



POLICY BRIEF

Learning to Read in Hausa and the Transition to English

NOVEMBER 2017



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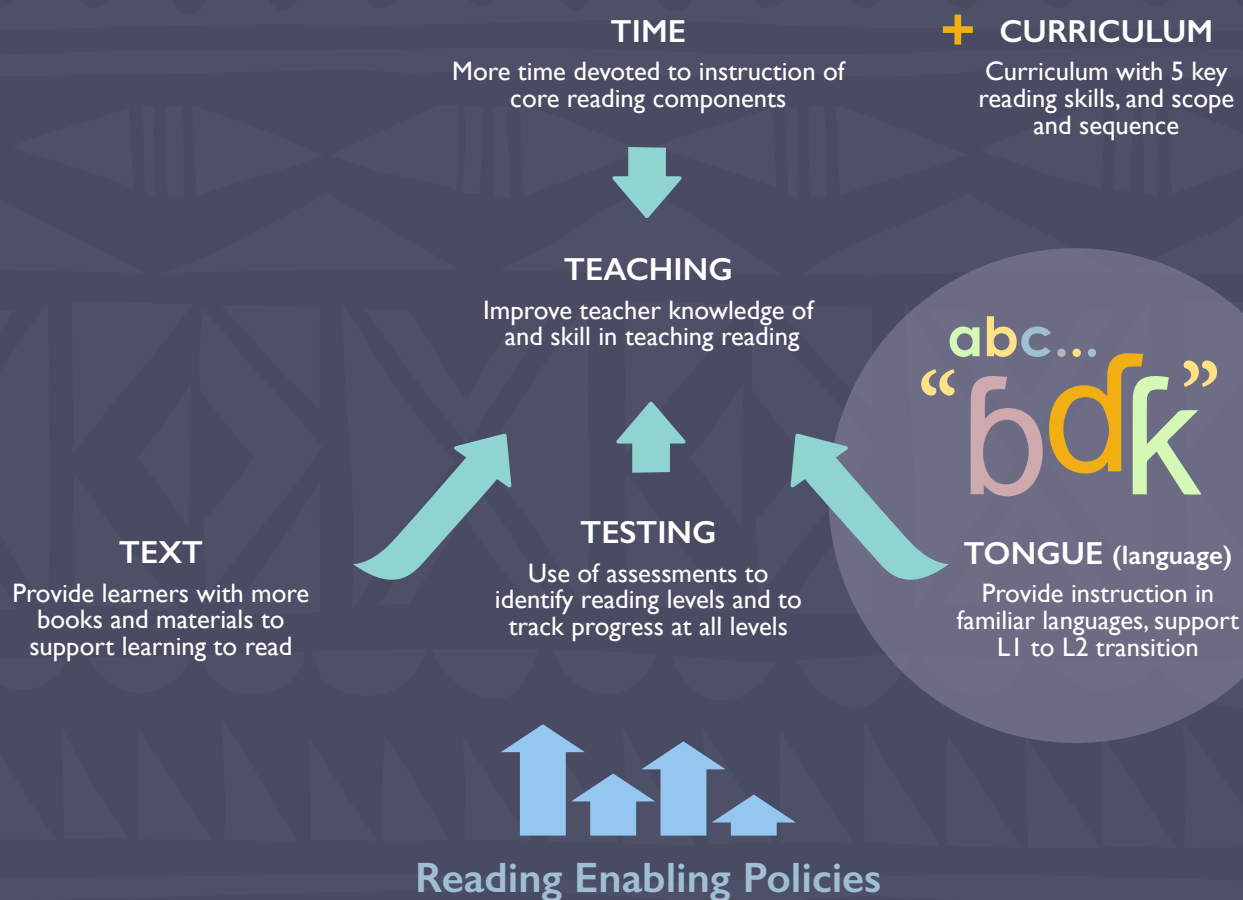
INTRODUCTION

Commencing in October 2015 with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the five-year Northern Education Initiative Plus project (the Initiative) is strengthening the ability of Bauchi and Sokoto states to provide greater access to basic education - especially for girls and out-of-school-children - and to significantly improve reading outcomes for more than two million school-aged children and youth. In reaching these outcomes, the Initiative employs an evidenced-based and system-strengthening approach that recognizes the need for

engagement at the policy level.

Evidence from effective reading programs has led to the 5Ts plus C framework for Early Grade Reading. The framework is a result of analyzing what works globally and helps education ministries, practitioners and development partners develop sound, evidenced-based policies, practices and programs.ⁱ Reading supporting policies have to be in place in order to get consistent, sustained improvements in the delivery of the early reading program.

5Ts + C of Good Reading Programs



WHY EARLY GRADE READING?

The first three years of primary school are critical years for children to establish themselves as emergent readers. Children at this stage are developmentally and cognitively ready to learn to read. If they haven't learned to read by the time they reach primary four, they may find it difficult to catch up.ⁱⁱ They often drop out of school as a result of not being able to read. Numerous studies have shownⁱⁱⁱ that children learn to read faster if they speak the language in which they are learning to read. When children are successful at reading and writing:



1. They are better able to understand their other subjects
2. They are successful in school
3. Their parents are supportive and send them to school
4. They proceed through to grade 4 and beyond
5. School drop out is reduced
6. Girls' enrollment and retention increases
7. More children complete high school and have greater social and economic returns to the individual and society

Background - Tongue: *Learning to read in mother tongue and the transition to English*

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of mother tongue to teach early grade reading has multiple benefits. Learning is facilitated when pupils use their mother tongue, and conversely when pupils do not understand the language of instruction their performance is negatively impacted.^{iv} Pupils typically enter school with a vocabulary in their first language as large as 6000 words. Building on this vocabulary helps pupils learn to read faster. The development of thinking skills is better facilitated in the familiar language. Reading and thinking skills mastered in mother tongue, including higher order reasoning, transfer to the second language or the language of instruction used in the upper grades.^v

The use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction has been extensively researched, particularly in the African context. A major study undertaken in 2011 by UNESCO, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the African Development Bank (ADB) recommends socio-culturally relevant curricula using African languages as the medium of instruction for at least the first six years of primary schools to improve education quality.

Research evidence supports the notion that transitioning from one language of instruction to another is most effective when the language of environment (LOE) (i.e. mother tongue or the language of the playground) is initially used as the language of instruction and when the curriculum continues to support the language of environment when transitioning to another language occurs. What is more, research also supports the conclusion that competencies developed in one's language of environment support the development of a learner's competencies in other languages.

This policy brief explores the evidence-based approaches for teaching reading in mother tongue (or early language of the environment) and the transition to a second language as the medium of instruction. The conclusion, outlines recommendations for reading supportive policies at the state level, many of which came out of policy dialogues in February 2017 in Sokoto and Bauchi.

Findings from Bauchi, Sokoto and federal level

In Bauchi and Sokoto (as well as other northern states) reading has not been taught systematically and explicitly. The National curriculum does not yet include an explicit systematic approach to learning to read in mother tongue, although interest by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in moving in this direction is high. Results on reading assessments^{vi} in the primary grades, over the past few years are dismal.

2014 EGRA (Four State Study) ¹	
Mean Oral Reading Fluency Score (Correct Words Per Minute) in Hausa	
State	Primary 3
Jigawa	3.4
Kaduna	0.5
Kano	2.8
Katsina	2.6

2016 NEI Plus Baseline EGRA ²	
Oral Reading Fluency (Correct Words Per Minute) Percentage of Zero Scores	
State	Primary 3
Bauchi	72.00%
Sokoto	77.40%

The *Mu Karanta! Let's Read!* program has been designed as a mother tongue based early reading program in primary grades 1-3 (*Mu Karanta!*) with a tran-

sition to English in primary 2-3 grades (*Let's Read!*). The program follows global best practices in learning to read in mother tongue and the transition to English. Early results are promising. Systemic constraints³, however, are worrying.

The Nigerian Education Policy stipulates that instruction at the lower basic primary level (primary grades 1-3) should be provided in LOE. Apart from the *Mu Karanta!* materials and Hausa textbooks, very few pupils' books for the primary grades in Sokoto and Bau-

Instruction in Primary 1-3 shall be in the language of the environment.

- Nigeria National Education Policy

chi are written in Hausa. Pupils' books in the primary grades for social studies, science, and maths, when they are available at schools, are predominantly written in English. Teachers are typically not skilled in English or teaching the subjects, and pupils have little exposure to the English language. Opportunities for strengthening pupils' reading skills, cognitive abilities and subject mastery in Hausa are diminished when their texts are in a language that they have not mastered, their teachers' skills are weak and there is little exposure to English in their environment.

The *Let's Read!* program in line with best practices, introduces oral English to pupils in primary 2. This allows pupils to gain a foundation in their mother tongue before moving to the second language. Reading and writing in English is introduced in Primary 3. Additionally the *Let's Read!* program is in line with the National Curriculum and therefore integrated with *Mu Karanta!*

In both Sokoto and Bauchi, however, two or more English programs can be

1 Nigeria Reading and Access Research Activity Results of the 2014 Hausa and English Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRAs) in Government Primary Schools and IQTE Centers of Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina States, USAID funded RARA study Research Triangle Institute (RTI)

2 Footnote for this Table: Northern Education Initiative Plus Results of Baseline Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) in Government Primary Schools in Sokoto and Bauchi. 2016

3 System constraints include weak teaching skills, poor teacher and pupil attendance, low time on task at school, large classes, weak supervision, and poor teacher motivation. These issues are addressed in other Initiative policy briefs.

operating within the same school. For example, in one school in Bauchi pupils are learning English from four different books with four different approaches.⁴ It would be surprising if both teachers and pupils weren't confused.

While the benefits of mother tongue instruction are well-established in the global literature, the general perception amongst parents and unfortunately some educators is that reading in English is the principle goal of education. Kenyan researchers found that teachers overwhelmingly favored the use of English in the primary grades at the expense of mother tongue.^v In Nigeria, similar attitudes may predominate.

As the evidence for teaching and learning in the early grades in LOE continues to expand, it is imperative that stakeholders in Bauchi and Sokoto States review their education policies and practices as it relates to language, teaching, and learning. Parents and community members should also be informed of the rationale (based on evidence) for policy choices. ■

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Mu Karanta!* and *Let's Read!* are in line with global best practices and the Ministry of Education's policy on teaching pupils in primary 1-3 in LOE. Support this policy in other subjects by working with the Universal Basic Education Commission and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council to have approved pupil books developed in Hausa and printed and distributed to pupils and teachers. Work with primary 1-3 teachers to help them understand the need for teaching other subjects in Hausa, and to improve their skills.
2. Evaluate donor and other implementing partner programs and make evidenced-based decisions on their implementation. Eliminate instances where more than one curriculum is operating in a given school.
3. Gather evidence over the next one or two years to determine whether the transition to English in primary grade 4 makes educational sense. Develop a policy on transition to English based on global and local evidence.



You only learn to read once.

- Fathi El-Ashry

4 Programs found in the same school include *Let's Read!*, Jolly Phonics, UNICEF supported ESSPIN Literacy, and the nationally approved English text.

Endnotes

ⁱ Kim, Y.-S. G., Boyle, H. N., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Nakamura, P. (2016). *Landscape Report on Early Grade Literacy*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.

ⁱⁱ Gove, A. and P. Cvelich. 2010. *Early Reading: Igniting Education for All. A report by the Early Grade Learning Community of Practice*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ouane, Adama and Christine Glanz, Eds, (2011) *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in sub-Saharan Africa*,

UNESCO Institute of Life Long Learning and Association for the Development of Education in African (ADEA) and African Development Bank (ADB); and Barbara Trudell & Leila Schroeder (2007): *Reading Methodologies for African Languages: Avoiding Linguistic and Pedagogical Imperialism, Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 20:3, 165-180 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2167/lcc333.0>

^{iv} Ibid. and, Barbara Trudell & Leila Schroeder (2007): *Reading Methodologies for African Languages: Avoiding Linguistic and Pedagogical Imperialism, Language, Culture and Curriculum*,

20:3, 165-180 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2167/lcc333.0> and Kim, Y.-S. G., Boyle, H. N., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Nakamura, P. (2016). *Landscape Report on Early Grade Literacy*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.

^v Charles Onchiri Ong'uti, Peter J. O. Aloka, Pamela Raburu, Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning in Mother Tongue in Public Lower Primary Schools in Kenya, *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 6 No. 3, 2016, pp. 161-166. doi: 10.5923/j.ijpbs.20160603.10. <http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijpbs.20160603.10.html>