



Designing a program of teacher professional development to support beginning reading acquisition in coastal Kenya



Margaret M. Dubeck^{a,e,g,*}, Matthew C.H. Jukes^{a,d}, Simon J. Brooker^b, Tom L. Drake^{b,c}, Hellen N. Inyega^f

^a Harvard Graduate School of Education, United States

^b London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom

^c Mahidol-Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit, Thailand

^d Room to Read, United Kingdom

^e RTI International, United States

^f University of Nairobi, Kenya

^g University of Virginia, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Literacy
Reading instruction
Teacher education
Kenya
Text messages
Perception

ABSTRACT

What should be considered when developing a literacy intervention that asks teachers to implement new instructional methods? How can this be achieved with minimal support within existing policy? We argue that two broad sets of considerations must be made in designing such an intervention. First, the intervention must be effective by bridging the gap between current teacher practice and the scientific literature on effective instruction. This broad consideration is detailed with 10 design recommendations. Second, the intervention must be amenable to being scaled-up and mainstreamed as part of government policy. This involves being (i) simple and replicable; (ii) well received by teachers; and (iii) cost effective. The paper describes how these factors were considered in the design of a literacy intervention in government primary schools in coastal Kenya. It also includes reactions from teachers about the intervention and their change in knowledge.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Among the multitude of factors influencing student outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa, the knowledge and practices of teachers has arguably the most direct effect and has the greatest potential for intervention through government policy. Many teachers lack confidence in their abilities to improve student learning, even when they rate themselves as professional and considerate of their students' needs (Onderi and Croll, 2009). Other teachers may be dedicated to their profession but recognize that they do not have the necessary pedagogical knowledge to influence all students' achievement (Dubeck et al., 2012), notably those struggling with learning to read in non-native languages.

The feeling that some teachers have that children in sub-Saharan Africa are not reaching their academic potential is supported in the data (UNESCO, 2010). It predominantly shows that children in upper primary grades have minimal reading skills. Furthermore, recent

efforts examining reading abilities for children in lower primary confirm what was observed in the upper grades – children's reading skills are lacking (Gove and Cvelich, 2010).

The situation in Kenya also points to low literacy levels (Onsumu et al., 2005). Data from Uwezo's survey in 70 Kenyan districts show that among grade three children, only 28% can read a Grade 2 English passage and just 36% can read a Grade 2 Swahili passage (Hoogeveen and Andrew, 2011). Other survey work found that 25% of the children could not read a single word in a grade level paragraph (Gove and Cvelich, 2010).

This evidence calls for a greater emphasis on improving academic outcomes for students. Substantial meta-analyses conducted largely in industrialized countries conclude that the methods used to teach reading have a key influence on successful literacy acquisition (August and Shanahan, 2006; NELP, 2008; NICHD, 2000). When instruction develops oral language skills (e.g., phonological awareness and vocabulary) and explicitly and systematically explains the relationship between sounds and symbols (i.e., letters), children have the foundation for word identification and reading comprehension. Therefore, to offer effective reading instruction, teachers need to acquire this knowledge and the pedagogy to teach others

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 4342841998.

E-mail address: mmd8f@virginia.edu (M.M. Dubeck).

how to read. Yet, the optimal way to encourage teachers to provide instruction that is aligned with current understandings remains an open question.

Present efforts in sub-Saharan Africa attempt to answer this question. In Kenya, [Hardman et al. \(2009\)](#) found that a systematic in-service training was most influential on classroom practice in math and sciences. In Liberia, a randomized trial using a literacy coaching model in which a trained expert serves as a supportive role to the teachers' developing knowledge has shown promising results ([Korda, 2011](#); [Davidson and Hobbs, 2013](#)). In the Gambia, nationwide in-service training program for all lower primary teachers was implemented in response to low literacy levels ([Gove and Cvelich, 2010](#)). Elements from these interventions informed our design.

1.1. Study context

The study took place in 51 government schools on the coast of Kenya, as part of a larger evaluation of both a health and literacy intervention (the HALI project; [Brooker et al., 2010](#); [Halliday et al., 2012](#)). Kwale District was identified by the Ministry of Education as a good site for our research because of its poor performance on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), a test given to students at the end of primary school. The district was ranked as the seventh poorest of 76 districts in the country and second poorest of the districts in the Coast Province¹ ([RTI International, 2008](#)). Data released during our implementation identified that three-fourths of the population of Kwale lived in poverty ([Commission on Revenue Allocation, 2011](#)).

Our previous work has identified barriers to improving pedagogy in the region ([Dubeck et al., 2012](#)). For example, the Kenyan government policy does not mandate that a single teaching method should be used ([MOEST, 2006](#)). Instead, the policy states that the teaching methods should meet the students' learning needs and the objective for the lesson ([Commeyras and Inyega, 2007](#)). For reading, these methods could include teaching the relationships between sounds and the letters that represent them (i.e., phonics), teaching words as a whole (i.e., look-say), or another method identified by the ministry (e.g., the sentence method). A related barrier to methods of literacy instruction is the language of instruction that children learn to read and write in first.

The Kenyan national education policy specifies the use of the *mother tongue* (i.e., the local language spoken in a student's home) as the language of instruction in grades 1 through 3. From grade 4 onward, the policy states that English should be the language of instruction ([Gacheche, 2010](#); [Muthwii, 2004](#)). Yet, practical implementation of this clear national policy is not always possible in communities where multiple languages are used. In the schools we worked were communities of the Mijikenda, made of nine language groups (e.g., Digo, Duruma). In this context, a single language did not always dominant in a school and even if one did, the language of the teachers did not always align with the broader language community. If a school had a dominant language with a teacher qualified to teach it, the lack of instructional materials in the local languages would have been another barrier.

These diverse schools responded to these language realities and considered the preferences of the school community, the abilities of the children, and the available instructional materials. Ultimately, they used a mix of languages, including local languages to instruct in the international language of English and the Swahili (i.e., Kiswahili) the lingua franca of the region and the country. Generally, teachers and school communities were comfortable focusing on English and Swahili in the early grades as they perceived doing so conveyed benefits on the primary leaving exam in grade 8.

Our work ([Dubeck et al., 2012](#)) suggests that teachers on the coast of Kenya follow the curriculum and use the contents of the English and Swahili textbooks to teach reading which results in an emphasis on teaching oral language skills. These teachers see the value in changing the instructional methods to improve reading outcomes, but they feel they do not have the capacity or the resources to alter their methods. Furthermore, they see the complexity of related issues (e.g., poor children's health, lack of resources, multiple languages) as impediments to their students learning to read efficiently ([Dubeck et al., 2012](#)). Therefore, the current question is how to implement a program that promotes effective instruction given these barriers.

The aim of this paper is to outline the components of an intervention designed to improve literacy instruction amidst the constraints outlined. In the following sections, we first outline the elements of the intervention and then highlight two broad sets of considerations in developing this intervention. First, we aimed to design an intervention that would be successful in improving literacy outcomes. This involved bridging the gap between current teacher practice and evidence-based recommendations for the most effective methods of literacy instruction. This broad consideration is detailed with 10 design recommendations. Second, we aimed to develop a program that could be scaled up and adapted as part of government policy on professional development. Key considerations here were (i) making the intervention simple and replicable; (ii) assessing how teachers perceive the intervention; and (iii) the cost of the intervention.

2. The HALI literacy intervention

2.1. Design considerations: bridging the gap between current practice and evidence-based recommendations on effective instruction

The HALI literacy intervention was designed to be compatible with successful models of literacy acquisition in an alphabetic language while taking into account the current teaching practices we had observed in the area as well as the perceived barriers to successful instruction ([Dubeck et al., 2012](#)). Importantly, the literacy intervention was not intended to be an independent curriculum for teaching reading in English and Swahili. Instead, the goal was to supplement the existing curriculum with methods to develop foundational literacy skills that did not have adequate attention previously. The major ideas of the intervention are based on an analysis of the scientific literature ([Adams, 1990](#); [August and Shanahan, 2006](#); [Hoffman et al., 2003](#); [NELP, 2008](#); [NICHD, 2000](#); [Pressley et al., 2001](#); [Tollefson et al., 1985](#)) on effective literacy instruction and how it relates to current teaching practices in the region. Below we summarize ten key recommendations from the literature and the steps we took to support their implementation in the HALI literacy intervention.

We chose to address these recommendations for reasons beyond being supported in the literature. One, these recommendations build from what the teachers are already doing and their stated perceptions, as ultimately we consider teachers as partners, not mere implementers. Two, these recommendations allow teachers to see children's current language abilities as assets, not deficits to non-native literacy acquisition. Three, these recommendations do not require many resources. Four, these recommendations, combined, should lead to noticeable changes in children's reading acquisition which we would motivate the teachers to remain involved. Yet, ultimately, we were interested to know if these recommendations would be relevant to the coastal Kenyan context.

1. Instruction matters.

Issues such as poverty, poor health, and limited resources complicate academic achievement ([Badian, 1988](#); [Heath, 1983](#);

¹ With the new Constitution in 2010, counties replaced provinces in Kenya.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841304>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841304>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)