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Libraries and Literacy Project Year Three Final Report

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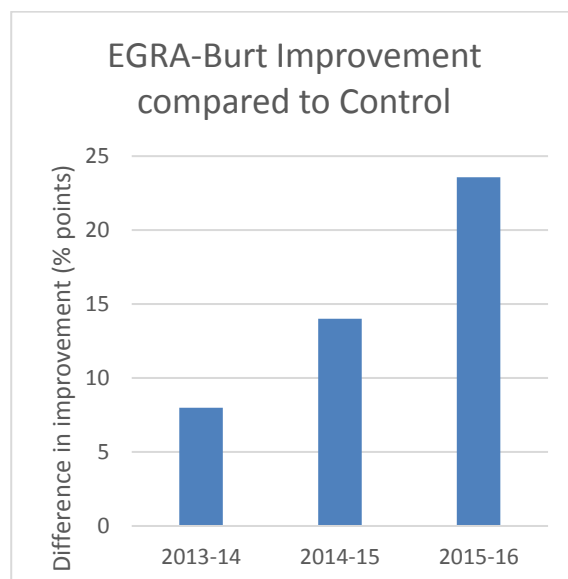
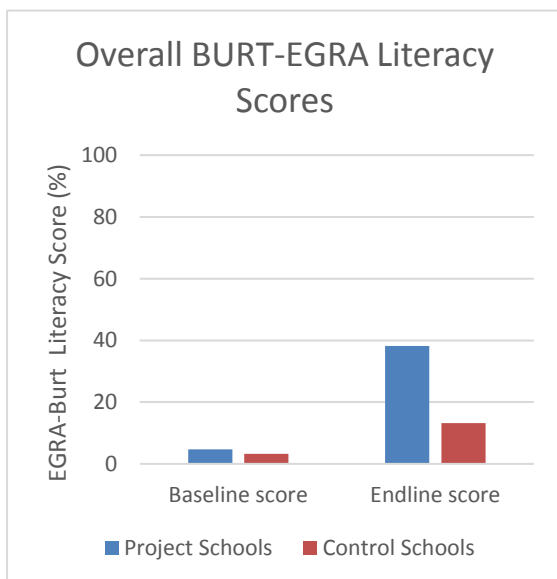
Executive Summary

The Libraries and Literacy Project was designed to improve English literacy and to promote the fun of reading. The project has been supported by the Waterloo Foundation since 2013 alongside British Foreign Schools Society, the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust, the Ashla Charitable Trust and individual and school donations.

For our 2015-16 project, donations were used to provide:

- Phonics training for 140 early grades teachers from 38 schools which benefited over 6,000 students;
- Librarian training and improvement grants for 46 librarians which delivered improved libraries for over 72,000 students;
- Weak readers tutorials at 9 secondary schools which benefited 315 students struggling with English;
- A new donkey library and training and improvement grants for four donkey librarians which gave access to books to almost 5,000 students;
- Improved teaching methods training for 8 schools which benefited 400 students;
- Reading clubs, reading bees and book boxes to promote the fun of reading for hundreds of children.

Library and Literacy schools have outperformed control schools in EGRA-Burt literacy tests measuring English sounding, reading, writing and listening. Participating students improved their English literacy score from 5% to 38% at the end of the year, a change of 33 percentage points outperforming control schools by 23%. Results were even more impressive in the Oromyia region, where project students improved by 40 percentage points over control school students. Library and literacy students could read at a 5yr 11 month reading age at the end of the year: higher than the expected level of a grade 1 native speaker. Link Ethiopia has seen improving literacy impact in EGRA-burt scores year on year since the project began in 2013.



Link Ethiopia Libraries & Literacy Project Year 3 Report

Improvements in the abilities of the students was matched by the improved quality of the lessons observed by volunteers and Link Ethiopia staff. Lessons not only exceeded the level of standard 'talk-and-chalk' lessons but the levels of previous years.

- Teachers had absorbed the English sounds and were able to teach them to their children;
- Teachers helped children learn more sounds and made fewer mistakes with sounds than in past years;
- The lessons were engaging and used activities and games to engage students.

Alongside the success of the phonics training, we expect to see continued improvements in school library awards with record numbers of schools achieving gold and our first platinum schools. Every improvement in award level is directly related to an increase in library users, books lent and the quality and accessibility of school libraries.

The data above shows the improvement of the average school and the average student. The stories of students and teachers demonstrate that the training can empower individuals to make even greater changes:



Mulugeta, Librarian, Atse Bekafa Elementary school

I have seen lots of changes in my role and I have the evidence; I have a training certificate, a gold award and medals from the [Education] office. Link Ethiopia has created an appreciation in me to work in the library and to learn.

The problems I raised have been answered by Link Ethiopia, I am happy. My priority is to serve the community, everyone is thanking me and saying 'keep it up'.

Reflecting on both the successes and challenges of the three years of the Libraries and Literacy project, Link Ethiopia would like to thank all the participating volunteers, teachers, librarians and students who made the project a success. We hope to build on our success working on literacy training and, in the future, work more closely with local and national government to increase the number of teachers and students who can access our training.

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Background

The academic year 2015-16 was the last year of the Library and Literacy project in its current form. As outlined last year, the original inspiration for the project was sparked from Link Ethiopia's 20 years of experience working with Ethiopian schools; we knew that teachers and students alike struggle with English literacy and that many students dropped out at secondary level, where English is the language of instruction. We knew that libraries and librarians were an underutilised resource within schools and we knew that the phonics approach was an important step in getting students reading and stopping them from falling behind. The Libraries and Literacy project was designed to work with teachers and librarians and to increase their skills to help them get students learning to read and reading to learn.

We started with 24 participating schools in 2014-15, which grew to 46 in 2015-16. It has been a privilege to work with the same schools again in 2015-16 and to carry on improving the project for the students involved. Thank you for the support of the Waterloo Foundation and our grant of £18,300, as well as other donors including the British Foreign Schools Society, the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust, the Ashla Trust and individual donors and link schools.

This report gives an overview of this year's project, its implementation, the impact on students and our conclusions and reflections on one of Link Ethiopia's largest and most successful projects.

Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Aims

- To alleviate poverty and improve quality of life by increasing childhood literacy.

Objectives

- To improve children's reading attainment in the early grades.
- To increase access to books and libraries for younger children.
- To encourage reading for pleasure.
- To improve early grade teachers' confidence in teaching reading and English.
- To improve the quality of teaching through adoption of pedagogies of systematic phonics and reading comprehension techniques.
- To improve outcomes for those identified as weaker readers in secondary school.

Expected Outcomes

- Provide 38 schools and at least 130 Grade 1-2 teachers with phonics training.
- Provide 9 secondary schools with training and financial support to support weak readers in Grade 9
- Invite to 46 schools in Amhara and Oromiya to take part in the libraries award scheme and offer improvement grants and book donations to improve libraries for students
- Expand the donkey library scheme to four libraries and include them in the library award scheme
- Invite 46 schools in Amhara and Oromiya to take part in regional level reading bees and celebrate reading within the community
- Conduct pilots of improved teacher training, reading clubs and public library book boxes

Project Implementation

Stakeholder Meeting

Stakeholder events were held in Bishoftu (southern Ethiopian) and Gondar (North) on the 6th and 20th November 2015 respectively. Both meetings were well attended with 50 participants in each region. Attendees included teachers, directors, trainee teachers and education office officials. The groups discussed the previous two year project, the planned activities for the year and shared ideas about challenges and best practice to make the project a success.

Phonics Training

The project provided 5 days of phonics training for 140 grade 1 and 2 teachers specialising in English. As well as elementary teachers, there were twelve guests including secondary school weak readers tutors, local trainee teachers and education office representatives who also participated. A two day session was held at the beginning of the first semester, November 2015, for three groups in Bishoftu and Adama and two groups in Gondar. The same groups received refresher and extension training at the beginning of the second semester, February – March 2016. Teachers were taught in mixed groups with those who had received the previous year's training mentoring new teachers.

The training was designed to train teachers in English phonics, to give them a 5-10 minute lesson structure they could replicate and to allow them to practice model lessons and get feedback from their peers.

The training was designed and delivered by our international teacher volunteers with support from Ethiopian project staff. The structure of the programme combined the successful elements of the Jolly Phonics and the Sounds of English schemes; we used the 42 Jolly Phonics sounds and actions, which help both students and teachers to memorise and recall sounds correctly and we combined this with the 5-10 minute lesson structure of Sounds of English.



Ababa, English Teacher, Abyiot Frey

In previous years we taught, 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', we didn't know the sounds of each letter. Now, children know the sounds, it makes it easy, and fun, to read and write. The lessons are enjoyable for me and the students, it should be not only for Grade 1 but for all grades as the importance is that high.

Each teacher received at least two monitoring visits from a Link Ethiopia member of staff or from our international volunteers. Priority schools, where teachers needed extra support to remember the sounds or the 5 minute lessons, received a third visit. Monitoring visits incentivised teachers to focus in the training sessions deliver the phonics classes effectively. They also allowed modelling of best practice and correcting small mistakes in pedagogy or in recalling the phonics.

Improved Teaching Methods

As a small pilot, four teachers in each region were selected to receive improved teaching methods training. The pilot was developed in response to the feedback from teachers and students that part of the phonics lessons that they appreciated was the use of more participatory teaching, for example the use of games, activities and active resources. We realised that we could apply these approaches to the wider curriculum.

The eight grade one teachers were selected based on their enthusiasm and application in the phonics sessions. They attended a one day training, applying and active learning approach to the government teacher guide for the English Grade 1 curriculum. Teachers were observed as part of their phonics observations. Our international volunteer's thoughts on the training are included below, on page 15.



Trainer volunteer, Cara, running an Improved Teaching Methods session, Gondar, Mar 2016

Library training and award scheme

A one day librarian training took place in both regions, in Bishoftu on 16th January and 1st February 2017 in Gondar run by our international teaching volunteer, Cara Fairhall. Librarians and directors from all 46 schools attended to learn about best practices for encouraging reading in school, the details of the library awards scheme and to share their experiences of the project in its first two years. By inviting librarians and directors we were able to encourage the librarian to form an action plan which would be supported and monitored by the school administration.

An extra library training session was provided in Gondar for our project partners Nisir to assist with their current library projects and our future collaboration.

The schools have all received a 4,000 Birr library grant. The grants were spent according to the individual needs of the libraries; some schools chose to purchase books, others chose posters and many elementary libraries chose to create cosy reading corners for their younger students.



Using flash cards at the phonics training session, Bishoftu, Nov 2015

The schools will receive three library visits between January and December 2016. The visits allow us to monitor progress assessed against the award criteria and to give targets for the next visit. The visits are also an opportunity to reinforce the lessons learnt in the training and

to share ideas about specific opportunities and problems faced by the school.

Throughout the year, schools have the opportunity to work towards one of four library awards: bronze, silver, gold and this year for high-flying schools, platinum. Each award had a set of criteria, which librarians and directors use as a checklist, encouraging healthy competition between schools. These awards encourage them to increase the number of students using the library, borrowing books and taking part in the library club. They also made sure that school made the library environment more organised, attractive and child-friendly. The awards will be handed out at the end of the first semester this academic year, 2016-17, and the school will receive a certificate and a cash prize of 1,000, 1,500, 2,000 or 2,500 Birr.

Donkey Library training and expansion

This year we had been able to expand our Libraries and Literacy project to some of the most deprived schools by linking the project to our donkey library programme, which uses mobile donkey libraries to visit rural schools that do not have access to books. Students in rural areas are less likely to have books at home and less likely to have a library at school; the donkey libraries bring books to students giving them access to books to borrow, read at school and as part of language lessons in the school.

We have been able to grow the programme from three to four libraries meaning we can help another five schools and another 1,000 students. Our new donkey librarian, Abebe, is based in Bishoftu and he began visiting local schools in June 2016.

As well as expanding the programme, all donkey librarians were invited to informal training sessions where they discussed their current working methods. The international volunteer and the projects team set out new guidelines adapted from the library award. We organised cluster meetings in both regions so the donkey librarians, directors and teachers could identify and implement improvements to the scheme. The librarians agreed to improve data recording techniques and maximise the number of children who use books in a visit. The schools agreed to work with the donkey libraries to ensure engaging and interesting reading lessons for students.

The donkey libraries will receive monitoring visits in 2017 and will receive new books and materials funded by the library grant.

Reading Bee and Reading Club

Both regions held reading bee events in June 2016. In Bishoftu, 24 children from 12 schools attended and in Gondar, 35 children from 22 schools. Schools selected children by holding their own school competitions. The participants read aloud in front of a panel of judges and were asked about their favourite book. Winners were selected based on reading fluency and expression, accuracy and their answers to the questions. The best readers were awarded books and stationery.

Following the success of the Gondar reading club in 2014-15, weekly Saturday reading clubs

were established in both regions. The scheme was open to disadvantaged children identified by our partner charity, the Othoniel College, to Link Ethiopia sponsored children and to children in linked schools. The clubs involved story telling in Amharic and English, role playing, independent reading and phonics. After the club students received tea and bread and had a chance to play and talk together. They were run by Link Ethiopia staff, international volunteers and, in Gondar, local student volunteers from Othoniel College.



Zemene, Tefera and our international volunteers judging the Gondar reading bee, June 2016

Weak Readers

Link Ethiopia provided a one day training and a grant of 4,000 Birr for nine secondary schools. The grant was used to provide extra English tutorials support for groups of 35 students per school, paying for extra teach hours and club refreshments.

A tutor from each school was invited to the phonics training and the Weak Readers training built on these skills adapting them for older learners. As well as phonics, Weak Readers tutors learnt how to plan reading and comprehension lessons around books and stories suitable for older readers, how to manage the behaviour of disengaged students and held peer to peer discussions on how to build on the lessons learnt in last year's programme.

The school selected 35 students who were low-achievers in English and who were enthusiastic about attending extra classes. Link Ethiopia staff visited a selection of sessions to offer support to the tutor and to monitor their effectiveness.

Link Ethiopia recommended that grants were used for 20 hours of tutorial lessons and incentives for the students (who would attend voluntarily) such as bread, tea and stationery.

Nisir book boxes

Link Ethiopia has signed a partnership agreement with Nisir association to design, build and run a new pop up library next to the teacher training college in Gondar. Unfortunately, despite several positive meetings with the president of Nisir and the town major, we have been unable to get the official paperwork to begin the project. We will continue to pursue the aim of expanding access to books within the town by working on action plans for Nisir's two existing library projects.

We have continued our link with Nisir, providing them with a library training session for staff and volunteers working in their current projects.



Makiba and Abenezer, Grade Two students, Atse Bekafa School

Makiba: Before we started Sounds of English it was difficult to read but now we can; you should carry on working on Sounds of English!

The reading bee was good; the questions were easy!

Abenezer: It was really good.

Project Impact

Research Methods

Link Ethiopia collected a range of data to monitor the impact of the project:

EGRA-Burt Tests – Students English literacy was assessed using a combination of the EGRA (Early Grades Reading Assessment) and Burt reading age tests.

The EGRA test is comprised of three elements, requiring students to: sound out a list of 42 written sounds in English (e.g. 'a','b','sh','ai'); read four simple sentences and write simple words read aloud by the assessor. The comprehension questions used in the previous year's assessment have been removed; so few students were able to complete any comprehension questions before or after the training that the results were not useful.

The Burt test requires students to read aloud from a list of 110 words of increasing complexity. The number of correct words give a standard reading age.

A sample of 20 schools were selected, which included 8 control schools and 12 schools who received training. The schools were monitored at the beginning and end of the project (Oct-Nov 15 and Apr-May 16)

Burt-EGRA tests have a total mark of 170, however the Burt tests have been capped at 58 words which is the expected score for children in the project age range. Overall percentages are therefore calculated from a total of 118.

Lesson Monitoring – Lessons were monitored using a simple 10 point checklist to ensure that the 5 minute lesson structure was followed, that sounds were formed correctly and that students were engaged. Overall comments and suggestions were communicated to the teacher by the volunteer or project coordinator at the end of the lesson. All schools were visited at least twice in the year.

Library Award Data – Libraries were assessed against a 42 point criteria including opening hours, number of books lent and several milestones concerning the attractiveness, cleanliness and usability of the library. Again, all libraries were visited at least twice in the year.

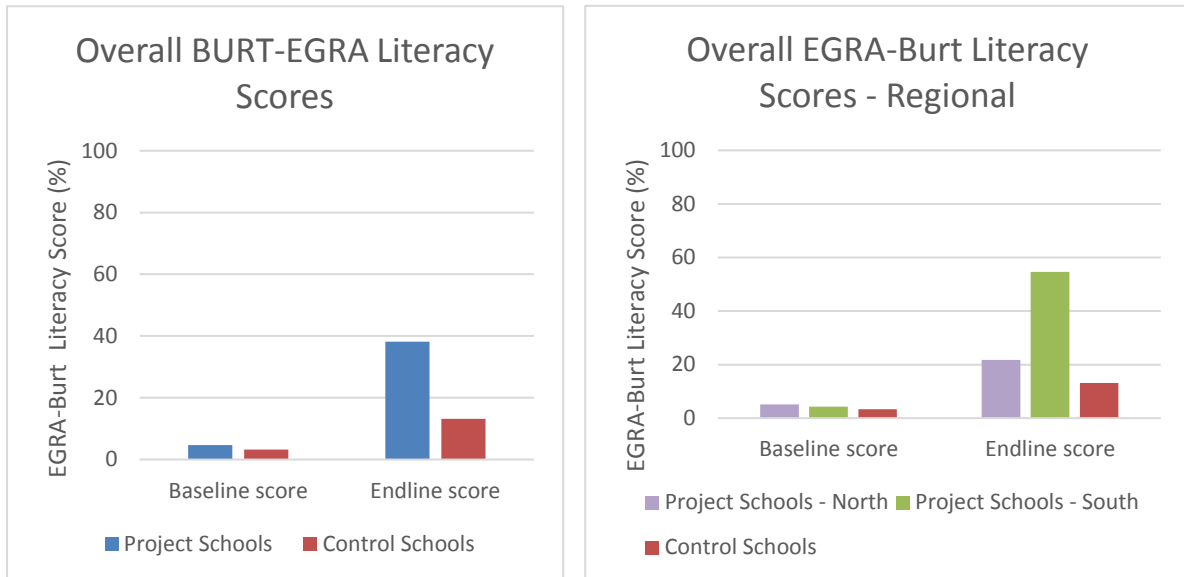
Weak Readers Assessment – A sample of schools involved in the weak readers' scheme were assessed before and after the tutorial programme; three schools in Gondar and three in Bishoftu. All students in the group were assessed.

Students were given a 67 word passage to read aloud and asked to answer 5 comprehension questions.

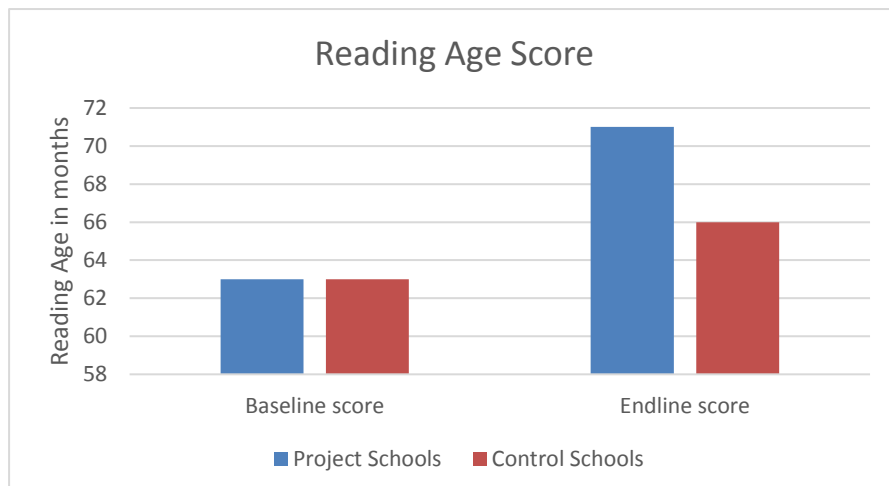
Teacher Training

EGRA-Burt Results

EGRA-Burt tests evaluate students in four elements of English literacy: letter sounds, word reading, sentence reading and aural understanding. Adding the four sections together the test is scored out of 118. The graphs below show EGRA-Burt tests as a percentage.



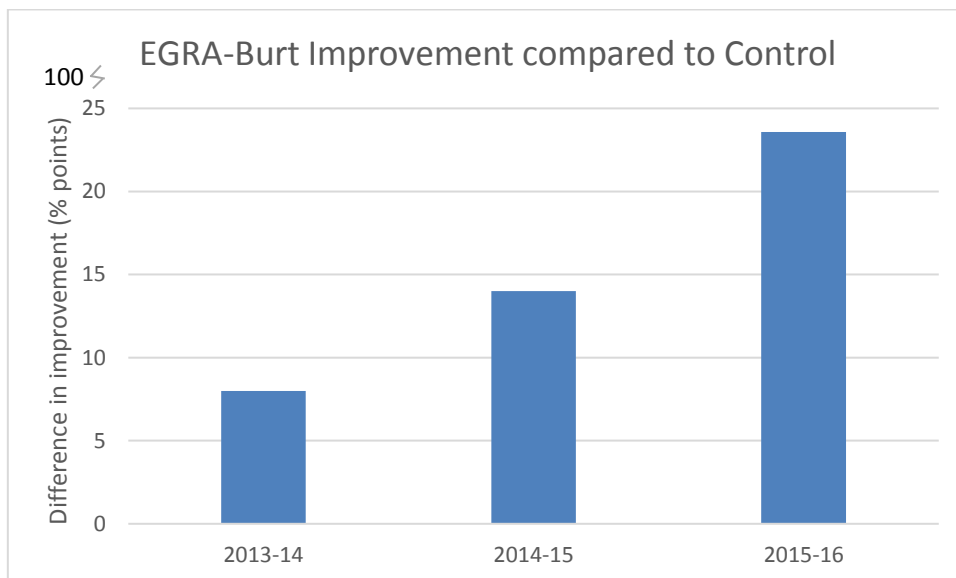
Taking an overview of phonics training, the average student taking part in the project increased their overall score from 5% to 38%, a change of 33 percentage points. In comparison, control students increased their scores from 3% to 13%, a change of 10 percentage points. That means we can attribute a 23% change to the phonics programme. Looking closely at the results in the Oromiya region we see an even larger impact with the average participating student improving by 40 percentage points over control schools. Project teachers managed to increase the English performance of their students almost fivefold. Due to unplanned staff absences in Gondar, we were able to conduct more monitoring visits in the South from both volunteers and staff, which accounts for the difference in impact and demonstrates the scale of the potential impact of the phonics approach.



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Looking at the Burt word reading scores allows us to give a reading age to the average student before and after the project. At the start of the academic year, both control and project students had a reading age of 5 years; at the end of the year, control students had a reading age of 5 years and 6 months compared to 5 years and 11 months for project students. Though students who participated in the project remain behind the expected reading age of a native speaker of the same age (most students were 8 at the end of the year) they outperformed the standard for a native Grade 1 speaker. Allowing students to improve by an extra 5 months will allow them to progress further throughout their education and increase the chances of them staying in education and achieving high grades.

Comparing the performance in 2015-16 indicates a steady improvement in the effectiveness of the lessons delivered by project teachers. It is difficult to compare the results achieved in Year 1 and Year 2 as the test format was changed in Year Two, however with those caveats in place, we can see year on year improvement, with the average project student improving by 8 percentage points more than a control student in 2013-14, by 14 percentage points in 2014-15 and by 24 points this year. The 70% improvement between this year and last year, where the same test was used, is particularly striking.

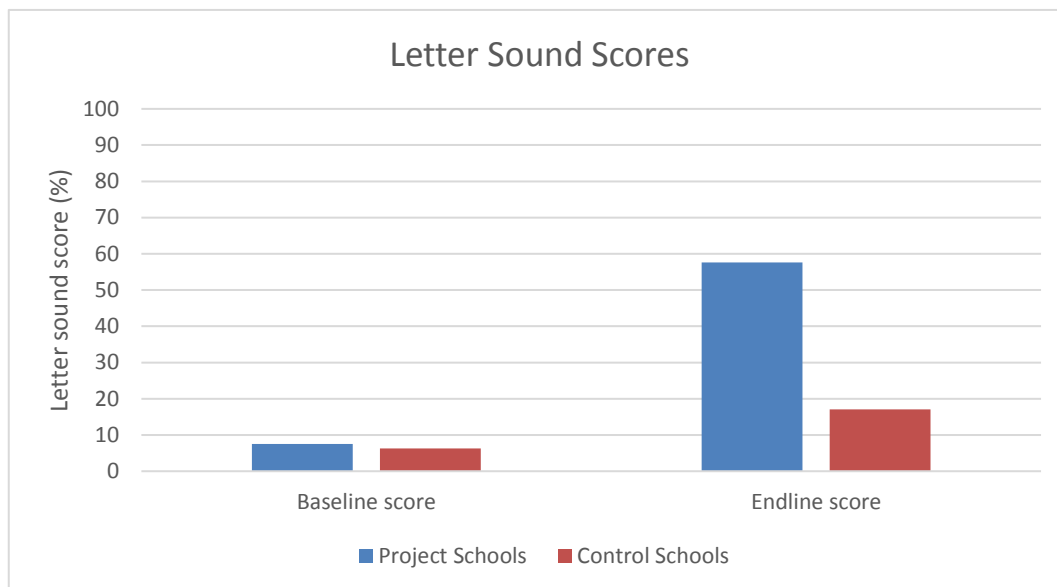


EGRA-Burt Results – Letter Sounds

The keystone to the phonics approach is that children learn not just letter names but the sounds they signify. This should allow them to ‘decode’ written words into their respective sounds and read them aloud. Therefore we would expect a considerably higher performance in target schools than control schools in the letter sounds elements of the EGRA-Burt tests.

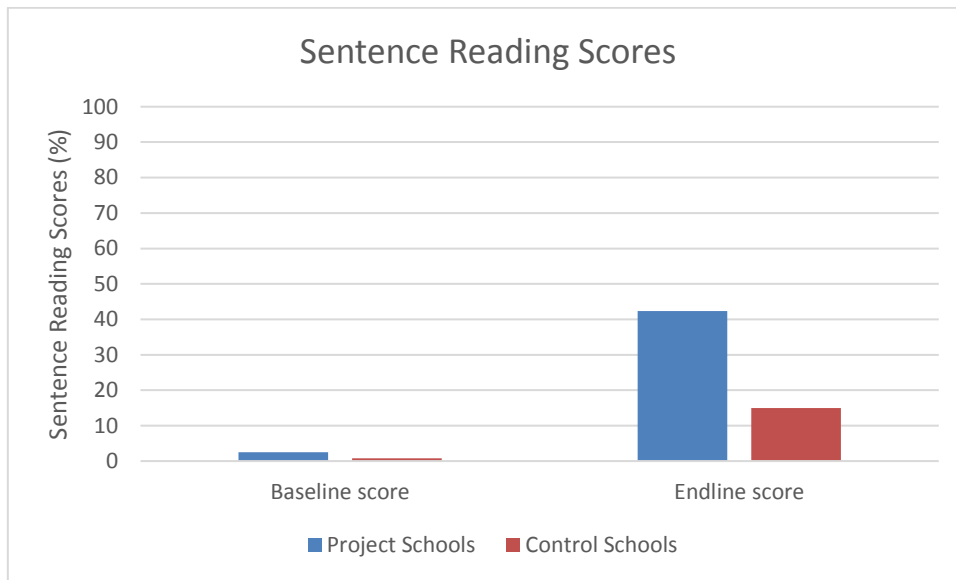
As the graph below shows, control schools moved from 6% to 17%, a 9% increase over the year, compared to a 30% increase for target schools who moved from an average score of 29% to 59%. This marks an almost doubling in the accuracy of sounding over the year.

As the graph below shows, control schools moved from 18% to 24%, a 6% increase over the year, compared to a 50% increase for target schools who moved from an average score of 8% to 58%. This means that 2015-16 students outperformed 2014-15 students by 20% and achieved a six fold increase in the accuracy of sounding over the year.



EGRA-Burt Results – Sentence Reading Scores

Looking at the detailed breakdown of the EGRA-Burt scores shows that the phonics training helped students not only in sounding and word reading but also reading short sentences. In this part of the test the average participating student improved by 40 percentage points compared to just 14 for control students. That 26 percentage point improvement marks a significant difference in reading capability and more than double the improvement seen last year.



Lesson Observations

Typically, lower grade reading lessons in Ethiopian primary schools consist of learning by rote and copying from the chalkboard, while the content comes from the government textbooks. There is a lack of books, writing materials or teaching aids and English lessons often consist of chanting of letter names and simple words. The observations conducted by volunteers and staff show not only a big improvement from this low baseline but teachers meeting and often exceeding the lesson formats set out in the training sessions.

The lesson observations are a crucial part of the project as they allow us to assess whether the training is actually being used, to correct errors and to give extra support and mentoring which is tailored to individual teachers.

Observations demonstrated that teachers were able to make the sounds well and to deliver the standard phonics lesson demonstrated in the training. Teachers' capability to clearly sound out each letter sound is crucial to students understanding how to read and write using phonics. This is often a difficult aspect of the training as teachers must learn sounds that are not in their mother tongue language (for example the short vowel sounds) or which they have learnt incorrectly. The sounding competency of teachers has improved every year and the teachers found the mix of sounds and actions used this year particularly helpful.

As in previous years, phonics lessons stood out because of the engagement of teachers and

students. Observing children enthusiastically participating in the lessons, offering answers and working in small groups shows that children are given different ways to absorb new ideas and take pleasure from learning a new skill in a fun way. There is positive reinforcement for both teachers and students.

Teachers struggled most with the aspects of the lesson which built upon and came after simply practicing sounds, particularly blending sounds together to make words and teaching tricky (non-phonically decodable) words.

Focus on Improved Teaching Methods Training

International volunteer trainer, Cara Fairhall

What was the problem that the Improved Teacher Training was designed to solve?

In general, Ethiopian teachers have very little training, knowledge or confidence in how to teach a subject or topic. The teaching style and method is very much 'chalk and talk', with a teacher dictating from a teacher's textbook. At times teachers don't even have this and teach from the student's textbook.

The extra training was designed to give teachers ideas and plans for activities to use in their teaching, as well as some basic psychology and child development to show these teachers *why* their teaching is so important to these children.

What did the training include?

The programme looked at classroom management and discipline techniques, teaching and learning activities, interactive teaching, child-centred learning, and homemade resources.

What was the feedback from the teachers after the training?

After the training, teachers spoke about having more confidence to design and create resources and techniques to help children learn in a different way. They have said it has helped the students to engage more fully in their learning.

What were your main findings from observing lessons after the training?

Ethiopian teachers lack knowledge of their subject, which in turns means a lack of confidence in what they are teaching. That means few children will access a good level of education and may become disengaged and drop out of school.

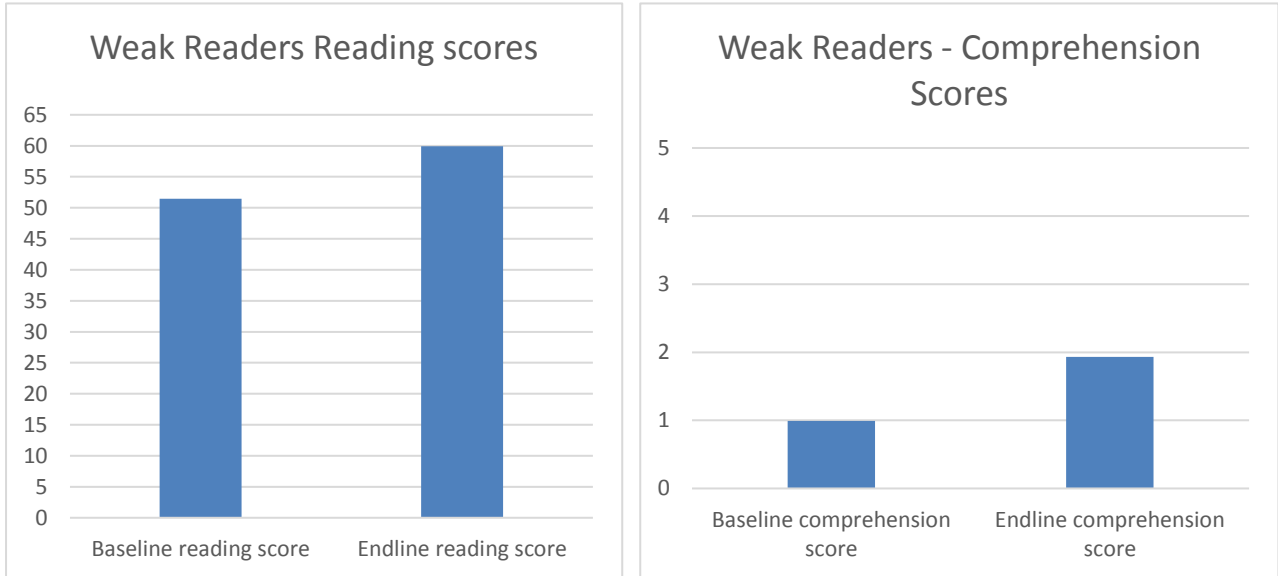
Ethiopian teachers are very open to learning more to help them become better teachers and this is evident from the lessons following the training. The teachers seemed to be more interested in their teaching and the students seemed more interested to learn! The teachers were proud to talk to me about progression and developments within their classes, no matter how small that progress or development was.



Hora Arsed, Dejene Seme, Foka, Keta and Yekatit 23 students participating in their phonics lessons

Weak Reader Results

The students involved in the weak reader scheme demonstrably improved their English reading and comprehension skills. Students took a test that was made up of a 67 word passage (with a point for each correctly pronounced word) and a five comprehension questions. The average student increased their reading scores by 8 points and moved from being able to answer only one comprehension question to two.



The students involved the scheme are identified as being in need of extra support and find it difficult to keep up with the level of English required in as the language becomes the medium of instruction. Grade 9 is an important transition year when students are at risk of dropping out.

Although the weak readers scheme has had a positive impact on students, the programme has not been able to replicate scale of success of the of the early grades programme. Despite alterations to the project to make it more appealing to students, including providing refreshments and making the scheme voluntary rather than mandatory, there have been variations in performances between schools with, particularly urbans schools, facing difficulties in retaining students.

Library Improvement

The library award assessments are scheduled to be completed by the end of the second semester in January 2017. Though the awards are not yet finalised, more schools than ever are on track to receive a gold award and we should see our first schools achieving platinum status. We hope to be able to show that the award scheme has encouraged more students to use the library and more books to be stocked and lent following the trend of the last two years.



Library club members helping to run the library in Fasiledes Secondary, Gondar



A soft reading area in Tana Haik Secondary, Bahir Dar

Conclusion

For the third year in succession, the Libraries and Literacy project has been able to demonstrably increase English literacy for participating students. On a standard literacy test, the average project student improved their score by 23 percentage points over the improvement of the average control student. This compares to a 14 percentage point improvement last year. Participating students reached a reading age of 5 years 11 months at the end of the project compared to 5 years 6 months in control schools. Older students participating in the Weak Readers scheme saw improvements in both reading and comprehension. Further, the phonics lessons were high points of student and teacher engagement with teachers increasingly confident to improve lessons with resources and activities.

As well as improvements to reading ability we also oversaw activities that we were able to encourage reading for its own sake; thousands of students can access books through our new donkey library, our libraries scheme is on track to deliver increased library users and book lending and our Saturday reading clubs were able to mix independent reading, story-telling and active games to help the neediest children.

This year, 2015-16, has marked the end of a three year library and literacy project. Talking to teachers and librarians it is clear that they valued the new skills they had attained through the project and that they would be able to sustain the impact of the training in future years. For the UK and Ethiopian project teams, the project has been an important learning curve, helping us to develop an Ethiopia-specific phonics programme, to train local staff with phonics skills and to improve our standard of evaluation across all projects. The next step for Link Ethiopia will be to expand the number of teachers and students who can benefit from the libraries and literacy training; we hope to work even more closely with the regional and federal government to improve the training provided to teachers and librarians.



Zemene, Project Manager, Link Ethiopia

We used the strength of international volunteers; using qualified, native speakers to run training events. The monitoring system and collecting of feedback, all these things were very successful; we do this for other projects but for Libraries and Literacy they are very well organised and scheduled. The commitment of directors and teachers really made the project a success. Also, running the project for three consecutive years made a difference, if you stop the impact is questionable. It's the best Link Ethiopia project.