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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SPORTS

USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program: Cluster 2 EGRA Follow-Up 1

Have fundamental reading skills increased as a result of the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program interventions? Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data collected for 4 Cluster 2 languages (local languages Lebacoli, Lugbarati, Lumasaba, and Runyoro-Rutoro) and English at baseline, beginning of P1 compared to data collected at the end of P1 show increases in foundational pre-reading and emergent reading skills, significantly higher than increases found in control schools. That being said, the overall reading gains and scores are still lower than the ideal.

Program learners performed better than control learners in virtually all reading skills assessed, most significantly in emergent literacy and pre-reading skills.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment data presented here are from a randomized control trial which included 3,893 program and 3,577 control learners at the beginning of P1 in February/March, 2014 and 1,628 program and 1,573 control learners at the end of P1 in October, 2014. Oversight of the data collection process was provided by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) and NORC at the University of Chicago, an external evaluation contractor.

These findings provide evidence that the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program interventions are having a positive impact on reading achievement in program schools.



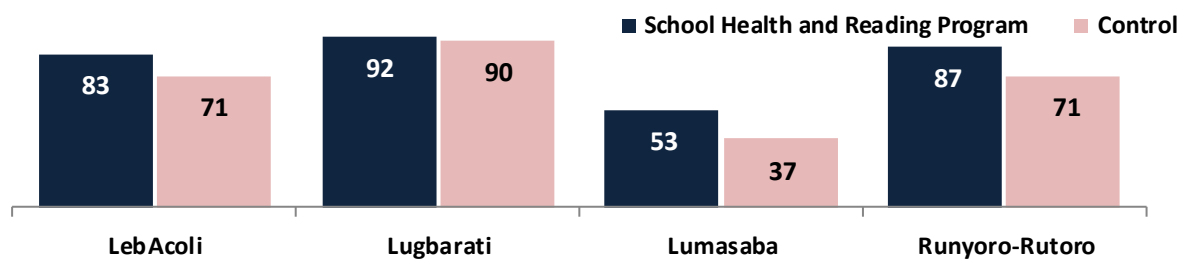
Emergent Literacy: Listening Comprehension and Sound/Syllable

Listening comprehension is a pre-reading or emergent reading skill. The listening comprehension assessment involved the assessor reading a local language story to the learner in local language and then asking the learner questions related to the story.

Figure 1 shows that the percentage of learners who answered one or more listening comprehension questions correctly at the end of P1 is higher in program schools than in control schools in all 4

language groups¹. In LebAcoli, the percent of learners answering at least one question correctly in program schools was 83% compared to 71% in control schools. In Lugbarati, the difference was 92% among program learners compared to 90% for those in control schools and in Lumasaba the difference was 53% for program learners compared to 37% in control schools. For Runyoro Rutoro, 87% of learners in program schools could answer at least one question compared to 71% of learners in control schools.

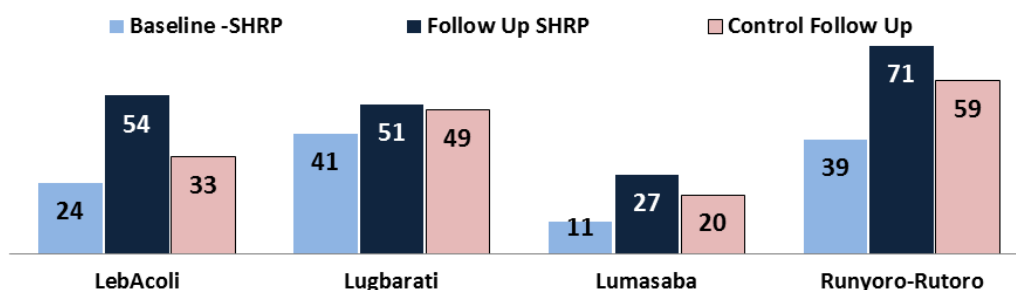
Figure 1: % of Learners answering at least 1 Listening Comprehension Question Follow up (end of P1)



Beginning Reader: Letter Sounds and Non-Word Decoding

Figure 2 shows that at baseline (beginning of P1), between 11 and 41% of learners could identify one or more letter sounds in the local language. At the end of P1, this percentage had increased to between 27 and 71% in program schools and between 20 and 59% in control schools. The biggest increases in program schools above control were found in LebAcoli where 54% of learners in program schools could identify at least one letter compared to only 33% in control schools and in Runyoro Rutoro where 71% of learners identifying one sound in program schools compared to 59% in control schools².

Figure 2: Percent of Learners who could identify at least one Local Language Letter sound



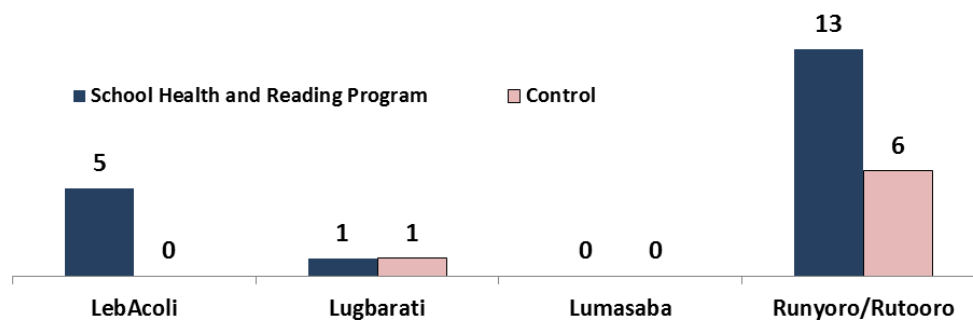
¹ These differences are statistically significant for all language groups with the exception of Lugbarati. Though some baseline figures were lower in control compared to program schools, the differences between baseline and follow-up were greater in all program language groups compared to control.

² These differences were statistically significant for all language groups except Lugbarati (which also had a lower baseline figure for the control group).

Local Language Oral Reading Fluency

Figure 3 shows the differences between program and control learners in the percentage who could read at least one word of a local language story. At baseline (not shown), there were virtually no learners who could read even one word. At follow up, 5% of LebAcoli and 13% of Runyoro-Rutoro learners in programs schools could read at least one word. In both language groups this reading gain is significantly higher than control learners who could still read no words at follow up in LebAcoli; in Runyoro-Rutoro 6% of control learners could read at least one word.

Figure 3: Percent of Learners Who Could Read At Least One Word of a Local Language Story (Follow Up 1 -- End of P1)



These gains, while modest, are still significant and need to be understood in context. We are learning more and more about the level of reading readiness among beginning P1 learners and though we know who has scored “zero” on the assessment, we are just beginning to understand how far below grade level these learners may actually be starting. Many of these P1 learners have had no exposure to print or books in general and in many cases have no idea how to hold a book or turn a page.

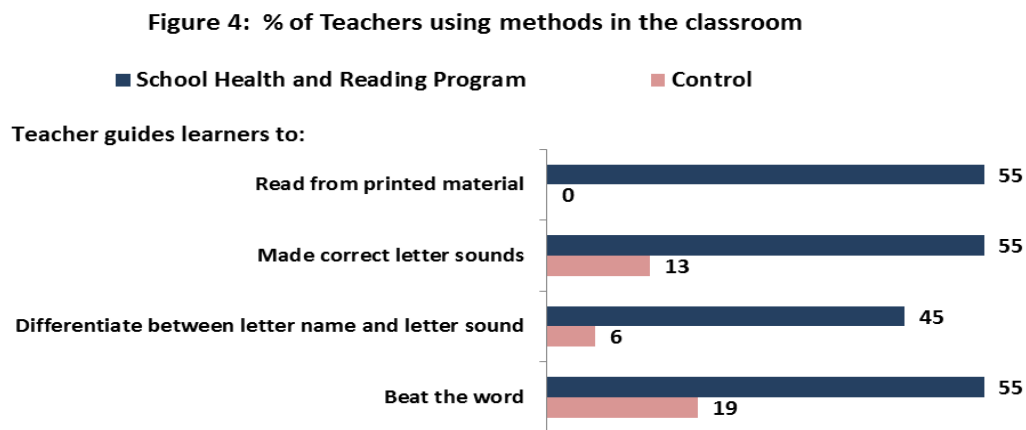
What is happening in the classroom: Evidence from classroom observations

Teaching children how to read involves a deliberate and explicit focus on the acquisition of basic reading skills. Teachers must be trained to teacher reading in the local language and be given continual support in the classroom. To what extent were new teaching skills found in use in the classroom and to what extent were teachers supported at the school?

Findings show that program teachers are more likely to demonstrate the use of these teaching techniques. Fifty-five percent of program teachers guided learners to read from printed material, for example, compared to zero control teachers. Actually reading from printed texts that they can point to with their finger is crucial for beginning readers to be able to identify individual letters and sounds.

Program teachers were also more likely to guide learners to make correct letter sounds (55% compared to 13% for control), differentiate between letter names and letter sounds (45% compared to 6%) and to “beat the word” or clap the number of syllables in a word (55% compared to 19%).

Figure 4 shows the percentage of teachers using reading promoting teaching methods in the classroom as evidenced during classroom observations.



Though we can see that program teachers are performing better than control teachers, there are still many teachers who are not using the books during the reading lessons or utilizing the reading methods and actions such as making correct letter sounds. There is also little difference between program and control teachers as far as regular lesson planning and continuous assessment of learners.

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 guide learners on the use of the learner materials. Teachers also need to be given guidance on regularly 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.