



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SPORTS

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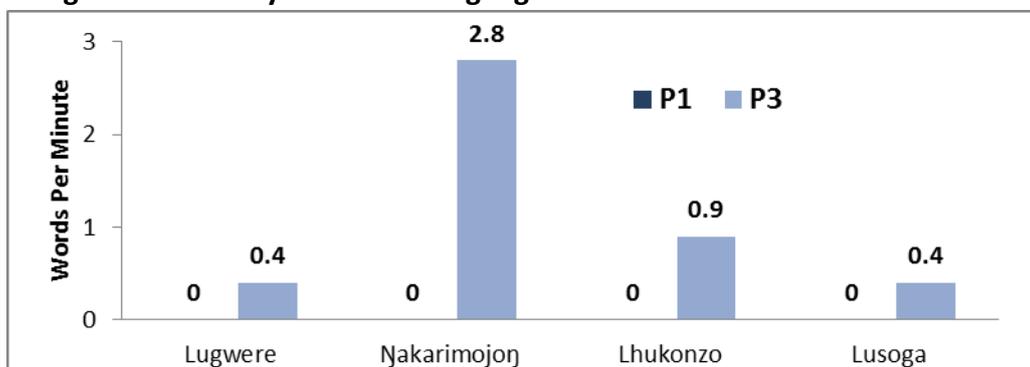
USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program: Cluster 3 Baseline Report

What is the level of reading achievement among P1 and P3 learners in Ugandan primary schools? What is currently happening in P1 reading lessons? How are teachers and schools supported to teach reading? To answer these questions for Cluster 3 schools, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data were collected from 112 randomly selected government primary schools in 9 program districts in Uganda. EGRA data were collected in five languages—Lugwere, Lusoga, Lhukonzo, Nkarimojoŋ and English; all learners were assessed in English and in one of the four local languages. Overall, 3,244 Primary 1 (P1) and 1,124 Primary 3 (P3) learners were assessed. In addition to this, 40 P1 reading lessons were observed and 104 teachers and 112 head teachers (or designees in their absence) were interviewed about the support that they provide to teachers in the area of reading.

Oral Reading Fluency at baseline: Similar to other assessments of reading in Uganda, the results were very low. **Figure 1** shows the average local language oral reading fluency (words per minute or WPM) achieved by P1 and P3 learners in Program schools at the beginning of the school year. **Since there were no significant differences between girls and boys, only the overall results are shown.** Very low scores at the beginning of the school year for P1 learners are not unexpected, but the scores for beginning P3 learners were also very low.

Findings show very low levels of oral reading fluency and reading comprehension at baseline among P1 and P3 learners in all Cluster 3 languages

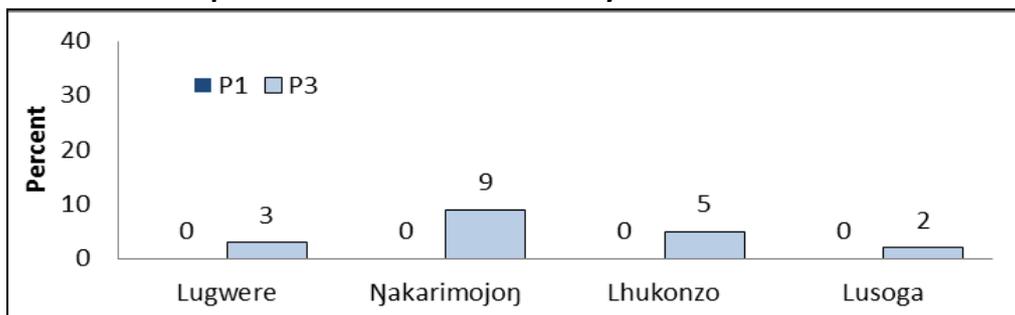
Figure 1. Local Language Oral Reading Fluency (Words per Minute) In School Health and Reading Program Schools by Class and Language



Local language reading fluency was low in all the four languages, and there were almost no differences between P1 and P3; **P1 learners could not read any words in all the four languages, while P3 learners could read less than 1 word on average.** The scores were slightly better in Nkarimojoŋ speaking schools where P3 learners read an average of 2.8 words per minute. Based on any type of “benchmark” these scores are extremely low; a lower bound for an international benchmark for P1 is 20 words per minute, P3 should be reading upwards of 40 words per minute.

Reading Comprehension: Learners need to read with fluency but they also need to be able to understand what they are reading. **Figure 2** shows the percentage of P1 and P3 learners who answered at least one comprehension question correctly after reading a story in local language.

Figure 2. Percent of Learners in School Health and Reading Program Schools Who Answered At Least One Comprehension Question Correctly



While in P1 no learners could answer a single question, in P3, some learners were able to answer at least one question correctly. Three percent of Lugwere learners could answer one or more comprehension questions correctly, 9%, for Nakarimojoŋ 5% of Lhukonzo and 2% of Lusoga learners could answer one comprehension question correctly in their respective local languages.



Emergent Literacy: Orientation to Print, Letter Writing and Listening Comprehension

Before we see changes in reading fluency or comprehension, it is expected that we would see improvements in pre-reading or foundational skills—before a learner can read words, they need to know the sounds of the letters, for example. The skills that the EGRA subtasks measure are acquired in phases and though the timing of these phases may vary, the phases themselves are predictable.

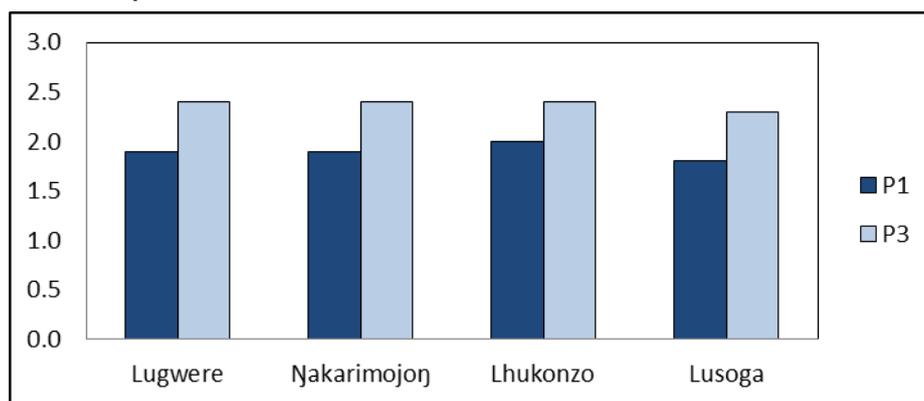
In order to assess their orientation to print skills (a basic pre-reading skill), P1 learners were given a local passage and asked to use their finger to point to where they would begin to read (upper left corner of the paragraph) and which direction they would then read (left to right). **Thirty one percent of learners in Lhukonzo speaking schools knew where to begin to read. This was followed by learners in Lugwere and Nakarimojoŋ speaking schools with 29% and 25% respectively. Only 23% of P1 Lusoga learners knew where to begin to read.**

Letter identification is also an important pre-reading skill. The letter identification task required P1 learners to write down letters after they were dictated to them by assessors. Five letters were read out to learners-one at a time and they were to write the letter. **Scores for this task were highest among learners from Lusoga speaking schools with a mean score of 1.2 letters and lowest among learners in Lugwere speaking schools whose mean score was 0.5 letters.** Learners in Nakarimojoŋ and Lhukonzo speaking schools had mean scores of 0.7 and 1.1 letters correspondingly..

The listening comprehension assessment involved the assessor reading a story to the learner in local language and then asking the learner questions related to the story. Poor performance on the listening comprehension task suggests that the learner does not have a good foundational level of vocabulary and comprehension in the language.

Figure 4 shows the number of questions answered correctly by P1 and P3 learners in SHRP schools out of a total of 3 questions asked. **On average, P1 learners were able to answer at least half of the questions correctly in all language groups.**

Figure 4. Number of Local Language Listening Comprehension Questions Answered Correctly (Out of Possible 3)



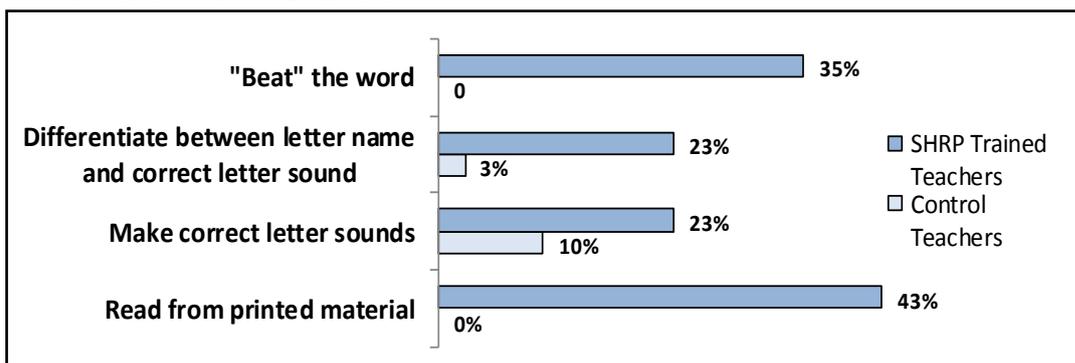
What is happening in the classroom and how are teachers supported to teach reading?

In addition to the EGRA data collected, 40 P1 reading lessons were observed (22 program and 18 control) and 104 teachers and 112 head teachers were interviewed to find out about support received from CCTs and head teachers towards the teaching of reading. While we do not expect there to be significant differences in learner performance this early in the school year, it is not unexpected to find differences in teacher classroom behavior after just a few weeks even without materials, and data from the classroom observations did show differences between treatment and control P1 classrooms. **Findings indicate that there are many reading supportive actions being undertaken by the teachers in the Program classrooms that are not occurring in control classrooms.**



Figure 3 shows the percentage of observed P1 reading lessons where teachers were found guiding learners to undertake reading-promoting behaviors. In 35% of Program P1 lessons observed, teachers were seen guiding learners to “beat the words” (clapping the syllables) to illustrate the concept that words are made up of syllables. This method was not observed in any control classrooms. **Program trained teachers were also more likely to guide learners to differentiate between letter name and correct letter sounds (23% vs. 3%) and make letter sounds (23% vs. 10%).**

Figure 3. Teacher Guides Learners to....



Support for teachers to teach reading

Besides training, a crucial component of teacher support is ongoing school based observation and support for teachers in the classroom. Fifty one percent of teachers interviewed¹ reported that they were observed once every two weeks and 29% said they were observed every month by someone at the school (head teacher or designee). While 11% reported that they were observed only once a term, 10% were never observed. The ideal is for teachers to be observed teaching at least once per week (while they are getting used to the new methodology) by school based staff. External support from the Coordinating Centre Tutor (CCT) is also important. While the ideal is for CCTs to observe teachers twice per term (over a 3 month period), **22% of the surveyed teachers reported that that in the previous year, their class had never been observed by a CCT.** Thirty-seven percent of the teachers reported that a CCT had observed their class once every term and an additional 23% were observed once in the previous school year.

Recommendations for improving 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 to teach reading (teachers guides and learner primers) but they also need to be trained in using these materials to benefit the learners. Classroom observation has found that even though learners have the materials, the teachers focus most on learners reciting from the board.

Teacher training: Teachers need to be trained on the explicit teaching of reading, how to utilize the teaching materials and how to guide learners on the use of the learner materials. Teachers also need to be given guidance on regular lesson planning and assessing learner progress in foundational reading skills. Foundational pre-reading skills (such as print awareness) need to be an early focus.

Teacher Support: Even if trained, teachers need continued follow-up support for reading instruction in the classroom. Current evidence suggests that CCTs are not visiting the schools often enough and head teachers (or other school based staff) are also not providing regular support and supervision of teachers in using the reading methodology.

¹ Treatment and control teachers are both included here as they were asked about CCT support in the previous school year before the beginning of the intervention.