



PASEC test for children with sensory disabilities in Mali

Challenges and solutions: summary of the 2022–23 pilot initiative



Authors

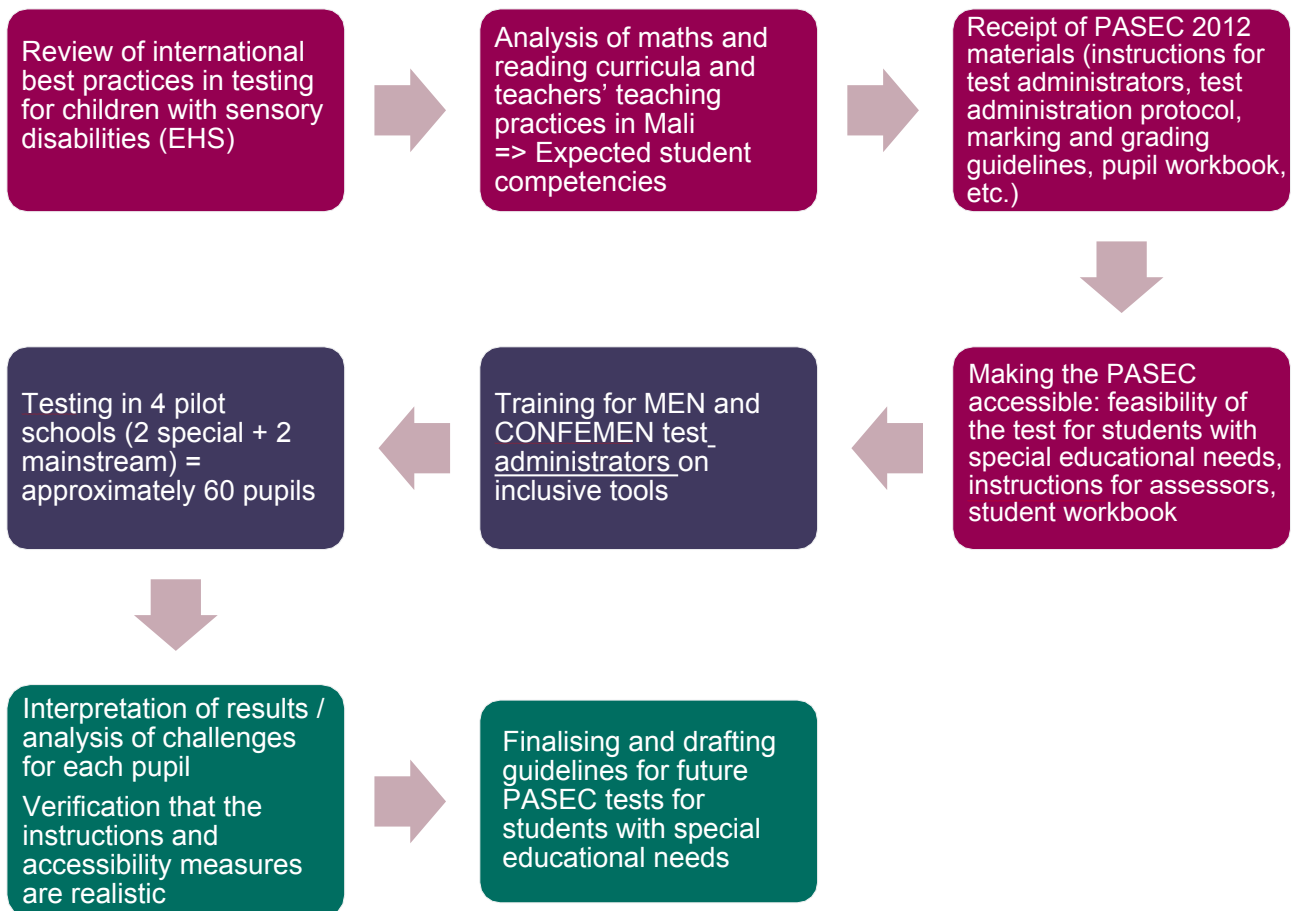
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Introduction

For several years, Sightsavers has been developing its expertise in the inclusivity of national and regional assessments, whether through EGRA in Mali, ASER and ICAN in Pakistan, or PASEC in Mali in collaboration with CONFEMEN. According to Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), children with disabilities have the right to participate fully in their education – including in skills assessments. However, many tests remain inaccessible to them and do not take their specific challenges into account. The aim of this pilot initiative was therefore to develop new approaches, to learn through the process of making PASEC inclusive and its implementation in the field, and to formulate recommendations for future disability-inclusive assessments.

Pilot process in Mali for the adaptation of the PASEC reading and mathematics test



Challenges faced by children with sensory disabilities during the PASEC test

Children with disabilities face many challenges at school. Regardless of the type and severity of their disability, they must receive special support to ensure their learning. Standard tests, exams or assessments can be very difficult for children with sensory disabilities. Being outside a classroom setting, alone with adults, can cause a feeling of isolation and increased vulnerability, which adults must be aware of, requiring approaches and means of communication adapted to these children. It is also important to address the challenges related to the intersectionality of gender and disability.

These challenges, in addition to other external factors such as children's nutritional status, family involvement, the quality of teaching, teacher training, or access to adequate educational resources, can influence the results of these tests. It is therefore important to take the following factors into account when administering tests to children with sensory disabilities:

Challenges faced by blind or visually impaired children:



- Children develop develops Braille skills more slowly, for both letters and numbers.
- It takes longer to read Braille because the finger picks up the words dot by dot.
- Braille paper is damaged by touch; some dots may be erased, causing confusion.
- Reading causes greater fatigue for these children.
- Images to aid understanding of words or sentences are not available to these children.
- Visually impaired children may lack everyday life experiences, which can delay their learning.

Challenges faced by profoundly deaf or hard-of-hearing children:



- Learning sign language is complicated by the wide variety of regional variations.
- The level of proficiency in sign language affects the understanding and memorisation of mathematical concepts.
- Translation into sign language takes a long time.
- Children have to lip-read and/or watch the signed translation and look at their exercise book at the same time.
- Certain phonemes and sounds may be inaudible to hearing impaired learners, or are difficult to translate into sign language.
- The explanation of maths problems in sign language does not always accurately reflect the original problem.
- Some children may not have sufficient command of spoken language to learn to read or understand mathematical instructions.
- Developmental delays may affect the understanding of concepts and instructions, particularly in profoundly deaf children.
- The child may have increased difficulty remembering instructions or questions during the test.
- The need for concentration and sustained attention causes significant fatigue.
- Practical experience of maths in everyday life is often lacking.

Strategies for making PASEC tests inclusive of children with sensory disabilities

Children with sensory disabilities have a right to education and must take part in tests, assessments and exams to better understand the challenges and progress they encounter during their learning. To achieve this, it is not a question of creating tests specifically for them, but rather of designing more inclusive tests from the outset, by adding targeted instructions for test administrators and making the student's test booklet accessible.

During this pilot project in Mali, the instructions for invigilators were expanded to include: a version for blind children, one for visually impaired children, one for profoundly deaf children and one for moderately deaf children. General guidelines and recommendations were then formulated. The student workbook was tested for each type and severity of disability. A Braille copy of the workbook was produced for blind children.

Kindness, respect and encouragement, regardless of the child's ability to complete the tests, are of the utmost importance. The child must also feel safe. If the child is a girl with a disability, the presence of a female teacher is recommended.

Strategies common to all children with sensory disabilities, added to the test administrators' instructions

- Conduct individual tests, reduce the distance between the examiner and the child (positioning is very important)
- Minimise background noise, ensure good lighting
- Reduce visual distractions and cognitive overload
- Allow children extra time
- Show kindness (reassure, encourage, stop the test)
- Use other senses (pictures, objects, gestures)
- Explain clearly and concisely
- Translate instructions into the local language if necessary
- Repeat the instructions
- Use several examples and models, ensuring they are understood
- Ensure attention and concentration
- Take breaks

Specific strategies depending on the type of sensory impairment, included in the test administrators' instructions



If the child is visually impaired, you should also:

- Use the available equipment (magnifying glasses, desk, glasses, cap, etc.)
- Position the child according to their visual needs (direct/indirect light, facing forward/to the side, etc.)
- Speak clearly and distinctly, using appropriate language
- Place your finger at the start of the line or on the exercise
- Clearly point out key words

If the child is blind, you should also:

- Position the child facing you, ensure the table is at the correct height and there is enough space so as not to hinder their dexterity
- Speak clearly and distinctly, and repeat the instructions
- Use complete Braille versions, in the correct order, and change them every 2 or 3 pupils
- Allow the child to handle tactile aids (rulers, geometric shapes, etc.) before setting them the test.
- Use simple, realistic tactile images, or objects illustrating words (fabrics, materials, objects), which the child has handled before.
- Cards and geometric shapes must be reproduced in tactile form (using local materials); tables must be linear in form.
- Help the pupil find their bearings: place a finger on the first line, on the tables, on the tactile image, and hand over the objects

- Provide a Braille teacher to assist with the workbook in addition to the Ministry of Education’s assistant who speaks and takes notes.



If the child is deaf or hard of hearing, the following is also required:

- Position the child facing you, ensure that the reader’s hands and lips are visible
- Speak clearly, use gestures and facial expressions
- Let them look at the lips first, then at their notebook afterwards
- Point to the questions with your finger, highlight the boxes in the tables, explain the instructions by miming them: with your finger in the air, ticking, circling, crossing out...
- Clearly highlight key words.

If the child is profoundly deaf, you should also:

- Position the child facing you, ensuring that your hands and lips are visible
- Use a whiteboard to support certain spoken instructions for visual understanding
- Speak clearly, sign at the same time, use gestures and facial expressions
- Simplify instructions (if the child does not know all the signs)
- Let them look first at the hands signing and the whiteboard, then at their notebook
- Point to the questions, highlight the boxes in the tables, explain the instructions by miming them: with a finger in the air, ticking, circling, crossing out...
- Clearly highlight the key words
- Arrange for a sign language interpreter who signs and shows the workbook to complement the Ministry of Education’s interpreter who speaks, writes on the whiteboard and takes notes.

Making the student’s workbook accessible

Making the workbook accessible involved preparing and adapting a Braille copy of the student’s workbook for blind children. This workbook must be available during the test, with two students per workbook if possible. It is important to ensure that the pages are in the correct order and position, with the written translation below for the invigilator to follow.

For profoundly deaf children, certain test exercises have been removed as they are not feasible, particularly those relating to phonemes, as not all of these are audible to these children.

For certain PASEC exercises, specialised materials should be used, such as Braille equipment for reading, writing and maths, as well as objects providing tactile cues (for example, everyday objects mentioned in the exercises, either real or thermoformed, or graphic and/or raised-relief representations). A slate has also been prescribed for certain instructions and exercise models for deaf children.

In all cases, the aim was to adhere as closely as possible to the content of the PASEC test so as not to skew the assessment objectives. We are therefore not talking here about changes to the test, but rather about accessible adaptations.


Towards an inclusive regional PASEC

We are moving towards a partnership with CONFEMEN to identify the approaches required to implement an inclusive PASEC 2024 for children with disabilities, regardless of the type and severity of their disability, in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), for all countries wishing to pilot the PASEC test.

Given that the analysis of these tests enables, amongst other things, the improvement of school curricula and teacher training content, the inclusivity of these tests is an essential link in the implementation of truly inclusive education for people with disabilities.

The comparative analysis of PASEC results, particularly in the West and Central Africa sub-region, also facilitates the establishment of partnerships between the various Ministries of Education. We therefore hope to support a community of practice among the target countries in order to benefit from diverse expertise in the teaching and learning of reading and mathematics for children with disabilities.

It should be noted that these approaches could benefit all types of national, regional and international tests, assessments and examinations, ensuring that no child with a disability is left behind and that all children can fully enjoy their right to education. Indeed, we hope that the results of this pilot project will enable us to design and evaluate the effectiveness of future assessments of learning in reading and mathematics that are truly inclusive of children with disabilities.

A large, stylized graphic of an eye, composed of several overlapping, thick, yellowish-gold rings that form the shape of an eye. The background is a solid, bright yellow color.

We work with partners in low-
and middle-income countries to
eliminate avoidable blindness
and promote equal opportunities
for people with disabilities.

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