



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

**ASER Pakistan
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1. What is ASER Pakistan?

ASER stands for the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER); in Urdu it means 'impact'. ASER started in 2008 in Pakistan as a citizen-led movement; it is the largest flagship program of Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), a national civil society organization. It is a household-based survey of children's learning performed one on one, and their schooling status and household profile.

Learning Status is recorded for children 5-16 years of age, whether they are in school or out of school, they are tested for their ability to read simple text/story with understanding (Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto and English) and, do basic arithmetic of competencies (numbers, operations) up to grade 2/3 level in the country.

Schooling status is recorded for children in the age group 3 to16, irrespective of the type of school in public or non-state sector, including all types of non-formal programs.

Today, ASER Pakistan has become a benchmark for quality, equity and access challenges faced by Pakistan. It is the most quoted document, embraced by policy makers, bureaucrats, think tanks, researchers, media, CSOs and politicians alike.

ASER Pakistan is a part of a south-south alliance of 17 member organisations called the [People's Action for Learning \(PAL\) Network](#) that works to advance children's foundational learning in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Members of the PAL Network carry out learning interventions programmes (action) and citizen-led assessments (CLAs) with the goal of enhancing learning outcomes and influencing policies. The mantra for ASER and the PAL Network is from assessment to action to advocacy (A3)

2. How frequently is large scale ASER implemented in the country?

3. What is the sample size of ASER survey?

ASER generates district level estimates of children's schooling status, basic reading, and arithmetic. Each year, ASER reaches entire Pakistan. In the past (up to 2021) ASER has reached 152/5 districts; however, with new districts added, it will reach 170 rural districts across the country.

Additionally, it also includes some urban areas in the sample, encompassing around 21+ urban districts. In each rural district, 30 villages are selected, and within each sampled village, 20 households are randomly selected. This gives a total of $30 \times 20 = 600$ households in each rural district. Depending on the exact number of districts surveyed, almost 87415 households across the country are sampled for each year's ASER.

In every household, all children in the age group 3-16 years are surveyed, and children of ages 5-16 years are assessed in basic reading in Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto, English, and arithmetic.

A total of approximately 250,000 or more children are surveyed from rural districts each year, while Urban ASER covering 21 districts includes 39593 children (2022).

4. Why does ASER aim to generate district level estimates?

Most official statistics in Pakistan primarily provide estimates at the national and provincial level. However, planning and resource allocation occur at the district level, making it crucial to have representative estimates at this level. ASER serves this purpose by providing gender dis-aggregated dataset each year for robust analysis and planning.

Information on enrolment and access to education can be obtained from the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey conducted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. Whereas data on public school enrolment, inputs and facilities are collected annually for each district by the provincial Education Management Information System (EMIS). This data is reported through AEPAM (now merged with PIE), which operates under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT). However, the estimates of children's basic learning levels are neither available at the district level nor provided annually or even biennially. Consequently, the ASER survey plays a vital role in filling this significant gap.

5. How are the villages selected?

ASER uses a two-stage sampling strategy to ensure comprehensive coverage of almost all rural districts in the survey. The obtained estimates are then aggregated, using appropriate weights, to calculate province-level and national-level results.

In the first stage, 30 villages are randomly selected from the village directory of the 2017 Census. The sampling is carried out using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) technique, considering the variation in the village population sizes.

In the second stage, 20 households are randomly selected in each sampled village, following the "every 5th household from the left hand-side" rule. This two-stage design ensures that every household in the district has an equal probability of being selected for the survey.

To ensure a combination of continuity and change in the sample from previous years, a "rotating panel" of villages is created. This panel consists of 20 previously surveyed villages and 10 new villages. This approach generates more precise estimates and maintains consistency while allowing for the inclusion of new areas.

By implementing this two-stage survey strategy and utilizing a rotating a panel of villages, ASER strives to provide accurate and representative data for analysis and tracking changes in children's learning outcomes over time.

6. How can I find out which villages have been surveyed?

This information is not in the public domain as the ASER village list is confidential. In large scale surveys and research studies, it is standard practice to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents. Therefore, all personally identifiable information (PII) pertaining to households, villages, and individuals is removed. This includes village names, respondent names, children's names and so on. In the publicly available ASER datasets on the website, village names are encoded and unique numeric identifiers at the household-, respondent- and child-level have been added to identify the observations.

7. Do the ASER estimates for a district also apply to individual villages in that district?

No, they don't. ASER estimates for a district are representative at the district level and provide a snapshot of children's schooling and learning status for the district. The sampling is not representative at the village level, and the situation in individual villages can be different.

8. Who designed this sampling strategy?

ASER Pakistan has adapted its methodology for the rural survey from ASER India, which was originally developed by Pratham, a prominent education non-profit from India. The development process involved consultations with experts at the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi.

On the other hand, the approach for the urban survey in ASER has been designed by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) in collaboration with the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

9. Does ASER also report on other household-level indicators?

Other than children's learning and education status, the ASER household survey also collects data on important household-level indicators, such as household assets on basis of which a wealth index is calculated. Furthermore, the survey also collects data on children's health, availability of basic facilities, effects of natural disasters, as well as parent's education level.

10. What are the guidelines that are followed in developing the reading and arithmetic assessment tools?

By design ASER is a 'floor' test which aims to evaluate children's early reading and basic arithmetic ability. The content of the reading assessment as well as numeracy is based on grade 2 and grade 3 level curriculum.

11. What is the purpose of sampling, and why does ASER do it?

It would be a massive undertaking and consume a lot of resources to evaluate the fundamental reading and numeracy skills of every child in Pakistan. Thankfully, this is not necessary. The thorough selection of a sample of villages and households allows us to produce data that is just as accurate and reliable as testing every child in the nation - provided that the sampling process is correctly carried out by specialists. The sampling strategy employed in ASER was created by specialists and is largely typical for large-scale surveys.

12. Are the reading assessments comparable across different languages?

Yes, these assessments are comparable. The ASER reading tool is also developed for Sindhi along with Urdu and is reviewed by translators and assessment experts to make sure all translated versions are comparable. Previously, the assessment tool for reading was also operationalized in Pashto.

13. Why are all children in the age group 5 to 16 assessed with the same tools? Why does ASER not assess children at their grade level?

All children are assessed with the same tools as the objective of the ASER survey is to ascertain whether or not children have attained early foundational skills in reading and arithmetic. This is irrespective of age or grade level. It is not designed to be a grade-

appropriate assessment but rather it is designed to provide an understanding of school-aged children's early reading and basic arithmetic ability.

14. When (Month of year) is the assessment conducted?

ASER Pakistan is conducted each year during September-November and the final report is launched in mid-January. The survey begins in September annually, when schools have resumed after the summer vacation in mid-August (in summer zone districts), and children have become more regular in schools. This cycle assumes an academic year beginning in April each year, giving students time to work on their new academic year for at least 2 to 3 months. After COVID-19 this may change in some provinces where ASER rounds must begin by end October early November giving children at least 2 months of academic time in the new grade/s. The chosen time for report launch is mid to end January as the planning for education, budgets for the next fiscal year by the government takes place gathering momentum on sector plans/targets/ policy refinements and budgets. Thus, ASER national /provincial and district findings are disseminated at national, provincial, district and even village level to address challenges, solutions, and actions both from Demand and Supply side.

15. Why does ASER use other organizations and volunteers to collect data? Are the volunteers capable and well-trained of doing the survey? Who hires the volunteers?

ASER is a citizens' initiative, implemented by partner organizations in every rural district across the country. One of the major aims of the survey is to generate awareness and mobilize people around the issue of children's learning. The entire design of ASER thus revolves around the fact that it aims to reach and involve 'ordinary people' rather than experts. All tools and procedures are designed to be simple to understand, quick to do, and easy to communicate. Procedures for ensuring the quality of data have evolved over several years. Typically, ASER volunteers are given 3 days of training. One of these days is spent practicing all ASER steps and procedures in the field. At the end of the training, a quiz is conducted to ensure that volunteers have understood the key elements of ASER. In addition, volunteers are monitored when the survey is in the field; and a substantial proportion of villages are rechecked by ASER teams. In ASER 2013, for example, more than half of all surveyed villages were either monitored or rechecked or both. Partner organizations are responsible for collecting data hence they choose volunteers.

16. Are the data collection/measurement tools vetted before the actual data?

Yes, ASER goes through an intensive tool review and testing process every year. Assessment focal institutions and experts from all provinces, government mainly and some non-govt./private experts are called in for a review meeting/workshop where they review ASER Tools in the light of curriculum alignment, context relevance and equity lens. The suggestions debated and received are then incorporated in the final set of tools.

17. Who supervises the data collection process, and what supervision methods were used?

ASER Survey is monitored with the help of partners (other than the survey implementation partners) and ASER Teams. 80% of the surveyed districts are monitored on the day of training as well as on the day of survey to ensure the presence of master trainers and volunteers. Moreover, volunteers and master trainers are called daily from ASER head for tracking and monitoring.

18. Where can I find the results of the survey?

ASER publishes national reports, which includes selected estimates at district, province, and national level. ASER reports can be downloaded from the ASER Pakistan website (<http://aserpakistan.org/index.php>) along with its various other publications and pilot study reports.

19. How might the ASER results be used to guide decision-making for improving children's learning?

Any ASER table of results can be closely examined to reveal the range of children's reading and numeracy skills are, even within the same grade. Children who are not at the level of expected competencies cannot be taught from a grade level textbook. They need support at the level where they are at, and not by age and grade level. As they advance through the system, these students, if they are not attended to their gaps, are left behind in typical classes and fall further and further behind progressively; hence even in grades 8, 9, 10 they are still lacking the basics of a grade 2 level competencies in numeracy and literacy or Foundational Learning. Understanding children's present abilities is necessary for designing teaching strategies and learning resources that will allow children to start at their current level and progress to learning levels appropriate for their age and grade. This will help children's foundational learning levels improve. To properly allocate resources, we can use ASER data to identify the areas where the majority of children struggle. Children who read at the same level but are in different grades can be put in one group. Teaching children according to their knowledge and abilities rather than their age or grade has come to be known as "Teaching at the Right Level," or TaRL for short. This strategy is already utilized by many countries, educational institutions, and programmes. The crucial first step is to understand the learning status of the students, and the ASER scores can give this information. The ASER tools and testing procedure can simply be utilized to generate this knowledge for any class, school, or group of children if data on a particular geography or group is necessary.

20. Is ASER data representative? At what levels?

ASER data is representative at district, provincial, area and national levels.

20. Can I volunteer for ASER or participate in any way? What can I do?

Yes, you can volunteer for ASER. ASER contact different universities and organizations to provide us with volunteers. Moreover, the partner organizations who are responsible for data

collection in their respective districts choose volunteers who can apply for such organizations.

21. Why does ASER test children at home and not in school?

The ASER survey generates estimates of schooling and basic learning status for ALL children in rural Pakistan in the age group 5-16 through household-based assessment. Household based assessment is the only way to ensure that ALL children are included. This includes children enrolled in different types of schools (government, private, and other kinds) as well as children not currently enrolled in school. Moreover, in our geographies where the non-state sector(private) has a wide spectrum and covers institutions from non-formal (established formally) to madrassas to non-elite non-registered to registered affordable to elite private schools, the household becomes a great catchment space to cover it all. Also, school-based assessments of student learning will leave out non-attending children (those that are either out-of-school or absent) who may have poorer learning levels. ASER Pakistan not only tests every child falling in the age group of 5-16 years but also surveys the local government and local private schools for facilities, teacher qualification and presence, students' attendance, multi-grade or single grade learning, grants to schools etc. to provide with a broader picture.

22 . Do you also collect information about the household?

Yes. In addition to gathering data on children's education and learning status, the number of household members, assets, parents' educational backgrounds and child's schooling information is also considered. The household data gathered varies from year to year; the ASER report for each year includes specifics on what is inquired about.

23. Do you collect information about schools?

ASER also conducts school visits. Survey teams visit the largest government school with primary sections in each sampled village, and collect basic information on enrollment, staffing, and school infrastructure. Details of the specific questions asked are provided in each year's ASER report. However, learning assessments are always done during the household survey, not in school.

24. Why does ASER only assess reading and arithmetic?

Since the beginning, ITA's work has strived towards basic literacy and numeracy skills for the children of Pakistan. Multiple research and datasets including ASER have revealed shockingly high proportion of children in primary grades struggling to learn these foundational skills. Children are unable to learn higher level abilities because of difficulties in these two areas. The performance in other subject areas is similarly weakened by an inadequate foundation of foundational knowledge, which adversely affects children's academic outcomes.

25. Why are all children in the age group 5 to 16 assessed with the same tools? Why does ASER not assess children at their grade level?

All children are assessed with the same tools as the objective of the ASER survey is to ascertain whether children have attained early foundational skills in reading and arithmetic. This is irrespective of age or grade level. It is not designed to be a grade appropriate assessment, but rather to provide an understanding of school aged children's early reading and basic arithmetic ability.

26. How do you ensure that children are at home on the day of the survey?

The household survey is usually conducted on a Sunday and/or at other times when children are not in school. If a child is not found at home at the time of the survey, surveyors are asked to note down the child's details and return to the household at a time when family members say she will be available.

27. How long does the process of testing a child take?

ASER is designed to be easy and quick to administer. Depending on the age and ability of the child, the assessment of reading and arithmetic takes an average of about ten to fifteen minutes per child.

28. What kind of reaction do you get from the community at large, or from the parents of the children you test?

As the ASER testing is conducted, there is typically a lot of interest and conversation in the community. People swarm all around to take in the scene and discuss it. The tool's simplicity encourages community members and parents to participate in the endeavor and to consider whether their children are learning. Parents frequently believe that just because their children are in school, they must be learning. ASER can be the first indication to parents that their children may be falling behind.

For further details please reach out to the ASER Team

Email: info@aserpakistan.org

Cell no: (+92) (42) 35711107-9