



Program Report

Literacy Instruction Training in Nakaseke District with Building A
Bridge to Uganda (BB2U) partner schools

Program Period: May – November 2023

Written by: Drew Edwards & Brenda Apeta

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Executive summary

Pangea Educational Development, in partnership with Build A Bridge to Uganda, delivered a teacher training program intended to improve the instructional practice of primary school educators at three partner schools of Marengoni Nursery & Primary School, St. Andrews Primary School, and St. Charles Lwanga Primary School in Nakaseke District, Uganda. The training program was structured with three components:

- 1) Holiday Workshops (May & September) introduced fundamental content knowledge for a blended approach to teaching reading for lower and upper primary students.
- 2) Coaching Observations (July, October) took place in teacher's classrooms and provided direct, constructive feedback to improve practice in literacy instruction in their classroom. training program ran between May and November May and September respectively.
- 3) Learning Materials (September) BB2U schools have already received substantial investments in locally produced, leveled reading materials (purchased from Pangea). Pangea made an additional donation of a set of phonics books to each school in the month of September of the training.

A total of 39 teachers participated in the training program, including both classroom teachers and administrators. The program evaluated progress primarily through teacher observations but also with longer-term metrics like randomized Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA).

The findings indicate that teaching best practices are beginning to take root and literacy skill development is improving across all three partner schools, on average. This improvement looks different at each school, complicated by three very different teaching and learning environments. Marengoni is well structured and generally well trained, but rigidity routinely makes learning materials inaccessible to learners. St. Charles Lwanga has trained educators, but class sizes are overwhelming for teachers, learner attendance appears to be inconsistent, and there are fewer teaching and learning materials available to both teachers and students. St. Andrews revealed no prior formal training in education for all teachers or administrators, but simultaneously displayed a disciplined and immediate commitment to implementing training. Moving forward, it is recommended to continue light coaching support complimented by frequent, smaller material investment and social organization for students to build a culture of reading. For St. Andrews, it is recommended to provide more intensive, formal training, including certification in addition to the former recommendation.

List of abbreviations and acronyms

EGRA- Early Grade Reading Assessment.

BB2U- Build a Bridge to Uganda

PED- Pangea Educational Development

PJP II - Pope John Paul II High School

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Program Description

1.1. Background

Pangea Educational Development (PED) and Building a Bridge to Uganda (BB2U) have been in partnership for over three years. PED has, over the years, supplied reading materials to BB2U to support their three partner schools – St. Andrew’s Primary School, St. Charles Lwanga Primary School, and Marengoni Nursery and Primary School. In an effort to invest in the quality of education and learning outcomes at these schools, BB2U partnered with PED to implement our Literacy Instruction Training (LIT) program as well as measure the learning outcomes of learners to understand the baseline and trajectory of their reading skill development.

1.2. Methodology

The LIT training program was conducted in two phases. The first phase was training (split into two trainings over 8 days). The first training was a 5-day workshop session with teachers from 22nd May to 26th May and the second was a 3-day training conducted from 12th to 14th September, 2023. Workshop trainings were facilitated through didactic, explicit instruction. Each day of the workshop covered a distinct subject, 5 of which are strategies for developing specific literacy skills including letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. These sessions were complimented by 3 foundational education workshops on pedagogy, classroom management, and student-centred learning. Literacy skill strategies included instruction on letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension.

During the sessions, surveys were conducted to assess the teachers’ content knowledge and also understand the teachers’ perceptions about their pupils’ literacy abilities. Additionally, an

observation tool was used to assess the teachers' instructional practice and evaluate how teachers create a learner-friendly learning environment for literacy instruction.

Lastly, the student's literacy skill development was assessed at the baseline and endline of the training using a disaggregated skill assessment EGRA tool. The tool breaks down skill development in letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and comprehension.

1.2.1. Participants

A total of 39 teachers attended the first training whereas 33 teachers attended the second training. The reduction in attendance was mainly a result of teacher attrition and a clash of events which had some teachers leave to attend other programs set by the government for teachers.

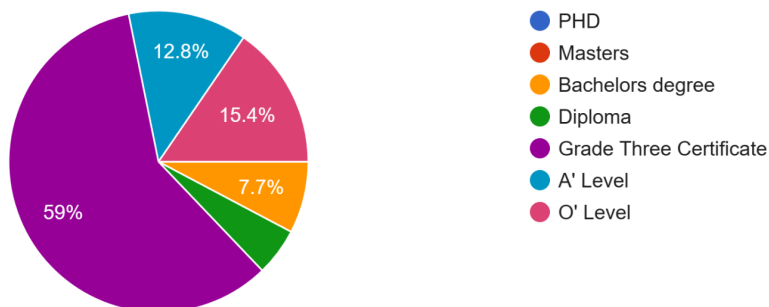
Table 1: Total number of teacher attendance.

School Name	Males	Females	Total
St. Andrews	3	6	9
St. Charles Lwanga	5	8	13
Marengoni	8	9	17

Educational level

The majority of the teachers were lower primary teachers (certificate level). Marengoni had the highest number with 14 teachers, St. Charles Lwanga had 8 teachers, and St. Andrews had only 1 teacher with a Grade Three certificate. St. Andrews did not have any teacher with a bachelor's degree or any degree higher than a certificate whereas St. Charles had only 1 teacher with a degree and Marengoni had the highest with two teachers. There were 28.2% of the teachers who were not qualified teachers. All these teachers were from St. Andrews and

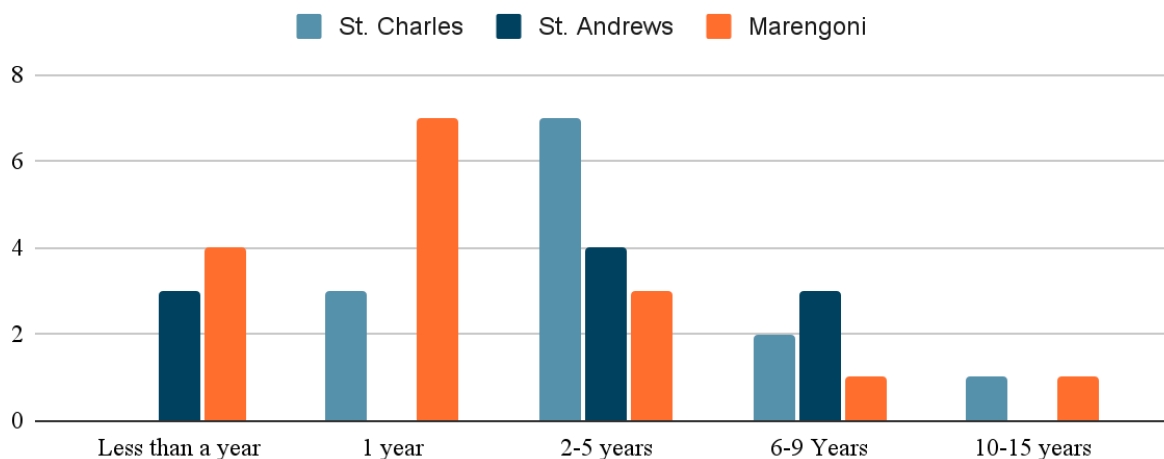
St. Charles with 6 and 5 untrained teachers respectively. All the teachers in Marengoni are trained teachers.



F1: A chart indicating the teachers' highest educational level.

The data indicated that 27 (69%) of the teachers had not received any professional development training in the past year. For those that had been trained in the last year, only 6 (15%) of the respondents had attended training in literacy instruction.

Number of teachers



F2: A graph showing the number of years the teachers have been teaching.

The teachers are also very young in the field - 28 (71%) of the teachers at these schools have taught for less than 5 years. This experience is surprisingly well balanced across schools, with the exception of St. Andrew's which does not yet have any veteran teachers on staff.

1.2.2. Observation and Coaching

As part of the training, the teachers were observed and coached twice. Firstly in July after the initial training and later in October following the second training. These coaching sessions are intended to give practical feedback in teachers' classrooms of practice. All strategies taught are intended to be used simultaneously. During coaching sessions, trainers indicate which strategies were observed and which were not.

Observation 1

During the first observation, the majority of the teachers feared having the trainers in their classrooms because it was unfamiliar. All teachers indicated that this was the first time they were having someone observe them. Note: this should be standard practice by administrators at all schools. At the very least, annually, but ideally termly so that teachers receive feedback to continue to refine their practice.

Teachers across all schools were initially equally challenged with applying many of the strategies to teach effectively. Figure 3 below, indicates the strategies that were most frequently missing across teachers' practice.

It should be noted that the three most common recurring issues were the use of a variety of strategies, using teaching aids (including books) in literacy instruction, and having lesson plans prepared. Integrating a variety of strategies is the most common struggle we see with teachers nationally. These strategies are necessary to avoid rote, predictable learning that is not student-centered. These strategies also allow teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet different students' needs. The use of teaching aids and lesson planning was alarming for our trainers. Feedback was given to focus on these two issues most immediately as progress couldn't be made without preparation.

The teachers were left with a copy of the observation sheet with feedback on areas that they need to work on to improve their teaching skills. It is important to note that these challenges were shared with school administrators in aggregate, not individually, to allow teachers to focus on their practice without feedback influencing their job status. Meanwhile, this feedback was intended to inform school administrators on the status of this skill incorporation.

Observation 2

When the teachers were observed the second time, the teachers had incorporated most of the strategies attained from the training that would encourage learners to have more reading time. Specific examples

Comparison of Teachers' competence between the first and second observation

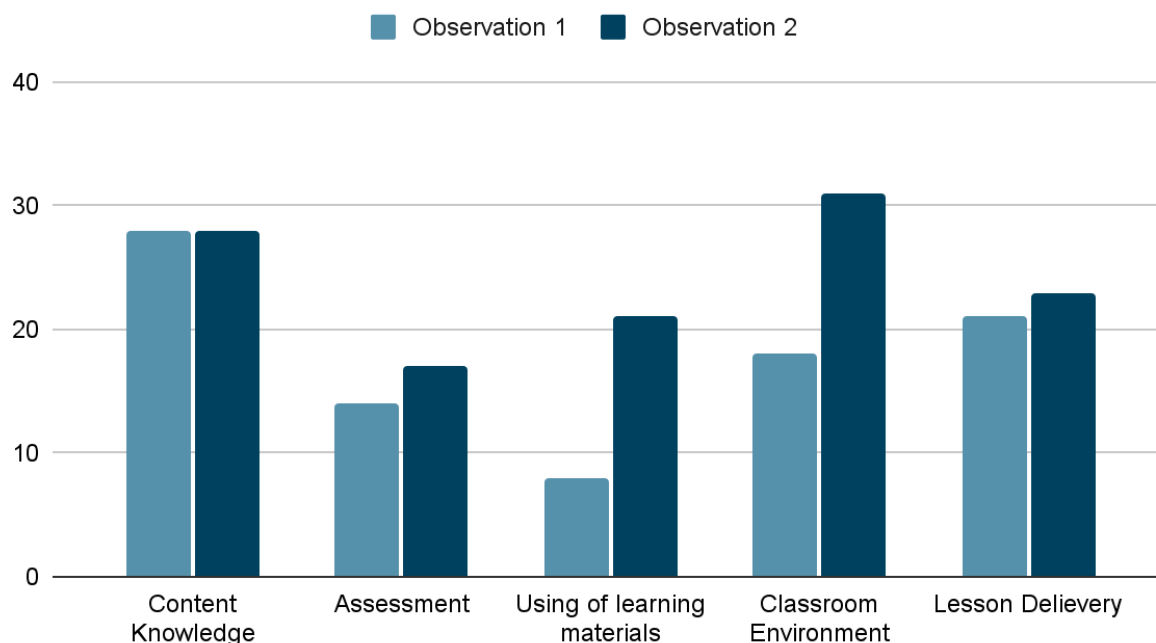


Figure 3: Classroom observation comparison data

Figure 3 above shows strong improvement several key areas of teacher instruction. Utilizing learning materials is significantly improving – this includes the actual frequency of use of books as well as the appropriate selection and use of addendum materials like lesson plans from the resources. Classroom environment focuses largely on how teachers are managing their classrooms. This includes teachers' rapport with learners, appropriate and constructive management of disruptive learners, and the ethos of the room, fostering a growth mindset instead of a punitive and intimidating environment.

Specific encouraging actions are also worth noting:

- At St. Andrews, the teachers introduced a 30-minute time frame on the timetable for reading.
- At Marengoni, the head teacher had created some time to observe teachers and ensure that they were planning their lessons accordingly.
- In all the schools, the teachers were using storybooks in all observed classes.



Picture 1: Teacher using group activities during a lesson to support collaborative learning

1.2.3. Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)

The PED team facilitated a EGRA to evaluate the baseline and endline to determine the current rate of growth in literacy skill development. EGRA is a formative assessment, meaning it has no single final score, but instead evaluates specific skills so that teachers can target strategies to improve those skills. These skills can be categorized as knowledge-based: including letter knowledge (ABCs) and letter sounds (sounds associated with letters), skill-based: decoding skills (blending sounds and deconstructing sounds when used together) and fluency rate (the speed at which readers can correctly identify words). Finally comprehension: the basic information and inferential skills students display when reading. The EGRAs were conducted randomly with 332 students across the three schools in June after the first training and again in October after the second training but during the final teaching observation.

The findings indicated that the learners' literacy levels begin at a very low baseline. Beginning with basic knowledge-based skills, the median letter knowledge score across all schools is 19 letters and letter sounds score is 13 letter sounds, both out of 100 possible. Meringoni students perform 19% better on average to St. Charles Lwanga and St. Andrews students. These are commensurate with the national average at age level.

To evaluate the growth of these skills, we conducted a comparison evaluation between the schools based on the rate of change. Nationally, we expect to see student growth range around 12-15% improvement toward mastery of these skills, in general. We observed an increase of 35% across all skills within this window. This is an exciting improvement. Further, this was observed in a short period of time, just within 3 months of beginning the training. Students at the Primary 3 level made the largest gains in meaningful ways. The middle 50% of students improving by nearly 40%, as shown in Figure 4 below.

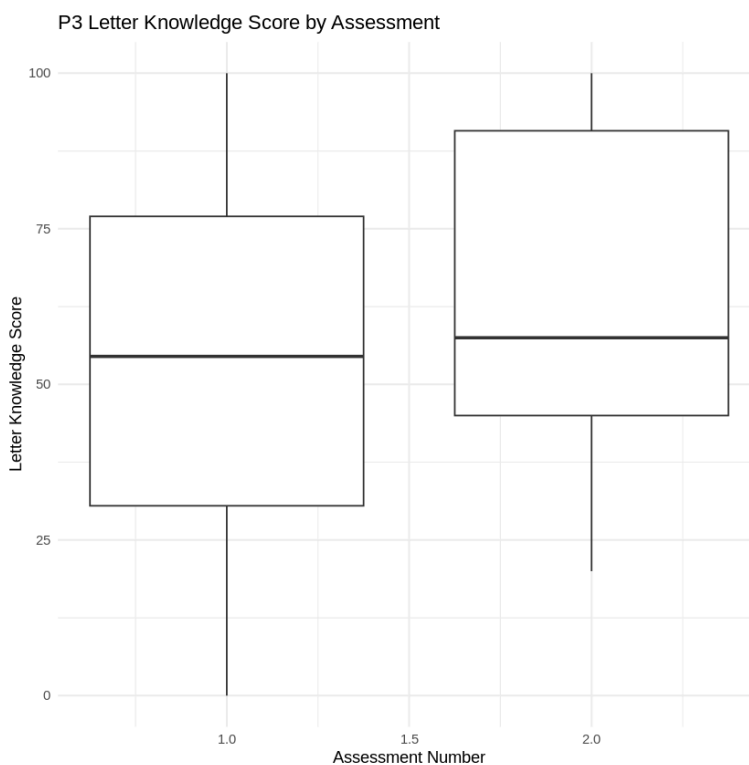


Figure 4: box and whisker plot of all P3 student letter knowledge scores between baseline and endline. The box represents the middle 50% of scores, while the lines, or “whiskers”, represent the top and bottom 25% of scores.

As displayed in Figure 4, these scores indicate that all students are improving, not just the top students. Differentiating improvement like this is difficult, but indicates that initial adoption of strategies by teachers is working in general.

Note: The EGRA is introduced to teachers during the training workshop. The teachers were trained on how to conduct the assessment and coached on how to take it with their learners more frequently than this baseline and endline, but it was not observed to have yet happened. This is a difficult skill and one we would continue to encourage to know where they can most help their own students, but also to track progress overall.

1.3. Recommendations

1) Support St. Andrew’s Teacher Certification

Prior to 2023, teachers could teach primary school with a certificate qualification. A new policy requires that teachers hold degrees as a minimum qualification for teaching primary school. Currently none of the existing teachers at St. Andrew's are certified teachers. This is a serious substantive and administrative issue.

Administrative Implications

The government is currently in the process of implementing this policy. If teachers do not adhere to the requirements, they risk suspension of their license and closure of the school if discovered by the Inspector of Schools. There is still some grace for now as the new policy starts.

Pedagogical Implications

The practical implications are that no teacher (with the exception of the Head Teacher) has any formal training in teaching. While we have made strides with the teachers, PED training is meant to be supplementary to improve foundational teaching skills. The training we facilitate will struggle without teachers understanding the basics of teaching and learning. Subsequently, student learning will continue to struggle.

Recommendation

While replacing staff with qualified teachers is a valid option for the school administration, we believe that would be a mistake for the longterm growth of the school. The teachers truly are committed and have the care and talent to become great educators. The teachers could be enrolled in an in-service training program, meaning that they acquire the credential during weekend and holiday training, while still teaching. This is likely the way forward with the most cultural continuity at schools.

Additionally, St. Andrews needs basic curriculum books for the teachers to follow and ensure they are covering all required topics to ensure students are set up for success on national examinations.

2) Ongoing Professional Development

Teachers have made strong progress in improving their technical practice of literacy instruction and general improvement in teaching and classroom management. However, there is more support needed, coaching in particular. Ongoing coaching provides continuous feedback to ensure teachers are continue to master their craft. Particularly,

teachers would benefit most from better assessing and identifying interventions for individual students themselves, instead of Pangea trainers.

Recommendation

We recommend continuing with 2 terms of coaching teachers in the classroom - no direct workshops needed. While doing so, it would be cost-effective to train promising local teachers that we have identified to serve as a full-time instructional coach for the area. After training the teacher along with our continued support, the local teacher could stay on to provide continued support going forward.

Our staff particularly recommends Option 1: Naggoli Catherine from St. Charles Lwanga (she is a government teacher which she may be unlikely to depart from her role given her pension benefits, however, she is certainly the best option). Option 2: is Niwagaba Sarahfina from Marengoni who has displayed strong skills and leadership and could also execute the role well.

3) Culture of Reading Events

Finally, reading skills are building at all schools, a culture of reading and writing is still lacking. There is a commitment to taking learning seriously in different manifestations at each school, but reading is still a secondary focus of many classrooms and learners. This change is as easy to solve as the community and leadership is connected around it. Given the proximity of the schools to one another and Pope John Paul II High School, we feel there is a large opportunity for soft development through different initiatives. These can include a range of activities such as:

- Celebrating international as well as national holidays through books - (ex. DEAR Day, World Readaloud Day, World Mother Tongue Day, bank holidays in Uganda, as well as a reading day of the week.
- Service learning - through PJPIL students doing frequent visits to learners either during (cross-curricular activity) or after school (extracurricular/club activity) - whatever is seen as most appropriate by school administration. These could include readalouds with students or more creative writing activities with students.
- Participate in National Spelling Bee - each year Uganda runs a national spelling bee in coordination with the U.S. Embassy. Participating in this be a fun competition around reading skills and help teachers coach students to utilize skills they are learning in the classroom.