

Balancing Linguistic and Contextual Factors

Lessons Learned from Supporting Reading in Three Alpha-Syllabic Script Languages

Wendi Ralaingita and Agatha Van Ginkel
28 March 2018, CIES Annual Meeting



Overview

Overview of EGR programs in Ethiopia and Nepal

Alpha-syllabic scripts and reading

Making decisions about reading instruction in Amhara, Tigrinya, and Nepali





Early-Grade Reading Programs in Ethiopia and Nepal



Early-Grade Reading Programs in Ethiopia and Nepal

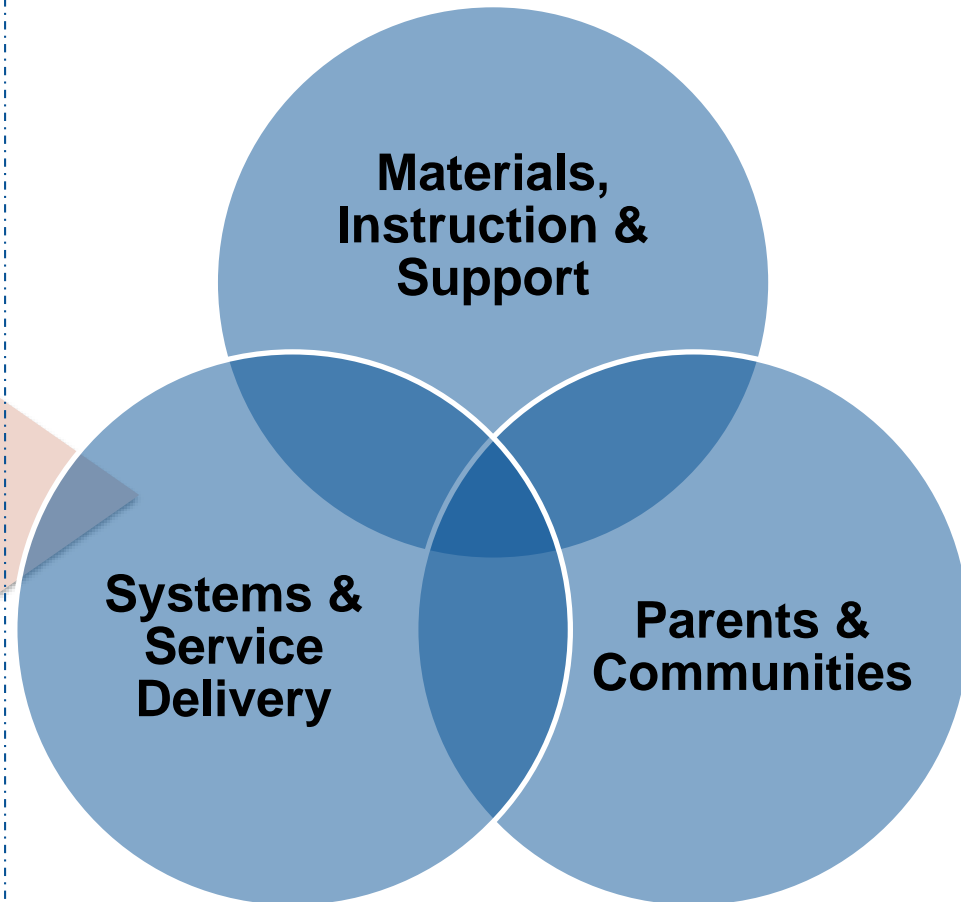
Ethiopia

USAID/Reading for Ethiopia's
Achievement Developed
Technical Assistance
(READ TA) (2012-2017)



Nepal

USAID/Early Grade Reading
Program (EGRP) (2015-2020)



Early-Grade Reading Programs in Ethiopia and Nepal

Ethiopia

USAID/READ TA

Technical support to MoE;

National level program;

Materials Development:

- Support to Regions to develop Syllabus, S&S, TLMs for grades 1-8 in 7 Ethiopian languages:
 - 2 alpha-syllabic script languages (Amharic and Tigrinya);
 - 5 Latin-script languages
- Support Moe to develop English TLMs

Nepal

USAID/EGRP

Technical support to MoE;

Program in all schools in 16 districts (out of 75) – provide model that can be rolled out to all other districts;

Materials Development:

- Support to MoE to:
 - Utilize existing Nepali G1-2 TLMs (developed by Room to Read);
 - Develop Nepali G3 TLMs.
- Support GON for Nepali L2 and other Nepalese languages



Alpha-syllabic script Languages and Reading

Alpha-syllabic Languages and Reading

Amharic and Tigrinya use *Ge'ez* (or *Ethiopic*) script;

Nepali uses Devanagari script.

The alpha-syllabic script means that symbols represent (mostly) a syllable, but also phonemes:

Basic consonant symbols represent two sounds (CV):

ቀ = /bə/ (Ge'ez)

ब = /ba/ (Devanagari)

Vowels are represented one way when alone (V):

ኤ = /é/ (Ge'ez)

ए = /é/ (Devanagari)

. . . but another way when following a consonant (CV):

ቁ = /bé / (Ge'ez)

बे = /bé/ (Devanagari)

Alpha-syllabic Languages and Reading

This means there are a large number of symbols that children need to learn . . . though there is some pattern:

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ए
क	का	कि	की	क	क	के
ख	खा	खि	खी			
ग	गा	गि	गी			
घ	घा	घि	घी			
ङ	ङा	ङि	ङी			
च	चा	चि	ची			
छ	छा	छि	छी			

	ā	u	i	a	e	ī	o
h	ᱠ	ᱡ	ᱢ	ᱣ	ᱤ	ᱥ	ᱦ
l	ᱧ	ᱨ	ᱩ	ᱪ	ᱫ	ᱬ	ᱭ
h	ᱮ	ᱯ	ᱰ	ᱱ	ᱲ	ᱳ	ᱴ
m	ᱵ	ᱶ	ᱷ	ᱸ	ᱹ	ᱺ	ᱻ
s	ᱼ	ᱽ	᱾	᱿	᱀	᱁	᱂
r	᱃	᱄	᱅	᱆	᱇	᱈	᱉

Alpha-syllabic Languages and Reading

Research on reading in alpha-syllabic scripts indicates that:

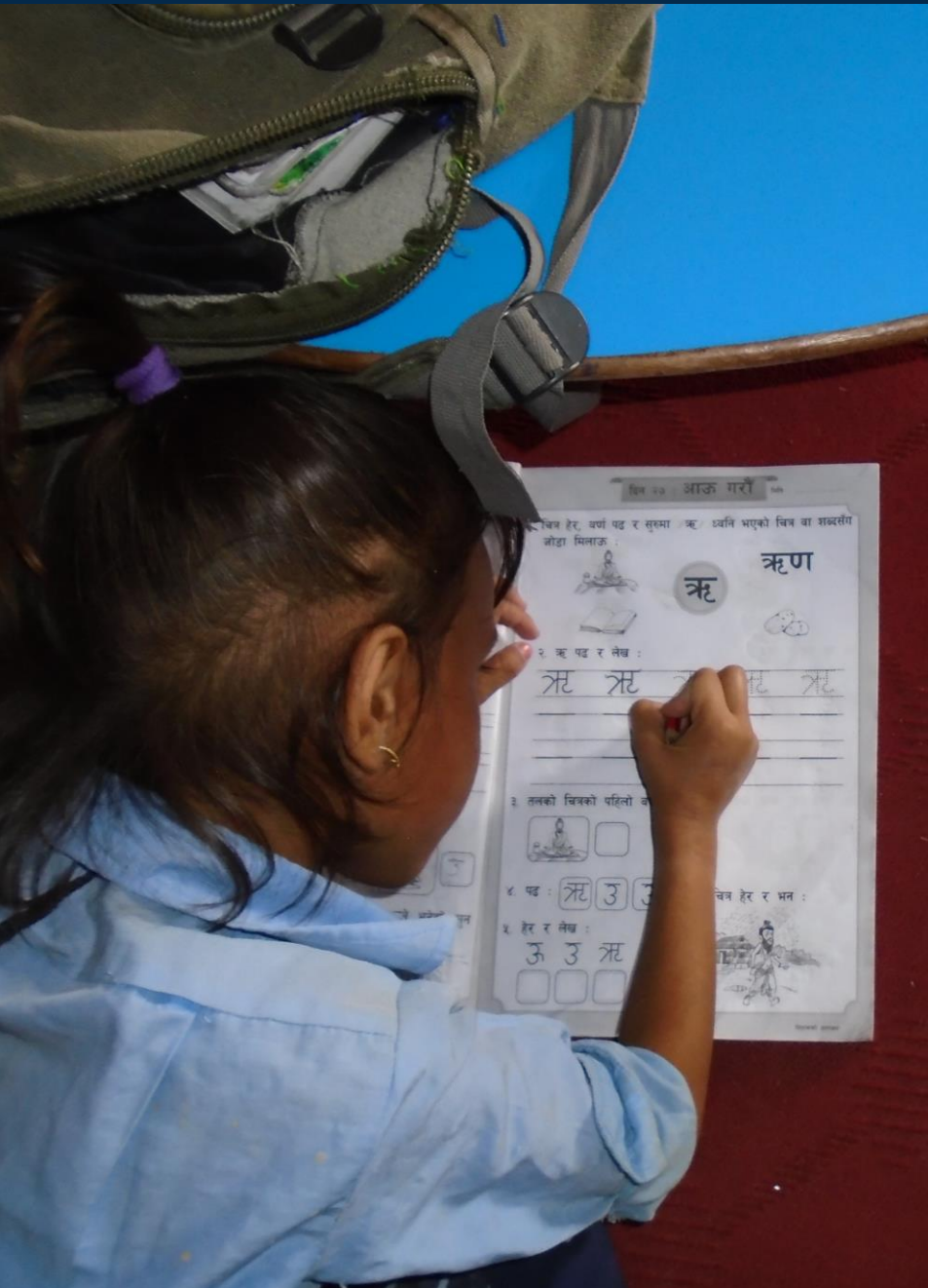
As in latin-script languages, Phonological and Grapho-phonological Awareness are important (Nakamura 2014; Nag, Caravalos, & Snowling 2010; Asfaha, Kurvers, & Kroon, 2009)

Both phoneme and syllable level awareness predict reading ability (Nag & Snowling 2011; Nakamura 2014)

Syllable level awareness accounts for more variance in reading ability (Nag, Caravalos, & Snowling 2010)

But

There is a lack of research on specific instructional approaches/activities that work best for developing these skills in alpha-syllabic scripts.



Making Decisions about Reading Instruction

Making Decisions about Reading Instruction

Given lack of clear research on the "best" way to develop needed phonological and grapho-phonological skills . . .

Decisions may be a combination of borrowing from rich "bag of tricks" from research in alphabetic scripts, linguistic examination, and local practice.



Making Decisions about Reading Instruction

Example 1 – phoneme level:

In English, exercises focus on isolating phonemes, so that students will be able to blend/segment words to decode.

In Nepali – isolating sounds is difficult and may not be "worth it".

So, rather than isolating sounds, instruction focuses more on comparing/minimal pairs:

के

Ke

को

ko

का

kaa

को

Ko

हो

ho

कलम कलम Making Decisions about Reading Instruction

Example 2 – syllable clapping/counting

In English, clapping and counting syllables often precedes the more difficult counting and identification of phonemes.

In Amharic, Tigrinya, and Nepali, syllable clapping seems to make sense, since the core alphabet is syllable-level.

However, adults tend to clap by fidel/matra, which becomes confusing when vowels are dropped.

कलम (/kalam/) should be 2 syllables ka-lam

but many adults think of it as 3 – ka-la-ma

So, syllable clapping was retained, but lower emphasis on counting, and focus on using regular CVCV words.

Making Decisions about Reading Instruction

Example 3 - Order of Introduction of letters/symbols

"Best practice" rules for determining order of letter introduction:

1. Frequency - most common, common, gradually more complex
2. Transparency
3. Shape of the letters
4. Pronunciation of sounds
5. Productive

Implications for Program Planning

Ethiopia (Amharic & Tigrinya)

- Analyzed frequency of consonants, used rules to determine consonant introduction order
- Introduced consonant families (target consonant with all vowels)

Nepal

- Difficult to convince GON colleagues, expert linguist— as traditional order uses phonetic grouping (vowels → velar consonants → palatal → retroflex . . .)
- Over time, with NGOs using frequency order, perhaps this can be revisited.

More Information



SharEd provides access to a wide range of international education topics, including

- Early childhood education
- Early grade reading and math
- Policy and systems support
- Information and communications technology



<http://shared.rti.org>

Wendi Ralaingita

RTI Senior Research Education
Analyst
wralaingita@rti.org

Agatha van Ginkel

Senior Multilingual Education Specialist
Agatha_van_Ginkel@sil-lead.org