

Early Grade Reading Evaluation in Ghana: Unprecedented Results and Policy Impacts



The effectiveness of instruction in a pupil's native language is a topic of significant ongoing debate at USAID, and in education circles more generally. While there is widespread support for mother tongue instruction, there is little compelling evidence either in favor of or against this approach, especially in multilingual societies.

It was in this context that USAID Ghana launched the Learning Early Grade Reading (EGR) Program, an early grade mother tongue language of instruction program that was scaled throughout Ghana from 2017-2019. The program was implemented in over 7000 schools in all 10 regions of Ghana, with instructional materials translated into 11 local languages. In total, more than 700,000 students and 51,000 teachers and supervisors were enrolled in the program.

Social Impact was contracted to conduct the impact evaluation (IE) of the program. The IE is the largest education IE conducted in Ghana to date and was designed to examine the effectiveness of native language instruction.

The evaluation determined that after two years of implementation, the EGR program substantially and significantly improved pupil reading skills in both Ghanaian language of instruction and English, as measured by the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). When benchmarking the Learning program's effect sizes against peer programs, we found that the USAID project's impacts were larger than those of any comparable peer program evaluated to date.

While the Government of Ghana is still discussing its approach to language of instruction in early grade reading, the findings from the evaluation have already informed some key changes in education policy and practice in Ghana. Our fidelity of implementation assessment which measured the extent to which the intervention was implemented thoroughly and as intended, showed that scripted lesson plans were the program component most associated with higher learning outcomes for children.



Based on this, in 2019, and in the future, the approach of using scripted lesson plans has been integrated into Ghana's new curriculum for primary schools.

Second, the evaluation showed that fidelity of implementation in general was highly associated with success. Based on these findings, USAID's project expanded the use of its fidelity of implementation tracking system and tool, and the Ministry of Education with the World Bank is now working to expand and implement the fidelity of implementation tool across the country.

Third, the evaluation's analysis of zero scores and the prevalence of zero scorers in almost every school, highlighted the need to expand support for struggling students. USAID adjusted its approach to provide significantly more support to lower performing students including comprehensive guidance and teacher training on supporting low performers.

Finally, under its contract, SI also disseminated the findings of the evaluation widely to numerous stakeholders. This was an important step to ensure the results of the evaluation would continue to be incorporated into important discussions and decisions related to early grade reading policy and practice in Ghana. This information sharing included publishing findings in a local newspaper, featuring the results at high-profile events, and meeting with decision makers to discuss key findings. Key among these influential actors were the Minister and Deputy Ministers for Education, the association for curriculum design and testing, and teacher training institutions.

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