



POLICY BRIEF

Providing Enough Instructional Time for Children to Learn to Read

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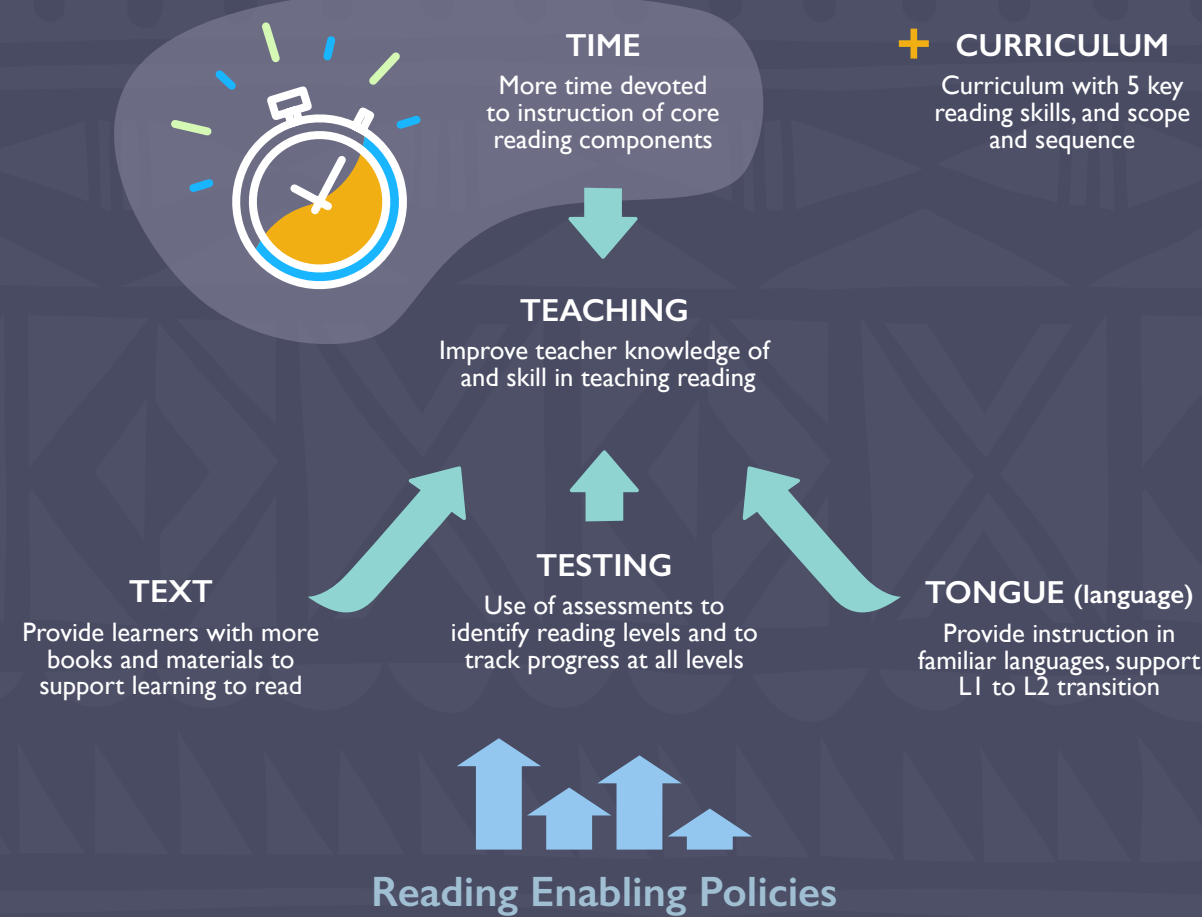
INTRODUCTION

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: Time on Task

International research examining time on task supports the conclusion that learning gains among students are maximized when time on task or "engaged learning time" is maximized.^{iv} In fact, international best practice dictates that to bolster students' opportunity to learn, the school year must have a minimal instructional time between 850 and 1,000 hours per year. While improvements have been made in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of instructional hours, these improvements leave much to be desired. Particularly in early grades, the median yearly instructional hours fall short of these best practices. The reality is increasingly evident when considered within the global educational context where countries such as the United States, China, Japan, and Germany boast significantly higher median yearly instructional hours.^v

Various reasons account for low levels of instructional time in schools. Chief among these reasons is the challenge of teacher absenteeism. What accounts for teacher absenteeism? First, research suggests that context matters. Teacher absenteeism is lower in urban communities compared to their rural counterparts.^{vi} Second, accountability mechanisms matter. Limited and/or ineffective monitoring by both internal and external actors is correlated with higher levels of teacher absenteeism.^{vii} Third, the distance from the branch Ministry of Education office has also been correlated with teacher absenteeism. Higher rates of teacher absenteeism is associated with greater distance from a branch office of education.^{viii}

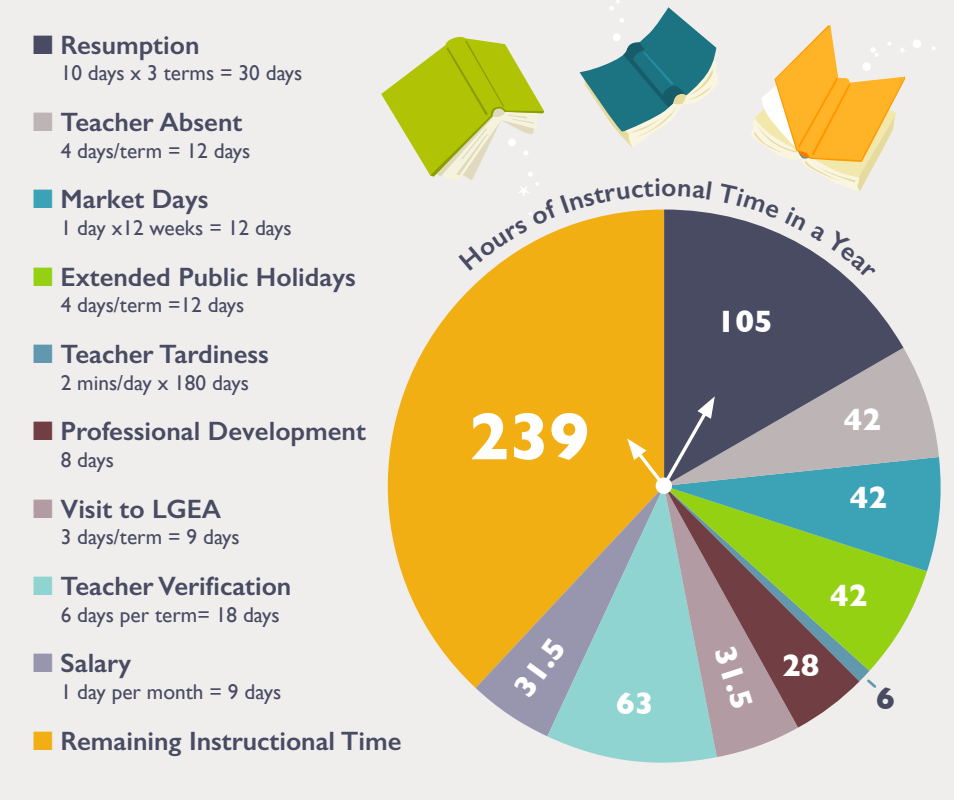
A nation's economic prospects follow the learning curve of its children.

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

While instructional time provides useful preliminary insights related to learner's engagement, this factor provides only a snapshot of a pupil's engagement. As noted above, time on task is a measure of engagement.

Total Instructional Time In Sokoto and Bauchi

(630 hours/Year) Minus Estimated Losses in Instructional Time
= Actual Instruction Time of 239 Hours



Instructional time is often squandered on tasks unrelated to teaching. In some classrooms, studies have shown that only 63 percent of class time was devoted to teaching activities. What is more, when teaching activities were undertaken, the vast majority of this time was spent on lecture-based lessons as opposed to interactive lessons.^{ix} Therefore, the challenge of time on task reaches beyond simply mandating increased instructional hours. Addressing the challenge of time on task must consider how instructional time is used within the classroom.

Findings from Bauchi, Sokoto and Federal Level

In Bauchi and Sokoto states, data shows that time on task is much lower than the international standard of between 850 and 1,000 hours of instructional time, with only 630 hours of timetabled instructional time per year, and even less in reality. Since the inception of the Initiative, encouraging policy shifts have occurred. The number of periods for Hausa for learners in primary 1-3 has increased from five 30-minute periods to ten 30-minute

periods a week in both Bauchi and Sokoto, ultimately doubling the time on task for early grade reading. Gains in instructional time are realized when teachers use structured lessons to teach early grade reading. Findings from the Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA) intervention in 2015 show that in 30-minutes of class time, teachers at baseline without the use of structured lessons only taught 10 percent of the lesson (three minutes). At endline teachers using a structured lesson taught reading 80 percent of the 30-minute lesson (24 minutes).^x

Despite these achievements, there is still work to be done. In Bauchi and Sokoto states, teacher tardiness and absenteeism remain a hindrance to time on task. The pie chart (above) is an outcome of policy dialogues held in Bauchi and Sokoto in 2016. Educational officials participating in the dialogue were asked to estimate how much learning time is lost due to teacher absenteeism and other events at the school. The pie chart shows the total hours of timetabled instructional time. At 630 hours, the total instructional hours depicted above, this is far below

the minimum instructional time of 850 hours, according to global research. Participants estimated the actual instructional time of 239 hours in a year, with an estimated 391 hours of lost opportunities for learning. With this low amount of instructional time in

Understanding the Cumulative Effect of Absenteeism and Tardiness

- If a teacher is absent for four days per term, three weeks of instructional time is lost.
- If a teacher arrives two minutes late for class, 3,200 minutes or two days of instructional time is lost.
- If a teacher attends four days of training each term, two weeks of instructional time is lost.
- If a teacher visits the LGEA Secretariat twice per term, one week of instructional time is lost.
- If teachers participate in teacher verification exercises for two days each term, six days of instructional time is lost.
- If a teacher must travel each term to collect his/her salary, two weeks of instructional time is lost.

schools, it is likely that many children will fail to learn to read in school.

Trainings, visits to the LGEA Secretariat, participation in teacher verification exercises, and the collection of salaries are all factors that feed into the prevalence of teacher absenteeism in Bauchi and Sokoto states. Beyond teacher absenteeism, pupil absenteeism must also be considered. For example, for learners in rural communities, absences often occur on market days or during planting or harvest seasons as a result of expectations to provide support to family on these days. The cumulative

effect of tardiness and absenteeism of teachers can significantly diminish instructional time over the year.

Finally, instructional time in primary grades at 3.5 hours/day is far below international standards. Combined with long morning/breakfast breaks and other disruptions, the 3.5 hours is likely rarely reached.

The Initiative is working with SUBEB in both states to study time on task in schools. A report that is expected to provide greater insight into instructional time at schools is due in early in 2018. ■

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase the instructional time in primary grades 1-3 to at least five hours a day. Reduce morning breakfast break to 20 minutes.
2. Address teacher absenteeism in several ways:
 - Strengthen headteacher roles and practices in holding teachers accountable for daily and on time attendance.
 - Strengthen SSOs role and practices in providing support and supervision to schools to increase teacher time on task in the classroom and their attendance at school.
 - Develop reasonable but effective consequences for unexcused teacher absenteeism by implementing verifiable attendance systems (e.g. mobile apps), docking pay for absenteeism, and providing rewards for perfect attendance.
 - Pay teachers on time.
 - Strengthen LGEA capacity to monitor and support schools and communities to improve teacher and pupil attendance.

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} Moore A. S., Ph.D., DeStefano J., & Adelman E. (2012). *Opportunity to Learn: A high impact strategy for improving educational outcomes in developing countries* (pp. 10 – 20). Funded by the United States Agency for International Development under the EQUIP2 Program. FHI 360. <https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EQUIP2%20OTL%20Book.pdf>

^v See citation above.

^{vi} King, E.M., and Berk Ozler. 2001. *What's Decentralization Got to do with Learning? Endogenous School Quality and Student Performance in Nicaragua*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank; Rogers, F. H., J. Lopez-Calix, et al. 2004. "Teacher Absence and Incentives in Primary Education: Results from a National Teacher Tracking Survey in Ecuador." Excerpt from Ecuador: Creating Fiscal Space for Poverty Reduction. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

^{vii} See citation above; Habyarimana, J. Draft 2004. *Measuring and Understanding Teacher*

Absence in Uganda. Boston, MA: Harvard University.

^{viii} See citation above; King, E.M., and Berk Ozler. 2001. *What's Decentralization Got to do with Learning? Endogenous School Quality and Student Performance in Nicaragua*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank; Rogers, F. H., J. Lopez-Calix, et al. 2004. "Teacher Absence and Incentives in Primary Education: Results from a National Teacher Tracking Survey in Ecuador." Excerpt from Ecuador: Creating Fiscal Space for Poverty Reduction. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

^{ix} Abadzi, H. 2006. *Efficient learning for the poor: insights from the frontier of cognitive neuroscience*. Washington (DC): World Bank.

^x Research Triangle Institute (2016) *Nigeria Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA): Results of an Approach to Improve Early Grade Reading in Hausa in Bauchi and Sokoto States*. USAID/Nigeria. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KYMI.pdf