



# Lessons from LAC Reads: *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos* in Peru and Guatemala

This brief is one in a series of briefs uncovering lessons learned from four evaluations of promising reading interventions funded by USAID as part of the Latin America and the Caribbean Reads (LAC Reads) project. The evaluations were conducted by Mathematica.

## Background

The *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos* program adapted Save the Children's Literacy Boost approach to improve early grade reading by incorporating instruction in the mother tongue while adjusting to the linguistic background of teachers and students. Previously implemented in 14 countries, Literacy Boost had shown promise of effectiveness. *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos* was implemented by Save the Children in communities with linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations in the Quechua-speaking region of Apurímac in Peru and the K'iche'-speaking region of Guatemala.

The evaluation focused on the impact of two specific intervention components:

### In-school teacher training and coaching, which included:

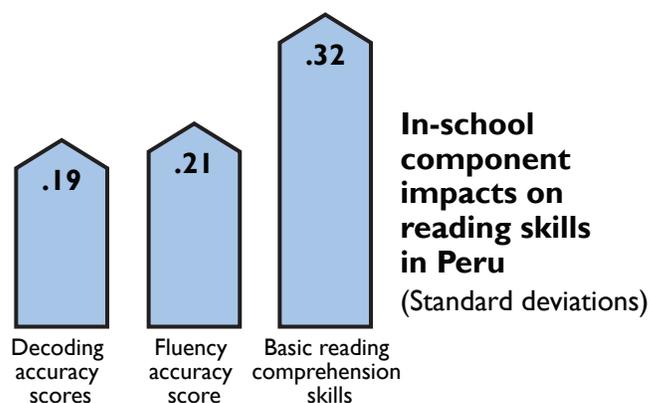
- Training teachers in mother tongue or Spanish reading instruction techniques and the five core skills of reading.
- Training teachers in the use of formative assessments to monitor students' progress and mastery of alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
- Mentoring and coaching teachers.
- Reading materials in mother tongue and Spanish.

### Community action, which included:

- Reading camps, reading festivals, reading contests, and varied reading activities led by community volunteers.
- Peer-assisted reading time with reading buddies.
- Parent and community workshops to encourage the creation of more opportunities for children to practice reading outside of school.

## Results

After 2.5 years, based on third-grade reading assessments, survey results, and qualitative findings from a randomized controlled trial, evaluators found that:



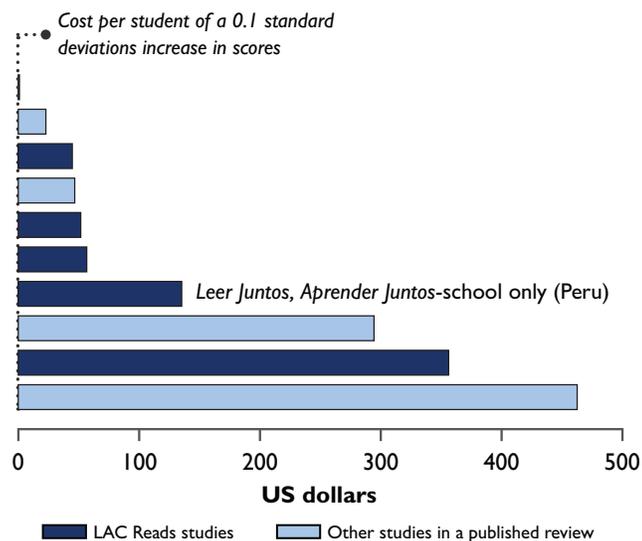
### The in-school component had a positive impact on students' reading skills in Peru but not in Guatemala.

- In Peru, the in-school component had favorable impacts on some of the reading outcomes we measured, and these were largely driven by improvements in girls' reading skills. The effect sizes, ranging from 0.19 to 0.31, are comparable to those of other interventions in developing countries aiming to improve foundational reading skills and reading comprehension in the early grades. This is equivalent to six more pseudo-words decoded correctly, six more words read fluently in a short passage (out of the total words read), and 9 percent more students answering at least one reading comprehension question correctly.
- In Guatemala, we did not find impacts of this component on any of the foundational reading skills and reading comprehension measures. Students in schools that received the in-school component had reading scores similar to those in the control group.

**The community component did not have a measurable impact on students’ reading skills in Peru or Guatemala.**

- In Peru and Guatemala, the community component improved some dimensions of the literacy environment in students’ homes. For example, in Guatemala, children in schools that received the community component were 9 percent more likely to read together with siblings at home. The community action activities may have encouraged older siblings to read to their younger ones, but those intermediate outcomes did not translate into impacts on students’ reading outcomes.
- Implementation of the community component did not occur as intended. Persistent difficulties with recruiting and retaining volunteers and barriers to children’s attendance at the activities decreased the fidelity of the community component.

**Cost-effectiveness of LAC Reads Interventions compared to similar interventions in the region**



**The estimated cost-effectiveness of the in-school component was \$136 per student per 0.10 standard deviation increase in emergent reading skills.** This is in the high range compared to other education interventions to improve student performance that have been rigorously evaluated in LAC.

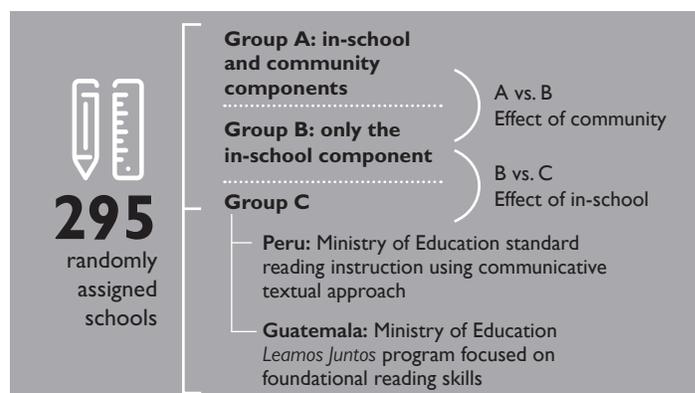
## Lessons learned and recommendations

**Training teachers on foundational reading skills instruction can be a useful mechanism to help improve reading outcomes in LAC countries where teachers might not receive it as part of their pre-service training.** In Peru, the evaluation showed that teacher training and coaching in reading instruction can be effective, perhaps particularly when it is distinct from other teaching approaches already in use. The communicative textual approach used in Peru was markedly distinct from the *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos*

approach to reading instruction. In Guatemala, the prevailing approach to reading instruction was similar to the *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos* approach. Teachers in the control groups of both countries reported receiving training and coaching, although not always at the coverage levels achieved by *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos*.

**When choosing education programs to invest in and evaluate, funders should consider service gaps and programs’ complementarities with prevailing practice.** In Guatemala, the evaluation demonstrated that the national early grade reading program may be at least as effective as a program implemented with technical assistance of a non-governmental implementer.

**Implementers may wish to conduct feasibility pilots before rolling out the full intervention for evaluation.** Due to implementation challenges in both countries with the community action component, it is unclear whether the lack of positive impact is due to weaknesses in implementation. Improving fidelity of implementation could lead to clearer impacts on students’ reading outcomes or to clearer interpretation of null findings.



### Evaluation Design for *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos*

A three-arm randomized controlled trial was implemented to assess impact and cost-effectiveness (2013–2016). Nearly 300 eligible schools were assigned to one of three groups. Group A received both the in-school and community components, Group B received only the in-school component, and Group C (prevailing practice) did not implement the *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos* program components. In Guatemala, the Ministry of Education’s approach emphasizes instruction on foundational reading skills leading to reading fluency and comprehension, which is similar to the approach of *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos*. In Peru, the prevailing practice approach emphasizes communication and the use of text to help students understand, speak, read, and write (communicative textual approach). Teachers in Group C schools in both Guatemala and Peru reported receiving coaching and training from Ministry of Education counterparts, although not always at the same levels of support provided by *Leer Juntos, Aprender Juntos*.

Within each school, we followed two cohorts of children from first grade through the end of third grade, for approximately 2.5 years of exposure to the program.