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USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program:
Cluster 3 Follow-Up 1 End of P1: Lugwere, Lusoga, Lhukonzo, Ɲakarimojoŋ

To what extent did the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program improve early grade reading skills among Primary 1 learners and the teaching of early grade reading in government primary schools over the course of the year? How are teachers and schools supported to teach reading and has this support increased? To answer these questions for Cluster 3 schools, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data were collected from 112 randomly selected program and control schools without the program in 9 districts in Uganda¹ in October, 2015 from 1,504 program learners and 1,432 control learners at the end of P1 and the findings compared to baseline data collected at the beginning of P1 in February, 2015 from 1,599 program and 1,574 control learners. EGRA data was collected in five languages— Lugwere, Lusoga, Lhukonzo, Ɲakarimojoŋ and English; all learners were assessed in English and in one of the four local languages. In addition to this, 35 P1 reading lessons were observed and 104 P1 teachers and 110 head teachers were interviewed about the support that they receive and provide in the area of reading.

Synopsis of Findings:

- P1 learners in program schools in all 4 languages performed better than P1 learners in control schools on all pre- and beginning reading tasks. Ɲakarimojoŋ learners realized the highest gains in most tasks compared to control.

- There was little difference in reading scores for boys and girls though there were differences in some tasks -- In half of the instances, it was girls who performed better than boys.

- In Ɲakarimojoŋ and Lhukonzo speaking schools, school attendance, as a percentage of enrollment at the beginning of the year, is higher in program schools than control schools at the end of the school year.

- More teachers in program schools are using reading related “best practices” in the classroom including ensuring learners are reading from printed material during the reading lesson, assessing learners and keeping learner attendance.

- Support to teachers in the classroom to teach reading is low and has not increased – teachers are not being observed teaching reading by either school based staff or CCTs.

- School Management Committees in Program schools are providing more support to activities that promote reading compared to control schools – 74% of head teachers in program school report that SMCs support reading related activities compared to 49% in control schools.

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¹ Districts include: Budaka, Kibuku and Pallisa for Lugwere; Iganga and Kamuli for Lusoga; Kasese for Lhukonzo; and Nakapiripirit, Napak and Moroto for Ɲakarimojoŋ.
Changes in Pre- and Beginning Reading Skills in Primary 1

We would expect that before we see changes in reading fluency or comprehension, we would see improvements in foundational reading 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. This briefer focuses on pre-, emergent and beginning LOCAL LANGUAGE literacy skills where changes are more likely to be found among P1 learners.

**Orientation to Print:** Learners were asked to place their finger where they should begin reading on a page (upper left corner of the paper/text). End of P1 learners in program schools in all 4 languages were more likely to know the correct starting place – for Ngakarimojong learners, 57% of program school learners assessed knew where to start reading compared to only 32% in control schools² (control schools figures did not increase much above those found at baseline).

**Letter sounds:** Another important pre-reading skill is the ability of learners to associate a letter with the correct letter sound. Again, in all 4 languages, program learners outperform control learners. Ngakarimojong program learners knew, on average, 6.3 letter sounds (compared to 1.9 for control). Lusoga program learners knew 3.3 letter sounds (compared to 1.5 for control).³ For Lugwere the figure was 0.7 in program compared to 0.4 in control and in Lhukonzo 3.3 letters correct in program compared to 2.6 in control.

² The differences were significantly higher than control schools in Lusoga and Dakarimojoŋ. In boys performed Dakarimojoŋ better than girls.
³ The differences were statistically significant for both languages with medium effect sizes (above 0.5). In Lhukonzo, girls performed better than boys.
Segmenting words into syllables: Though the results are not shown, program learners were also able to segment or break words into syllables (what are the syllables in “kitten”) better than control learners in control schools. In program schools, Nakarimomoro learners were able to segment on average 6.4 words compared to 5.5 for control; Lhukonzo 6.0 for program compared to 5.5 for control; in Lusoga 5 words on average for program schools compared to 4.7 for control; and in Lugwere 4.9 in program compared to 4.7 in control.

What is changing in the classroom and are teachers supported to teach reading? In addition to the EGRA data collected, 35 P1 reading lessons were observed (19 program and 16 control), 104 teachers were interviewed to find out about support received from CCTs and head teachers towards the teaching of reading and 110 head teachers were interviewed to find out about the support they provide to teachers. Findings indicate that there are many reading supportive actions being undertaken by the teachers in 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. The percent of learners who were reading from printed material (in contrast to reading only from the board) was 89% in program reading lessons compared to only 6% on control reading lessons. Individual interaction with print (pointing to the letters and words) is crucial in early reading. In 79% 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.

Though teachers were much more likely to use the correct letter sounds in program schools (demonstrated in 37% of program lessons compared to only 13% in control schools) the figure is unacceptably low. Unfortunately we have seen this lack of letter sounds knowledge on the part of the teachers during program school visits as well. Other areas where program teachers are outperforming control teachers: giving regular written exercises to the learners; having lesson plans and teach according to the lesson plans and keeping records of learner assessment. Program teachers were also more likely to have taken attendance in the last week: 83% of P1 teachers in program schools took attendance in the past week compared to only 58% in control schools.

*Differences were statistically significant at the .10 or higher level for all languages with the exception of Lugwere.*
Support supervision in the classroom: A crucial component of teacher support is ongoing school based observation and support for teachers in the classroom. While P1 teachers in program schools reported that they were more likely to have their lesson plans checked at least weekly (53% of P1 teachers in program schools reported that their lesson plans were checked weekly compared to 42% of control teachers), they were equally likely to have had someone at the school or a CCT observe their teaching in the classroom. Thirty-percent of program teachers reported that they were NEVER observed teaching by a CCT in the past year compared to 27% for control teachers -- and both were higher than reported at baseline. Forty-nine percent of program teachers and 48% of control teachers reported being observed once every term or more often. Unfortunately, this mirrors our findings from routine program monitoring that CCTs are not visiting schools and providing the optimal amount of support (twice per term which is the number of visits stipulated in the CCT terms of reference with the teacher training college).

![Figure 4: How often did the CCT observe your classroom teaching in the past year](image)

Besides the CCTs, head teachers or other school based staff are also expected to provide support to teachers in implementing the new reading methods. Though program teachers are less likely to report that they have never been observed teaching by the head teacher or other school based staff than control teachers (4% of program teachers report never being observed by a head teacher compared to 14% of control teachers) they are equally likely to have been observed every month or more often – 71% of program teachers report being observed every month or more often compared to 70% of control teachers.

School Attendance: School attendance or retention is higher in program schools compared to control schools – a pattern found in both Lhukonzo and N’karimojong speaking schools (in the other 2 languages, the differences between program and control were similar). As part of the classroom observation, a head count of learners in the P1 classrooms was undertaken and the number in attendance was compared to the number of learners reported to be enrolled in the class. While we would expect attendance to be lower than enrollment, it was much lower in control schools than program schools: in Lhukonzo, in control schools there was a 62% difference between enrollment and attendance, in program schools the difference was 34%; in N’karimojong the difference was 57% in control schools and only 40% in program schools. This could be due to either increased attendance as well as increased school retention as many learners who don’t attend have actually dropped out but have not been removed from the register.

SMC support for reading related activities: While SMCs in program schools did not meet more regularly than SMCs in control schools, they provided more support to reading related activities in the schools. Seventy-four percent of head teachers in program schools reported that SMCs supported reading related activities, compared to only 49% in control schools.