Qualitative Study of Community Knowledge, Attitudes, & Practices (KAP) in Mozambique

Final Report

October 2017

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Review was conducted by the Vamos Ler! team, with editorial support from Corrie Blankenbeckler, Senior Associate and Vamos Ler! Project Director, Creative Associates International.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Vamos Ler!* is a five-year program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), that aims to improve early grade reading (grades 1-3) in Mozambique’s Nampula and Zambezia provinces. To this end, *Vamos Ler!* provides evidence-based technical and material assistance to improve classroom instruction in three local languages: Emakhuwa, Elomwe, and Echuwabo, as well as support to children for the transition to Portuguese in their fourth year of primary school. The program is implemented by Creative Associates International (Creative), in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) and in partnership with World Education, Inc. (WEI), American Institutes for Research (AIR), blueTree Group (bTG), and Overseas Strategic Consulting, Ltd. (OSC).

In recent years, the Government of the Republic of Mozambique (GRM) has implemented policy reforms to decentralize government control over primary schools, and institute a system of school councils to strengthen community-school engagement. In addition, the GRM, with the assistance of USAID and *Vamos Ler!*, has begun scaling up the use of bilingual education as an evidence-based approach to improving learning outcomes.

While a significant body of research exists to support the use of bilingual education (Alidou et al., 2006; J. Enever et al., 2009; Mothibeli, 2005; Van Ginkel, 2014), the role of parent and community engagement in bilingual education and children’s learning more generally is yet not as well understood (Djite, 2008; Heugh et al., 2007). Efforts to engage and mobilize parents to support bilingual education and involve themselves in their children’s education in and out of school require a nuanced understanding of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices surrounding bilingual education, school/teacher performance, learning in the home/community, and attendance (Britto, et al., 2014; Marphatia, et al., 2010; MnCUBE, 2010; Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016; Walter, 2015). Only with this understanding, can a social and behavior change communication (SBCC) strategy aimed at addressing key behaviors be developed, and its attendant communication activities be appropriately designed and implemented.

Qualitative research was conducted in Spring of 2017, to identify knowledge, attitudes, and practices surrounding bilingual education and parental involvement. *Vamos Ler!* conducted focus groups disaggregated by gender, relationship to the school, and whether the respondent was in a rural or urban setting. Questions were developed that gave respondents the ability to express their objective view of education and how they interact with community-based schools. The responses to those questions led to the development of the four recommended behaviors contained in this report. Data recorded in local languages, was transcribed by interviewers, and coded. Responses were disaggregated by the gender, geographic area, or the respondents’ relationship to the school.

The study shows that parents in Nampula and Zambezia do not fully understand the concept of bilingual education. Parents/guardians do not understand the meaning of the phrase, nor that bilingual education is best achieved when it is based on the use of the mother tongue (MT)\(^1\) to

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\(^1\) In this report Mother Tongue is used interchangeably with Language 1 (L1), defined as the child’s strongest spoken language when they enter school. L2 is used to refer to Portuguese, common defined as second language or a language that the child is not familiar with when they enter school.
learn to read in the early grades (Alidou et al., 2006; Heugh, 2012; Ouane, & Glanz, 2006). Parents also do not understand how development of oral language skills in Portuguese in the early grades will contribute to increased ability of a child’s transition to Portuguese in later years (Walter & Trammell, 2010). Within this context, most parents ultimately believe it to be advantageous for their children to learn in both the local language and Portuguese, as way of preserving local heritage and traditions. A large majority of the respondents felt that both Portuguese and their local language should be taught in grades 1-3, mainly to facilitate understanding of Portuguese in the classroom. However, many of the parents interviewed felt the transition to Portuguese later would be difficult for their children, and are somewhat hesitant about a scaled-up introduction of bilingual education throughout the region.

Parents are supportive of education more generally, viewing it as a path to better employment opportunities and increased economic prospects for their children. Parents have high aspirations for their children and understand that education, particularly in Portuguese, is necessary for these aspirations to be realized. Parents understand that they should be actively engaged in furthering their child’s education outside of school. However, responses to questions regarding parental involvement in their children’s education evince a pervasive lack of self-efficacy on the part of parents. Parents feel poorly equipped to help their children learn outside of school, either due to their own limited education, limited set of physical and cognitive educational tools, limited financial means, or some combination of the three. In addition, many parents describe a limited sense of control over their children’s school attendance and dedication to their studies outside of the classroom.

Respondents to the study revealed a connection to their children’s school, however, most are unaware of how the school councils function, or how to participate with them. Parents feel that they have the opportunity to participate in their school and voice concerns, but often refrain from one-on-one meetings with teachers, or interactions with the school councils. According to parents, one of the major barriers towards parental involvement, was the time available to participate either at home or with the school, even if they wish to do so.

Analysis of media consumption patterns described by respondents suggests that face-to-face (interpersonal and event-driven) and radio communication channels will be the most effective channels for communication and mobilization activities. Limited parental literacy, TV ownership, and cell phone penetration make print, TV, and ICT communication channels less attractive, though they may still be utilized to good affect under the right circumstances.

This report outlines specific behaviors for parents/guardians to implement that will increase the community engagement of the two target provinces. Included in this analysis are recommendations for activities to increase four key desired behaviors: 1) support for bilingual literacy, 2) increased parental/guardian support for learning outside of school, 3) increased parental/guardian involvement with the school, and 4) reduced absenteeism: send children to school regularly, on time and for the entire school year.
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ACRONYMS

AIR American Institutes for Research
BE Bilingual Education
bTG blueTree Group
CESC Centre for Learning and Capacity Building Civil Society
Creative Creative Associates International
CSO Civil Society Organization
DPEDH Provincial Directorates of Education and Human Development
EGR Early Grade Reading
FAQ Frequently Asked Questions
FGD Focus Group Discussion
GRM Government of the Republic of Mozambique
IDI In-depth Interviews
IRs Intermediate Results
IVR Interactive Voice Response
L1 First language, usually referring to mother tongue or familiar language
L2 Second language, usually referring to Portuguese (although for many students Portuguese may be a third or fourth language)
MINEDH Ministry of Education
MMS Multimedia Messaging Service
OSC Overseas Strategic Consulting, Ltd.
SBCC Social and Behavior Change Communication
SMS Short Message Service
STC Save The Children
UEM Universidade Eduardo Mondlane
USAID United States Agency for International Development
USSD Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
WEI World Education, Inc.
VAMOS LER! (LET’S READ!) PROGRAM

The Government of the Republic of Mozambique (GRM) has committed to improving its early grade literacy outcomes through recent investment in the expansion of its national bilingual education program. With the rollout of bilingual education training and planned revision of the bilingual education curriculum in 2016-2017, the government hopes to reverse the worrisome trends plaguing its school system: Fewer than half of Mozambican children complete primary school, and rates of teacher absenteeism are among the highest in the world.

Mozambique’s investment in a bilingual education policy highlights its ambition to significantly improve early grade reading (EGR) outcomes. Reform efforts focus on L1 (mother tongue or familiar language) to L2 (Portuguese) transition, strengthening EGR policy frameworks, and building the capacity of the MINEDH to roll out the bilingual education program across the country. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), under the Assistance to Basic Education Learn to Read Now (ABE LEARN) IDIQ, the Vamos Ler! program will strengthen the Mozambican government’s ability to ensure that students in the two target regions (Nampula and Zambézia) can achieve grade-level fluency and comprehension in the local language in the first cycle of primary education (grades 1-3).

Vamos Ler! will focus early grade literacy instruction in three local languages, Emakhuwa, Elomwe, and Echuwabo, and will provide second or new language acquisition and literacy support to prepare children for transition to Portuguese as language of instruction in grade 4. Through a three-fold results-based approach Vamos Ler! supports the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) to strengthen classroom and systems support to lay the foundation for sustaining and expanding bilingual early grade literacy throughout the country:

- IR 1: Early grade reading (EGR) classroom instruction improved
- IR 2: National EGR policy framework and delivery systems improved
- IR 3: Parental and community engagement in EGR increased

Lead implementing contractor, Creative Associates International, and sub-contractors, World Education, Inc. (WEI), American Institutes for Research (AIR), Oversees Strategic Consulting (OSC), and blueTreeGroup (bTG) are committed to support the GRM to realizing these aims over the five-year program, through quality, cost-effective and sustainable, evidence-based technical and material assistance.
LITERATURE REVIEW & SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

EVIDENCE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE FOR IMPROVED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Parental engagement in their children’s learning and development, particularly in early childhood, is among the strongest influences of brain development and later success. Research conducted by UNICEF found that programs in which parents were taught the value of specific behaviors demonstrated improvement in children’s developmental outcomes, including academic progress. The psychosocial stimulation and support, particularly in low-resource families, resulted in improved cognitive development. Programs that promoted longer amounts and more frequent interactions between parents and children demonstrated the most success. In South Africa, students whose parents expressed interest in their work, regularly followed up on attendance and assignments, performed better in school. While the parent’s academic background might have been limited, students benefited from the enthusiasm exhibited by their parents’ interest in school meetings, assignments, and academic progress (Britto, et al., 2014).

Research also supports the idea that parental involvement has improved children’s literacy and performance in school, regardless of the parents’ status or personal achievement. Community engagement and mobilization activities that increase parental engagement in a variety of contexts, including policy implementation, have been shown to have strong, though indirect influence on improving learning outcomes (Marphatia, et al., 2010). Other studies have shown that communities with a capacity to influence staffing decisions, manage budgets, and implement policy reforms, achieve better educational outcomes for students (Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016). Thus, community and parental engagement represent an important area of study and intervention in early grade reading projects.

MOZAMBIQUE CONTEXT

Mozambique’s slowing economic growth and the decline in foreign investment have had significant negative impact on efforts to reduce poverty and raise personal incomes. More than 44% of the Mozambican population faces severe, multidimensional poverty and 68.7% of the population lives on less than the equivalent of $1.90 per day (UNDP, 2017). While the current food security forecast for Mozambique suggests that this year’s harvest will be good, many farmers are still recovering from the poor harvests of the prior two years (FEWS, 2017).

Mozambique faces significant educational challenges. The adult literacy rate is only 58.8% and the primary school drop-out rate is greater than 69%. Results from 2014 school performance reports showed that only 6% of all 3rd grade students were able to read fluently on national exams conducted in Portuguese (UNESCO, 2014). One critical factor identified as contributing to poor early grade reading performance is the language of instruction. In Mozambique, the majority of children entering school begin learning in a language they do not understand.
Portuguese, the official language of instruction in most schools, is the mother tongue\(^2\) of only 11% of the population (National Institute of Statistics, 2007).

Other critical factors are linked to quality of education. Studies show that teacher knowledge and teacher absenteeism are significant indicators of low-quality education (Akiba, et al., 2007; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Ejere, 2010; Miller, 2012). To alleviate the teacher shortage and rapidly expand the number of teachers employed for primary education, the years required for certification were drastically reduced in 2007-2008. As a positive result of these changes, all new teachers hired in 2009 received training, which reduced the number of non-trained or allegedly under-qualified teachers (OSF, 2012; World Bank, 2017). However, minimum qualifications standards are still insufficient and result in poor teacher knowledge and pedagogical skill (Smith & Motivans, 2007). Further, a 2015 survey from Mozambique showed that 45% of teachers were not in school during announced visits, which contributes to learning loss (World Bank, 2015).

**NAMPULA AND ZAMBEZIA CONTEXT**

As two of the most populous and more densely populated provinces in Mozambique, Nampula, and Zambezia present unique challenges to parental engagement efforts. Job growth and productivity have increased, albeit slowly. Between 2002 and 2015, the number of firms and total employment increased in the northern provinces, but economic growth and employment opportunities remain limited (World Bank, 2017).

Outside of Maputo, Zambezia and Nampula have the highest gross enrollment rates of all Mozambique provinces. Zambezia and Nampula have more than 25% and 15% of all pupils in Mozambique, respectively (MINEDH, 2016). Performance of the education system in both provinces is weak. In addition to drop-outs, Nampula and Zambezia have maintained a high rate of students repeating their grade levels between 1\(^{st}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) grades. Nampula and Zambezia have the highest rates of grade repeaters of any province in Mozambique (MINEDH, 2016).

Both provinces—particularly Zambezia—are representative of a wide variety of ethnolinguistic backgrounds (SEDAC, 2017). Indeed, study participants in Nampula reported speaking Emakhuwa, Portuguese, Elomwe, Etoki, and Enahara, while participants from Zambezia reported speaking Elomwe, Portuguese, Echuwabo, Emaganja, Emanyawa, and Cisena. This diversity complicates teacher-student and teacher-parent interaction in some instances where interlocutors lack fluency in a mutually spoken language. Communication and outreach efforts must take both this linguistic diversity and its attendant impacts on social networks into account when designing activities and developing materials.

**LANGUAGE POLICY**

The language in which children are educated plays a profound role in establishing their later national and ethnic identity. Thus, the selection of national languages and the language(s) of instruction are political questions of the highest order insofar as it can determine who is part of

\(^2\) In this report Mother Tongue is used interchangeably with Language 1 (L1), defined as the child’s strongest spoken language when they enter school. L2 is used to refer to Portuguese, common defined as second language or a language that the child is not familiar with when they enter school.
the national identity (Anderson, 2006). National leaders of all stripes have attempted to utilize language policy as an instrument with which to shape or establish a national identity, often at the expense of local identities closely tied to other languages (Opoku-Amankwa, et al., 2015).

Mozambique’s 2004 constitution (amended in 2007) states that while the official language of the republic is Portuguese, “The State shall esteem national languages as cultural and educational heritage, and shall promote their development and increasing use of languages that convey our identity.” (Ruchti, 2012). This is a step forward from the national language policies of previous constitutions which promoted Portuguese at the expense of African languages in an effort to promote national unity (Canhanga & Banda, 2017). Education policy reforms recently announced by the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) in 2016, have proposed nationalizing 16 languages in addition to Portuguese (Trudell, 2016).

The above softening toward African languages notwithstanding, Portuguese has remained the official language of instruction in the vast majority of Mozambican schools, and shifting toward a bilingual education model is fraught with social and political sensitivities. Although bilingual education has been shown to improve learning engagement and outcomes in the Mozambican context (Benson, 2000; Capra International, 2013), recent research suggests that parents, teachers, school administrators and higher-level education officials harbor a variety of doubts regarding bilingual education, at least in the limited areas where bilingual education has been piloted previously (Canhanga & Banda, 2017). These doubts, which range from concern over the efficacy of bilingual education to the fundamental soundness of the philosophy behind bilingual education, highlight the need for deep, contextually rich understanding of parental knowledge, attitudes and practices surrounding both bilingual education and early grade education in the area where Vamos Ler! will operate.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN MOZAMBIQUE: WHAT’S BEEN DONE THUSFAR, CHALLENGES AND OUTCOMES**

Administrative decentralization has facilitated community engagement in education, though much work remains to be done. Elected local governments were formed in urban and semi-urban areas upon the implementation of Municipal Law 2/1997. By 2002, 2,000 leaders were recognized as ‘community authorities’ as provided for by Municipal Law 2/1997. While these community authorities are intended to function as partnerships that facilitate democratic participation in education outcomes, challenges ranging from a lack of trust to limited mandates remain (Roby et al., 2009). Most school-community engagement continues to be facilitated by civil society organizations (CSOs).

Mozambican and international CSOs have been effective in focusing their effort on decreasing the barriers between schools, the community, and parents, though these efforts have tended to be resource intensive and therefore limited in scale. In 2016, the Impact Evaluation of the USAID/Aprender A Ler Project found that increasing community engagement, and directly targeting the barriers to engagement, enhanced the sustainability of community-driven projects. Radio, community events, and the provision of learning materials were all used to great effect in the targeted communities (Raupp, et al., 2016). The Centre for Learning and Capacity Building Civil Society (CESC) has utilized a paper and SMS-based system, combined with radio events to engage parents in developing community scorecards that assess teacher, school, and community performance in supporting education. These efforts appear to produce results but require...
staffing at the district level to support relatively intensive school council capacity building (CESC personal communication, July 12, 2016). CESC efforts at parental engagement and mobilization appear more robust in urban areas and at higher grade levels.

Save the Children (StC) has also undertaken effective community engagement efforts, working both through school councils and less formal community structures. StC has been able to promote EGR in homes through a combination of events (reading fairs), community level support activities (e.g. reading clubs and book banks), and the provision of local language reading and instructional materials. This multi-faceted approach has proven effective, but even here challenges remain significant. StC has staff at the district and community levels, but quality and consistency of engagement remain issues in spite of this intensive engagement. Sustainability and Government of the Republic of Mozambique (GRM) participation are also issues addressed under this model. While StC coordinates with the relevant community and provincial GRM structures, much of StC’s community engagement takes place outside the school council or other officially designated support structure (N. Figia, Save the Children International / Mozambique, personal communication, July 12, 2016).

More general challenges for community engagement are widespread and significant in scale. Limited CSO capacity combined with weak community structures in many areas, means that there are few platforms for engaging parents and few workers or volunteers to do the engaging. High rates of poverty further complicate community engagement efforts (Casey, 2014). Even the limited time and financial commitments required to attend community meetings or purchase the most basic reading materials to support reading in the home may be too much for parents and communities living in deep, multi-dimensional poverty.
PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While a significant body of research exists to support the use of bilingual education (Alidou et al., 2006; J. Enever et al., 2009; Mothibeli, 2005; Van Ginkel, 2014), the role of parent and community engagement in bilingual education and children’s learning more generally is yet not as well understood (Djite, 2008; Heugh et al., 2007). Efforts to engage and mobilize parents to support bilingual education and involve themselves in their children’s education in and out of school require a nuanced understanding of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices surrounding bilingual education, school/teacher performance, learning in the home/community, and attendance (Britto, et al., 2014; Marphatia, et al., 2010; Mncube, 2010; Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016; Walter, 2015). Only with this understanding can a social and behavior change communication (SBCC) strategy aimed at addressing key behaviors be developed and its attendant communication activities be appropriately designed and implemented.

The main objective of the study was to reveal behavior and behavioral determinants including current knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of male and female parents/guardians, teachers, school directors and community leaders about bilingual education and early grade reading (EGR) as they pertain to recommended behaviors for increased support for education. The research questions were designed to provide for answers that could be used in an analysis, and ultimately to inform community engagement strategy for education support under Vamos Ler! The information gathered feeds directly into the Social and Behavior Change Communications (SBCC) strategy and informs the development of communication interventions and messaging for the Vamos Ler! program.

The research included a desk review of project documents, strategy documents and existing research surrounding attitudes toward bilingual education in Mozambique, as well as informal focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Research questions are formulated based on academic literature that has examined parental/guardian behavior and identified categories of parental/guardian involvement or engagement shown to benefit child learning (Epstein, 1986). Qualitative research questions were open-ended, intended to explore respondents’ attitudes and perspectives were categorized around recommended behaviors as follows:

1) **Support for Bilingual Literacy**
   a. What do respondents know and feel about the current language of instruction and “bilingual education”?
   b. What are some of the specific potential benefits or problems they perceive about “bilingual education”?

2) **Parental/Guardian Support of Learning Outside of School**
   a. How do parents/guardians currently support their child’s learning outside of school?
   b. What are some of the limitations they face in trying to support their children’s literacy?

3) **Parental/Guardians Involvement with School**
   a. How do parents/guardians currently interact with the school?
   b. What’s typically discussed and how do they learn about meetings?
c. What are some of the characteristics they believe make a school and teacher “good” versus “bad”?

4) Reduced Absenteeism: Send Children to School Regularly, On Time and for the Entire School Year

a. What do parents/guardians currently do to ensure their children attend school every day and on time?

b. Why do they think children miss school?

c. What do teachers/directors/leaders believe about why children miss school and how to reduce absenteeism?
STUDY METHODOLOGY

To achieve these objectives, two classic qualitative research methodologies were used:

- **In-depth interviews (IDIs)**: Semi-structured, face-to-face interview with an individual to learn their individual experiences, attitudes, and understanding about a subject.

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**: Guided discussions with a group of 5-8 homogeneous participants to identify common experiences, knowledge, beliefs, social norms (e.g., common trends, assumptions) and explore the differences that may arise.

SAMPLING PLAN

Twelve schools were purposively selected from Nampula and Zambézia provinces that contained a mix of languages, geographic areas, and cultural influences. These were geographically scattered and segmented by urban/rural locations and by the three maternal languages, Echuabo, Elomwe, and Emakhuwa. The researcher reviewed the data for responses that were saturated across languages, geographic areas, and cultural influences. The final numbers of IDIs and FGDs by these characteristics and by respondent type can be found in Table 2 below.

**TABLE 2: NUMBER OF FGDS & IDIS CONDUCTED AS PART OF THE RESEARCH BY LANGUAGE AND URBAN/RURAL LOCATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th># of FGDs</th>
<th># of IDIs</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Echuabo</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mother</td>
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Vamos Ler! implemented the research in consultation with MINEDH and Provincial Directorates of Education and Human Development (DPEDH) of Nampula e Zambézia, and technical support from Creative Associates International (Creative), Overseas Strategic Consulting (OSC), American Institutes for Research (AIR), Dr. Esmeralda Mariano, an Anthropology Professor at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) and Chapane Mutiua of the Centro de Estudos Africanos at UEM as the field supervisor. Experienced interviewers with the requisite national language skills were recruited and trained. Discussion guides were reviewed and pre-tested and field work took place in March 2017.

DATA ANALYSIS

FGD discussions and participant data were recorded by FGD facilitators in the languages noted above. Discussions were then transcribed in Portuguese. All IDIs/FGDs were recorded and then transcribed and translated into Portuguese and English by the Centro de Línguas da UEM. The analysis was conducted by both OSC and AIR, with support from Creative. Partial English translations were created in some instances. The researcher translated the data when needed and developed a coding program that correlated the respondents with responses to qualitative questions. Responses were reviewed for answers that were saturated, and used to develop recommended behaviors that are designed to remove barriers to community engagement.
FINDINGS

Findings from the qualitative formative study are rich and varied and will inform all aspects of the Vamos Ler! community engagement and communications by shaping the behaviors and the core messages used to address them. The Community KAP study reveals that while community attitudes toward education are highly favorable, knowledge of bilingual education is limited. Similarly, while support for parental involvement in schools and learning in the home/community is high, the actual implementation of learning approaches (practices) at home is much more limited. Socio-economic constraints also appear to play a significant role, and barriers to learning in the home include a lack of parental knowledge regarding steps that can be taken to promote learning in the home/community.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Parental understanding of and support for bilingual education is limited by the novelty of the concept. Most parents ultimately want their children to read, write, and speak Portuguese since mastery is perceived to convey economic and social advantages. At present, however, most parents do not understand how bilingual education, as it is being implemented under Vamos Ler!, supports this goal, or even what is meant by the term.

Most parents acknowledge that while Portuguese is the official language of instruction under the current pedagogical framework, L1 is frequently used to facilitate student understanding in the classroom. However, when asked to define bilingual education, most parents are unable to explain the term. This is unsurprising since the approach has yet to be widely rolled out. But it does mean that parents will need to be educated on the tenets of bilingual education as implemented by Vamos Ler! so it can be more explicitly linked to the acquisition of early reading skills in a familiar language, with transfer of skills to Portuguese reading, writing, and speaking ability.

Many of the parents had reservations about their children learning Portuguese at an early age. One mother said:

“They don’t understand what the teachers say. They don’t understand and even if they have got something to say, they remain silent because they don’t know how to say it.”

Some of the fathers felt that Portuguese should be taught early because they were already learning their local language at home. One of the fathers said:

“They have to teach the children in Portuguese so that they reach the next grades, it becomes easier.”

Parents generally appear favorably pre-disposed to the notion of bilingual education even if they do not yet understand the concept. With some limited exceptions in Zambezia, most parents in the study area believe that a mix of both L1 and Portuguese should be used for instruction in grades 1-3. Parents feel that bilingual education will enable children to learn two languages, enhance communication between children and the elderly, and will preserve local heritage/traditions. While many parents express no concerns regarding bilingual education, some express concern that the transition to full Portuguese instruction may be difficult, or that learning Portuguese may be inhibited, highlighting a need for Vamos Ler! to carefully and
convincingly articulate the promise of bilingual education when it comes to ultimate fluency in Portuguese.

PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

Parents across a varied demographic and geographic strata want their children to get a good education because it is seen as the pathway to a productive future. While expectations surrounding the specifics of future employment differ along urban/rural lines, education is accepted as the key to desirable government or professional employment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, parents want the educational system to enable their children to be able to read and write in Portuguese above all else. Good behaviors, math, farming, artisanal skills, and the arts, are all of the secondary or tertiary importance.

Importantly, while the link between education and future employment prospects appears strong in the minds of parents, significant probing was often required to push parents to think about their children’s futures in concrete terms. While further research would be required to confirm the reasons behind this, the cognitive costs of poverty and economic stress may play a role. Parents simply have more immediate and pressing concerns, such as putting food on the table, than the long-term future of their children (Shafir & Mullainathan, 2013).

Parents are proud of their children’s educational achievements and cite attendance, good grades, good manners, and the ability to read the alphabet as markers of this achievement. Parents worry primarily about the costs of education, especially uniforms and supplies, in the face of numerous financial challenges, and whether their children are actually learning—the return on their investment. Fathers are particularly concerned about the cost of education and its ultimate value, while mothers tend to be more concerned with the health of their children and negative social behaviors children might learn at school.

Parents identify good schools and good teachers through tangible, if not always accurate, proxies for performance. The condition of facilities, provision of books and supplies, and the punctuality of students and teachers are key signs of a good school as far as parents are concerned. School-community engagement is also indicative of a good school. Parents see good teachers as those who are organized, on time, and actively engaged with their students. Learning outcomes of children do not figure highly in parents’ determination of whether schools or individual teachers are performing well, likely due to the fact that these are difficult to understand or to observe for poorly educated and otherwise highly pressured parents and to assess.

Fathers focused on the quality of the school and teachers in their responses to their support of education. “The quality of the school depends on its directorate” mentioned one father in an urban setting. A similar response was given elsewhere by a father in a rural setting, and in a different language, good schools require “increased size, more classrooms and all the material and instruments it needs.” Many of the responses from mothers focused on the availability of supplies, including snacks and books. A grandmother in a rural area responded accordingly, “I wish there were snacks at school for the children when they go to school because they go back on an empty stomach.”
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Most parents express strong feelings of ownership and involvement in their children’s schools. It is common for parents to participate in locally-driven projects intended to improve school facilities and to attend local school meetings. Parents generally feel that they have the opportunity to voice their concerns about their children’s school and for concerns to be listened to, but it is rare for parents to engage in a one-to-one meeting with their children’s teacher or school director.

The most common way for parents to engage with their children’s school is at the opening of the academic year or June first celebration marking the end of the year. Trimestral meetings are also important opportunities for interaction as these meetings are focused on student performance. Other meetings throughout the year seem to be more variable across schools. Parents are informed of the meetings by either a home visit directly by their child. As one mother stated:

“The children will tell the parents about the meetings and the mothers go.”

Another mother said that “A girl was sent to summon her. When she gets a summons she goes sometimes, but no agenda is provided beforehand.”

With the exception of the June first celebrations, most parent-school meetings appear to focus on asking parents to reinforce prosocial behavior in their children, provide additional funding for schools, or deliver student performance information. School and teacher performance is generally not a significant point of emphasis at these meetings. As one mother described the dialogue at the community meetings:

“They tell us to supervise our children, control their assiduity, their attendance, their hygiene in a way that they are always clean, with their hair combed, and they also ask us to help clean the school.”

Most parents are aware of school councils and understand that they are comprised of parents, school administrators, and teachers. That said, parental attitudes toward school councils are mixed. While a relative few parents have explicitly negative feelings toward school councils, many parents are unclear on how they function, the frequency and purpose of meetings, etc. The monitoring function of school councils seems poorly understood by most parents.

PARENTAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING IN THE HOME

Parental attitudes surrounding learning in the home are highly favorable to the objectives of Vamos Ler!, but parental knowledge of techniques for supporting learning in the home is more limited. When combined with the competing priorities of economically marginal existence and the limited learning materials available in many communities, this lack of knowledge results in many parents falling short of the ideal when it comes to promoting learning in their home.

Nearly all parents know that they should support their children’s learning outside of school. Parents understand that they should ensure children complete their lessons, practice the alphabet with their children, and generally support their studies. However, many parents are at a loss when it comes to helping children read when they themselves are unable to read. Similarly, many parents themselves struggle with Portuguese, making them feel ill-equipped to assist their children in learning. This limited sense of self-efficacy is also evident when it comes
to parents encouraging their children to continue learning outside of school. Some parents suggest that they are incapable of encouraging their children to study when they would rather play.

Parents often lack the time to support or supervise their children’s learning in the home, even though they know they should do so. A lack of reading materials in the local language presents an additional barrier to parents hoping to assist their children in learning to read. While some parents have access to a Bible in the local language, the only books most parents have access to are their children’s Portuguese-language school books. Very few parents have sufficient money to purchase books. In any case, most are unaware of any locations where books of any kind can be purchased, borrowed, or even read on site.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS – REACHING PARENTS

Poverty, illiteracy, and limited connectivity intersect to constrain the media consumption patterns of parents in the study area. Parents currently receive much of their information through face-to-face meetings. With respect to education, these meetings are most commonly the school meetings described above, but the church, zone, political party, and neighborhood meetings are also common, and could occasionally serve as a platform for discussions regarding education.

The reach of broadcast media varies according to the level of urbanization. Radio is far more common than TV in rural areas, but not everyone owns or has access to a radio. Popular programming includes news, children’s educational programs related to health, farming programs, and Christian programs. Radio and TV ownership are much more common in urban areas; virtually everyone owns and radio and/or a TV. Popular TV programming includes news, sports, agriculture/animal husbandry, religion, and soap operas. In all cases, local language programming is important, as adults frequently struggle with Portuguese.

Mobile phone penetration is also directly related to the level of urbanization. Phone ownership is still limited in rural areas, where many men, but few women have feature phones. Smartphones are very rare in rural areas. In urban areas, most adults have feature phones, but smartphone ownership is still uncommon. Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS) and Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) messaging are possible using feature phones, communication through feature phones is generally limited to voice calls (or Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Short Message Service (SMS)).

Even in urban areas virtually no parents have internet connections, even over mobile phones. As a result, social media and other websites are not commonly viewed in the study area, making them very poor channels for reaching parents.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Parents offer many explanations for the high rates of absenteeism that plague many schools, but most break down into three major categories: opportunity costs associated with keeping children in school, poor service delivery, and limited parental oversight. Significantly, these explanations are all externally focused. Lack of support for education, low parental interest in
their children’s education, and lack of control are not cited by parents as reasons for their children’s poor attendance. Rather, factors beyond parent’s control are to blame.

In rural areas, where poverty is both more pervasive and extreme, opportunity costs figure most prominently in parental explanations for absenteeism. School and uniform fees are seen as sapping scarce funds and children in school represent lost childcare or farm labor. Poor school conditions are also a factor but appear less significant. In urban areas, poor service delivery dominates the discussion. Absent or abusive teachers, early class hours and lack of food offerings for students are the primary reasons why children are not in school, though parents report fewer absences than the number reported by teachers.

Both urban and rural parents report limited control over children where school attendance is concerned. A community leader who was surveyed mentioned that “sometimes children miss because they have to work the fields as punishment for misbehavior.” Another community leader when surveyed mentioned that “children are not obeying their parents, and some parents want their children to help on the farm” are contributing factors to absenteeism. Numerous parents in both groups stated that they were not always aware of their children’s absences or suggested that they couldn’t make their children go to school if they didn’t want to.
KEY BEHAVIORS

For the purposes of informing the SBCC strategy development, it was important to isolate the specific behaviors we want parents/guardians to implement (known as “desired behaviors”) and analyze the data in terms of what parents/guardians are currently doing instead of those behaviors and, importantly examine why. By understanding what motivates their current actions, and what barriers exist that block adoption of our recommended behaviors, we can try to remove barriers to our “desired behaviors” and make them more attractive and doable for parents/guardians. Qualitative analysis dictated that the removing barriers to the following behaviors would increase community engagement and improve educational outcomes.

The following tables describe results from the qualitative research in this format for each of our four key behaviors. Note that for each behavior we found various actions and attitudes among parents/guardians.

KEY BEHAVIOR 1: BILINGUAL LITERACY

1) Support bilingual literacy (language of instruction policy change) and do not oppose it.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What they are currently doing/thinking?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Most parents/guardians are totally unfamiliar with the term “Bilingual Education.”</td>
<td>The vast majority of parents/guardians, believe Portuguese is the most important language for their children’s future, BUT also want their children taught in both Portuguese AND their maternal language to facilitate comprehension. Only urban parents from Zambézia Province preferred Portuguese as the sole language of instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Among many teachers and school directors and the few parents/guardians who had some understanding of the term “Bilingual Education”, they understood it as using both L1 and L2 in the classroom to facilitate understanding.</td>
<td>Most teachers expressed difficulty using only Portuguese for instruction so are currently forced to use maternal languages to facilitate communication. Many believed that Bilingual Education means making that practice official and adding training and books to improve the quality.</td>
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<td>When “Bilingual Education” was briefly explained to those parents/guardians that had no familiarity with the term, they overwhelmingly supported the idea.</td>
<td>Most could only see advantages and not identify any disadvantages. When pressed, they mentioned the following disadvantages: that some professors coming from outside the area do not speak the local language; L1 variants may be hard to standardize, or that the transition may be difficult. They also sometimes voiced concern that Bilingual Education might inhibit their children’s learning of Portuguese. This later belief was a greater concern among teachers and school directors, who were more wary of the new program. They were also concerned about how teachers from out of the area, who did not speak the local language would teach it and how teachers would manage class time when providing lessons in both languages.</td>
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KEY BEHAVIOR 2: PARENTAL/GUARDIAN SUPPORT OF LEARNING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

2a) Provide materials, time and psychological support to or care for children to support their studies.
2b) Read to and get involved with your child’s learning outside of school, including helping and checking your child’s homework.

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<tr>
<th>What they are currently doing?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parents/guardians provide little/no support, materially or otherwise, to support learning.</td>
<td>Due to poverty, they lack money to buy school materials like pencils, notebooks, uniforms or snacks. Illiteracy and feeling that they lack the knowledge to help their children. They lack time and energy, coming home tired after a full day of physical work on their farms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents/guardians provide some material support (uniforms, supplies) but little assistance with homework or reading at home.</td>
<td>Many parents/guardians perceive teaching literacy as the school’s role, they are unable or unwilling to get involved beyond the provision of necessary school supplies. Many also lack education (are illiterate) themselves and lack time and books or materials to provide more support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents/guardians check homework or read to their children occasionally, but not regularly.</td>
<td>Some parents/guardians know they should check their children’s homework or try to read with their children, but they do not do this regularly or don’t know how to help their children in their learning. Most homes have no books or other reading materials or electricity. Some parents also blame their children for preferring to play, implying that they cannot control them.</td>
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KEY BEHAVIOR 3: PARENTAL/GUARDIANS INVOLVEMENT WITH SCHOOL

3a) Visit the school and talk to teachers to better understand the curriculum, know teachers and understand your child’s skills development and performance.
3b) Participate in formal (e.g. School Council) and informal meetings and events at the school

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<tr>
<th>What they are currently doing?</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attend major meetings (like at start of the school year)</td>
<td>Most parents/guardians see the school as belonging to the community and report that they attend routine meetings (particularly women) like those at the start of the year. Topics at these meetings include general plan for the year, announcing new regulations and issues that can be characterized as “requests and complaints” (about children’s behavioral problems, poor</td>
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performance, poor attendance, hygiene problems, etc.) Non-attendance of these meetings was due to lack of time or interest.

| Volunteer at the school (some) | Many parents/guardians reported that they have volunteered to build or repair the school building or teachers’ housing or for cleaning or weeding duties. This was more common in rural areas. The major barrier to volunteering was lack of time. |
| Attend 1-on-1 meetings, but only when called | 1-on-1 meetings between parents and teachers seemed to only happen to deal with a problematic situation, either poor performance, bad behavior, absenteeism or fights between children. |
| Attend School Council meetings (rare) | Many parents/guardians knew about the school council, but did not attend those meetings, because they didn’t know when they occurred or due to lack of time, interest, confidence, or for political reasons (in fact, according to School Council Manual, not all parents are invited to School Council meetings, so not surprising.) They also were largely unaware of the results of school council meetings. Opinions about how the school council functioned varied considerably. |

**KEY BEHAVIOR 4: REDUCED ABSENTEEISM**

4) *Send the children to school regularly, on time and for the entire school year*

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<th>What they are currently doing?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Children arriving late</td>
<td>Due to the distance between home and school, household chores, left by parents/guardians to get to school on their own with no monitoring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children leaving early</td>
<td>Due to lack of food/hunger, poverty, needing to work to help support their families, teacher absence or poor performance/poor understanding of the lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing days here and there</td>
<td>Due to work to help their families (for example absences on market days to sell produce), initiation rites, child’s lack of interest in school due to poor performance/poor understanding of lesson and poor teaching (absence of child-oriented teaching) and lack of monitoring of attendance by parents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dropping out of school completely</td>
<td>Due to their poor performance or lack of understanding Portuguese (instruction language), poor teacher performance or absences, need to work to help support their families. Early pregnancies, marriage (for older children).</td>
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CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The barriers to implementing our key desired behaviors identified in the research typically fell into the following categories:

**Parents lacked resources, time and energy** to better support their children and get more involved in school life. These are formidable barriers that help explain everything from the lack of reading materials in the home to children’s need to miss school for work or their poor diets and consequent lack of attention, to parents’ lack of support with homework and poor attendance at school meetings.

These structural barriers are difficult for a program like *Vamos Ler!* to remove because they deal with larger societal issues outside of the scope of the project. In order for the project to maximize its impact, project implementers must be mindful of parents’ limitations and come up with efficient, inexpensive, and convenient ways parents can improve the quality of the support they give their children, without over-taxing their resources. The following interventions and policy recommendations will help deal with these limitations:

**Policy Recommendations**

- Reduce all remaining fees associated with school attendance.
- Consider providing school meals or snacks (or educating parents on affordable locally available nutritious foods that make convenient snacks for children).
- Make necessary materials and supplies available for free through the school and eliminate requirements for special school uniforms.

**Program Interventions**

- Use the language that parents understand best to communicate with them about their children’s education and school matters.
- Make sure all meetings with parents are scheduled at times that are convenient for them.
- Provide supplemental reading materials and establish after-school reading clubs where children can get more reading practice in a fun environment.

**Parents lacked information and knowledge** about various topics, including bilingual education, or how their children were doing in school, whether they were attending school on time and regularly, or when school council meetings took place and what was discussed. Lack of information makes it easy for parents to blame others and not take responsibility to solve a problem. For example, many parents blamed teacher absences for their children’s poor performance or said as far as they know their children do attend school regularly and on time when teachers reported otherwise. The lack of definitive information about student and teacher attendance makes it easy for parents to cast blame on others and to ignore their role in helping to solve the problem. Providing clear, easy-to-understand and timely information to parents on these and other topics can make all actors more accountable. The following specific interventions are recommended:
• Orient parents/guardians, teachers and other community members on what “bilingual education” practically means, its benefits and expectations about how the new curriculum and program will be implemented. Do this through including clear messages in all training curricula (for teachers, directors and school council members) and dissemination of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Talking Points at community meetings and via community radio.

• Make sure parents are informed as soon as their children are falling behind via an early warning system whereby teachers reach out to parents of children who fail to reach specific benchmarks.

• Teachers should meet with parents 1-on-1 more regularly,

• Continue revitalizing School Councils, increasing publicity about its work and process more widely, including the details of when meetings take place and the outcomes of those meetings. Inform School Councils about activities, or results of research done in Vamos Ler!

• Parents should be informed of their children’s school attendance regularly.

• Directors and School Councils should monitor teacher attendance and report it regularly to parents/guardians in the community.

Parents lacked skills or confidence to support their children’s learning or get more involved with the school. This is particularly the case for the many illiterate parents who feel incapable of helping their children learn and are sometimes intimidated by teachers and the school itself. Use of maternal languages in the classroom may help eliminate the linguistic barriers that some parents face, but illiteracy and inexperience with the school are still formidable barriers. The following are some recommended interventions to address lack of skills/ability and confidence:

• Build the capacity of parents/guardians through a provision of easy to do “tips” or exercises and games that improve the quality of the interaction they have with their children to expand their vocabulary or otherwise promote learning can address this barrier.

• As part of the training materials for teachers, meetings between parents/guardians and teachers should include encouragement for parents to take concrete steps to solve problems, for example, to organize older children or other community members to accompany young children to and from school to be sure they get there on time or specific. Tips they can use to help children with learning at home.

Traditional social norms delineate distinct roles for parents and school/teachers regarding their children’s education. Parents/guardians are responsible for their children’s moral education and for providing material support for them to go to school, while the school and its teachers are responsible for their children’s academic education. This social norm is an underlying barrier to encouraging all behaviors under IR3 and should be challenged by the program through recommended interventions such as:

• Promoting positive role models and examples of how parents who do actively support children’s learning at community meetings, on community radio and in theater productions.
• Orient Community Leaders about the need for parents to be rewarded for improvement, including results of children and teacher attendance, and more active role in their children’s learning including promoting all our recommended behaviors.

Parents lack the motivation, i.e. they do not adequately perceive the benefits of increasing their engagement in their child’s learning and lack the emotional impetus to implement our recommended behaviors. The following interventions are recommended to increase parental/guardian motivation:

• Hold read-a-thons or contests to celebrate children’s achievements and be a source of pride for parents/guardians to encourage their children’s learning.

• Parent-teacher meetings should include a review of the child’s achievements as well as any difficulties they are having.

To overcome these barriers, it is recommended that Vamos Ler! borrow lessons learned from the fields of communication, behavioral sciences, psychology, public health as well as education, which has used Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) to encourage changes to social norms and personal behavior. The Vamos Ler! SBCC strategy document elaborates on this approach, drawing from this study, and other inputs from key stakeholders to develop an SBCC approach appropriate to the Mozambican context.
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