

Building a Culture of Reading in Liberia

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Facts about Education and Language in Liberia

Literacy rate: 58%

Life expectancy: 58 years

Official language: English

Local languages spoken: 16 +

From Ministry of Education, 2008-09 National School
Census Report (October, 2010).

Challenges in the Education Sector

Problem

- Overage students
- Reading as a separate curriculum standard

Solution

- *Accelerated Learning Program* and the (USAID) *Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth* . Created in 2005. New USAID funded program is *Advancing Youth*.
- Liberia recently adopted reading as a separate subject for all students grades 1-8.

Challenges

- Unqualified teachers at the primary level
- Unqualified teachers at the junior and senior secondary level

Solutions

- Rehabilitation of the Rural Teacher Training Institutes and new in-service training programs
- Government collaboration with international NGOs to train teachers
- Government has made teacher colleges at the University of Liberia and Tubman University tuition free with no costs for textbooks for all education students.
- Improved salary incentives for teachers

Questions to Guide the Efforts to Improve Literacy in Liberia

1. How did the Ministry become aware that there was a national issue with early literacy skills? What was the value of oral reading assessment in generating an awareness of the need to initiate change?
2. How did the Ministry plan to improve reading skills?
3. What specific approaches is Liberia using in grades 1-3 to improve children's reading skills?

Questions to Guide the Efforts to Improve Literacy in Liberia

4. Does Liberia have outcomes that validate a model or approach to improving reading?

5. How have international goals and aspirations been useful in focusing Liberia's efforts to improve reading skills?



1. How did the Ministry become aware that there was a national issue with early literacy skills?



A pilot Assessment in 2008 (funded by the World Bank) confirmed that there was a serious reading problem among children in grades 2-3.

- 34% of grade 2 students in a nationally representative sample of students could not read ONE word.

- The average number of correct words per minute read by children in grades 2-3 was 19.6. (students read a second grade level passage)

2. How did the Ministry plan to improve reading skills?



Plan for Reading Intervention Pilot Study (funded by USAID)

1. Reading intervention developed with Ministry of Education and Liberian educators as a response to the baseline oral reading assessment data
2. Research design: experimental study
3. Implementation of the reading intervention
4. Coaching component to support implementation
5. Mid-term and final assessments of students

3. What specific approaches is Liberia using in grades 1-3 to improve children's reading skills?



The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus Intervention

- ✓ Reading lessons are based on a “speech to print” (Moats, 2004) approach to reading instruction with a clear scope and sequence of instruction. Children learn the sounds of English and then map the sounds to letters in initial instruction.
- ✓ Simple, evidence-based routines employed in the basic level of instruction
 - Daily instruction for 45 minute lessons plus teachers read a second story aloud to students every afternoon
- ✓ Homework every day: Students are required to read to parents at home and parents sign a form to document that their child read to them.

Additional Components of the Study

- Coaching: Cascade Model: teachers learned to teach the intervention program through coaching provided by trained Liberian educators.
- Social Marketing: Radio Shows, Reading Competitions
- Parent and Community Report Cards
- Continuous assessment in the classroom

4. Does Liberia have outcomes that validate a model or approach to improving reading?

Significant effects for the EGRA Plus model (Jan. 2009-June 2010)

Subtest		Baseline Mean	Final Mean	% Increase over Baseline	Effect Size
Letter-naming Fluency	Control	61	82	36%	
	Full Intervention	62	99	59%	.52
Oral Reading Fluency	Control	18	25	39%	
	Full Intervention	21	50	138%	.80
Reading Comprehension (5 questions)	Control	24%	32%	33%	
	Full Intervention	26%	59%	130%	.82

EGRA Plus model

Grade level growth over 1 year

- Letter naming Fluency – 1.2 years
- Oral Reading Fluency – 1.9 years
- Reading Comprehension – 2.0 years

EGRA Plus is now **Reading First**, a program that is now being implemented on a national scale by the USAID funded Liberia Teacher Training Program



5. How have international goals and aspirations been useful in focusing Liberia's efforts to improve early grade reading skills?

Using an international oral reading fluency goal

- Liberia set an interim goal of 45 correct words read per minute at the end of grade three as a goal for all students.
 - Goal based on the pilot study results in which the full intervention classes achieved an average score of 50 correct words per minute after 1.5 years of intervention.
- International goals are consistent with 45 correct words read per minute.
- All children reading by grade 3 is a goal for Liberia

Sustaining the Success

- Maintaining a core reading course in all teacher education programs – a course that integrates effective instructional approaches with general methodology and the science of how individuals learn to read (a component being implemented in the USAID funded Liberia Teacher Training Program). ***All teachers need skills in how to teach students of all ages to read.***
- Ensuring a vertical alignment of literacy curriculum/programs between early childhood education and primary education
- Developing a national report card that includes school-based data on reading achievement. Reward schools that meet or exceed expectations.

GRADE 2: Early grade reading supplementary report card for the community (PTA, other community leaders)

Note 5/5 means that the child was able to answer 5 questions out of 5 correctly, 4/5 that the child answered 4 correctly, and so on.

	Period 2		Period 3		Period 4		Period 5		Period 6	
School average	Goal	Score	Goal	Score	Goal	Score	Goal	Score	Goal	Score
Letter-reading (letters per minute)	60+		60+		60+		60+		60+	
Story-reading (words per minute)	30		35		40		45		50	
Story understanding (5/5, 4/5, 3/5 and so on)	5/5		5/5		5/5		5/5		5/5	

Sustaining the Success

- Build a national professional development model that incorporates evidence-based practices to continue to increase teaching skills in all regions of the country (e.g., the Liberia Teacher Training Program, Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth,).
- A National Assessment will be administered in literacy and numeracy to all Grade 4 students.
- Build a bridge from pre-primary instruction in local languages to learning to read in English.
- Partnerships with other local literacy efforts including the Liberia Writers Association and *Read Liberia*, a reading intervention being implemented in 26 schools in Monrovia.

National Curriculum

- Maintain a separate set of standards for reading.
- Require that all curricula implemented in the schools include continuous assessment.
- Ensure that all teachers understand how to administer, score and utilize continuous assessment data to inform instruction.

Summary of key contributors to reading success: Building a Reading Culture in Liberia

- FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS on reading
- Provide resources to upgrade teacher skills: national professional development models, reading courses, linkages between early childhood and primary, supports for overage youth that incorporate life skills with academic skills
- Ensure that there is an effective partnership with the Ministry of Education

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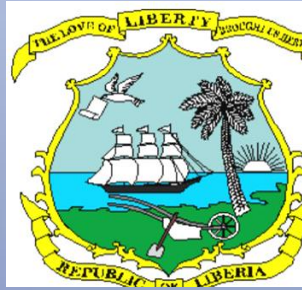
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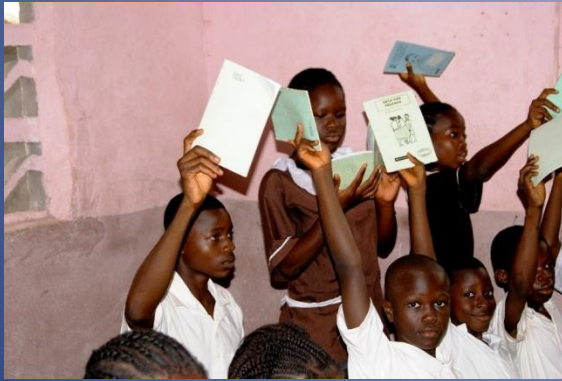
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Thank you!



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