



POLICY BRIEF

Improving the Teaching of Early Grade Reading & the Transition to English

NOVEMBER 2017



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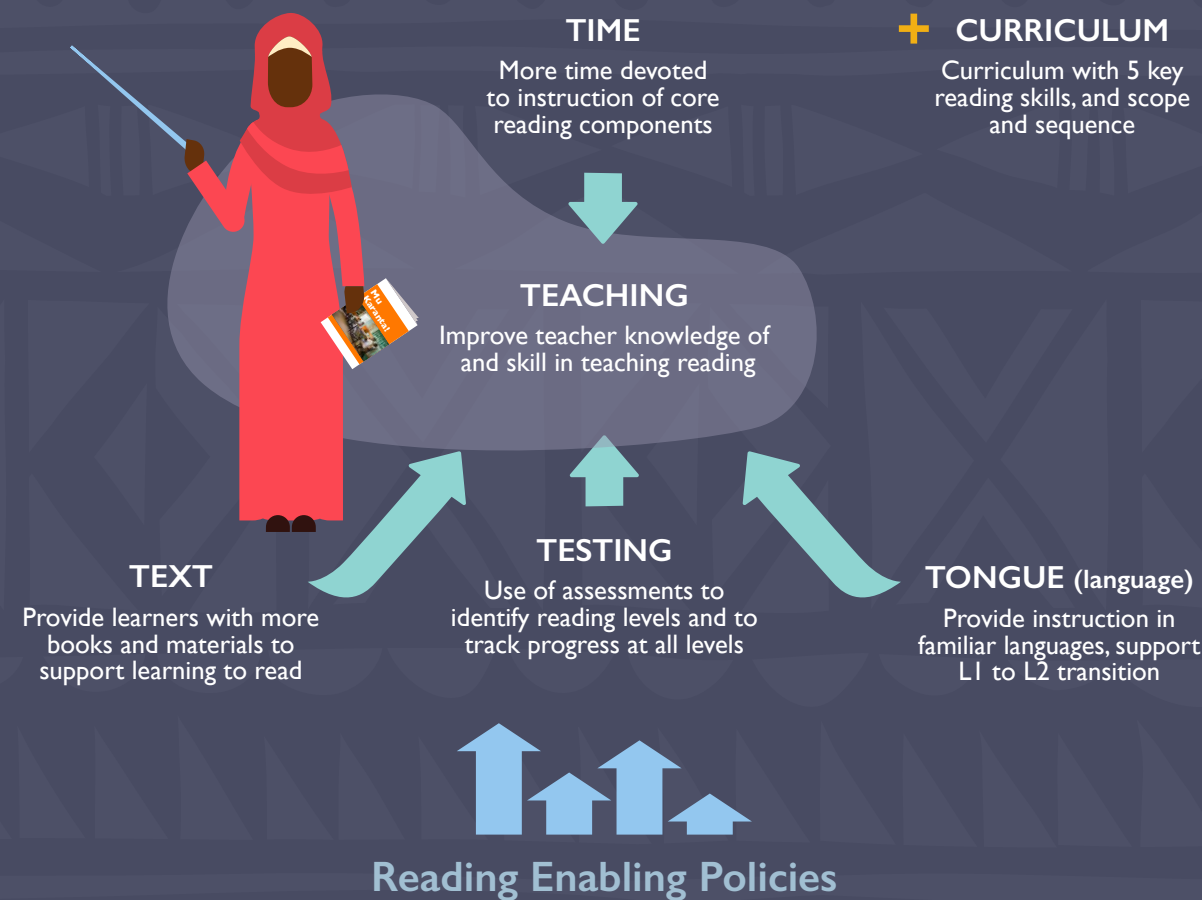
INTRODUCTION

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.¹ 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: Improving the teaching of early grade reading and the transition to English

Competent, effective teachers of reading in the early grades are perhaps a nation's most valuable teachers. Ensuring that children learn to read early and well, with interest, sets a foundation for the success of children in school and the rest of their lives. The developing, recruiting, supporting and deploying of quality teachers is a complex undertaking. Numerous research studies^{iv} point to the need for quality early reading teachers to have the required knowledge, skills, beliefs and motivation. Systems then need to ensure that:

- Teachers know the language of the environment in which children are learning to read
- Teachers know the transition language (English in the case of Nigeria)
- Teachers have successfully completed a pre-service program that included teaching children to learn to read in their mother tongue in a systematic and explicit way and the transition to the language of instruction in upper grades where it is appropriate
- Teachers are deployed to teach at the grade levels and in subjects for which they have the qualifications
- Teachers have regular support and participate in professional learning communities
- Teachers have appropriate teaching and learning spaces and materials
- Teachers are remunerated regularly and at a salary that attracts good teachers and keeps them

Currently, pre-service programs do not prepare teachers to teach reading, and once deployed there may be little opportunity for continuous professional development. In many countries, teachers of the primary grades are

typically the least qualified, lowest paid, have the largest number of pupils, teach more hours than teachers in upper grades, and have fewer opportunities for professional development. In essence, the primary teacher is undervalued by society and education officials.

Findings From Bauchi, Sokoto And Federal Level

The quantity and quality of teachers in Nigeria is a cause of concern for all. From a survey of teacher characteristics in Bauchi and Sokoto,^v 22 percent of teachers in Bauchi and 42 percent in Sokoto do not have the requisite qualifications for teaching. The contextual analysis of pre-service curricula conducted in September 2016 revealed that the National Certificate of Education curriculum contains no explicit and systematic teaching of reading in the early grades.^{vi} Only 30 percent of teachers have participated in in-service professional development since taking up their posts. There is little support or supervision for teachers by School Support Officers, whose roles seem unclear even to them. Teacher absenteeism in both states is high.

Evidence from classroom observations of teachers who have completed the 14 day in-service training for *Mu Karanta!* (learning to read in Hausa) and *Let's Read!* (the transition to English) show

weak skills and commitment, even after training and support. Many of these trained teachers are unable to:

- Follow a structured teacher's guide
- Produce teaching and learning aids and use them effectively
- Use child-friendly approaches in class
- Write clearly and in appropriate script on the chalkboard
- Position themselves appropriately in the classroom
- Engage all pupils in learning
- Make the classroom a print-rich environment

These inadequate teaching skills are compounded by:

- Overcrowded classrooms with student teacher ratios upwards of 100:1
- Dilapidated classrooms and poor school infrastructure
- Lack of libraries or access to anything to read

These factors combined give an alarming picture of the state of teaching and learning in the primary grades in Sokoto and Bauchi. ■

A nation's economic prospects follow the learning curve of its children.

- (Gove, A. and P. Cvelich., 2010)





POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a policy that prioritizes improving the quality and stature of primary teachers. The policy should include the following:

- Improve intake systems at pre-service colleges to attract Hausa and English speakers with good high school results
- Ensure all newly recruited teachers have completed and passed courses on early reading in their pre-service course
- Ensure all in-service teachers have successfully completed at least 14 days of training on early reading (*Mu Karanta!*) and the transition to English (*Let's Read!*)
- Ensure all Area Education Officers (AEOs) and School Support Officers (SSOs) supporting primary 1-3 teachers have successfully completed a training program on providing support to primary reading teachers
- Institute professional learning communities at the school (teacher learning circles) and cluster (cluster learning circles) levels for teachers to continue learning and growing through exchanges with peers and supervisors
- Develop schemes to recruit more female teachers and aim for gender parity in the primary grades
- Institute class teaching in primary 1-3 and eliminate subject teaching
- Develop non-monetary incentives (awards, certificates, recognition in the community and on media) for teachers who improve and excel
- Deploy enough teachers in the primary grades for a maximum student teacher ratio of 40:1
- Pay teachers regularly, well, and on time. Budget and plan for improve learning spaces at the primary level including multiple working chalkboards in each room, furniture for pupils and teachers, supplies for teachers to make and display teaching and learning materials, school libraries or book boxes in each classroom for pupil reading.



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} Kim, Y.-S. G., Boyle, H. N., Zuilkowski, S. S., & Nakamura, P. (2016). *Landscape Report on Early Grade Literacy*. Washington, D.C.: USAID: du Plessis, J., & Muzaffar, I. (2010). *Professional Learning Communities in the Teachers' College*. A Resource for Teacher Educators. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, USAID/EQUIPI.; Clark-Chiarelli, N., & Louge, N. (2016). *Teacher quality as a mediator of student achievement*. In UNESCO Institute of Statistics, *Understanding what works in oral reading assessments*

(pp. 30-40). Montreal, Canada: UNESCO. 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>

^v NEI Plus (2016) Baseline EGRA Report. USAID/Nigeria

^{vi} NEI Plus (2016). *Baseline assessment of pre-service teacher education programs and institutions of teacher education in Bauchi and Sokoto States, Nigeria*. A technical report produced by the Florida State University team for the Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI Plus) Project, Creative Associates International: USAID-Nigeria 2017