

Teacher Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes

Related to Literacy and Language that Influence Early Grade Literacy Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa

Executive Summary

Despite some progress in early grade reading outcomes in sub-Saharan African countries, literacy levels remain low. One of the key challenges in improving learning outcomes is ensuring that teachers are prepared to effectively teach. For countries implementing bilingual and multilingual education, this entails teachers having the appropriate pedagogical skills and knowledge, literacy in the languages of instruction (LOIs), and willingness to teach in a local language.

Multiple challenges exist for effectively implementing bilingual and multilingual education. It is common to find a mismatch between teachers having the appropriate pedagogical skills and knowledge, ability to read and write in the LOI and willingness to teach in a local language. This could be due to several factors, including potential resistance to teaching in the local language and pressure from parents to teach in the regional or ex-colonial language instead of a local language. Additionally, mismatches exist between teachers' language and literacy skills, students' mother tongue (MT), and the designated LOI of the school. Data on teachers' local language proficiency is extremely limited. Many teachers struggle to teach in a language with which they lack reading and writing experience, as is the case across much of sub-Saharan Africa. Teachers may also lack the pedagogical knowledge and skills to effectively help their students develop language and literacy skills, especially when utilizing two or more languages.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) continues to put significant investment and effort into improving early grade literacy in sub-Saharan Africa and recognizes the need to examine critical issues on teacher effectiveness for early grade reading. This report responds to that need. Its objective is to examine and synthesize the literature base on the relationship between teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA) regarding LOI and early grade reading outcomes in multilingual contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. The report aims to better understand the challenges in language

PREPARED FOR
Bureau for Africa
Office of Sustainable Development,
Education and Youth Division
United States Agency For
International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20523

PREPARED BY
Kristin Rosekrans (Independent
Consultant)
Dexis Consulting Group
1412 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

policy planning and implementation, as well as to provide recommendations and identify research gaps. This framework report lays the groundwork for future USAID research activities in issues related to teachers and LOI in early grade reading.

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Specifically, the report examines three primary topics 1) Teachers' Language and Literacy Skills, 2) Teacher Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills, and 3) Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs Towards Local Language Instruction. An integrative literature review approach was conducted that used key search terms to retrieve peer-reviewed literature and grey literature according to established criteria. A total of 77 articles were retrieved by the search terms and an additional 32 by other means (e.g., references and bibliographies). The 109 identified articles are included in a summary table and assessed based on inclusion criteria for relevance and quality standards. The review ultimately included 74 sources.

TEACHERS' LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SKILLS

Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have LOI policies that promote the MT as the first language of instruction (L1) and the ex-colonial language as the second language of instruction (L2). However, there is often a gap between the official policy and its implementation, resulting in teachers not being equipped to teach in the designated LOI. Findings revealed widespread limitations in teachers' local language capacity for teaching in bi/multilingual programs. Although teachers may have oral language skills in a local language, they frequently lack opportunities to become fully literate in a local language and to attend teacher preparation programs that use a local language as the medium of instruction. In many countries, entry and/or graduation requirements for teacher preparation programs are not rigorous enough to ensure teacher proficiency in a local language. Additionally, teacher deployment policies do not always consider local language proficiency as a criterion, resulting in a discrepancy between the school's designated LOI and the teacher's capacity to effectively help students learn their primary language. A systematic review is needed of efforts across countries to strengthen institutions and mechanisms for improved teacher local language capacity, as well as research on how to best support teachers with limited LOI language skills.

Data on teachers' local language proficiency across sub-Saharan Africa is extremely limited. While multiple studies have determined that the mismatch between the official LOI and teacher proficiency in that language is a challenge, very few included any type of assessment of teachers' language and/or literacy skills. Successful implementation of bi/multilingual education will depend on having adequate and accurate information to inform programming.

The Mismatch Between Teachers' LI Abilities, the LOI of the School, and the Students' LI Occurs for Several Reasons:

- ▶ Teachers may speak the LI but since they did not study it in school or in their teacher preparation, they lack the literacy skills to use it for instruction and to teach that language to students

- ▶ Teacher preparation programs often do not include courses for teachers to develop skills in a local language

- ▶ Teacher deployment policies do not consider the teachers' language abilities as a requirement for placement

- ▶ There is a lack of information, and/or information use, on teachers' language and literacy skills in regards to the LOI of the schools where they are teaching

Teacher proficiency in the ex-colonial languages, which are often the students' second language (L2), varies within and across countries. In some countries, teacher proficiency is insufficient for ensuring that students can effectively learn these languages. This is a concern for students in the commonly used early-exit bilingual education model, in which students are supposed to develop their foundational language and literacy skills in the early primary grades, after which they are expected to learn all subject matter in the L2.

There is limited causal research on the relationship between student learning outcomes and teachers' language and literacy skills and practices in the LOIs. However, evidence points to teacher LOI proficiency being critical for student learning and shows that when teachers have limited LOI proficiency their teaching and learning practices tend to be less effective for student learning. More research is needed to establish causal relationships between teachers' language and literacy skills, in the LOIs and student learning outcomes.

TEACHER PEDAGOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Overall, teachers are not receiving adequate preparation to teach effectively in multilingual contexts. The development of competencies for teaching reading and writing in general is often insufficient or not part of teacher preparation requirements. Specific instruction for developing the L1 and L2 is especially lacking. There tend to be low expectations and standards for preparing teachers, ineffective in-service teacher

education, a lack of teacher education institutions, and too few teacher educators who are equipped to impart the skills and knowledge teachers need for bi/multilingual instruction.

LOI should be more integrated in teacher training and requirements. Teachers need an understanding of literacy acquisition in a first and second language, how to use assessments to inform instruction, and first and second language teaching methods. Capacity building of teacher education faculty is needed, particularly in pedagogical knowledge for multilingual settings. In-service training should be aligned with the curriculum for bi/multilingual education and training should be provided evenly across geographical regions.

Research has shown that teacher education can have positive effects on student outcomes in multilingual contexts. Furthermore, outcomes from different approaches to training shed light on the most effective approaches. However, research gaps still exist, especially for large-scale and/or nationwide programs (rather than only pilot programs). Formative evaluative research has been useful for identifying the most effective strategies for training and coaching teachers, such as the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach to project implementation and scaling up. CLA can be part of the implementation process and monitoring and evaluation plan to create and adjust training materials and strategies to best respond to teachers' needs.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS TOWARDS LOCAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

It is known that favorable teacher attitudes towards local language instruction leads to more widespread implementation. Yet findings on teachers' attitudes were mixed. Some studies found that teachers prefer a combination of local language and the ex-colonial language for the LOI and some revealed a strong preference for the ex-colonial or regional language. Few countries studied evidenced teachers strongly preferring local language instruction, with the notable exceptions of Rwanda and South Sudan. In addition to teachers preferring not to teach in the local language due to a lack of proficiency, they often prefer the ex-colonial/regional language because of pressure from stakeholders. Historical and political contexts influence stakeholders (including decision makers) to emphasize ex-colonial language instruction over local languages, including beliefs about them being higher status and unifying (while local language LOI can be perceived as divisive). Teachers and other local stakeholders who were not part of the mother tongue LOI decision-making process were also shown to have less favorable attitudes towards using a local language for instruction. Involving teachers and local stakeholders in language policy decisions is important to ensure that there is agreement on the LOIs, which can help lead to more fidelity in its policy implementation.

There is a need for research that examines the relationship between teachers' beliefs about local language instruction and student learning outcomes as well as studies on how to effectively change attitudes and beliefs through interventions. ■

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