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Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus Liberia: Project Overview



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Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus: Liberia

Overview:

- **Name of project:** Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus: Liberia
- **Start date to projected end date:** October 7, 2008 – October 6, 2010
- **Prime and subs:** Prime: RTI International. Subcontractor: Liberian Education Trust
- **Counties of operation or coverage in Liberia:** 180 schools in the following counties: Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Monteserrado, Bomi, Gbapolu
- **Description of purpose:** The objective of the EGRA Plus: Liberia program is to support Ministry of Education efforts to improve the quality of primary education and the teaching of reading in Liberia. The project will demonstrate the use of data on student performance to support teacher and school development so as to improve the quality of instruction and enhance accountability for effective outcomes in reading.
- **Any major accomplishment(s) to date you would like to highlight.** After only some 3.5 months of effective implementation of the EGRA reading interventions, treatment schools outperformed control schools on all tasks tested. In what is likely one of the most rigorous randomized trials being done by any USAID project, preliminary analyses indicate that application of data and improved teaching methods have produced gains in certain aspects of reading of as much as 52% over baseline in letter naming, 69% in familiar-word recognition, and 51% in connected-text reading fluency. A final version of the mid-term assessment report is available. These advances were achieved in spite of dire environmental conditions immediately around start-up, namely a volunteer teacher crisis in January and early February 2009.

Project Description:

Building on the success of the [Early Grade Reading Assessment \(EGRA\)](#) as a measurement tool, many countries have begun to show interest in moving away from measurement only and toward the types of interventions that can increase student achievement. For example, Liberia's path toward interventions in early grade reading started with a pilot assessment using EGRA in 2008 (funded by the World Bank), which was used to complete a system-level diagnosis that documented areas needing improvement. Based on that assessment, the Ministry of Education and USAID/Liberia decided to fund a two-year pilot intervention program (2008-2010), called EGRA Plus: Liberia, to improve student reading skills by implementing evidence-based reading instruction.

The EGRA Plus: Liberia program uses empirical data from early grade reading assessments to track progress toward quality improvements in early grade reading instruction, with particular focus on phonics-based instruction. EGRA Plus is both an intervention and an experiment, as it is designed as a randomized controlled trial. Three groups of 60 schools were randomly selected, for a total experiment of 180 schools. These groups are clustered within districts, such that several nearby schools are organized together. The intervention is targeted at grades 2 and 3. The design is as follows: The control group does not receive any interventions but has been assessed using EGRA. In the "full" treatment group, reading

levels are assessed; teachers are trained on how to continually assess student performance; teachers are provided frequent school-based pedagogic support, resource materials, and books; and parents and communities are informed about student performance. In the “light” treatment group, the community is informed about reading achievement, and students are assessed.

Based on the results of the midterm assessment conducted in May and June 2009, after only some 3.5 months of effective implementation of the EGRA reading intervention (effective time was shortened by the teacher crisis in early 2009), treatment schools outperformed control schools on all tasks tested. Preliminary analyses indicate that application of data and improved teaching methods have produced gains in certain aspects of reading of as much as 52% over baseline in letter naming, 69% in familiar-word recognition, and 51% in connected-text reading fluency. A final version of the mid-term assessment report is available upon request. The second academic year is looking promising for yielding even greater results and bringing Liberian children closer to becoming fluent readers.

The following paragraphs detail some of the evidence on results.

- **Letter knowledge:** At the baseline assessment, children were capable of identifying letter names, for the most part, yet improvements were made even here. The average grade 2 control child identified 58 letters per minute and the average grade 3 child identified 69 letters. At midterm, grade 2 students in full-treatment schools showed a 52% increase in letter-naming fluency, and grade 3 students’ results increased by 42%. Interestingly, children in light treatment schools increased their scores over baseline by 36.4% and 32.5% in Grade 2 and Grade 3, respectively.
- **Phonemic awareness:** Program impact on phonemic awareness was more moderate. Combined scores from grades 2 and 3 showed that the number of sounds identified increased by 30% in full treatment and 17% in light treatment schools.
- **Familiar-word fluency:** In full-treatment schools the increase was 69%; in light-treatment schools, 54%.
- **Unfamiliar (nonsense) word fluency:** Full-treatment schools increased 79%, an increase of 1.5 words per minute on a baseline of 1.8 words. Since the baseline was very low, even a 79% improvement is not sufficient, so this is an area for improvement.
- **Connected-text fluency:** Compared to baseline, full-treatment children increased the number of words read correctly per minute by 51%, while light-treatment schools increased by 29%. This means that full-treatment schools increased from 19 to 30 words per minute, while light-treatment schools increased from 21 to 27. This improvement leaves children short of a desirable goal, but is still quite good, given the short duration of the intervention in Grades 2 and 3.
- **Comprehension:** This is one result area where major improvement is still to be achieved. Full-treatment schools increased their scores by 1.6% over baseline. Fluent reading is an

important indicator because children who can read quickly and accurately without struggling to decode words are far more likely to be able to comprehend what they are reading. In Liberia, learners in Grade 2 and 3 are not yet decoding fluently (using 60 correct words read in one minute as the benchmark) and until they achieve greater fluency in decoding skills, comprehension skills may not increase significantly. With improved fluency this should also improve.

- **Listening comprehension:** Increases for full- and light-treatment schools were a remarkable 128% and 130%, respectively. In fact, the scores increased from 33% to 77% correct for full-treatment schools and 34% to 78% for light-treatment schools, both large increases. Full-treatment schools increased by 9.9 percentage points and light treatment schools by 9.8 percentage points more than control schools.

In summary, given the short timeframe and the relatively modest cost of the program, EGRA Plus: Liberia so far has outperformed expectations with respect to impact on student achievement. It is clear that the EGRA Plus: Liberia program is yielding results, and even larger results are expected on the final assessment that is scheduled for June 2010.