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USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program (SHRP)



Systemic, Sustained Reading Achievement in Uganda:
Early Grade Reading Assessment Results, January, 2019

The USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program (2012-2019) is a large-scale program working with and through existing Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) systems to **improve reading achievement in 12 local languages and English in Grades 1 to 4 in 4,097 government primary schools.**

SHRP's approach was designed for sustainability and built from the ground up. By the end of the program, SHRP had supported the MoES to strengthen systems and register significant gains in reading achievement. Learners gained reading skills in their local language and were then able to use these skills to also learn to read in English.

Major findings include:

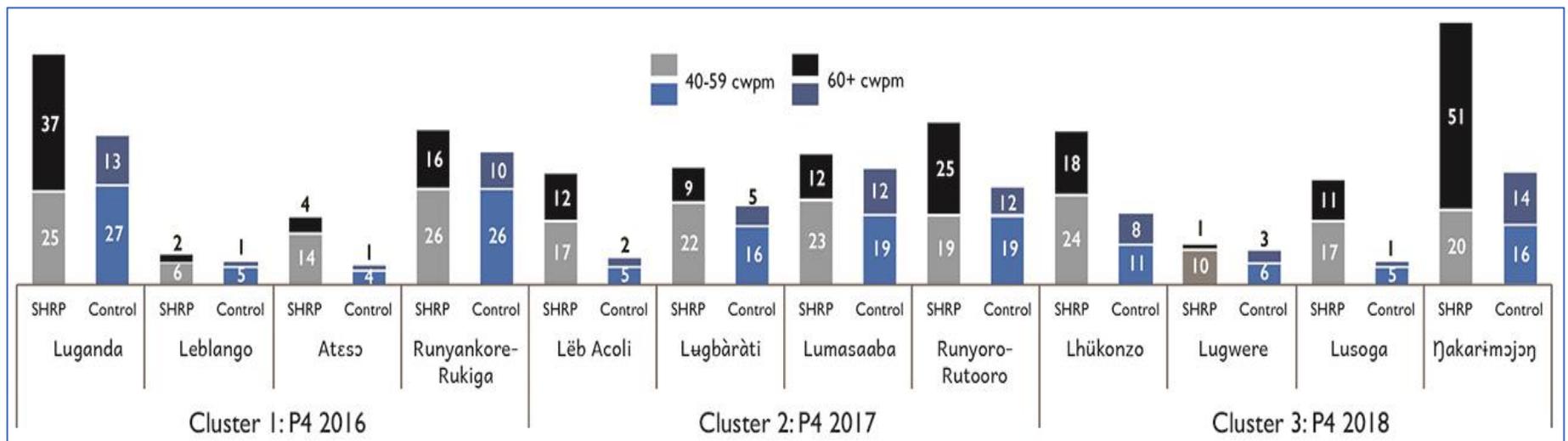
- By the end of Primary (P)4, program learners were more than twice as likely to be reading 60 or more words per minute in English than learners from control schools.
- P4 Program learners were also able to answer almost twice as many comprehension questions correctly in English than control learners.
- Program results are proving to be sustainable. P2 learners in subsequent cohorts registered reading gains similar to those found in the initial cohort, and control schools brought into the program also registered gains. Furthermore, these gains are being maintained into P5 (though the program ended in P4)

Primary 4 (P4) oral reading fluency in English: Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data demonstrate that SHRP program schools made significant improvements in reading achievement compared to control schools. EGRAs were conducted at the beginning of P1 and at the end of every school year through P4 (the last year of direct program support). Results showed equal achievement between boys and girls.

38% of P4 program learners could read 40 or more correct words per minute in English compared to 22% of control learners -- 18% of P4 program learners could read 60 or more correct words per minute compared to 7% of control learners.

Figure 1 compares the percent of P4 learners who can read 40-59 and 60 or more correct words per minute in English in program schools (orange bars) and control schools (blue bars). The overall height of the orange bars is higher than the blue bars which indicates that **learners in program schools are more likely to read 40 or more correct words per minute (cwpm) in English than learners in control schools in all 12 program language cohorts.**

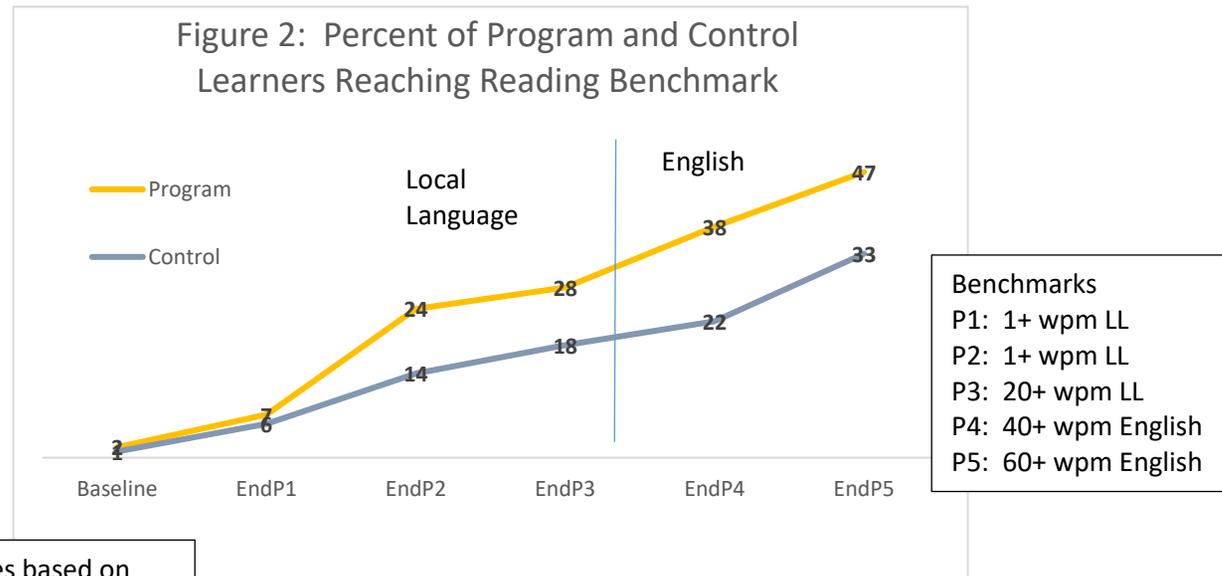
Figure 1: Percent of P4 Learners Reading 40–59 and 60+ cwpm in English - Program vs. Control Schools C1 (2016), C2 (2017), and C3 (2018)



Significant differences were found in 9 of the 12 languages (Luganda, Ateso, Runyankore-Rukiga, LebAcoli, Runyoro-Rutooro, Lhukonzo, Lusoga, Lugwere and Ngakarimojong). The biggest differences were found in Ngakarimojong where 71% of P4 learners in program schools are reading 40 or more cwpm (20% reading 40-59 and 51% reading 60 or more) compared to only 30% in control schools¹.

¹ Of the few significant differences by gender, girls outperformed boys in Lhukonzo program schools and in Lusoga, Runyoro-Rutooro and Luganda control schools and boys outperformed girls in Leblango program schools and Lhukonzo control schools.

Figure 2 shows the percent of learners reaching the specified reading benchmark compared to control learners. At the end of the program in P4, 38% of program learners are reaching the benchmark of reading 20 or more correct words per minute in the local language compared to 22% for control learners.



Calculated using weighted averages based on size of language in the population

Though significant gains have been achieved, there are still too many learners not reading

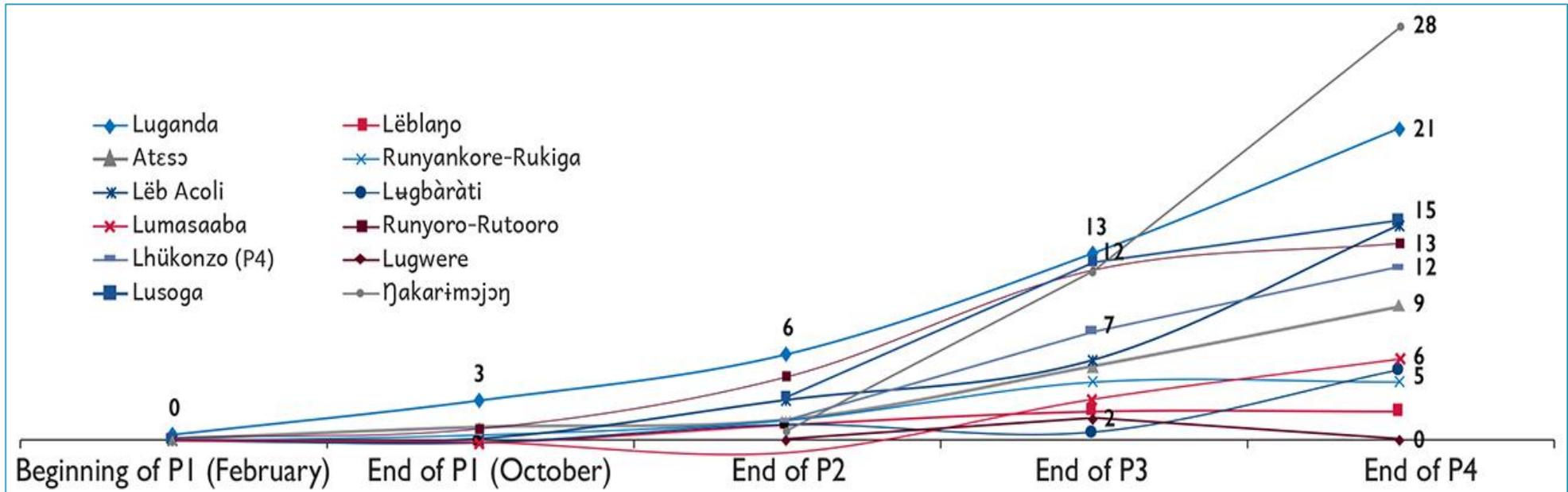
There are many systemic and economic factors that contribute to low levels of reading achievement, including:

Overcrowded and under resourced classrooms: While the program made sure that all learners had printed reading material to use during the literacy lessons, many classes have too many learners and inadequate desks and materials.

High teacher and learner absenteeism: Recent reports indicate that teacher absenteeism is so high that learners receive the equivalent of one third of a school year of instruction each school year.

Low starting level of reading: Government primary schools in Uganda cater to the least well-off students and families in the country as those with means opt to send their learners to private schools. Twenty-seven percent of learners assessed came to school with no shoes. Preschool attendance is low. At baseline at the beginning of Primary 1, virtually no learners could read even one word in the local language. In neighboring Kenya, a baseline assessment for a similar large scaler reading effort found 30% of learners could read at least one word.

Gains in English reading fluency from baseline to end of P4: Program schools achieved significantly higher gains in reading fluency by the end of P4 than control schools. **Figure 3** compares the difference in gains in English correct words read per minute (cwpm) between program and control schools. For example, Luganda speakers in program schools were reading 21 more words in English than those in control schools (52 cwpm vs. 31 cwpm) at the end of P4. Though there was little difference in English cwpm at the end of P1, differences started to emerge at the end of P2. By the end of P3, significant positive differences were found in 8 of the 12 languages. Most notable are gains from P2 to P3 in Ngakarimojong, Lusoga, Lhukonzo, Runyoro-Rutooro and Ateso; and gains from P3 to P4 in Luganda, Leb Acoli and Lugbarati.



It takes time to realize significant programmatic gains in reading achievement in large scale interventions that work through existing government structures

In Uganda, the timeline is further increased due to low baseline levels of reading (virtually no learners across the 12 languages could read a single local language word at the beginning of P1) and other systemic challenges within Ugandan schools not uncommon in similar modest resource settings.

Local Language Oral Reading Fluency: The program followed the MoES policy and curriculum to use local language as the medium of instruction in P1, slowly transitioning to English in P4. The increased English reading ability in program schools compared to control schools discussed above is a result of increased reading ability in the local language. In P4, the last year of SHRP support, learners in program schools were significantly more likely to read 20 or more correct local language words per minute than those in control schools in 10 of the 12 languages.



Figure 4: Percent of P4 learners reading 20 or more cwpm in Local Language
Cluster 1 (2014), Cluster 2 (2015) & Cluster 3 (2016)
Program vs Control

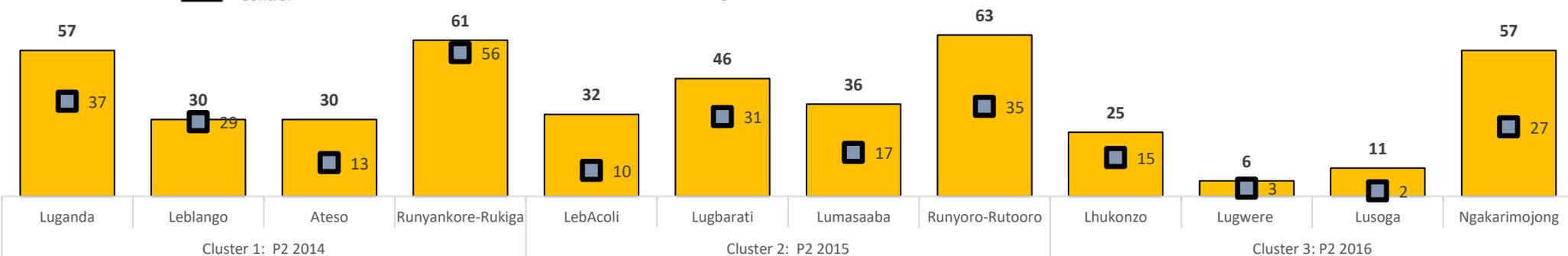


Table 1 shows the additional number of questions answered correctly by learners in program schools compared to learners in control schools, this ranged from 0 to 2.5 additional questions answered.

Local Language Reading Comprehension at the end of P4 is significantly higher in program schools compared to control schools in 8 of the 12 local languages.

Table 1: Number of additional questions answered in program schools(out of 5) *= statistically significant difference	
Luganda	0.4
Leblango	0.1
Ateso	0.4*
Runyankore-Rukiga	0
LebAcoli	0.5*
Lugbarati	0.5*
Lusaamaba	0.7*
Runyoro-Rutoro	0.7*
Lhukonzo	0.6*
Lugwere	0.2
Lusoga	0.5*
Ngakarimojong	2.5*

Sustaining Gains: An analysis of Primary 2 learners over time

In 2018, SHRP assessed P2 learners in all 12 languages. Since the program initially supported P2 teachers and provided classroom materials in 2013, 2014 and 2015, respectively, for clusters one, two, and three, the learners assessed by SHRP in 2018 experienced the effects of SHRP activities years after those activities took place. For cluster one schools, the assessed learners were the fourth “wave” to receive EGR instruction, which for them took place 5 years after teacher training activities took place and their classrooms received learning materials. Similarly, the assessment for cluster two assessed the third “wave” of learners and the assessment for cluster three assessed the second waver of learners (who were still control learners at this time). Teacher training and distribution of learning materials took place four years prior for cluster two, and three years prior for cluster three.

- In eight of the 12 languages, the scores were maintained or increased in the 2nd, 3rd or 4th wave to go through the program.
- Increases in C1 and C2 former control schools were commensurate with increases in the original cohort of program schools.
- For C3, gains in the 2nd wave continue to be higher than controls.

Enduring Gains Beyond Primary 4: At the end of P4, program learners were reading, on average, 13 more correct words per minute in English than control learners (**Figure 4**). These reading gains endured into P5 and P6 (1-2 years after the program ended) despite the high level of school mobility experienced in these upper primary years. In Primary 5, program learners are reading, on average, 12 more words than control learners. In P6, program learners are reading 10 more words than control learners.

Learners in program schools continue to outperform learners in control schools 1-2 years after the program ends (in Primary 4).

Red words are the additional read by program learners in each grade

This is the number of English words control learners can read correctly at the end of Primary Four. **Primary four PROGRAM learners, can read thirteen more words or to this point.** By the end of Primary Five, control learners can read as far as this point. **And PROGRAM learners maintain this twelve word edge one year after intervention.** At the end of Primary Six, control learners could read to here. **Primary Six program learners could read an additional ten words.**

In Primary 5 and 6, program learners are still reading, on average, 12 and 10 more words per minute compared to control learners one to two years after the intervention ended at Primary 4.