LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION COUNTRY PROFILE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACCELÉRE! Accès, Lecture, Retention et Redevabilité
DFID U.K. Department for International Development
DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo
EESSE Emergency Equity and System Strengthening in Education
EGIDS Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
EGR Early Grade Reading
EGRA Early Grade Reading Assessment
EQUIP Education Quality Improvement Project
GPE Global Partnership for Education
IFM Teacher Training Institute (Institut de Formation de Maître)
IYDA Integrated Youth Development Activity
L1 First Language
L2 Second (or additional) Language
LOI Language of Instruction
MEPSP Ministère de l’Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel (Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Vocational Education)
REEP – A Research for Effective Education Programming – Africa
TENAFEP Test National de Fin d’Etudes Primaires
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID U.S. Agency for International Development

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INTRODUCTION

Enhancing reading skills in the early grades is a key education priority for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Despite some improvements in access and learning in sub-Saharan Africa, literacy levels in the early grades remain low, and progress has been slow. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early grades have led to an increased focus on the role of the language of instruction (LOI). Recent research has demonstrated that mismatches between the LOI and the language that students and teachers speak and understand best, can hamper effective teaching and learning (University Research Co., 2019). Thus, it is critical to understand the LOI policy and linguistic context of a country when trying to design programs to improve literacy and learning outcomes.

Currently, USAID supports Early Grade Reading (EGR) initiatives in 19 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. Many policies in these countries have recently shifted toward adopting the mother tongue as the language for initial literacy acquisition, and then transitioning to a second or additional language, such as a regional, national, or international language, as the subsequent LOI.

Government policies and strategies related to teachers and LOI reflect country priorities, approaches, and objectives for early grade literacy. During the design-phase of donor-funded reading programs, decisions are made regarding the manner and extent to which national policies are incorporated into project design, and when alternative approaches or additional elements need to be considered. However, government policies on LOI, and other information relevant for informing design, are often difficult to find and are not easily accessible.

The LOI country profiles aim to address this need. The profiles will allow the USAID Africa Bureau, USAID Missions, and partner organizations to quickly understand the country’s linguistic and policy context in order to design an approach that most effectively helps improve EGR outcomes. These profiles, designed for 18 of the countries with current or upcoming USAID EGR initiatives, aim to clearly and succinctly describe and illustrate the country’s linguistic landscape and official LOI policy. This country profile in particular provides information on language policy and practice in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

According to SIL International’s *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, there are 212 living languages in the DRC. Of these, 207 are indigenous languages and five are non-indigenous. Further, nine are institutional languages, 30 are developing, and 135 are vigorous, while 31 are in trouble and seven are dying (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2020). For more information on how languages are categorized on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), please see Table 1.

The official language of the DRC is French, with 31.9 million speakers of a total population of 84 million (Eberhard et al., 2020). French is a second language (L2) for all speakers in the DRC. The Constitution also names four national languages: Lingala, Kiswahili (Congolese Swahili), Chiluba (Luba-Kasai), and Kikongo (Kituba). Lingala is the statutory provincial language in the northwestern regions and the first language (L1) of most Kinshasa residents, the capital city, with 2.04 million speakers. Luba-Kasai is the statutory provincial language in the Kasai region, with 7 million speakers, and Congolese Swahili is the statutory provincial language in the eastern regions, with 11.1 million speakers. Kituba is the statutory provincial language in the Bas-Congo and Bandundu regions, with 5 million speakers (Eberhard et al., 2020). For more information on the geographic dispersion of indigenous languages, please see Figure 2a and 2b.

Table 1. Assessing Language Vitality: EGIDS Scale

| Institutional | The language is used by institutions beyond the home and community |
| Developing    | The language is in vigorous use and with literature in a standardized form |
| Vigorous      | The language is not standardized but it is used among all generations |
| In Trouble    | Intergenerational transmission is breaking down |
| Dying         | Only fluent users, if any, are middle-aged or older |
| Extinct       | The language is not used |

Source: SIL International, n.d. For more information, please see: www.ethnologue.com/about/language-info

1. Language names differ slightly between SIL International and the official government names. The names in parentheses are those used by SIL International, and will be used throughout this section since the data being referenced was collected by SIL International.
Southern Democratic Republic of Congo

Figure 2: Mapping of Indigenous Languages in the Southern Democratic Republic of the Congo

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICY

In 2009, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo issued a policy for the use of national languages (Stratégie nationale d'utilisation des langues nationales), which indicated that one of the four national languages (Lingala, Kiswahili, Chiluba, and Kikongo) should be used as the LOI in Grades 1 through 4. The initial LOI used in schools should be the national language that is most predominant in the surrounding geographic area. The policy also stated that, during Grades 1 to 4, the LOI should be taught as a subject as well as French (Global Partnership for Education [GPE] Secretariat, 2020). In Grades 3 and 4, French will gradually be introduced as the LOI, with French becoming the primary LOI in Grade 5, while the national language continues to be taught as a subject (GPE Secretariat, 2020). All teaching beyond Grade 5 utilizes French as the medium of instruction.

The national languages policy is currently being piloted across the country, and has not yet reached full implementation (GPE Secretariat, 2020). Some teachers have reported issues with implementing the policy due to a lack of teaching and learning materials in the national languages. In those cases, teachers often revert to teaching in French (Chemonics International, Inc., 2020). Similarly, a language mapping exercise conducted in 2018 found some mismatches between the national language used as the LOI and children’s mother tongue (Chemonics International, Inc. & SIL LEAD, Inc., 2018). The study, covering five provinces across the DRC, noted that children in urban areas were almost universally competent in the national language used as the LOI. However, children in rural areas were often less familiar with the national language. This was particularly true in the Sud Ubangi province, where Lingala is the national language. In this case, 53% of Grade 1 students were unable to speak in Lingala, and 25% of Grade 1 students were able to partially speak in Lingala (Chemonics International, Inc. & SIL LEAD, Inc., 2018). Such mismatches between the LOI and languages that students are familiar with may also present challenges for the implementation of the national languages policy.

CLASS TIME

In the DRC, education begins with two years of pre-primary and six years of primary education (Grades 1 to 6), followed by two years of junior secondary education (Grades 7 and 8) and four years of senior secondary education (Grades 9 to 12). Only six years of primary schooling is compulsory in the DRC (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020).
The Ministry of Primary, Secondary, and Vocational Education (Ministère de l’Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel, or MEPSP) is responsible for overseeing primary education, including setting the national primary curriculum. As of 2011, the national primary school curriculum covered five domains: languages, mathematics, science, and technology; social and environment studies; art; and personal development (MEPSP, 2011). Within these domains, the curriculum covers 11 separate subjects. The complete list of subjects from the 2011 curriculum is displayed in Table 2.

As of the 2015-2016 school year, reading instruction took place each school day for 45 minutes in Grades 1 through 4 (USAID & DFID, 2015). Despite these efforts, recent data has shown that literacy levels in primary schools are low. Preliminary results from an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) conducted by the World Bank in 2020 revealed that 64% of Grade 4 students were unable to read a single word of a grade-appropriate text in French (World Bank, 2020).

Upon completion of primary school, students take an examination called the test national de fin d’études primaires (TENAFEP) covering three subjects — mathematics, French, and general culture. If the student passes the TENAFEP and their school grades are determined to be satisfactory, they are awarded a primary school leaving certificate (Certificat d’Études Primaires) and may advance to junior secondary school (World Bank Group, 2015).

### PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR LITERACY

The DRC does not have a formal policy around pre-service teacher training (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020). Instead, pre-service teacher training is a stream that students can pursue during senior secondary education. The curriculum for the first two years of secondary school (junior secondary, Grades 7-8) are common across all three streams (general education, pedagogical, and technical). Upon completion of junior secondary, students then opt-in to the pedagogical stream, which lasts for four years (senior secondary, Grades 9-12) (World Bank Group, 2015). Upon completion of senior secondary, trainees in the pedagogical stream earn a primary school teacher certificate, called the Brevet D’Instituteur.

Primary school teachers are not required to complete any formal training beyond the pre-service stream during secondary schooling. Thus, the country has an extremely high rate of qualified teachers. As of 2012, almost 94% of primary teachers in the DRC held the required diploma to teach at the primary

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**Table 2. National Curriculum for Primary School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Congolese Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics, Science, and Technology</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Environment Studies</td>
<td>Civil and Moral Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health and Environment Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manual Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from MEPSP, 2011
level (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020). Despite the majority of primary teachers being trained, there are concerns around the degree to which training at the secondary level prepares teachers to teach effectively. For instance, an EGRA conducted in 2012 revealed that only 50% of primary teachers assessed, received a passing score on the reading comprehension portion of the test, and only 36% received a passing score on the written component (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020).

To address teachers’ additional training needs, the DRC is currently working with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to establish teacher training institutes (Institute de Formation de Maître, or IFM in French) where teachers who have completed senior secondary can enroll in further pre-service teacher training, as well as in-service professional development workshops (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020).

**TEACHER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TRAINING**

A language mapping exercise of five provinces in the DRC found that 99% of the 500 teachers interviewed were competent in the national language used as the initial LOI in that province (Chemonics International & SIL LEAD, 2018). The high rate of proficiency in the initial LOI was attributed to the fact that most teachers were working in the province in which they were raised. Thus, they were likely to have previous exposure to the national language used in that province and have learned it in school themselves. This may be a result of teachers being selected directly by schools themselves and then hired by the MEPSP, as it is unlikely that schools would recruit teachers who did not speak the LOI (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020). Though not generalizable to the rest of the country, there did not appear to be mismatches between teachers’ language proficiencies and the national language which students spoke (Chemonics International & SIL LEAD, 2018).

The language mapping study also aimed to gauge teachers’ attitudes toward using the national languages as the initial LOI, as opposed to French. It found that teachers had overwhelmingly positive reactions toward using the national languages to speak with enumerators as well as using the national languages to teach in the classroom. As such, teacher attitudes did not seem to be an impediment toward the implementation of mother tongue reading instruction (Chemonics International & SIL LEAD, 2018).

An initiative of GPE called the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) is supporting the implementation of the national languages policy by delivering language-specific teacher training. EQUIP has updated and validated training modules on reading and writing in the four national languages, and delivered training to 28 national teacher trainers, 508 provincial trainers, and 12,230 teachers on this topic as of 2020 (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020).

**TEACHER IN-SERVICE**

In-service teacher training opportunities in the DRC are limited, and there is no standard path for career advancement for teachers (School-to-School International, 2019). USAID’s Accès, Lecture, Retention et Redevabilité, or access, reading, retention and accountability, (ACCELERE!) project is working to address the lack of in-service training opportunities in the DRC and to orient teachers to the project’s EGR approach. As such, ACCELERE! has developed teacher training materials, including video modules, in the national languages and French to support literacy acquisition in both languages (USAID & DFID, 2015). Teachers will also receive coaching support to implement the reading program pioneered by ACCELERE! through a multi-tiered model that includes training and support at the classroom, school, and cluster levels (School-to-School International, 2019). In support of this training model, the project trains master trainers, coaches, and literacy monitors who all support teachers to implement the ACCELERE! reading program (USAID & DFID, 2015).
USAID READING PROGRAM APPROACH AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

In alignment with the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID’s programming in the DRC aims to support the needs and priorities of the partner country to ensure that gains from the programming are sustained.

As such, USAID established a joint primary education initiative with the U.K. Department of International Development (DFID) called ACCELERE!. ACCELERE! aims to improve equitable access to education across eight provinces in the DRC, including Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental, Equateur, Sud-Ubangi, Nord-Kivu, and Sud-Kivu. ACCELERE! includes four separate components. The first component targets equitable access and learning through a six-year (2015-2021), $134 million initiative implemented by Chemonics International. ACCELERE! aims to improve EGR outcomes by developing and distributing teaching and learning materials in the national languages and French, and implementing in-service professional development that builds teachers’ capacity to deliver effective EGR instruction and facilitate the transition to French instruction by the end of Grade 4. In response to COVID-19, the project has also pivoted to distance learning, and is developing radio lessons in the national languages to ensure that students still have access to quality educational opportunities (Chemonics International, Inc., n.d.).

The second component of ACCELERE! aims to improve governance and accountability in the education sector through a six-year (2015-2021), $24 million initiative implemented by Cambridge Education. This includes improving government transparency by strengthening budgeting, planning, and payroll systems and increasing school accountability by supporting parental and community involvement in creating school budgets and improvement plans. The third component targets monitoring and evaluation, with a six-year (2015-2021), $25 million initiative implemented by International Business & Technical Consultants, Inc. to design and implement both performance and impact evaluations of the project. Last, component four focuses on reducing the number of out-of-school children through a three-year (2018-2021), $50 million initiative implemented by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (USAID, 2020).

USAID also launched the Integrated Youth Development Activity (IYDA), a three-year (2018-2021), $22 million initiative to provide vulnerable youth with inclusive educational and economic opportunities across the DRC. Implemented by the Education Development Center, IYDA implements interventions such as professional development and life skills trainings, youth-led income generation programs, and literacy outreach to encourage learning outside of formal school environments. IYDA currently works in North and South Kivu and aims to improve access to basic education for 12,000 children and youth and provide entrepreneurship and professional development training for 8,000 youth (Education Development Center, n.d.).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN USAID PROJECTS

Community support for improved EGR instruction is a critical component of ACCELERE!, as the project firmly believes that sustainable education reform occurs from the bottom-up (USAID & DFID, 2015). As such, ACCELERE! works to increase community participation in school-based and extracurricular reading activities. In particular, ACCELERE! supports communities in accessing information about their schools, such as school development plans and financial information, so that community members can become informed advocates for quality education and EGR instruction (USAID & DFID, 2015). ACCELERE! distributes this information by encouraging community participation in school conferences and meetings, and also posting updates and financial statements on community notice boards.
OTHER DONOR FUNDED READING PROGRAMS

Alongside USAID, several other organizations are involved in implementing projects to address literacy and language issues across the DRC, which are described below.

**GPE’s COVID-19 Response**

In 2020, GPE and UNICEF funded a $15 million education sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the DRC. The grant supports the production of learning materials, capacity building for distance learning and contingency planning, as well as efforts to provide learning continuity during school closures and disruptions (GPE, n.d.). Activities to promote learning continuity center around the production of learning materials for different media types, including radio, television, and digital platforms. Printed materials are also being developed to ensure learners without access to such platforms have learning opportunities during the pandemic (GPE, n.d.).

**Education Cannot Wait’s Education in Emergency Response**

In 2020, Education Cannot Wait announced a $22.2 million, three-year (2020-2023) resilience initiative to accelerate the education in emergencies response in the DRC. The initiative also hopes to leverage an additional $45.3 million in co-financing from other partner organizations to target 200,000 internally displaced, returnee, deported, and host community children and youth in the provinces of Tanganyika, Ituri, and Kasai Central. In particular, the initiative aims to improve access to safe and equitable learning opportunities by constructing and rehabilitating schools, addressing underlying issues around school dropout such as food security and nutrition, and delivering a package of educational content that targets learners’ academic, physical, and social-emotional development (Education Cannot Wait, n.d.).

**GPE’s Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP)**

EQUIP is a five-year (2017-2021) initiative of GPE to improve the quality of primary education and enhance governance of the education system in the DRC. To improve education quality, the project focuses on teacher training and the provision of learning materials in the four national languages for Grades 1 to 4. In particular, EQUIP is working to construct four teacher training institutions to create more training opportunities and enhance teacher effectiveness. The project has also developed training modules for in-service teachers around reading and writing in the national languages. As of July 2019, 13,230 teachers and principals had received these trainings (Meysonnat & Torrano, 2020).

**The World Bank’s Emergency Equity and System Strengthening in Education Project (EESSE)**

The EESSE project is a four-year (2020-2024), $800 million initiative of the World Bank to support the provision of free primary schooling across the DRC. With a focus on ten provinces, EESSE will work to reduce household spending on education and improve enrollment and retention in primary school. Further, the project will work to strengthen government systems that support the provision of free primary schooling, including teacher payment systems and education management systems (World Bank, 2020). Initial estimates from the World Bank reveal that the project will support as many as 1.28 million low-income children of primary school age to enter the education system (World Bank, 2020).

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2. For more information, see: https://www.educationcannotwait.org/myrp-drc/

3. For more information, see: https://projects.worldbank.org/en/operations/project-detail/P172341
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