



LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION COUNTRY PROFILE

Djibouti

PREPARED FOR

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ABBREVIATIONS

BEPC	End of First Cycle Studies Certificate
CFEEF	Training Center for Basic Education Teachers
DEGRA	Djibouti Early Grade Reading Activity
EGIDS	Expanded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
EGR	Early Grade Reading
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
L1	First Language
L2	Second (or additional) Language
LOI	Language of Instruction
MENFOP	Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PA	Pedagogical Advisor
REEP-A	Research for Effective Education Programming–Africa
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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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 Djibouti.



LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

According to SIL International's *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, there are five languages in Djibouti, all of which are still in use. Of these, two are indigenous and three are non-indigenous. Furthermore, two are institutional, two are developing, and one is vigorous (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). For more information on how languages are categorized on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), please see Table 1.

French and Arabic are the national languages of Djibouti, both of which are institutional. Of a total population of 957,000, 453,500 are French speakers, of which 20,500 speak it as their first language (L1) and 433,000 speak it as their second language (L2) (Eberhard et al., 2020). There are 40,100 speakers of standard Arabic and 71,200 speakers of Ta'izzi-Adeni Arabic (or Southern Yemeni Arabic), which is a vigorous language. Additionally, there are 77,200 speakers of Omani Arabic (Arabic spoken in regions of Oman), which is an unestablished language (Eberhard et al., 2020).

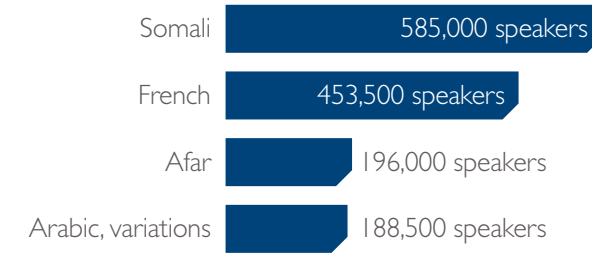
Figure 2 below provides detailed information on indigenous languages and populations that speak them. The most widely spoken indigenous language is Somali, a developing language which has 585,000 speakers, followed by Afar, with 196,000 speakers. In addition to the indigenous languages referenced on the map, there are also 3,260 Amharic speakers in Djibouti (Eberhard et al., 2020).

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

Most widely-spoken languages in Djibouti



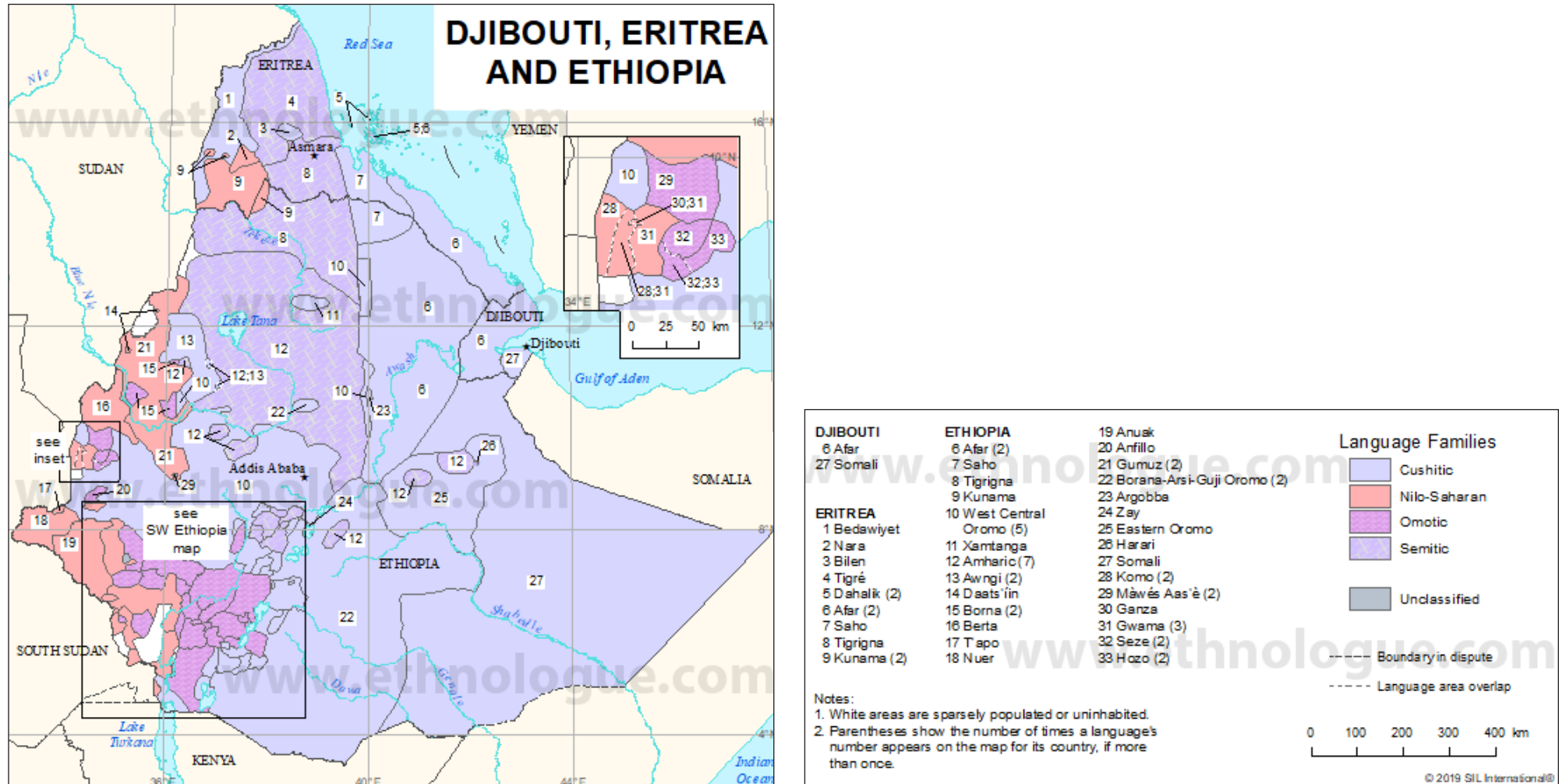
Source: Eberhard et al., 2020

Figure 1. Map of Djibouti



20 KM

Figure 2. Mapping of Indigenous Languages in Djibouti



Source: Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). (2020). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-third edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICY

French has been utilized as the medium of instruction in Djibouti since independence in 1977. However, the majority of the population speaks Somali, Afar, or the Djiboutian Dialectical Arabic as a mother tongue, and very few speak French as a first language. As such, Grade 1 students undergo linguistic immersion and are expected to acquire oral fluency and literacy in French by the end of Grade 2. Students begin to learn standard Arabic in Grade 3 (USAID, 2018).

CLASS TIME

The first stage of basic education in Djibouti is pre-primary education, which lasts two years. This is followed by primary education, which is a five-year program for children ages six to eleven. Primary students study French, Arabic, mathematics, history, geography, science, health, manual labor, physical education, and music. All subjects in primary school are taught in French; Arabic is taught as a subject for two hours each week and considered a modern language (Dirie, 2017).

Upon completing primary school, students are awarded a Primary School Certificate. Those who pass a Common Entrance Examination move on to middle school (lower secondary school). Middle school education lasts four years, and takes two forms: a general course offered by middle schools or a vocational course offered by apprenticeship centers. Upper secondary school, which lasts for three years, offers general education or technical education and vocational training (African Development Fund, 2004).

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR LITERACY

In 2015, the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFOP) established the Training Center for Basic Education Teachers (Centre de Formation des Enseignants de l'Enseignement Fondamental in French, or CFEEF), which provides both pre-service and in-service teacher training.

To become a primary school teacher in Djibouti, candidates must have a secondary school diploma or an End of First Cycle Studies Certificate (BEPC in French), which is obtained upon completion of upper secondary school or Grade 12. Those who have a secondary school diploma or university education attend pre-service training at CFEEF for one year; and those who have a BEPC must attend for two years (USAID, 2018).

Primary school teacher trainees devote half of their time to learning pedagogical theory and methods, and the other half to learn the various subject disciplines. Trainees are also required to complete three to six months of practical teaching experience. Once students have completed their training at CFEEF, they have one opportunity to pass a final exam - no repetition is allowed. While standards to be a teacher are high, this has contributed to a shortage of qualified primary school teachers and to high teacher-student ratios (World Bank, 2010).

TEACHER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TRAINING

During pre-service training, teachers study the disciplines that they will teach in primary school, including French and Arabic. However, recent analyses have shown that teachers could benefit from additional training in early grade literacy and methods to support second language acquisition, since students are taught to read in their L2, French (USAID, 2018).

TEACHER IN-SERVICE

In Djibouti, primary school teachers are expected to devote 30 hours to in-service training each year (USAID, 2018). In-service teacher training can take two forms. First, CFEEF organizes centralized trainings, oftentimes during school holidays or other breaks (World Bank, 2019). There is no standardized content or guidelines for progression through this type of in-service teacher training. Instead, trainings cover topics proposed by Pedagogical Advisors (PA) and inspectors based on the needs they identify during classroom observations (World Bank, 2019). Given the more centralized nature of these trainings, they tend to focus less on applied activities to improve classroom instruction such as instructional practices, teaching the curriculum, and strategies for special needs students (World Bank, 2010).

Additionally, PAs and inspectors lead a cascade model of training, in which they share feedback based on their own training and experience (MENFOP, 2017). To do this, PAs conduct classroom visits and offer feedback to individual teachers based on their observations. Inspectors also conduct two formal classroom observations a year to evaluate teachers' performance and provide feedback.

USAID READING PROGRAM APPROACH AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

In alignment with the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID's programming in Djibouti aims to support the needs and priorities of the partner country in order to ensure that gains from the programming are sustained. As such, USAID launched the **Djibouti Early Grade Reading Activity (DEGRA)**¹,

¹ For more information, see: <https://www.fhi360.org/projects/djibouti-early-grade-reading-activity>

a five-year (2019-2024), \$4.79 million initiative to support MENFOP's efforts to improve the reading skills of more than 55,000 primary school children (Grades 1-5). The activity works with partner organizations School-to-School International, Overseas Strategic Consulting, Ltd., and the Center for Applied Linguistics.

DEGRA has three components: 1) enhancing the quality of primary reading instruction, 2) increasing community engagement in support of reading, and 3) developing comprehensive policies for reading. To improve reading instruction, DEGRA provides primary students and teachers with materials, including teacher guides, textbooks, student workbooks, and reading materials. DEGRA also provides professional development to Djibouti's 1,300 primary school teachers on evidence-based approaches to second language acquisition, gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching practices, and formative classroom assessments of students' reading skills. Information on DEGRA's second objective, increasing community support for reading, is provided below. To strengthen policy for improved reading instruction, DEGRA and MENFOP are establishing a technical commission on reading to support data-informed policymaking and are working to create standard norms and benchmarks for reading (FHI360, n.d.).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN USAID PROJECTS

One of DEGRA's primary objectives is to build community engagement with early grade reading. In particular, DEGRA supports parent-teacher associations and civil society organizations in organizing community-based reading activities and utilizes social behavior change messaging and communication approaches to build community support for reading for all children, particularly for girls and children with disabilities (FHI360, n.d.)

OTHER DONOR FUNDED READING PROGRAMS

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

Islamic Development Bank

The \$6.24 million Basic Education Support Project, funded by the Islamic Development Bank, aims to increase access to and the quality of (with a focus on girls) primary and middle schools, mainly through school and classroom construction. The project aims to also build a bilingual primary school in each region of the country. These schools follow a trilingual education model (French, Arabic, and English) (USAID, 2018). The Islamic Development Bank also funded the \$10 million Bilingual Education System Strengthening Project, a four-year (2016-2020) initiative. The project's primary aim was to support the National Education strategy (2010-2019), which has the goal of achieving universal education through strengthening bilingual education in Djibouti. The project included the establishment of new schools, provision of textbooks, teaching materials, teacher training, and enhancing the management of the bilingual education system.

World Bank/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)²

The World Bank, through UNICEF, funded a one-year, \$5 million Education Emergency Response to COVID-19 project that aims to improve access to quality remote learning by developing and broadcasting lessons through TV, radio, and an e-learning platform. Lessons provide vulnerable children with limited access to instruction while schools are closed and also professional development to teachers, advisors, and inspectors. It also supports the healthy and safe re-opening of schools through psychosocial support programs in primary and middle school, infrastructure investments for improved school hygiene, back to school campaigns for students at risk of dropping-out, a learning diagnostic, remedial lessons to cover missed content, and literacy courses for refugee

2. For more information, see: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/djibouti>

families. Additionally, it also aims to strengthen the education sector's resilience to emergencies through providing equipment for improved communication between schools, teachers, and families.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE)/ UNICEF³

UNICEF is the coordinating agency for a \$3.8 million grant supporting MENFOP to: 1) construct, rehabilitate, and equip rural and overcrowded urban schools, creating a total of 20 new classrooms; 2) improve early grade mathematics learning through training teachers, school directors, pedagogical counselors, and inspectors on differentiated instruction, formative assessment, lesson planning, and how to support low-performing students and students who are hearing and visually impaired; and 3) development of a student assessment policy, which includes both formative classroom assessments and an Early Grade Math Assessment (USAID, 2018). Additionally, in March 2020, UNICEF received an additional grant of \$70 million from GPE to support MENFOP with distance learning programs, including paper-based learning.

World Bank/GPE Expanding Opportunities For Learning Project⁴

The World Bank is funding a five-year (2019-2024) \$10 million project, with \$9.25 million co-financing from GPE, to increase equitable access to basic education, improve teaching practices, and strengthen MENFOP's management capacity. There are four components of this project: 1) establishing foundations for quality preschool education, 2) expanding access to and improving retention in primary and lower secondary education, 3) building capacity to support teaching and learning, and 4) strengthening MENFOP's management capacity and data systems organization.

3 For more information, see: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/djibouti>

4 For more information, see: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/605651570154537746/text/Djibouti-Expanding-Opportunities-for-Learning-Project.txt>

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