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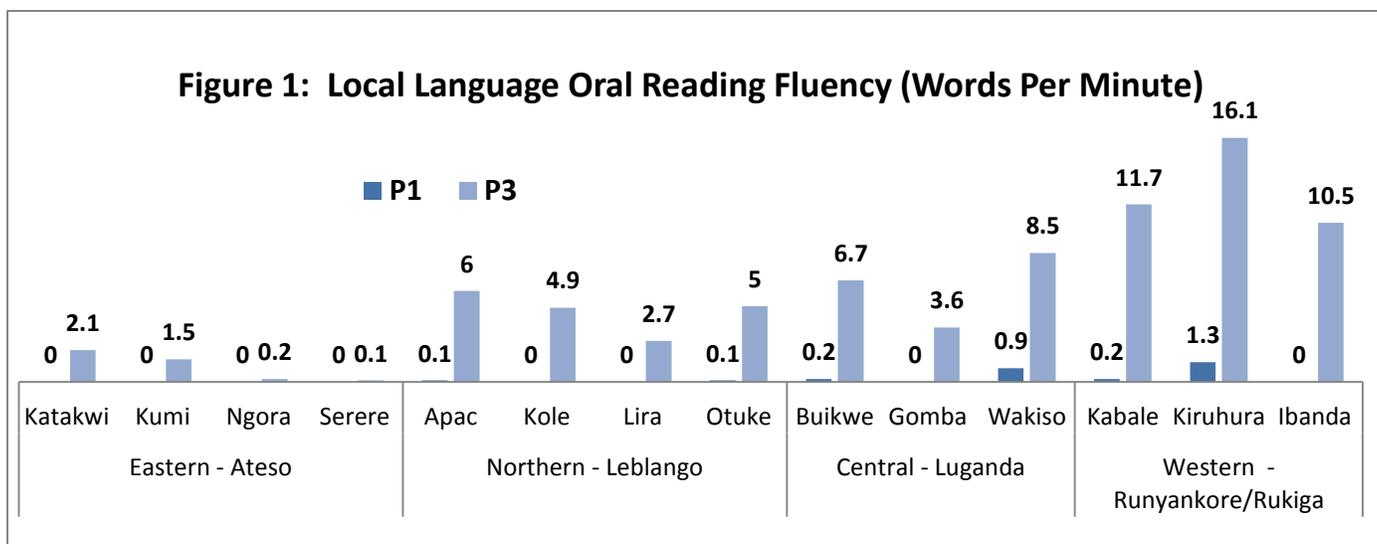
USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program (July, 2013)

Early Grade Reading Assessment Baseline Results

What is the level of reading achievement among P1 and P3 learners in Local Language and English in Ugandan primary schools? What is currently happening in P1 reading lessons? How are teachers supported to teach reading? What should be the focus of future MOES support for reading? To answer these questions, in February and March, 2013, data were collected from 300 randomly selected government primary schools in 14 districts in Uganda. 7,463 P1 and 2,163 P3¹ learners were assessed in one of four local languages (Ateso, Leblango, Luganda and Runyankore/Rukiga) and English.

Oral Reading Fluency: Similar to other assessments of reading in Uganda, the results were very low.

Figure 1 shows the average local language oral reading fluency rates achieved by P1 and P3 pupils in School Health and Reading program and “control”² districts at the beginning of the school year. **Since there were no significant gender differences only the total scores are shown.** Local language reading fluency was lowest in Ateso speaking schools and the difference between P1 and P3 is minimal. Very low scores at the beginning of the school year for P1 learners are not unexpected, but the scores for P3 learners are low as well. The scores were not much better in Leblango speaking schools where P3 learners read less than 6 words per minute. Local language Reading fluency is highest for

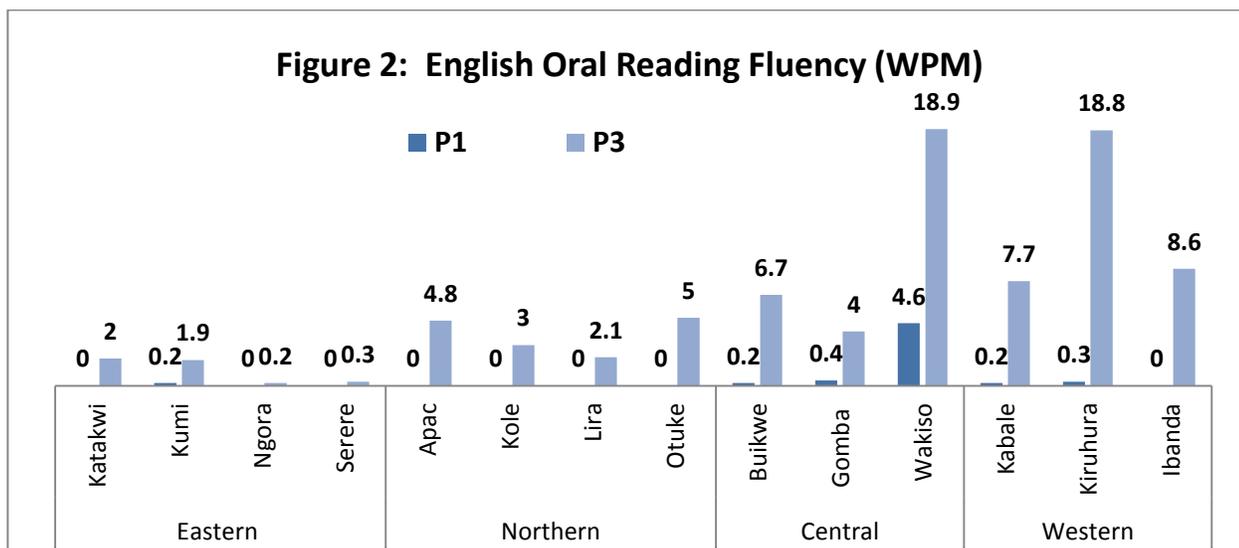


¹ It should be noted that the assessment took place in the first month of the new school year. Though this analysis refers to “P3 learners” they are really serving as a measure for end of P2 results.

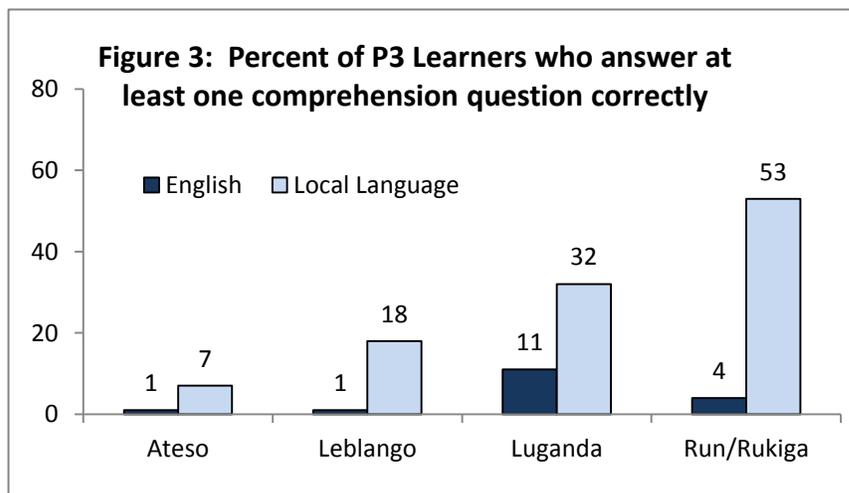
² The 4 control districts (Ngora, Otuke, Buikwe and Ibanda) are not included in the full base line report.

Runkyankore/Rukiga speakers in P3 where learners could read over 10 words per minute in all districts. The Luganda speaking schools differ by district – with Wakiso being relatively high performing and Gomba as low as other low performing language areas. Based on any type of “benchmark” these scores are compared to, they are extremely low – a lower bound for an international benchmark for P1 is 20 words per minute and a minimum level to read with comprehension is 45-60 words per minute.

English oral reading fluency results were also low and there was little difference between P1 and P3 in most districts and for most language groups as shown in **Figure 2**. As expected at baseline, virtually no P1 learners could read a word in English – with the exception of learners in Wakiso - -but in n 9 of the 14 districts, P3 learners could read fewer than 5 words per minute. Wakiso and Kiruhura P3 learners read, on average, almost 19 words per minute in English.



Reading Comprehension: Learners need to read with fluency but they also need to be able to understand what they are reading. Figure 3 shows the percentage of P3 learners who answered at least one comprehension question correctly. In P3, only 7% of Ateso learners could answer one comprehension question correctly in Ateso. 18% of Leblango speakers, 32% of Luganda speakers and 53% of Runyankore/Rukiga P3 learners could answer one comprehension question correctly in the local language. The results are even lower in English where, in Luganda speaking districts, only 11% of P3 learners could answer one question correctly. **Though oral reading**



fluency may have been similar in English and local language (or even higher in English in some districts) comprehension was higher in local language which confirms that learners can read and comprehend better in a familiar language.

What is happening in the classroom and how are teachers supported to teach reading?

In addition to the EGRA data collected, 69 P1 reading lessons were observed and 289 teachers and 280 head teachers were interviewed to find out about support received and provided for teaching of reading. Major findings in the areas of teaching practices in the classroom and teacher support for the teaching of reading include the following.

Teaching of reading in the classroom:

- **Not once did assessors observe learners reading from printed materials of any kind.** One of the 69 P1 classes observed had local language reading materials, but they were not being used.
- Teachers did not have a methodological approach to teaching reading and often reverted to writing the vowels on the board and drilling learners on the names of the vowels (not the vowel sounds).
- Only 12% of teachers had a teaching guide in the appropriate language of instruction.
- 45% of lessons were taught without a lesson plan.
- Some reading lessons lasted only 16 minutes.

Support for teachers to teach reading

- When asked what kind of support would be most useful to help them improve their ability to teach reading, 94% of teachers said materials followed by training.
- 66% of teachers reported being observed teaching at least once a month by the head teacher or deputy head teacher; 10% reported that they were never observed.
- 38% of teachers reported that they were observed every 2-3 months (or once a term) by a Coordinating Centre Tutor (CCT) in the previous school year, 40% reported that they were never observed, and 22% reported that they were observed once in the year.
- Head teachers reported that they were mainly responsible for observing teachers in the classroom, but in some schools they also reported that teachers were observed by directors of studies, deputy head teachers, heads of infant section, CCTs, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, and School Management Committee (SMC) members.

Characteristics of Better Performing Learners and Schools

Of the learners assessed, 399 were able to read at least 20 words per minute in either English, local language or both and 34 schools had 5 or more learners who could read at least 20 words per minute. These learners and schools were used as the basis for an analysis “better performing” learners and “better performing schools”. Common characteristics of better performing learners and schools include:

Characteristics Associated with Better Performing Learners:

- Southwest, Central Region (Kiruhura District)
- Attended pre-school
- Did not repeat current grade
- Not absent previous week
- Teacher not absent previous week
- More likely to take materials home from school and have someone read to them at home

Characteristics Associated with Better Performing Schools:

- Southwest, Central Region
- Head teacher received training that prepared them to teach reading or support teachers to teach reading
- Reported presence of textbooks for reading
- Has a library
- Has electricity

Recommendations for improving the teaching of reading and reading achievement in Ugandan primary schools

Given the very low levels of reading achievement in both local languages and English and the situation in schools and classrooms, the following recommendations for moving forward in the area of support for reading reform in primary schools in Uganda include:

Materials: Teachers need materials that will help them bridge the gap between the thematic curriculum and the teaching of reading in the classroom. The teachers’ guides being developed under the School Health and Reading Program that includes guidance on basic reading methodology (such as breaking words into syllables and teaching letter sounds) will help fill this gap. Learners need print materials in the local language linked to the teachers’ guides.

Teacher Support: Teachers need more support for teaching reading in the classroom. Even if trained, they need continued follow-up support. Who is best placed to provide this support? All sources of potential support, including head teachers; peers; CCTs; and local government including the district education officer, district inspectors, and even associate assessors need to be brought “on board” to support teachers to teach reading. In some schools, even SMC members were responsible for observing teachers in the classroom.

Time on task: Teachers need to be guided as how to best utilize the literacy hour set aside on the timetable for reading- and writing-related activities. Providing teachers with content and methods will help them to program this time.