

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES IN REFUGEE CONTEXTS

A summary of two research studies conducted in Isingiro, Arua, Yumbe and Adjumani districts of Uganda;

- **Uwezo** (a Program of Twaweza East Africa): **Are our children learning? Uwezo learning assessment in refugee contexts in Uganda***
- **British Council: The impact of refugees on schools in Uganda.**

INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper summarises the key findings from two studies, both published in July 2018. The research studies both examined the impact of refugee influxes on education. The two studies were carried out in the same districts at approximately the same time and although the focus and specific questions being addressed are different the studies when seen together provide an important reflection on the current situation in the schools and give practical recommendations for strengthening education for both refugees and host communities.

SUMMARY OF STUDIES

	Uwezo Study	British Council Study
Districts	Adjumani, Yumbe, Arua and Isingiro	Yumbe, Arua and Isingiro
Schools and communities selected	103 schools (46 in refugee settlements and 57 in host communities). 2,184 households (1,080 located in refugee settlements and 1,104 in host communities)	30 schools in refugee settlements.
Learners studied	4,156 children between 6-16 (2,257 refugees and 1,899 non-refugees).	20 learners in each school (600) from P3 and P5 were divided between host and refugees 1:2 but all within settlement schools
Data collection methods	Randomised sample of households from both host and refugee communities. Data collection through surveys and learning assessments.	School survey conducted on schools selected using criteria. Data collection through; School check list, focus group with teachers, classroom observations, questionnaire and learning assessment tool.
Learning outcomes	Measures of English reading literacy and numeracy at P2 level of competence	The four skills (Oracy and literacy) in English at P2 level
Learning conditions and school size	A range of indicators measuring school and household conditions, teacher to learner ratios and classroom resources	Growth in school numbers and teacher to student and classroom to student ratios. Use of teachers and language assistants
Language	Focus is on reading in English	Focus on language use in the classroom and at home and how this compares with refugees language background.

KEY FINDINGS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GROWTH AND CAPACITY

There has been a dramatic growth in the number of pupils in schools in the districts with an average of a fivefold increase in the numbers of refugees in schools over three years. This has resulted in severe shortages of teachers and learning spaces. Teacher to learner ratios now average 100 and often exceed 200, in many cases 300 learners were observed in one class with one teacher, especially in lower primary and nursery classes. Only 12% of schools located outside refugee settlements and 19% of schools in refugee settlements had a double shift system. Many classes were being taught by language assistants as there are insufficient numbers of qualified teachers. One school had 3 qualified teachers for over 1000 children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the use of double shift system.
- Use language assistants qualified in their country of origin as temporary teachers.
- Look for fast track ways of ensuring they become qualified through in-service training and establish avenues to provide Ugandan equivalence for teaching qualifications from outside Uganda.
- Increase opportunities for unqualified but educated refugees to qualify as teachers.

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2. THE LANGUAGE SITUATION

A very complex situation was discovered across all of the districts, with 19 languages in common use in the 30 schools studied by the British Council team. There was considerable confusion over which language should be used as the language of instruction (LoI) when so few children understand English and so many had previously been learning in a different language. 15% of lessons observed were using a local language as the LoI. A third of lessons used more than one language during teaching but two thirds of all classes observed were monolingual English classes with no use of any other supporting language even though at least a third of the class did not understand the lesson. Although schools did have language assistants very few were fulfilling this role because they were teaching whole classes themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In line with the Ministry's language policy, establish a language that is familiar to the greatest number of children as the LoI in Nursery and P1-3 and use English but with L1 support in P4-7. The languages selected should be chosen at school level as they look for a language common in the playground.
- Recruit language assistants to support language groups that cannot easily follow the LoI both in the class and outside. Language assistants can have lower levels of qualification or training than at present envisaged. They should have a support role bridging English and the child's known language but also a role that is supportive of the whole child not just the language.
- Train teachers in bilingual approaches, moving between languages when required to give attention to all the children in a class. The idea, so common in the 1970's, that it is wrong to switch languages needs to be trained out of teachers.

3. OVERAGE CHILDREN

There is a severe issue with overage children in lower primary. On average, refugee children were 3 years older than they should be for their grade. The result of this will certainly be learner drop-out and failure to complete, especially for girls. One cause of this was the system of placement on arrival. New refugees would be assessed through an interview or written test in English. As a result their placement was based on their ability in English. Refugees from countries using French or Arabic as the LoI were particularly disadvantaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the Alternative/Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP) for older learners who are able to learn faster once language and curriculum gaps are addressed.
- Provide language support and rapid English Improvement classes for learners from different language backgrounds, especially French and Arabic.
- Provide language assistants for minority languages to help in and out of class.
- Placement in primary grades to be based on age, general cognitive ability and knowledge across the curriculum not just on language.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES: LITERACY IN ENGLISH AND NUMERACY

Both studies highlight severe issues with literacy levels among pupils. Approximately 30% of all pupils tested were able to read at the expected level for P2. Uwezo findings indicated that literacy levels in English were low across all pupils, but lowest among refugee pupils. In the British Council research, letter recognition was particularly poor (only 15% recognised most letters) though scores improved on word reading (34%), picture matching and responding in writing to questions read silently (44%). This evidence suggests that teachers are not developing the crucial decoding skills in their learners and therefore not providing them with strategies for reading new words or texts. Isingiro learners, who mainly used L1 in early grades, were better at reading but worse in the listening and speaking than those from Arua or Yumbe.

Uwezo findings showed refugee and non-refugee children performed better in numeracy than in English literacy. About 50% of refugee and non-refugee children reached the expected competency levels in numeracy compared to just about 30% who had acquired the expected literacy competences for P2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Through training and reading support materials get teachers to introduce a stronger phonics element using a language familiar to the children in the early years.
- Develop reading approaches and strategies for children who do not know the language they are trying to learn to read orally. This may involve greater use of the child's first language to develop phonic knowledge through the language assistants.
- Provide simple bilingual reading materials covering topics that are gaps between the host curriculum and the curriculum of the refugee countries to both strengthen English reading and fill in the curriculum gaps that may lead to learners being demoted to lower grades.