

Thematic curriculum registers success

By Betty Amamukirori

The new thematic curriculum introduced by the education ministry has registered a improvement in early grade learning in the 27 pilot schools, a new survey by the National Assessment of Progress in Education has revealed.

The baseline study report on Early Grade reading Assessment (EGRA), which was launched recently in Mukono, revealed a great improvement in reading skills of pupils in primary one and two, in both the local and English languages.

The thematic curriculum was introduced in 2007 with the aim of increasing the quality of education. This followed concerns that children were failing to acquire basic literacy skills.

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Alex Kakooza, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education and Sports, explained that learning in most of the rural schools had deteriorated to a level where a pupil in Primary Five could not read or comprehend what they were reading.

"We had veered off from a number of things in our education system. Earlier, there were basics in learning, for example, in our days, learning started with early morning parades, where our cleanliness was checked. This is no longer practiced. So, we now want to go back to the basics," he said.

Kennedy Jumanyol, an examinations officer at the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC) noted that teaching young children to read with fluency is the cornerstone to improving educational outcomes.

"Unless they learn to read and write at an early age, children cannot absorb more advanced skills and content that rely on reading. The challenges rooted in poor reading skills lead to disappointing results and, often, early dropout," he said.

Under the thematic curriculum, learners are taught their mother tongue for the first three years of schooling to enable them read, write and understand easily. The schools are expected to teach in a language commonly used in the locality and the English language.

EGRA was developed in 2006 to provide a reliable and valid measure of skills that contribute to reading acquisition.

The baseline EGRA survey, which was carried out in 2016, considered 27 schools and 11 languages. A total of 189 assessors and 12 data quality assurance officers were recruited for the exercise.

Pupils were sampled and assessed orally and individually, both in the local language and English. They were assessed on letter identification, letter sounds, vocabulary, listening comprehension, oral passage reading and reading comprehension.

Under letter identification, it was found children who were assessed in Luganda, Ateso, Lugbarati, Leb-Lango, Leb-Acholi, Runyoro-Rutooro and Runyankore-Rukiga, scored more highly in the local dialects than in English, while those assessed in Lhukonzo, Lumasaaba and Lusoga scored highly in the English language.

Learners were able to sound correctly letters in both the local language and English, except those who speak Ngakarimojong.

They were also able to identify objects, answer questions correctly and read in both English and their local language.

Kakooza said the piloted schools are currently registering an influx of children being registered in the schools due to the ability of the lower grade pupils to read.

"In Mukono, to be particular, parents are removing their children from private schools and bringing them to government-aided schools. We are planning to bring on board more teachers to manage the increasing numbers," he said.

However, Amos Opaman, the focal point officer at UNEBC, noted that most teachers in lower grade have a problem with pronouncing letter sounds.

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