategy in the 39 classes is:

- a. Expectation / anticipation..... 26% of classes.
- b. Asking direct questions 62% of classes.
- c. Asking indirect questions..... 18% of classes.
- d. Summarizing 5% of classes.
- e. Retelling stories..... 5% of classes.
- f. Using story map 10% of classes.
- g. Other..... 0% of classes.

Not all students learn similarly. And repetitively using the same teaching strategy risks diminishing student interest and attention. Additional teacher training and model lesson plans and exercise designs using other comprehension strategies may be recommended.

Students Practice Reading

How often do students practice reading connected text in class? Student practice of reading skills in class is essential to their mastery. In observation interviews, teachers and principals often despaired of the lack of family support for student reading at home. Many families expect their children to be educated by schools. Student practice of reading in schools is thus paramount to their mastering reading.

Observers looked for 4 different practices of student reading in class: students reading altogether and aloud, students reading aloud individually, students reading their textbook, and students reading silently.

Table 9: Students Practice Reading in Class

#	Practice of Student Reading	% of Classes
1	Students read altogether aloud	54%
2	Students read individually aloud	82%
3	Students read silently	3%
4	Students read their textbook	72%

More than half of classes included students *reading altogether aloud*. This is a welcome practice for struggling readers who can mimic their classmates without individual scrutiny. But the pedagogical utility and skills-building of students reading altogether aloud is not high.

Most classes (82%) provided opportunity for students to *read individually aloud*. This popular practice demands that every student read and offers teachers the opportunity to observe and appraise individual reading proficiency. The challenge is that MOE classes are typically large. The 39 observed classes had an average enrollment of 47 students. That is, nearly half of the classes had 50-80 students. In a class of 50 students, if every student is given just 15 seconds to read individually aloud, at least 12 minutes of the 45 minute class would be needed to give every student a chance to read. Moreover, reading individually aloud is not welcomed by the weakest readers and illiterate students in the classroom. And most every class has weak and illiterate students. Reading individually aloud *before the entire class* is effective practice for intermediate to strong readers. Reading individually aloud *in small, homogeneous skill groups of struggling or intermediate readers* may be a more effective strategy for these readers. Meanwhile, strong readers can practice silent reading and peer reading in their own small group in class.

Virtually no classes (3% -- just one class) provided opportunity for students to *read silently*. Yet nearly every student had their textbook with them in class.