



RESOURCES VS. ROUTINES: WHICH FORM OF SUPPORT AT HOME IS MORE STRONGLY ASSOCIATED WITH LEARNING?

ICAN-ICAR 2025 assessed over 89,000 children across 11 countries through household-based assessments. This Spotlight examines how five home factors relate to minimum proficiency, considering them together and accounting for child and household characteristics.

WHAT FACTORS ARE MOST PREVALENT AT HOME?

Prevalence of each household factor among assessed children, by country. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

	 Bangladesh	 Kenya	 Mali	 Mexico	 Mozambique	 Nepal	 Nicaragua	 Pakistan	 Senegal	 Tanzania	 Uganda
 Children's books at home	23%	51%	30%	72%	16%	22%	59%	28%	55%	32%	19%
 Smartphone*	77%	56%	77%	96%	27%	93%	92%	73%	87%	38%	26%
 Paid tuition	55%	26%	7%	14%	6%	25%	16%	40%	17%	14%	16%
 Homework help	60%	58%	22%	70%	39%	50%	76%	40%	43%	27%	35%
 Storytelling**	28%	31%	4%	24%	10%	7%	27%	12%	6%	5%	25%

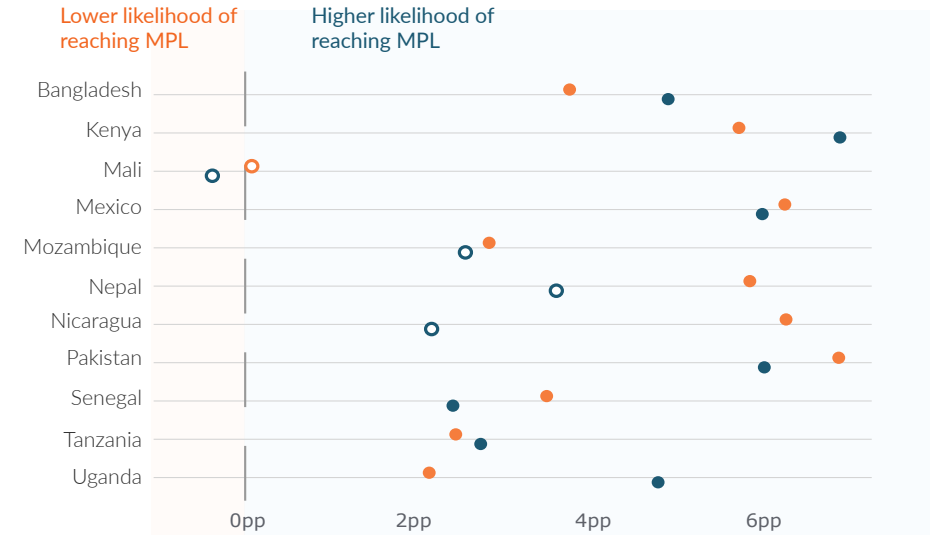
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Smartphones are more prevalent than children's books in every country surveyed.
- Paid tuition varies widely, but is especially prevalent in Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- Homework help is more common than storytelling in every country.
- Regular storytelling remains below one-third in all 11 countries.

* Measures whether a smartphone is available in the household, not whether the assessed child personally uses it.
** Measures how often someone in the household reads or tells stories to the child, using the survey's frequency threshold of at least 1–2 days per week.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AT HOME SHOW THE MOST CONSISTENT ASSOCIATION WITH LEARNING, YET MOST CHILDREN DO NOT HAVE THEM

Association between books at home and learning after accounting for household and child characteristics. Associations do not establish causal effects.



POSITIVE, SIGNIFICANT ASSOCIATIONS

10/11 Reading
7/11 Math

Not statistically significant ○○
Significant ●●

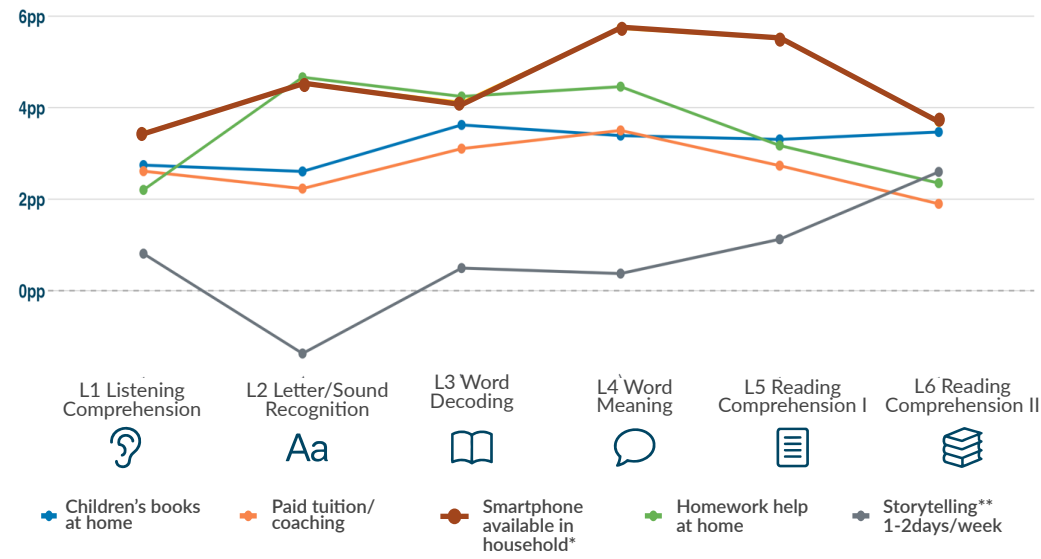
No country shows a statistically significant negative association.

MPL = Minimum Proficiency Level



IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, HAVING A SMARTPHONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD IS POSITIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH ALL SIX READING SUB-DOMAINS

Association between home factors and reading sub-domains in Sub-Saharan Africa, ordered from listening to reading comprehension.



Lowest: +3.4pp
listening comprehension

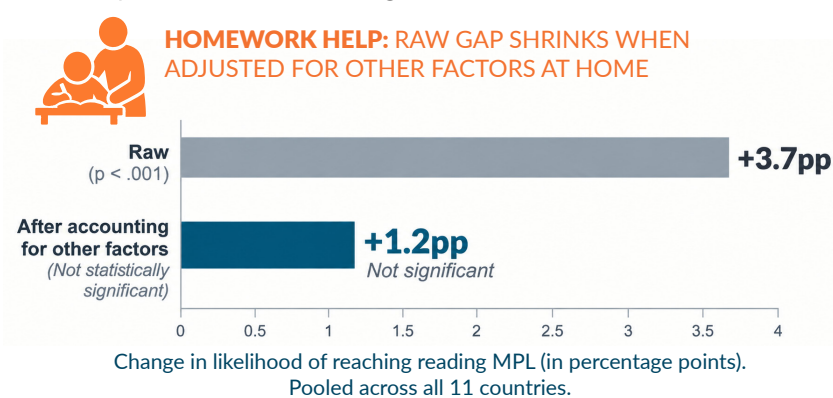
Peak: +5.7pp
word meaning

KEEP IN MIND

- Smartphone ownership is measured at the household level. It does not indicate whether children access or use the device. Further research is needed to understand this association.

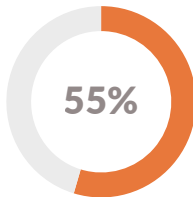
HOMEWORK HELP, PAID TUITION AND STORYTELLING ARE MORE CONTEXT-SPECIFIC

Their associations vary across countries and after accounting for other factors, highlighting different questions about how each household practice relates to learning.



The reduction after adjustment suggests that much of the raw difference reflects which households provide help: children in wealthier and more educated households are more likely to receive it.

PAID TUITION: FOCUS ON BANGLADESH



Bangladesh
+8.9pp reading,
+12pp math

Paid tuition is most common in Bangladesh among the 11 countries surveyed, and is significantly associated with reaching MPL in both reading and math. Its widespread use raises questions about whether families seek tuition to fill gaps in schooling, meet social expectations for extra tutoring, or both.

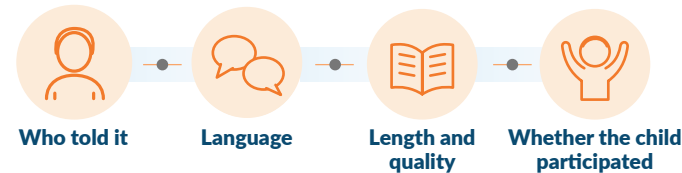
STORYTELLING: THE MEASURE CAPTURES FREQUENCY, NOT QUALITY

Storytelling shows no consistent association with learning across countries. The survey captures frequency, but not the quality or nature of the interaction.



WHAT THE SURVEY MEASURES
Storytelling on at least 1-2 days per week

WHAT IT DOES NOT CAPTURE



MAIN FINDINGS

- Resources families can buy, such as books and smartphones, show more consistent associations with learning than activities that families routinely perform, such as homework help or storytelling.
- Children's books show the most consistent association: positive and significant for reading, yet fewer than one-third of children have books at home in 7 countries.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, having a smartphone at home is positively associated with all six reading subdomains. Further research is needed to understand this association.

This is the fourth in a series of spotlight briefs showcasing evidence generated by the 2025 ICAN-ICAR common assessments of children's foundational learning in the Global South.



Download the Report