EdData II

Task Order 15: Data for Education Programming in Asia and the Middle East (DEP/AME)

Research on Reading in Morocco: Analysis of Non-Formal Education Textbooks

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of the analysis of the Arabic Language Curriculum (ALC) and the reading module in both the student textbooks[1,2] and facilitator's guides[3,4] for level 1 and level 2 of the non-formal education (NFE) program for reintegration into the formal school.

The objective of this analysis is to evaluate the curriculum, the student textbook, and facilitator's guide with an aim to improve their effectiveness at providing reading instruction. The analysis will determine the extent to which these two textbooks are in compliance with the educational principles underlined in the ALC for NFE, as well as with evidence-based international standards for textbook content. More specifically, the analysis intends to examine if the five components of reading (phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension) are covered in the textbooks, and if the instructional material provided in the facilitator's guides supports the development of competence in these skills to a level sufficient for the learner's reintegration into the formal education (FE) system.

To achieve the above objectives, the study starts by determining the instructional approach used to teach Arabic in the textbooks and to what extent this approach is designed to meet students' specific needs. It then proceeds to analyze reading as a skill and as a means for learning other subjects by using a set of criteria. The criteria are designed to confirm whether the extent to which reading is being taught is explicit and effective. The study seeks to determine whether the textbooks align with current academic research and standards in regards to the teaching of reading, and whether students can develop these skills if teachers are not explicitly trained in how to teach reading.

The analysis of the approach, contents, and reading activities adopted in the textbooks as well as their design yielded a number of strengths that are worthy of mention. On the design level, the level 1 textbook presents colorful images and drawings that may attract learners and motivate them to read. The paper used and the book covers are of high quality. As for the content of the textbooks, the first level textbook has succeeded in isolating letters that have similar basic shapes from each other. For example, the textbook presents the letters [ب] "b", [ت] "t", separately from the letters [ث] "θ", [ﻴ] "y", and [ن] "n"; it also presents the letter [ر] "r" in isolation from [ز] "z",

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[1] Learner's Textbook, first level, *'Afriiqya ššarq* Press, Casablanca (2007).

اللغة العربية، كتاب المتعلِّم، المستوى الأول، مطابع أفريقيا الشرق، الدار البيضاء (2007).

[2] Learner's Textbook, second level, *'Afriiqya ššarq* Press, Casablanca (2007).

اللغة العربية، كتاب المتعلِّم، المستوى الثاني، مطابع أفريقيا الشرق، الدار البيضاء (2007).

[3] Facilitator's Guide, Committee for NFE curriculum development: Integration Program in Formal Education, First level, Mahd Publications, Casablanca (2007).

دليل المُدرّس (ة)، المجموعة التربوية لتدريس مناهج التربية غير النظامية، برنامج الإدماج في المدرسة، المستوى الثاني، منشورات مهد، الدار البيضاء (2007).

[4] Facilitator's Guide, Committee for NFE curriculum development: Integration Program in Formal Education, Second level, Mahd Publications, Casablanca (2007).

دليل المُدرّس (ة)، المجموعة التربوية لتدريس مناهج التربية غير النظامية، برنامج الإدماج في المدرسة، المستوى الثاني، منشورات مهد، الدار البيضاء (2007).

and the letter [ح] "j" separate from the letters [ح] "H" and [خ] "x", etc. This helps the student master the letters without confusing letters that have the same basic shapes. The authors have succeeded in introducing at the initial stages of the textbook the most frequent and commonly used letters. The authors of the analyzed textbooks also paid attention to the "tashkil" diacritic signs (vowel markers), which are essential for novice learners to decode the language at this level. Indeed, all the words are vocalized in the textbooks, whether they are introduced for the first time or repeated. Finally, the textbook offers diversified reading activities. The second level textbook covers the most basic grammatical rules needed at this level.

The results of the study confirm that the reading modules in the two textbooks do not contain the elements that are essential, according to international studies and research, to properly support the teaching or learning of reading skills. This is a significant finding, as early literacy skills are key indicators of future academic achievement and success in school. Furthermore, the instructional methodology used in the facilitator's guides is not supported by current evidence of successful approaches to reading instruction.

The study highlights the need to develop effective reading instructional methods, derived from evidence-based research in the field of early grade reading. Research suggests, in particular, the adoption of explicit and direct teaching of the five components of reading in the teaching of reading in Arabic. The study also notes that if the NFE facilitators get pre-service training the quality of reading instruction may improve.

The study concludes by highlighting the need for increased awareness around the importance of reading and the positive, lasting impact it will have on academic achievement and student success.

This report is the product of a team comprised of members from the Directorate of NFE and the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP) under the supervision of a consultant from Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI).

It falls within the scope of the larger initiative that the MENFP (notably the Directorate of Curriculum and Directorate of NFE) is currently carrying out, in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in order to improve student literacy in the early grades. With a strong understanding of the importance of basic reading skills for learning across all subject areas, there was consensus to conduct a thorough descriptive analysis of the current level 1 and level 2 textbooks as well as to assess the effectiveness of current instructional approaches to teaching reading.

The report reviews the current NFE curriculum with a specific focus on the Arabic language units of the level 1 and level 2 textbooks, in the light of international standards for teaching reading in early grades, namely direct and explicit teaching of basic skills as part of a curriculum with precise, leveled and measurable expectations for student outcomes.

1. Background

1.1 Reading in Morocco

The concept of reading (القراية '*leqraaya*') in Moroccan society has two meanings; the first denotes the cognitive activity of decoding and understanding the meaning of written texts. The second, and more widespread, meaning is synonymous with learning and academic achievement, and even to success in life. In fact, the word "read" in Moroccan Arabic holds an additional meaning: "to study diligently."

In Moroccan culture, the act of reading is associated with going to school and studying. The terminology is so closely linked that when someone graduates from school, they are described as having completed their "reading." Moreover, because learning to read is inherently synonymous with learning the language, reading literacy is not seen as a separate set of skills that one learns independently from learning the language. In some educational systems (like that in the U.S.), however, reading literacy is taught as an independent subject.

The National Charter for Education and Training,[5] Morocco's fundamental education policy framework, recommends a general, quality education for all children at the age of schooling. The Charter recognizes the importance of preparing for learning to read as early as preschool, where a key objective is:

> *"[A]ctivities preparing learners to acquire reading and writing in the Arabic Language through the mastery of spoken Arabic relying on mother tongues."[6]*

Accordingly, the Arabic language curriculum for the formal sector was adopted to achieve those goals, emphasizing the importance of children's aspirations and their physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive, artistic, and social needs, and putting learners at the center of the educational process. The curriculum promotes children's self-confidence, openness to others, and positive interaction with the social environment, and rewarding hard work and perseverance.

To achieve these goals, Morocco adopted a competency-based curriculum for Arabic language. Competency is achieved through a gradual interaction between the learner, knowledge, and the environment.[7] The ultimate goal is for the learner to achieve mastery through the following principles:

- Learners should interact with knowledge, instead of memorize information.

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[5] Royaume du Maroc. (1999). *La charte nationale d'education et de formation*.
http://www.men.gov.ma/sites/AdministrationCentrale/DAJC/DocLib1/charte/charte_fr.pdf

[6] Article 63, p. 26. Translation by the authors from the original French: "des activités de préparation à l'apprentissage de la lecture et l'écriture en langue arabe, notamment à travers la maîtrise de l'arabe oral, et en s'appuyant sur les langues maternelles"

[7] Gharib, A. (2010). The pedagogy of integration: models and ways of application and assessment. Calam tarbiyyah Publications.

عبدالكريم غريب (2010): بيداغوجيا الإدماج: نماذج وأساليب التطبيق والتقييم، منشورات عالم التربية. ص.

- Learning should be gradual, so that each stage is a foundation for the next.
- Lessons should be complementary so as not to separate grammatical knowledge from the contextual background.
- Learners should acquire the ability to produce original and meaningful Arabic, either in the form of a sentence, a whole structure (short text), or spoken word.[8]

Literacy skills enable individuals to make sense of written texts and to communicate effectively about the text in writing and orally, ultimately opening the door for lifelong learning. Difficulties in reading typically lead to low academic achievement, resulting in higher dropout and lower retention rates.[9,10] Additionally, failure to develop reading skills at an early age can significantly interrupt a child's understanding and performance across all subject areas, including science, math, etc., as lessons, assignments, homework, and so forth become that much more challenging to complete.[11] Moreover, inadequate reading skills in older students are primarily due to a failure to master basic literacy skills in the early grades. For example, a child's ability to decode words in first grade is a strong predictor of adequate reading comprehension in grades 2 and 3 and strong reading comprehension in grade 9.[12] Therefore, effective teaching approaches in the early grades are critical to ensuring that all pupils master basic reading skills for ongoing academic success.

Moreover, several studies have determined that the developmental period between four and eight years of age is considered a critical period for learning reading skills, notably the ability to link a sound to a letter and to decode a group of letters to form a syllable, a word, and finally a sentence.[13] The ability of the child to recognize letters in a variety of contexts will improve phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge, both of which are critical early literacy skills needed to read with fluency and comprehension. This is not to imply that they are the *only* skills of importance, but explicit and direct teaching of these skills will enable the child to benefit more from the kind of immersive and contextualized learning process that the National Charter promotes (see above).

In 1999, Morocco launched a comprehensive reform of the education and training system. The reform succeeded in extending access to primary education for most school-age children in

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[8] The White Book (2002). Known locally as the "*Livre Blanc,*" this is the Moroccan national curriculum document.

[9] National Reading Panel (2000). Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/documents/report.pdf

[10] Ontario Ministry of Education (2003). Early reading strategy: The report of the expert panel on early reading in Ontario. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/reading/

[11] Tibi, S. (2006). [طيبي، سناء عورتاني] Early intervention procedures for the prevention of reading failure. *Arab Journal of Special Education* 8 (1):126-178 [المجلة العربية للتربية][إجراءات التدخل المبكر في الوقاية من الفشل في القراءة]

[12] Honig, B. (1998). Preventing failure in early reading programs: A summary of research and instructional best practice. In W.M. Evers (Ed.), *What's gone wrong in America's classrooms* (pp. 91-116). Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

[13] Brown, D. H. (2000). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy.* Second edition. New York: Longman.

Morocco, with enrollment rates exceeding 95%.[14] However, dropout rates remain high ; it is estimated that only 53% of middle school students will continue on to high school and fewer than 15% of first grade students will graduate from high school.[15] According to the MENFP, it is estimated that 800,000 children under the age of 15 are not schooled at all and that 107,000 children drop out of school before completing compulsory education each year.[16,17]

A study conducted in 2008 by the National Program for the Assessment of Student Achievement in Morocco (PNEA) reported that fourth grade students received an average score of only 27 out of 100 on the Arabic test, concluding that "the answer to questions about academic background in languages, requires the mastery of basic skills in the construction or the selection of correct answers, which requires an early and total effective involvement of students in the reading process."[18]

The USAID-funded Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) study in 2011 confirmed the PNEA's (2008) findings. EGRA assessed student reading in the primary grades in the Moroccan region of Doukkala-Abda and found that only 34 % of these students read well enough for a comprehensive understanding of the text designed for their level. It also revealed that 33% of second graders and 17% of third graders were unable to read a single word in Arabic. Among the 775 pupils surveyed, only 2.5% responded correctly to five out of six reading comprehension questions.[19]

Both studies reveal that poor reading skills among second and third graders can be a result of a combination of complex factors. These are the same as the external and internal factors that contribute to low enrollment of school-age children and school dropout in Morocco. Cerbelle (2012) summarizes the external factors as: the long distance between the school and home, poverty and inability of families to provide for the direct and indirect costs of school, broken families, parents' negative attitudes towards school, poor health of children, migration, early marriage of girls, illiterate parents, and child labor.[20] As to the internal factors, poor reading skills is associated with language barriers due particularly to inadequate instructional methods, given

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[14] World Bank (2013, September 11). *Maintaining momentum on education reform in Morocco.* Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/09/11/maintaining-momentum-on-education-reform-in-morocco

[15] USAID. (2015, March 23). *Morocco: Education*. Retrieved from http://www.usaid.gov/morocco/education

[16] National Agency for Literacy. (2014). Data on the integration of NFE children for 2014/2013, (internal document) معطيات حول إدماج أطفال التربية غير النظامية موسم 2013/2014، كتابة الدولة المكلفة بمحاربة الأمية والتربية غير النظامية.

[17] MENFP. (2011). Outcome of the NFE program, (internal document).
حصيلة برنامج التربية غير النظامية 2011، وثيقة داخلية.

[18] Le Programme National d'évaluation des Acquis (2008) [National Program for Educational Acheivement Testing]. http://www.csefrs.ma/pdf/rap_analyt_VF.pdf

[19] RTI International. (2011). Student performance in reading and mathematics, pedagogic practice, and school management in Doukkala Abda, Morocco. Report prepared for USAID under EdDataII.. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadz049.pdf

[20] Cerbelle, S. (2012). Enfants hors l'école : faible remédiation et faible demande. Le cas du Maroc [Children out of school: weak remediation and low request. A Moroccan case-study], *Cahiers de la recherche sur l'éducation et les savoirs*, 11:149-167. http://cres.revues.org/2221

the fact that most students are not using the language of instruction at home. Internal factors also relate to the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student,[21] low number of contact hours as a result of teachers' absenteeism, poor teacher training programs, and poorly developed curriculum. In addition, pupils may face an unsafe school environment and poor school infrastructure (lack of electricity, drinking water, and toilets). [22] Finally, a lack of stimulating reading textbooks also contributes to the lack of reading skill.[23,24]

A MENFP study of characteristics of children in NFE[25] reported that the reasons behind high dropout rates are related to the economic and social situation of the family, as well as to school and learning-related factors (***Exhibit 1***).

Exhibit 1:   Reasons for dropout in formal education

Reasons for dropout	Percentage
Learning difficulties	41%
Social/economic	30%
Violence at school (peers, teachers, etc.)	19%
Dysfunctional family and lack of social or geographical stability	11%

UNDP highlights the crucial role that basic education plays in the community development process. Basic education is at the heart of the human development process. Reading is the main indicator of the quality of education. It is an essential and primary part of the curriculum in all schools all over the world. According to Wagner (2011), "[P]oor reading in primary school is among the most powerful predictors of future disadvantage in terms of educational, social, and economic outcomes because literacy is the gateway to advancement and job opportunities." [26]

In 2006, the Secretary of State in charge of combating illiteracy submitted, in partnership with UNICEF, a report on the economic benefits of education. The report affirms the country's benefit from education: each additional year of school per child will result in a wage increase of 12.7%

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[21] MENFP, Directorate of NFE (2007). The peculiarities of NF children and how to address them; Cerbell, 2012.
خصوصيات أطفال التربية غير النظامية وسبل التعامل معها 2007، مديرية التربية غير النظامية، تمت الطباعة بمساهمة منظمة العمل الدولية.

[22] Cerbelle, S. (2012)

[23] Abadzi, H. (2006). Efficient learning for the poor: Insights from the frontier of cognitive neuroscience. Washington, DC: World Bank. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2006/06/6892301/efficient-learning-poor-insights-frontier-cognitive-neuroscience

[24] RTI International. (2011)

[25] NFE, 2007. The characteristics of children in non-formal education. p. 18 .
خصوصيات أطفال التربية غير النظامية وسبل التعامل معها. مصوغة تكوينية لفائدة منشطات ومنشطي التربية غير النظامية 2007، مديرية التربية غير النظامية، قسم التكوين ومناهج التربية غير النظامية.

[26] Wagner, A. D. (2011). Smaller, quicker, cheaper Improving learning assessments for developing countries, International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris.

in the future.[27] Children who have been deprived of school are doomed to work in low-paying jobs or move between "disguised" employment (e.g., the illegally or occasionally self-employed such as ambulant merchants, retail cigarettes venders, shoe polishers, etc.), unemployment, and socially undervalued jobs.

As noted above, a considerable number of children drop out of school due to learning difficulties, such as inability to decode and spell words correctly and poor performance in math and the sciences. These data reinforce current research that students with difficulties in learning to read have inadequate learning in other subjects and are more likely to drop out of school. In fact, third grade is a "determining and crucial phase as far as school dropout is concerned."[28] Children who continue to experience reading difficulties in level 3 are less likely to catch up, and are more likely to fall further behind their peers and drop out of school. Therefore, it is crucial to detect these difficulties early.

1.2   Theoretical framework

Direct and explicit teaching of reading

Research in the field of reading education suggests the importance of developing basic reading skills in the early grades.[29] In order to develop these skills, students need to be provided with meaningful opportunities to engage with the oral language and written texts. Teachers play a key role in this process. The direct teaching of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the early grades is based on a set of steps that monitor students' progress throughout the reading process, while creating meaningful interactions between the student, teacher, and text. This type of teaching includes the following elements:

- Focusing on one skill or learning a specific item (vocabulary or a letter, or uttering a sound, etc.)
- Progressing through a logical sequence of skills, from the easy to the difficult
- Setting up and communicating clear objectives for pupils to achieve before the start of the lesson activities
- Reviewing pupils' previous knowledge and skills before the start of a new lesson
- Presenting a model of skills and deciding on the steps to learn them
- Using clear language that the pupil understands (for example, free of rhetorical techniques and technical jargon)

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[27] Gouzi, A., Aoufi, El Aoufi, N. (2006). La non scolarisation au Maroc : Une analyse en termes de coût d'opportunité. Secrétariat d'Etat auprès du Ministre de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Formation des Cadres et de la Recherche Scientifique Chargé de l'Alphabétisation et de l'Éducation Non Formelle and UNICEF. http://www.unicef.org/morocco/french/La_non_scolarisation_au_Maroc.pdf

[28] NFE. (2007: 10).

[29] National Reading Panel, 2000.

- Monitoring pupils' progress and providing feedback that will enable pupils to improve their performance

Direct and explicit teaching of the five components of reading, which will be explained in the following section, has been proven effective in promoting reading skills in alphabetic languages. Direct instruction is a family of approaches that explicitly expose the learner to smaller units of the learning material before proceeding to larger units.[30] It is complementary to, not a replacement for, communicative approaches that encourage practice listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The five components of reading

Research shows that effective reading instruction in all alphabetic languages includes (but is not limited to) five key elements, presented below.[31]

Phonemic awareness: Phonemic awareness is an understanding of sound structure of language and the ability to fragment this structure into individual units of sounds (phonemes). To build phonemic awareness, it is necessary to know that words are composed of sounds that characterize the oral language and that words are made by combining those sounds, which can be manipulated by means of deletion, addition, and substitution. While phonemic awareness refers to the smallest units of sound, phonological awareness encompasses the understanding that words are made up of larger "chunks," such as syllables. A syllable is a unit of speech sounds made of a vowel and one or more consonants. This means that syllables are larger sound units compared to phonemes. If we exclude the case endings at the end of words, the word سَدّ *sadd* "dam" is considered monosyllabic, the word رَئيس *ra'iis* "president" is disyllabic, and the word مَدْرَسة *madrasa* "school" is trisyllabic, etc. Pupils' ability to read one syllable is their first step to learning to read a word.

As Arabic is a transparent alphabetic language (as opposed to English for example) where, for the most part, each sound is represented by one character and each character represents one sound, learning how to fragment words by converting letters into syllables and then combining them to read a word will help pupils develop their ability to read words more quickly and accurately. This quick reading of syllables and words enables pupils to read texts fluently, which in turn, is associated with reading comprehension.

Phonological awareness activities can continue on and be embedded within reading activities throughout the early years. Literacy skills develop on a continuum, and build upon one another; therefore, continuous reinforcement and practice are essential.

Activities that support the development of phonological awareness, in the absence of printed text, include the following:

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Learning Point (2004). A closer look at the five essential components of effective reading instruction: A review of scientifically-based reading research for teachers. Naperville: Learning Point Associates. http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/literacy/components.pdf

- Distinguishing between two words: Pupils listen to two words and try to distinguish whether they begin with the same sound or not, for example, [باسم] *baasim* "Basim" — [بارع] *baaric* "talented" and [رسم] *rasama* "he drew" — [أكل] *'akala* "he ate."

- Toning: Pupils listen to words with the same intonation to develop their ability to come up with other words that have the same tone, for example,([نار] *naar* "fire" — [جار] *jaar* "neighbor", and [رأس] *ra's* "head" — [فأس] *fa's* "axe."

- Counting: Pupils count syllables that make up a word, such as [كِتَابٌ] "*kitaabun* "book," which consists of three syllables.

- Combining: Pupils separate the sounds and blend them together to read the whole word, for example, [مَزْ / رَ / عَة] *maz /ra /ca* or [مَزْرَعَة] *mazraca* "farm."

- Fragmenting: Pupils read a word quickly and then separate the sounds out, for example, (*mazraca* "farm") then (*maz /ra /ca*).

- Deletion: Pupils listen to a word and then are asked to delete the first sound and repeat the new word, for example, [كمال] *kamaal* "Kamal" — [مال] *maal* "money."

- Addition: Pupils listen to a word and then are asked to add a sound to it and read the new word, for example, [جَـ + مال] *ja +maal=* [جَمال] *jamaal* "beauty."

- Substitution: Pupils listen to a word and then are asked to substitute the last sound with a different one. For example, they can replace the last sound in [أمواج] *'amwaaj, "*waves," with the sound [l] to get a new word, [أموال] 'amwaal, *"*money."

Studies conducted in this field have shown a strong correlation between a student's level of phonological awareness in the early grades and future reading acquisition.[32,33] A child is more likely to grasp other skills and concepts of reading when there is a strong understanding of how sounds and letters operate in oral language and print. When analyzing textbooks, we look for evidence of activities such as these, which develop phonemic awareness.

Alphabetic principle: The alphabetic principle refers to the relationship between sound and symbol. Letter-sound knowledge is prerequisite to effective word recognition in alphabetic languages.[34] Teaching the alphabetic principle includes the pronunciation of letters as sounds and blending letter sounds together to form words. Direct and explicit teaching of predictable letter-sound relationship is more effective than implicit teaching and helps improve students' ability to read words.[35] It also supports spelling.

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[32] Cunningham, P.M. and Cunningham, J.W. (2002). What we know about how to teach phonics. In A.E. Farstrup & S.J. Samuels (Eds.), *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 87–109).

[33] Fountas, I. C., and Pinnell, G. S. (2006). *Leveled books (K-8): Matching texts to readers for effective teaching.* Portsmouth: Heinemann.

[34] Juel, C. (1991). Beginning reading. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 759-788). New York: Longman.

[35] Armbruster, B. and Osborn, J. (2001). Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read. Kindergarten through Grade 3. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/html/prfteachers/reading_first1.html

Phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle are essential elements to teach reading. Learning basic literacy skills such as letter-sound combinations, and accurate and quick recognition of words, ultimately leads to reading with fluency and comprehension. Acquiring these skills enables beginner readers to decode automatically, and this allows them to direct cognitive resources to linking words with each other and focusing on meaning.

Vocabulary: Children begin to acquire listening and speaking vocabularies long before they begin to develop reading and writing vocabularies. Beginning with home language and parental support, the larger a child's vocabulary, the more likely that child is to be an effective and successful reader.[36] Direct teaching of vocabulary in level 1 is important because pupils' understanding of the meaning of spoken words increases their ability to recognize them in print (based on their knowledge of the letter-sound correspondence) and subsequently to comprehend a text. This element is particularly important when the language of reading instruction is not the language the child uses most in the home and community. Strong command of speaking and listening skills in the language of reading will help develop reading competency.

Teachers can achieve measurable results when they teach vocabulary by

- introducing new vocabulary words on a regular basis;
- pointing out context, semantics, vocabulary maps, vocabulary networks, and morphology (word roots) in relationship to vocabulary;
- providing opportunities to practice the use of learned vocabulary in meaningful ways;
- teaching vocabulary, including frequent sight words, as part of daily curriculum; and
- reading aloud and encouraging students to read a wide variety of texts and use vocabulary words in different contexts.

Vocabulary is an important factor in determining the level of difficulty of the text. The strong relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary learning and knowledge from prior experience[37] has a direct impact on overall academic achievement. The lower the vocabulary skills of a child, the less able he or she is to read with fluency and comprehension. For example, texts that include more abstract words than concrete words are more likely to prove difficult to be understood by early graders. Some guidelines suggest is that if a child picks up a book and can't understand 5 words on the second page, then the text is too difficult.[38] Children who struggle with vocabulary read less since it is harder to understand the text, which in turn reduces the chances of enriching vocabulary skills.

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[36] Sénéchal, M. and LeFevre, J. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child development*. 73(2): 445-460.

[37] Hirsh, E. (2003, Spring). Reading comprehension requires knowledge—Of words and the world. Scientific insights into the fourth-grade slump and the nation's stagnant comprehension scores. *American Educator*. http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Hirsch.pdf

[38] Davidson, M. (2013). Books that children can read: Decodable books and book leveling. Report prepared for USAID by Aguirre Division of JBS International. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00jw1v.pdf

Fluency: Fluency refers to the rapid (i.e., fluid, not hesitant) and accurate reading of letters, sounds, words, sentences, and paragraphs, and is a demonstration of mastered reading. Pupils need to learn to decode single and contextual words automatically and accurately to become fluent readers.[39] Some ways in which teachers can support the development of fluency include

- giving students the opportunity for repeated reading, followed by support and feedback; and
- determining the pupils' reading level, and providing them with appropriate texts.

Reading with fluency is associated with students' ability to understand what they have read.[40] Slow, hesitant reading is a sign that all cognitive resources are being spent on the decoding process, leaving few resources with which to focus on meaning. When a child achieves automatic recognition of words, more words—and their meaning—can be held in short-term memory and processed for reading comprehension.[41]

Reading comprehension: Reading comprehension is a complex thinking process through which readers make meaning out of the text. As mentioned above, Hirsch (2003) emphasizes the importance of the mental process, which includes activating the prior knowledge and linking it with other heard and read information to achieve reading comprehension. Therefore, reading comprehension includes direct and inferential understanding. Bloom[42] classified cognitive learning domains into six levels, which can be applied to reading comprehension. The first three levels are considered minimum levels of knowledge, while the last three require proficiency in the lower levels.

1. Knowledge: Remembering facts, names, and examples and reciting them from memory when needed

2. Comprehension: Understanding the meaning of prior knowledge, demonstrated through rephrasing information in one's own words or interpreting instructions

3. Application: Using the learned concepts in new situations and contexts

4. Analysis: Classifying text into detailed elements in order to understand its organizational structure and deduce conclusions, classify assumptions

5. Evaluation: Judging the value of a specific text for a particular purpose; critiquing and interpreting the value of the ideas

6. Synthesis and creation: Creating new knowledge by combining and integrating concepts, or in reading, combining words and sentences in original compositions

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[39] Hirsh, E. (2003).

[40] Vaughn, S. and Thompson, S. (2004). *Research-based methods of reading instruction. Grades K-3*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

[41] Hirsh, E. (2003).

[42] Bloom, B.S. (Ed.). Engelhart, M.D., Furst, E.J., Hill, W.H., Krathwohl, D.R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives, Handbook I: The cognitive domain.* New York: David McKay Co Inc.

Other elements of textbook analysis

The textbooks were also analyzed according to whether or not and how the following elements are presented.

Values and issues: The NFE curriculum aims to produce righteous, just, and civically engaged citizens who are eager to learn and acquire more knowledge, who are avid to participate in the development of their country, and who are aware of their duties and rights. It is important for the curriculum to instill in learners the sets of values that are age appropriate and derived from their surroundings.

Gender: Socially constructed gender refers to the various rights, responsibilities, and roles performed by women and men and the relationships between them; in other words, gender issues are not simply issues of male vs. female, but also concern how society and culture define the coexistence of men and women and shape their behaviors and identities. The curriculum can be regarded as a vehicle for the social construction of positive and equitable gender representations—as stipulated in the National Charter for Education and Training: "Declared principles and rights of children, women, and humans in general are respected in all education and training facilities as provided for in international treaties and conventions ratified by the Kingdom of Morocco" (p. 15). The Charter also aims to "Achieve equity between citizens and provide them with equal opportunities, and preserve the right to education for all girls and boys both in the countryside and in cities in conformity with the Constitution of the Kingdom" (p. 16).

Textbook design: The extent to which textbooks vary in terms of attractiveness, selection of pictures, illustrations, and images, font type, and size of printed texts. Textbooks must be designed to accommodate the levels and abilities of the pupils, keeping all of these particulars in mind.[43,44]

1.3   About this study

Objectives

This study aims to examine the reading component in the level 1 and 2 textbooks and facilitator's guide of non-formal education, and to highlight their compatibility with

- the Pedagogical Principles set in the Curriculum of the Arabic Language cited in the White Book 2002 for Primary Education in comparison with the curriculum adopted in NFE; and
- the terms of reference adopted to produce textbooks.[45]

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[43] USAID (2014). Best practices for developing supplemental reading materials. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JV69.pdf

[44] Slade, T. (2014). Components of an effective textbook for early grade reading. Invited presentation for the The State-of-the-Art Workshop about Early Grade Reading in Morocco. Rabat, November 2014. https://www.eddataglobal.org/video/index.cfm#textbook

[45] Choices and Orientations of Non-formal Education Curricula (2004)

To meet these goals, this study intends to

- shed light on the curriculum and how to improve it in light of recent developments in the teaching methods of reading;
- describe the pedagogical approach adopted in teaching Arabic in the non-formal sector and its suitability for the needs of learners; and
- identify the necessary criteria to assess and analyze textbooks.

This analysis was based on a set of criteria that are used to verify whether the teaching of reading in textbooks and related guides used in NFE settings is explicit or implicit. The analysis has also raised a number of questions such as: What are the criteria for evaluating the quality of teaching Arabic language to elementary grades in NFE? Do textbooks keep up with the progress of academic research in the field of teaching reading skills? And how well do learners acquire reading skills in the early years of NFE?

Follow-up questions to those listed above include the following:

- What are the general specifications and criteria of school textbooks?
- What are the proposed standards to assess and analyze textbooks?
- Is improving the quality of textbooks enough to teach reading tools to pupils and turn them into independent readers?
- Is it possible to develop children's reading skills in the absence of a teacher specialized in these skills?

Educational materials are the core tools that help pupils achieve the goals of the curriculum.[46] Therefore, reviewing textbooks is essential to further understanding how and what children are being taught and to providing recommendations to improve the quality of education children are receiving.

Scope of the study

The current study was limited to the analysis of the guiding framework of the MENFP's *Choices and Orientations of Non-formal Education Curricula (2004)*, and the level 1 and 2 learner's textbooks of the School Reintegration Program (which is one among the four NFE programs: School Reintegration; Vocational Training Integration; Curriculum for Rural Children; and Social Integration) in Morocco (see footnotes 1 and 2). The current study also assessed the facilitator's guides (see footnotes 3 and 4).

This analysis discussed the placement test for assigning students to the appropriate levels. However, this study did not evaluate the students' actual reading skills, nor did it conduct class

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- اختيارات وتوجهات مديرية التربية غير النظامية، 2004، مديرية التربية غير النظامية.

[46] Halas, D. (2007). Standards for textbook quality and specifications for early grade students. (in Arabic). Available at: https://uqu.edu.sa/fabughdadi/ar/35402

observations to characterize classroom reading instruction and the pedagogical tools made available for the instructor.

Methodology and procedures

A working group made up of a consultant from AUI, an expert from Research Triangle Institute (RTI), and the NFE staff at MNEFP carried out the textbook analysis. The two facilitators presented the theoretical framework, introduced reading concepts and methods, and discussed the framework of the study, as well as how to use the analysis tools.

The framework of the study and its tools and procedures were first presented to the Department of Non-formal Education for discussion, feedback, and guidance. Afterwards, the two facilitators carried out the task of analyzing first and second grade curricula adopted by the Department. A workshop was held December 22–26, 2014, and weekly meetings were held from January to March 2015 to introduce some concepts about reading and methods to teach reading skills, and to present and discuss the framework of the study and the analysis tools. Participants were trained in analysis mechanisms and use of the tools. They also were divided into groups tasked with analyzing the textbook of a particular grade, submitting data and analysis, and writing a report about the results of the study.

The study was conducted in two phases:

- Phase I: The analysis focused on determining the type and nature of the vocabulary, then extracting the sentences and paragraphs from the text.
- Phase II: The study focused on the content of texts, reading comprehension, and assessment. In the end, the analysis laid particular stress on providing and analyzing data and writing a report on the results of the study.

The current study analyzes the first three units of the two textbooks based on a set of themes and sub-themes including the following:

- Text readability: including vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs, styles, the nature of texts, scientific terminology, and the morals learned from the lesson
- Distribution of goals according to Bloom's cognitive levels: recall, understand, apply, analyze, construct, and assess
- Objectives set in a procedural fashion: Specific – Measurable – Achievable (non-complex) – Realistic – and Timely (or SMART)
- Objectives focused on developing language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking
- Assessment: selecting assessment tools
- Artistic adaptation of textbooks: including images, graphics, font, font size, layout, colors contrast, and the quality of paper

The study collected and analyzed data in relation to the various reading components. The tools adopted are related to the following points:

- Formulation and arrangement of competencies in the facilitator's guide

- Values contained in the texts

- Issues raised by the texts in terms of their adequacy and suitability for the level of learners

- Gender dimensions: equality of representation of gender in texts content, images, and illustrations; absence of incitement to violence against one of the sexes

- Sentences: number of words, complexity: simple/complex or informative/rhetorical

- Vocabulary: repetition in the three units; type (concrete, abstract, or conjunctions)

- Textbook design: textbook shape and size; font, font size, and writing aesthetics; images and illustrations: size, beauty, and relevance to the content

2. Non-formal education in Morocco

2.1 History and beneficiaries

The NFE programs were introduced in Morocco in 1997–1998 to improve the situation of out-of-school children by providing them a second chance for reintegration into the formal educations system. These programs are implemented through contractual partnerships with civil society associations that are responsible for attracting the targeted individuals, opening and managing classes, and signing contracts with educational facilitators to advise these children according to the curricula established by the MENFP. The Ministry provides financial support to these associations in order to meet the expenses of implementation, supervision, and training of educational facilitators. In addition, the Ministry monitors and assesses the implementation of the projects.

NFE programs have changed significantly over the last decade and a half in terms of approach, performance, and number of beneficiaries. The number of students in second chance and remedial schooling went from 33,177 in 2009 to 47,088 in 2014 (***Exhibit 2***).

Exhibit 2:   Evolution of the number of beneficiaries of NFE
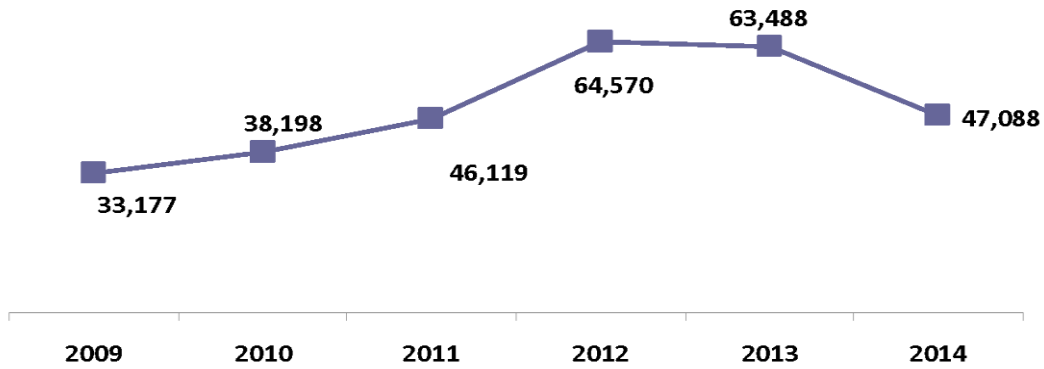
Source: Results from NFE Directorate report for 2013–2014

As a result, the rate of reintegration into formal schools has increased from 5% in 1998–1999 to 33% in 2012–2013 (***Exhibit 3***).

Exhibit 3:   The evolution of the reintegration into formal education
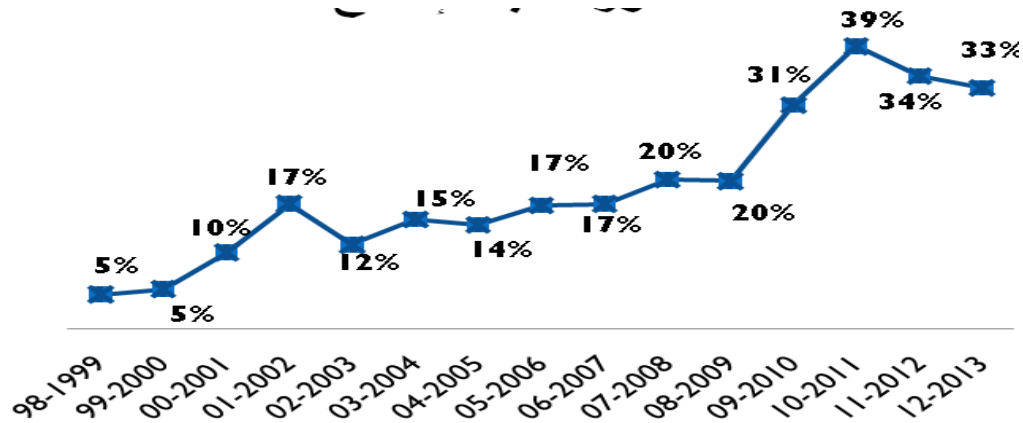
Source: Results from the NFE program (November 2013)

The number of partner associations has increased from 34 during the first two years to 412 during 2013–2014 as shown in the table below (***Exhibit 4***).

**Exhibit 4:   General data on partner associations for the NFE "Second Chance"
reintegration program (2013–2014)**

Academy/delegation	Number of partner associations	Number of beneficiaries	Number of facilitators	Number of centers
Academy of Oued Eddahab Lagouira	2	350	12	5

Academy of Laayoune Boujdour Saqia al hamra	4	477	20	20
Academy of Guelmim Essmara	12	475	25	21
Academy of Souss Massa Daraa	21	17,122	467	415
Academy of Gharb Chrarda Bni Hssein	12	913	37	34
Academy of Chaouia Ouardigha	68	2,033	83	74
Academy of Marrakech Tansift El Houz	21	3,675	135	126
Academy of the oriental region	41	3,120	128	113
Academy of Grand Casablanca	31	1,966	80	50
Academy of Rabat Sale Zemmour Zaers	33	2,298	92	71
Academy of Doukkala Abda	14	2,307	94	91
Academy of Tadla Azilal	33	2,077	68	66
Academy of Meknes Tafilalet	30	3,736	195	180
Academy of Fes Boulemane	20	1,180	48	41
Academy of El Houceima Taounate	26	2,389	100	93
Academy of Tangier Tetouan	42	2,970	141	129
General total	408	47,088	1,725	1,529

Beneficiaries: Children and adolescents targeted by NFE programs constitute a heterogeneous group. This group is generally characterized by psychological instability, economic and social vulnerability, and social disadvantage. A number of children live in rehabilitation centers and orphanages. A large number of beneficiaries are students who have dropped out or "failed" in formal school settings. These can be further classified into the following categories:

- Marginalized children in socially vulnerable situations: homeless children; orphans; children living in centers for child protection; children working agriculture, handicraft, domestic, and trade jobs

- Children threatened by social vulnerability and marginalization, from socially and economically disadvantaged families

- Children who dropped out or failed out of the formal school system who need additional educational guidance

- Children in rural and semi-urban areas, especially those facing significant financial hardships and social vulnerability, which impede their ability to benefit from formal schooling (NFE programs give priority to this last category).

Classes are made up of children who have attended formal schools and those who have not. Children who attended formal school take a placement test, administered by a facilitator or association, for placement within learning centers at the appropriate level (1–3). Children who have never attended school do not take a test and are placed in level 1 classes. The levels are described below.

- **Level 1**: Children placed in this level cannot read and write; their time in formal education, if they had any, was not sufficient for the development of basic skills.

- **Level 2**: Children placed in this level can read, write, and can do simple counting, but are not able to fully understand what they read or count. These students typically struggle

with comprehension skills and have difficulty expressing what they have learned through written and oral activities.

- **Level 3**: Children who can read, write, and count well enough to understand and express the content and represent it in both written and oral activities. They have the ability to talk about what they read and write, and can reflect on the instructions given to them, whether in the written or oral expression activities.

Since the correct placement of a student plays a crucial role in his or her likelihood of reintegration into the formal system, this study also looked at the Arabic placement test to better determine its reliability.

2.2   Learner's placement test

The NFE Arabic Language Placement Test is conceived to help place students in their appropriate levels depending on the results they obtained in the test. This kind of test is not administered in formal education. It has been endorsed since January 2000 and consists of 64 questions equally divided among two parts. The questions of part one of the language test can be divided into dictation and copying, grammar, general knowledge, reading, writing, and vocabulary.

Exhibit 5 below presents model questions used in the language placement test; there is one test for all levels.

Exhibit 5:   Example questions from the placement test

Exercise	Model
Dictation and copying	Question 1 : Write clearly each of the following letters: [مَ] 'ma', [هُ] 'hu', [جـ] 'ci' Question 2 : Write the following words correctly in the space provided: [درهَم] 'dirham, [شَجَرة] 'tree', and [عَيْن] 'eye' Question 4 : Write the following sentence in the space provided: [تَلْعبُ زينب بالدمية] 'Zeinab plays with the doll'
Grammar	Question 9 : Complete the beginning of the words with either an epenthetic 'alif [ا] or a hamza [أ]
General knowledge	Question 15 : Circle the tools that the carpenter uses: [مقص] 'scissors', [مطرقة] 'hammer', [متر] 'meter', [إبرة] 'needle', [مسمار] 'nail', [خيط] 'thread'
Reading	Question 11 : Arrange the scrambled words to obtain a complete sentence: [أحمد] 'Ahmed' – [الرسالة] 'the message' – [في] 'in' – [الظرف] 'the envelope' – [وضع] 'puts' Question 13 is about a table with two columns, where the first column consists of weather icons and the second column presents days of the week. Students are asked to choose the correct answer out of four choices. The question is on which days this very cloudy weather is going to be: a. [الإثنين] 'Monday', [الثلاثاء] 'Tuesday', [السبت] 'Saturday' ; b. [الإثنين] 'Monday', [السبت] 'Saturday', [الأحد] 'Sunday' ; c. [الإثنين] 'Monday', [الأربعاء] 'Wednesday', [السبت] 'Saturday' ; d. [الأربعاء] 'Wednesday', [السبت] 'Saturday', [الأحد] 'Sunday'
Writing	Question 31: Your friend who has dropped out of school has decided to register in the NFE program. Help him fill out the form.
Vocabulary	Question 12: Circle the word that matches the picture.

Exhibit 6 presents the distribution of the questions in the Arabic language placement test.

Exhibit 6: **Distribution of questions in the NFE Arabic Language Placement Test**
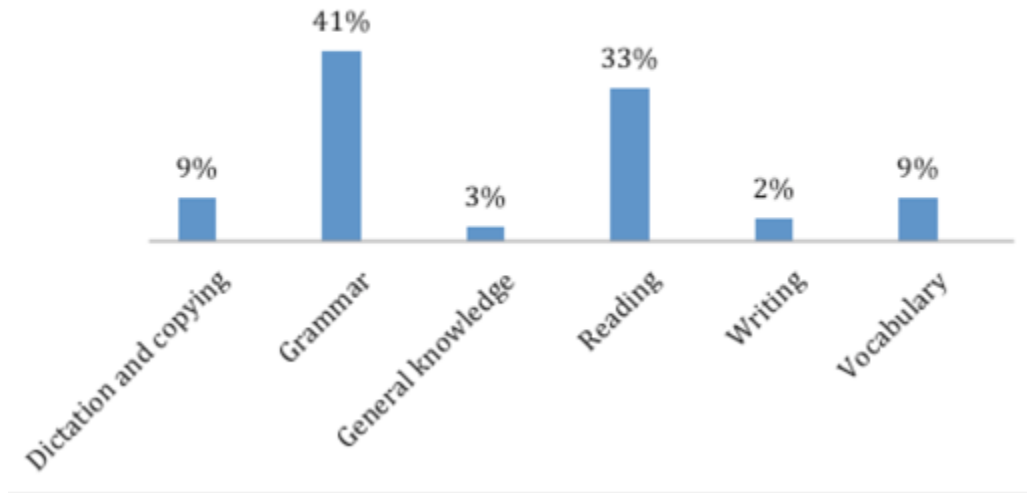
The grammar component of the test features 26 questions (41%); 21 for comprehension (33%); the test has 6 questions for vocabulary and 6 for dictation and copying (9% each). Only 3 questions are devoted to writing (2%) and only 2 to general knowledge. A general knowledge question might ask pupils to select one out of four from the following: 1. Temperature increases in autumn; 2. Temperature decreases in winter; 3. Dust rises in winter; 4. Tree leaves fall in winter. The test does not measure oral communication skills.

The White Book (2002) defines the curricular competencies that should be promoted at each grade and stipulates that instruction on stylistic structures and grammar should occur implicitly: "Indirect instruction of stylistic structures within the limits of the learner's level, physical and mental age." In other words, the White Book focuses on the importance of implicit, and not direct, grammar instruction. However, the NFE Arabic Language Placement Test presents direct grammar questions, a fact that is inconsistent with the White Book's principle of implicitness. *Exhibit 7* shows some of the questions that reflect this inconsistency between the curriculum and the test.

Exhibit 7:   Example questions from the placement text (Continued)

Question 46 :	Complete each sentence with the appropriate grammatical specification [التمييز] in the brackets: (من اللبن ـ لبنا) . . . . شربتُ كوباً 'I drank a cup…… (of milk – milk)' (من حيث الثمنُ ـ ثمنا) . . الحرير أغلى من الصوف Silk is more expensive than wool…..(in price – price);
Question 47 :	Circle the word that can be the 'verbal noun' (*maSdr*) for each of the following verbs: To extract / a.extracted/ b.extraction / c.exit استخرج أ. مُستَخرَجٌ ب. إستخراج ج. خروج To come / a.coming / b.acceptance / c. approach أقبل أ. مُقبل ب. قَبول ج. إقبالٌ

The large number of grammar questions implies that students are being placed based on grammar knowledge rather than reading skills, and in fact, the format of the placement test assumes a certain reading fluency.

The results of the test help in the placement of children in one of the three official instructional levels in the NFE program, defined above. The test brings to light certain issues with those levels:

- **Level 1**: The definition provided of this level is an absence of any skills; since the placement test is a written test, presumably children who cannot complete any question are considered "non-readers." However, this does not help identify what, if any, component skills they might have. Moreover, it does not define the intended learning outcomes at the end of each grade.

- **Level 2**: The identification of this level is mostly ambiguous. Basic counting, reading, and writing are not measured on an equal basis.

- **Level 3**: There are no official standards for determining the quality of reading, writing, and counting for placement in level 3. The placement test is not progressive in structure, or questions don't progress from easy, to difficult, to most difficult. The limited number of written exercises in the placement test make it difficult to diagnose writing ability, and the role the direct grammar questions play in assessing reading, writing, and comprehension is difficult to determine.

All NFE learners need prerequisite academic support to smooth their transition to their appropriate formal education grade equivalent. To help the students progress through the NFE levels, each level should be more specifically defined and measured, with the following:

- Conditions for assignment at each level, including the first level (basic skills)

- Measurable learning outcomes for each level

- Performance indicators for each level

- The profile of NFE program graduates.

Admission to any formal education grade must be predicated on the acquisition of a set of required skills and basic knowledge. In the absence of these skills, pupils should receive academic support and intervention lessons prior to school entry so that they are equipped to follow the lessons.

Learners should be placed in levels based on:

- A placement test that determines ability on the basis of the learning outcomes for each level; and
- An exit test to assess skill acquired by the learner throughout study in the NFE program.

Exhibit 8 shows the age ranges of students in both formal education (FE) grades and NFE levels. Pupils targeted by the NFE reading curriculum are between 6 and 8 years old (which is consistent with official international standards for reading instruction). The actual age of NFE program children, however, ranges between 9 and 15 years old.

Exhibit 8:   Age ranges for FE and NFE grades and levels

FE level	Age in FE	NFE level	Age in NFE
1	6 years	1	9 and 15 years
2	7 years		
3	8 years	2	9 and 15 years
4	9 years		
5	10 years	3	11 and 15 years
6	11 years		

Children benefit from studying throughout three NFE program levels, where each level is equal to two of the FE grades. The NFE intervention strategy focuses on basic and functional learning (reading, writing, and math) to qualify children for direct reintegration in the formal education system. As a second chance, it allows beneficiaries to reclaim what they had difficulty in gaining during the past; learners can thus move more quickly through the curriculum. Moreover, NFE program learners are older, and their relative maturity enables them to participate with greater focus.

In general, the NFE learners possess more general knowledge and life skills than the elementary school children in the formal system. There is an assumption that this group acquires reading much faster because of the richness of these learners' distinctive vocabulary in comparison with that of younger children. The following question is pertinent: Are methods of acquiring reading for children between 6 and 8 years old (children registered in formal education) similar to, or different from, those of NFE program children whose ages range between 9 and 15 years?

In the absence of studies in Morocco around general reading skill acquisition for this age group (Wagner, 2013), it would be important to examine the level of word recognition and the type of

errors these learners make in identifying words in texts or in reading samples. It is necessary to research whether all NFE children learners tend to use visual or alphabetic strategies when faced with problems in identifying the word, whether they seek to decode the symbols and use other phonemic strategies to identify the words and spelling, or whether they have other techniques and strategies to decode word symbols. That was not the scope of this study, but the analysis of the textbooks does suggest a lack of evidence base for developing curricula and materials for this particular target group.

NFE instructional materials should be developed to take into account the more advanced age and maturity of NFE program learners. These materials should still be leveled to cover all the component skills of reading in order of difficulty, and in ways that accommodate the ages of the learners in the different NFE program levels. The NFE Arabic Language Placement Test should be revised to more accurately assess ability in the particular reading skills, in line with expected ability at each level.

2.3   NFE managers' and facilitators' training

The MENFP provides training for those in charge of NFE in all the NFE program centers throughout the country. Those who are directly involved in NFE are members of partner associations (civil society organizations [CSOs]) who are appointed or volunteer to act as members of staff or facilitators, heads of central and external offices in charge of NFE programs at regional and provincial levels, and the various members of staff in the NFE.

These actors are called "facilitators,"[47] not teachers or instructors, as they are in charge of a number of duties in addition to teaching academic subjects in class. For example, they are in charge of recruiting vulnerable children from anywhere they can find them (homes, the street, CSO shelters, etc.). The facilitators must convince children and their parents or legal guardians to join the NFE centers and participate in any one of the programs. They also play the role of counselors who provide psychological support for the children throughout their time in the centers. They follow up with the children's academic progress and social reintegration process, even when the children leave the NFE center. They may even look for a child who has dropped out of the NFE program for any reason and try to help that child return to the NFE center.

These facilitators are, in fact, very much like "social workers" whose job is to empower vulnerable children academically, socially, and psychologically and enhance their wellbeing. They are considered to be the pedagogical and social actors who are the closest to and most understanding of children's problems in the open learning centers; therefore, they are the focal point on which all training strategies and approaches have been shaped since the launch of the NFE program in 1997.

An individual who wishes to become a facilitator

- must obtain a baccalaureate degree or higher (i.e., any university level degree);

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[47] For convenience, this report may use the term "teacher" at times. It can be assumed that "teacher" and "facilitator" are synonymous in the context of this report.

- may have a university degree in any academic specialization;
- may or may not have basic training in teaching;
- may or may not have prior knowledge of NFE;
- should have a certain degree of flexibility to travel.

In short, the facilitators should demonstrate a fair degree of communicative and social competence as well as a propensity to develop necessary pedagogical skills. They should also possess assessment capabilities so they can monitor the children's progress. The training is expected to develop the above competencies and abilities to make the NFE center feel like a second (or even first) home. The ultimate objective is to have all the children finish the NFE program so that they can reintegrate in formal school and society at large.

The training that the facilitators receive is focused; it provides them with ideas and skills (e.g., communication strategies) to learn how to identify and cater to children's academic and other needs. The facilitators' training is usually administered in the following way:

Three training sessions are planned each academic year:

1. At the beginning of each academic year (September–October)
2. In the middle of the academic year (February–March)
3. At the end of the academic year (June–July)

Each training session consists of three days of six hours per day. In each training, facilitators benefit from a total of 54 hours per training. Each training session is preceded by the inspector's visit to the classrooms to identify problems and needs. After each visit, the agenda of the training session is established.

The first training benefits newly hired facilitators as well as the continuing ones. The training is split into two sessions so each group benefits from the training. In general, newly hired facilitators benefit from topics such as: learner's specifications, curriculum management, teaching methods, and the role of the facilitator. The continuing facilitators may be trained in such areas as the methodology of teaching, new child recruitment, and ways of dealing with difficult situations such as learning disabilities, etc.

The second training during the school year is also preceded by the inspector's visit to classrooms. A new agenda is set for the training based on the facilitators' needs and the inspectors' assessment of the situation and their classroom observation. In general, the second training session covers mainly issues related to methodology, classroom activities, the implementation of the competency-based approach in classrooms, archiving and planning, and student's assessment. It also tackles the immediate challenges met in classrooms during the inspector's visit and the best practices to solve them.

The third and last visit occurs at the end of the academic year mainly in June–July. Both the inspector and the facilitator assess the students' learning gains, their personal project, and identify

the students who will be integrated in the formal education or the vocational training program and those who will stay in the same level. After this visit, the training session will focus on deepening and expanding the facilitator's knowledge and addressing topics related to the NFE program, such as preparing students for integration in the formal education or vocational training.

After each training the facilitators receive a certificate of participation in recognition of their work and involvement in the training.

The facilitators are expected to prepare reports on children's needs and send them to NFE management. The professional competencies that NFE facilitators are required to possess (Referential Plan for Training, 2012: 52) by the end of the training are as follows:

- Possess a good command of communication techniques to form communities/groups of children in NFE and know the procedures for analysis of problems, needs, and categorization according to category indicators

- Have theoretical and practical knowledge about approaches to analyzing NFE curricula and programs and about procedures and techniques for planning, structuration, programming learning/instructive situations and patterns according to the competency-based approach

- Be knowledgeable about concepts and contents for learning the subjects programmed for NFE classes, and be able to convert them into situations and activities for learning and acquiring knowledge

- Have theoretical and practical knowledge about learner-centered pedagogical approaches (competency-based pedagogy, differences-based pedagogy, problem-solving pedagogy, pedagogy of learning by play, pedagogy of learning by mistake), and adopt procedures for managing and facilitating learning situations and knowledge acquisition in NFE classes

- Have theoretical and practical knowledge about didactic techniques and procedures compliant with the methodologies of the subjects programmed for NFE classes, and convert them into interactive and communicative situations (teaching actions/learning activities)

- Have a good command of scientific and methodological techniques and related know-how of evaluation pedagogies that are appropriate to children targeted by NFE and know well the procedures for constructing and managing evaluation situations

- Have theoretical and practical knowledge about learner-centered pedagogical approaches, and be able to construct support-related situations and activities according to the nature of problems, constraints, and obstacles to learning faced by pupils in NFE classes

- Have theoretical and practical knowledge about techniques and procedures for developing and managing educational projects that are compliant with the pupils' needs in NFE classes

- Have a good command of the theoretical and practical knowledge about communicative and interactive techniques for managing the problems that are related to the dynamics of the individuals in NFE classes.

The profile of the educational facilitator (Referential Plan for Training, 2012: 54) can be defined as follows:

- To be able to communicate, interact, and attract the pupils to join NFE classes, adapt to their socio-educational conditions, and secure their needs in learning, acquiring knowledge, and reintegration in the educational and social environment

- To be able to plan, manage, and assess situations of learning and acquiring knowledge in NFE classes, as well as to handle intended learning outcomes and reinforce them with back-up activities according to adopted curricula and programs that aim to reach educational integration or socio-professional integration of the teachers in such classes

- To focus on children's rights and legislation, the sociology and psychology of NFE, psychology of development and acquiring knowledge, pedagogy of managing learning, didactics of academic subjects, and pedagogy of evaluation and support.

The pedagogical approaches adopted for managing training situations are as follows:[48]

- Basic modules: the basic learning and resources necessary for managing situations of learning and acquiring knowledge (general knowledge, knowledge of academic subjects, values-based knowledge). Training is based on: 1. diagnosis of forms of professional practice; 2. proposing activities, approaches, and practical/theoretical solutions; 3. converting theoretical approaches into professional practices through adaptation and compliance

- Learning modules: the degrees to which procedures and actions of evaluation and support are mastered. The objective of such modules is to "enable (the facilitator) to acquire the knowledge necessary for developing professional abilities and competencies in the field of management of learning situations pertaining to children in NFE classes" (p. 60).

To summarize, the NFE training program focuses on developing broad professional competence in the facilitator, ranging from planning learning, to evaluation and preparing for reintegration. It familiarizes the facilitators with the subject areas in the curriculum and the facilitation methods proposed in the reference guide and related procedural guide. However, it does not directly address concepts of beginning reading instruction other than what is presented in the Arabic language module. The facilitators have a significant amount of responsibility beyond teaching subject matter, and their backgrounds are diverse, since there is no specific pre-requisite education.

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[48] MENFP. (2013). Referential Plan for Training, p. 60–61

2.4 Summary of the studies conducted by the European Union on improvement of NFE curricula

The Directorate of NFE, with the technical support of the European Union (EU), carried out a series of studies to review and improve the educational curricula and textbooks of the NFE system. The objectives were to describe the current situation of the existing NFE curricula and to provide recommendations for improvement. The studies were carried out in light of new evidence emerging from the field, with an aim to build upon existing programming and improve the quality of NFE programs. The following summarizes the results of the study.[49]

The EU report is presented into two parts. Part I concerns the NFE curricula, the current situation, and recommendations. Part II focuses on the analysis and recommendations for the textbooks, as well as the establishment of social integration units.

Part I: NFE curricula, the current situation, and proposals for improvement

The EU study was grounded in the following key questions:

- To what extent do the four existing curricula satisfy the needs of the target groups?
- What changes can be made to better support a basic skills approach?
- To what extent should the four existing curricula be preserved, and how many textbooks should be provided for each?
- Is there a balance between the basic skills approach for learning in the field of NFE and the current curricula?

The study concluded the following:

- In terms of form and content, the study confirmed the richness and diversity of the existing curricula.
- In terms of the methodology adopted in development process, the study commended the importance and value of a participative approach.
- In terms of the main instructional approach, the study approved the basic skills approach.
- In terms of the implementation of the curricula, the study commended the diversification of the tools and content implementation, which resulted in the achievement of the expected outcomes.

On the other hand, the EU study pointed out some missing pieces of the NFE curricula:

- A reference document that includes a comprehensive analysis for implementation in the classroom
- Tools to monitor curriculum implementation

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[49] El Bouazzaoui, H. (2013). Assistance technique pour la "refonte des curricula de l'éducation non formelle: Composante manuels et intégration sociale." Appui technique de l'Union Européenne à la Direction de l'Education Non Formelle, Ministère de l'Education Nationale.

- Methods to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the existing curricula so they can be modified in the light of the new strategic guidelines in the field of NFE.

The EU study made the following recommendations:

- Adopt only two curricula (one for school reintegration and another for preparing the students for vocational training) instead of the current four curricula.

- Further enhance the basic skills approach during the curricula development, their implementation phases, and learning outcomes management.

- Provide support and assistance to the different stakeholders through trainings and providing them with the necessary pedagogical tools.

- Take into account the situation of children who have never been to school.

- Adopt mechanisms for continuously renewing and updating the curricula and complementary educational measures.

- Reflect on the need for taking advantage of modern technology (ICT) in the fields of training and educational management.

Part II: Analysis and textbook improvement and preparation of modules for social inclusion

This part of the EU study had the following objectives:

- Analyze the textbooks used in NFE

- Provide recommendations and modifications to the content of textbooks in the light of results from the first study

- Design complementary modules for social integration.

The study was grounded in the following key questions:

- To what extent do the current textbooks respond to the requirements of NFE classes?

- What elements of the textbooks can be modified, and what measures can be taken to improve them?

- Are the current textbooks and supplemental activities capable of developing the expected skills?

- Do partner associations have the capacity to implement social inclusion activities to achieve the desired results?

- What conclusions could be reached on the development of the four dimensions of social inclusion (psychological, pedagogical, social, and professional) in the absence of a systemic approach?

The study concluded that the strengths of the current textbooks are that they

- adopt the Basic Skills Approach: The Basic Skills Approach is defined in the document *Competence-based Approach in NFE* (2013: 8) as the mobilization of information and a

set of skills (know-how) in problem-solving situations; it recommends applying knowledge in new contexts;

- are easy to use; and
- include instruction cards in the facilitator's guide.

Some areas for improvement were recommended by the NFE facilitators, CSOs, inspectors, and heads of departments:[50]

- The design of the textbook: the font type and size, and the quality of pictures
- The content of the curriculum: adopting a more efficient competency-based approach
- The gender aspects of texts included: promote gender equality
- The didactic aspects: ensuring appropriateness to the different students' levels, efficiency through functionality, problem-based learning activities, etc.

The analysis of the social inclusion model modules was done in two stages:

- Stage 1: field research focused on determining the various implementations of social inclusion programs (associations used listening centers, psychological and educational support, and handicraft workshops, among other methods, to implement these programs)
- Stage 2: provided recommendations for the development of the four modules; psychological, pedagogical, social, and professional.

The EU study concluded that the following aspects are missing:

- A systematic and comprehensive approach for social inclusion modules targeting children benefiting from the NFE (materials development, content, work methods, etc.)
- A psychological rehabilitation module that can be used in the development of other modules (pedagogical, social, and professional rehabilitation).

The study found

- the need for further examination of the research collected at the national level and a means to manage the data;
- the need to consider the four modules and supplemental activities as integral components of the curriculum, rather than optional activities;
- the need to benefit from the previous experience documented and archived at the Directorate of NFE (e.g., examples of handicraft lesson cards, human rights education sheets, and children's individual projects, etc.).

Overall, the EU analysis was positive concerning the curriculum, but the EU did not look in detail at any one subject area. In particular, no mention was made of pedagogy related to reading. The EU study does not suggest any areas of improvement, nor does it specifically recommend reading literacy as an area of improvement.

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[50] El Bouazzaoui, H. (2013:128).

3.   Findings

3.1   Curriculum analysis

The framework document

During 2004–2005, the Directorate of NFE launched a project to develop a standardized curriculum to be used in all learning centers. Using a participative approach, a committee of 41 members was established, including researchers, inspectors of education, teachers, representatives of the concerned government sectors, and partner associations. The committee was tasked with the following:

- Overall development of the curriculum
- Classification of the students and analysis of school cycles
- Formulating basic educational skills in their two dimensions, generic and specific, which cover all materials
  - Determining the main areas of learning
  - Setting up the pedagogical requirements that convert these skills into contents and activities to be performed within the classroom

The work achieved by this committee led to the establishment of the framework document, which is used by the educational teams in charge of drafting the textbooks and guidebooks, including the two textbooks studied in this report. Note that the two textbooks were developed by the educational teams selected by the NFE, who provided a version of the textbooks. This was not a competitive bidding process and there was no formative evaluation done during the development of the textbook. The teams consisted of primary and secondary school teachers and inspectors.

Exhibit 9, below, outlines the most important generic and language-specific competencies in this document (2004: 12).

Exhibit 9:   Framework document: *Choices and Orientations of NFE* (2004)

Competencies
The concept of "competency" refers to the set of skills used by the learners to mobilize knowledge and know-how to solve problems. This approach allows the use of the previous learning gains in the new context. (*Basic Competencies in the Field of Non-Formal Education*, level 1, 2013: 6)

The competencies are divided into two types: generic and specific (i.e., related to the field of language).

Generic competencies
- Positioning in time and place;
- Positioning vis-à-vis the other and the social institutions;
- Using critical thinking and creativity in situations encountered inside and outside of school;
- Adopting protective behaviors to preserve health safety in all dimensions;
- Being able to use different forms of communication;
- Acquiring methods of organized work;
- Behaving in compliance with the principles of rights and obligations.

Specific Competencies
Communicative competencies:

- Clear oral expression;
- Appropriate communication in different situations (search for information, express opinion, exact response, etc.).

Reading competencies:

- Easy and expressive reading;
- Understanding the basic information contained in documents;
- Practicing and enjoying reading (Facilitator's guidebook for level 2, 2006: 7).

Writing competencies:

- Writing in clear hand-writing with appropriate pace;
- Producing functional and correlated writing;
- Using communication techniques.

The framework document *Choices and Orientations of NFE (2004)* includes the scope and sequence of reading in the first two levels, including guidelines for the number of hours recommended per year (2,606 hours per year), and the order in which the concepts/themes are introduced by week. The document also sets indicators for the structure of modules to be used and the general framework for presenting a lesson.

Theoretically, *Choices and Orientations of NFE (2004)* is meant to present the curriculum at a very general level, without elaborating. ***Exhibit 10*** shows the objectives of competencies as presented in this framework document.

Exhibit 10: Competencies and associated learning areas

Competencies	Objectives of competencies
Communicative competencies	Clear oral expression
	Appropriate communication in different situations (search for information, express opinion, exact response, etc.)
Reading competencies	Easy and expressive reading
	Understanding the basic information contained in documents
	Reading with joy (Facilitator's guidebook for level 2: 7)
Writing competencies	Writing in clear penmanship with appropriate pace
	Producing functional and correlated writing
	Using communication techniques

Content of the curriculum

The curriculum is based on functionality of learning outcomes, their complementarity and coherence, and transferability of acquired skills. It is limited to three main areas of learning, namely, languages (Arabic and French), math and the sciences, and civic education and the individual's upbringing.

Values: The curriculum emphasizes the importance of values for both reintegration into formal education and interacting positively in a variety of social contexts. The set of values were integrated with an aim to

- promote the diverse but complementary dimensions of the Moroccan identity in support of inter-cultural appreciation;
- reinforce the values of modernity and modernization; and
- raise awareness in terms of rights and obligations.

To reach these goals, the NFE curriculum was developed in line with the National Charter (1999: 6) that stipulates education should consolidate the national identity with all its religious, cultural, and social dimensions, and aims to improve teaching and learning to keep up with contemporary challenges. Its foundations are summarized in the following values:

- Islamic values
- Citizenship values
- National identity compatible with ethnic and cultural diversity
- Human rights values and universal principles.

The four curricula of NFE: Due to the diverse characteristics of non-schooled children and the multifaceted nature of their needs and expectations, the Directorate adopted a flexible approach in terms of conception and development of the NFE curriculum. The curriculum was developed in consideration of the characteristics of the target groups and their educational needs, as determined by an analysis of the expectations of the beneficiaries and the generic competencies, the basic competencies, and the education objectives.

Due to the diverse needs of the beneficiaries, each category of learners was assigned a specific curriculum; the freedom of the learner to choose the curriculum was also maintained. On this basis, four special educational curricula were adopted that aimed at ensuring basic learning outcomes in reading, writing, and math. In addition, the curricula were flexible to integrating other learning and knowledge areas that respond to the needs and expectations of each child. The four curricula are described in the following paragraphs.

1. School Reintegration curriculum: aims to prepare children for reintegration into the formal education system. By the end of the program, the children should be able to

- read and communicate in writing and orally at a level that allows them to reintegrate formal education;
- use Arabic language to acquire knowledge and values; and
- use Arabic to open up to their natural and social environments.

2. Vocational Training Integration curriculum: designed to prepare students to integrate into vocational training programs. It was developed with an aim to

- respond to the expectations of the beneficiaries who would like to enroll in a vocational training program;
- enable students to enhance their basic education skills; and
- prepare students for professions in a variety of trades.

3. Curriculum for Rural Children: developed for the children who live in rural areas. This curriculum aims to

- enable rural beneficiaries to benefit from basic learning;
- build on the specific content to teach relevant skills; and
- broaden their knowledge and expand their skills.

4. Social Integration curriculum: designed for vulnerable children, such as homeless children, children living in centers for child protection, and child laborers. This curriculum was developed with an aim to

- improve a child's self-perception and their perceptions of others;
- enable children to build relationships based on respect, tolerance, and forgiveness;
- empower children with the necessary skills and tools for reintegration into society; and
- encourage civic awareness and responsibility.

The above four curricula are implemented in three year-long levels. Each level in NFE corresponds to two grades of formal education as shown in ***Exhibit 11***.

Exhibit 11:   The levels of the NFE curriculum

NFE Levels	Corresponding levels in FE
Level 1	First and second year of primary education
Level 2	Third and fourth year of primary education
Level 3	Fifth and sixth year of primary education

The School Reintegration curriculum, which is the main focus of this report, imposes 864 contact hours per each level per year for the teaching of Arabic; 75% of this time is devoted to skills acquisition activities, and the remaining 25% is for gaining and using these skills.

In formal education, time for reading (Arabic language) instruction starts with 4.5 hours per week in grade 1, and 4 hours in grade 2, but by grades 3 and 4 this is reduced to 2.5 hours or less, and in grades 5 and 6 only 1.5 hours per week is devoted to this subject area.[51]

The teaching time dedicated to Arabic language in level 1 of NFE is 11 hours per week, with a total of 22 classes of 30 minutes per class. In this level, 9 classes (of 30 minutes) are dedicated to reading, with a total of 4.5 hours per week. Levels 2 and 3, on the other hand, spend only 2 hours per week on reading. Interesting to note is the drastic drop in the number of classes as well as hours per week devoted to reading from level 1 to levels 2 and 3. This can be explained by the fact that, by definition, level 1 students are those with no reading ability, whereas level 2 is for children who demonstrate reading ability but lack comprehension skills.

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[51] This is in contrast to, for example, South Africa, where the norm is between 9 and 10 hours of instruction for "Literacy Learning" per week. See https://edulibpretoria.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/doe-teaching-reading-early-grades-2008.pdf . Similarly Egypt allocates 9 hours per week in formal education and 6.75 in non-formal education (Samir Habib, personal communication).

Level 3 spends only 6 hours on Arabic per week, with only 2 hours dedicated to reading. ***Exhibit 12*** shows the time allocations.

Exhibit 12: Time allocated for reading in FE and NFE (Level 1)

Grades in FE	Total time allocated for reading in the two grades	NFE level	Time allocated for reading in NFE
Grade 1 + 2	8.5 hours	Level 1	4.5 hours
Grade 3 + 4	4.5 hours	Level 2	2 hours

As ***Exhibit 12*** illustrates, the total number of hours allocated to the teaching of reading in NFE is lower by half (i.e., 4.5 hours for level 1, and 2 hours for level 2) compared to the number of hours allocated for reading in the formal education (i.e., 8.5 hours for grades 1 and 2, and 4.5 hours for grades 3 and 4).

Given that the first two levels in FE correspond to the first level in NFE, it is expected that the number of hours that should be allocated to reading in one level in NFE should be doubled; that is, it should be 8.5 hours. Instead, the number of hours is reduced to half of the required number in NFE (i.e., 4.5 hours).

In short, given the absence of equivalency in the number of hours allocated to reading in FE and NFE, then the assumption is that the methods are more efficient or the children are more capable because of their maturity and prior experience. Unless these assumptions have been validated through experience, it may be expected that NFE students will lag behind their peers in FE programs, and they will need continual intervention to understand and keep up with the contents in other subjects, such as social studies, math, etc.

Textbook structure and production

The specifications provided in *Choices and Orientations of NFE (2004)* tend to be rather obscure and facilitator-centered. For example, the framework document does not specify to the textbook writer the ways in which the textbook should address the learner. It is silent on how to use icons and easily decodable symbols to make it easier for the learner to understand how to use the book independently.

As a result, textbook writers provided guidelines on how to use the textbooks in a language that addresses facilitators and literate adults in general, and not the learners who are the end users of the textbook.

The following is an extract from the introduction to the NFE level 1 textbook (author's translation):

   Dear Beneficiary,

This textbook is prepared in accordance with the specifications in both the "National Charter for Education and Vocational Training," and the series of pedagogical documents published by the State Secretary in charge of combating illiteracy and of non-formal education.

This reading textbook follows the analytical-synthetic approach that sets out from an image or a scene from which is drawn the starting sentence. A letter, selected from one of the words that constitute the sentence, is analyzed and read with its diacritics (vowels, long vowels, and in its different positions). After that, a "mobile lexicon" (sentences and simple texts) is relied on to move from analysis to synthesis, so that the letter is used in words to form sentences that become the basis for a simple reading text, etc. (p. 5)

The learner faced with this introduction is helpless because he or she does not yet possess the necessary language tools to understand this long and intimidating introduction. Moreover, the guidelines that are needed to explain how to use specific units and practice activities are omitted altogether; for example, the level 1 textbook focused on reading skills and neglected practice activities that support the learning outcomes, such as handwriting and spelling, exercises related to reading comprehension using pictures and illustrations, exercises that encourage oral presentations of what the learner understands from the reading texts, teamwork for correcting reading to peers, etc.

Since the textbooks are one of the means, among others, of operationalizing the curriculum, this study included a review of the textbook specifications in this section.

The following is a rather literal translation of the specifications as provided in the *NFE Curriculum: Choices and Orientations* (2004: 14):

- Special guidelines to facilitate the use of the textbook by the student
- Detailed table of contents
- A glossary of concept and terms
- An outline that shows gradual unfolding of the program's components
- Flashcards for the learners, which contain different activities, drawings, and graphs that concern the learners, attract their attention, and motivate them to build knowledge during their learning stages, and if time allows, some specific amount of time for analysis, drills, and speaking/writing
- Flashcards for suggested activities during periods of evaluation, intervention, and integration
- A number of enriching documents in relation to the topics and activities (pictures, flashcards, maps, and small graphs)

The specifications mainly concern elements of textbooks that are for the benefit of facilitators; for example, the inclusion of guidelines on how to use the textbook (the student is not meant to

read these, but the teacher is). Thus, the textbook and facilitator's guide appear to be the same. This may be why there are no specific directions for conducting activities in the classroom.

Textbook compliance to specifications. *Exhibit 13* shows the extent to which level 1 and 2 textbooks comply with the specifications (see above).

Exhibit 13: Textbook compliance to specifications

Textbook specifications	Level 1	Level 2
1. Special guidelines to facilitate the use of the textbook by the student	No	No
2. Detailed table of contents	Yes	Yes
3. A glossary of concept and terms	No	No
4. The outline shows the gradual unfolding of the program's components	Yes	Yes
5. Flashcards for the learners, which contain different activities, drawings, and graphs that concern the learners; attract their attention; and motivate them to build knowledge during their learning stages, and if time allows, some specific amount of time for analysis, drills, and speaking/writing	No	No
6. Flashcards for suggested activities during periods of evaluation, intervention, and integration	No	No
7. A number of enriching documents in relation to the topics and activities (pictures, flashcards, maps, and small graphs)	No	No

Although the textbooks were produced within the NFE Directorate, *Exhibit 13* shows only 2 out of 7 (28%) specifications are met in the textbooks' production.

The specifications are not very detailed. How the information is presented is left up to the discretion of authors/publishers. However, it is not clear why specifications were developed at all if the books were not meant to be subject to competitive bidding. As guidelines for content development for a team of authors, they could be much more specific so that the authors could follow a detailed outline during development.

Allocation of time for reading in the textbooks

In level 1 and level 2 textbooks, each module spans over the course of three weeks and four weeks, respectively. The first two weeks in level 1 textbook are dedicated to the presentation of the lesson, its reinforcement, and practice. The third week is for assessment and intervention. In the level 2 textbook, it takes four weeks for one unit to be presented, reinforced, and assessed. After each two units are covered, a whole week is devoted to reinforcement of all the learning gains in the previous two weeks.

The amount of time devoted to reading instruction in the level 1 textbook is 9 sessions of 30 minutes each; that is, as *Exhibit 14* shows below, 4.5 hours a week. Each week is made up of 22 class sessions outlined below. (Facilitator's guide, first level: 12).

Exhibit 14: Time devoted to reading instruction

Components	Oral Expression	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Total per week
Number of sessions	7	9	6	Are implicitly communicated during writing, reading and expression	22 sessions
Duration	30 m	30 m	30 m		
Total	3.5 hours	4.5 hours	3 hours		11 hours

The time allocated to reading for level 1 is nominally about 4.5 hours a week for formal education. This number is less than standards in some countries such as the USA,[52] South Africa,[53] and Egypt[54] unless one considers the curricular hours for Islamic studies which might include some reading practice. In practice, however, time allocation may vary from one class to another and from one facilitator to another depending on the facilitator's perception of reading. The scope of the study did not include observations or interviews with a representative sample to determine with certainty the time allocated to reading. In addition, developing reading depends on how the other language skills (writing, spelling, and sentence work) and even other subject areas are taught.

The time allocated to reading in the NFE first level classes (i.e., 4.5 hours) matches the standard in the table above. The curriculum and the Facilitator's Guide do not specify how the teaching of other skills could contribute to developing reading. *Exhibit 15*, below, shows the content of the level 1 book, by week. This is also very similar to the sequence and topics in the formal education textbook. Level 2, though not included in a table here, is also similar to the formal education and the topics prescribed by the White Book.

Exhibit 15: Level 1 textbook contents by week

Module	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
Area	The Child and the School	The Child and the Family	The Child and relation with the neighbor-hood and the village	Child, Food, Health and Sports	Child, Parties and Events	Child, Environment, and Nature	Child and the World of Games and Creativity
Subject	At school, I love my School, First day at School, Effective Use of Time	Trip to the village, visiting a Patient, Return of the Grandfather from	In my Grandma's Village, The Neighborhood Grocer's, The Village Gates, A Beautiful Traditional	A Fish Meal, Eating too Much, Sport is Beneficial to the Body,	Birthday Party, Muslims Festival, Independence Day, At the Bakery	Environment day, In Front of the Waterfalls, Water Drops Trip, Birds	Cooperation Day Activities, Agricultural Tools, Mobile Phones, The

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[52] Perie, M., Baker, D., Bobbitt, S. Time spent teaching core academic subjects in elementary schools: Comparisons across community, school teacher and student characteristics. US Department of Education. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/97293.pdf

[53] Department of Education [Pretoria, South Africa]. (2008). Teaching reading in the early grades: A teacher's handbook. https://edulibpretoria.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/doe-teaching-reading-early-grades-2008.pdf

[54] Samir Habib (2015, personal communication). In Egypt, the formal curriculum allocates 90 minutes per day, 6 days per week for reading instruction. In non-formal education, reading instructional time is 6.75 minutes per week (9 classes of 45 minutes each).

Module	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
		Pilgrimage, Being Cautious when crossing the Road	Dress Jellaba	Let's Go to the Market			Computer

Teaching methodology

In the absence of clear textbook development specification in the *Choices and Orientations of NFE* (2004) and White Book for NFE, the authors of the two school manuals aligned content with the specifications provided in the White Book (2002) for formal education.[55] See **Annex 2a** for a table of competencies in the level 1 teacher's book.

Level 1

The White Book (2002) outlines the following principles for teaching reading in Level 1:

- Adopt the alphabetic approach in teaching letters; that is to say introducing the letter as a sound, then by its name. For example, the letter م\مْ 'm' is taught as the sound مْ 'm' instead of "ميم" *'miim'* which is its "alphabetic" name in Arabic.

- Provide a certain order in which Arabic letters should be taught. The guidebook, however, does not provide any rationale for the recommended order of letters being thought. However, the teachers start with the more frequent letters (e.g., *l, n, m, w, y, h,* and *r*).

- Place emphasis on the teaching of the vowel signs as they occur in words, to encourage recognition and distinction of syllables.

- The grammar rules should be addressed implicitly during the early grades.

The following structure is used in the learner's textbook.

Each letter is taught in four lessons: presentation, reinforcement, exploitation, and evaluation and support. This means that two letters can be presented per week, according to the schedule presented above.

Lesson 1: Presentation

The presentation lesson consists of the following activities:

- Activity 1: Introduction: Student reads a short sentence that will be used to teach a target letter.

- Activity 2: Reading the key sentence: Student is asked to write the sentence.

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[55] NFE programs are based on two reference documents as sources for textbook development: one which is not detailed, i.e. the *Choices and Orientations of NFE* (2004), while the other, i.e. White Book (2002), is more detailed but initially designed for formal education.

- Activity 3: Framing the sentence: Student is asked to break down the sentence, following the teacher's commands, and read the smaller fragments, in order and without order.
- Activity 4: Isolating the target letter: The teacher invites the pupils to isolate the letter from the words of the sentence by pronouncing it and writing it in a different color to distinguish it, then asks them to read it.
- Activity 5: Reading the sentence in random order: The teacher asks the learners to read the sentence in its entirety.
- Activity 6: Reading exercises: The teacher writes the letter separately with the vowel diacritics "*fatha* "a"; *Damma*, "u"; and *kasra* "i"), encourages the child to repeat, read the letter, and think of another word that uses the same letter.

In the case of Activities 1–3, "reading" is actually reciting after the teacher, since children who have not learned the letters yet are not reading. This is not to say there is no value in the oral language activities, which might be building phonemic awareness and vocabulary, among other things; however, the whole language methodology as described is building these skills implicitly rather than explicitly, which in the long term may not be as efficient as a direct and explicit instructional approach.

Activity 5, which involves reading the sentence in mixed-up order, does not have a strong pedagogical justification, and in fact risks causing confusion about correct sentence formation in the language. Although it is good to verify decoding skills on isolated words, it would be more effective to just have pupils read a list of words. They should be making sure that children have a chance to tackle new sentences on their own, without the teacher reading them first or choral recitation. A more appropriate activity would be for children to put words in the correct order to make a sentence. The textbook supports this type of activity (see image insert, **Annex 1**).

Lesson 2: Reinforcement

The reinforcement lesson consists of three activities:

- Activity 1: Reading what has been learned: The teacher writes on the board or displays on a "shingle" the sentence that was previously introduced together with its elements, the targeted letter in isolation, and asks the pupils to read it. Activity 1 is a good exercise to reinforce and to monitor student understanding.
- Activity 2: Reading exercises: The pupils read the letter in isolation, and then come up with words containing the targeted letter. Then, the pupils are asked to produce their own sentences. Activity 2 is, in fact, a phonemic awareness exercise and is appropriate for early learners, if followed regularly.
- Activity 3: The teacher asks pupils to read the first page of the lesson, which introduces the letter.

All three of these activities would lend themselves well to some group-based work and peer support, which would allow the facilitator to address different learning styles and reading levels

of the learners (creating heterogeneous groups, for example, where better readers can assist struggling readers; circulating among groups and providing individual attention, etc.), while at the same time increasing time on task (contact time with print) for the learners.

Lesson 3: Exploitation

The exploitation lesson consists of three activities:

- Activity 1: Presenting what has been learned: The pupils read words and sentences in order, and scrambled.

- Activity 2: Reading exercises: The pupils read the words and match them with the corresponding pictures in the textbook; then they write and read the missing letter in the words.

- Activity 3: Using the textbook for perusal, as needed. The pupils read page 2 of the lesson that is devoted to the letter at hand.

In this methodology (Activities 1–3), children are learning to memorize words by sight (their shape, length, etc.), perhaps using some letters as clues, but they are not learning to decode, unless they are doing this implicitly. Again, this does not mean there is no value at all in learning to read words by sight—this is effective for many common or irregular words. However, in the long term it is not efficient to memorize every word of the language by sight, or to wait for the rules of orthography and decoding to be understood implicitly. To be independent readers, children need strategies for "attacking" and systematically decoding new words in new context.

Lesson 4: Evaluation and Support

This lesson is about evaluating the learning gains in the three activities and providing support as needed. The lesson has three activities and ends with an assessment.

- Activity 1: Evaluating what is learned: The teacher writes words and sentences on the board that contain the target letter, reads them aloud, and asks the students to repeat.

- Activity 2: Supporting the learning gains: The teacher represents the target letter with various exercises such as the activity "I read and I distinguish." The teacher shows pictures with words using the target letter, then asks the students to read the sentence and to identify the response that corresponds to the picture.

- Activity 3: Using the textbook, as needed: The teacher motivates the pupils to read from the textbook.

Although this section is called "evaluation," all activities, as described (especially Activity 1) repeat the same instructional methodology. There is no clear and deliberate strategy for monitoring learning. It is unclear how the facilitator is monitoring progress of individuals through a group activity.

The level 1 school manual does not include oral expression exercises nor a writing component. See **Annex 1** for additional examples (with photos) of exercises included in the level 1 textbook.

Level 2

The Arabic language unit is meant to enable children to reach a level of Arabic that allows them to understand and use oral and written texts that correspond to the grade 4 level in the formal system. See **Annex 2b** for the basic and specific competencies.

The Arabic language curriculum adopts a communicative approach; teachers are required to place the learners in real life-like situations in which they are encouraged to communicate with each other using the words and structures they have learned. This method is believed to help students learn and then "possess" the new words and structures in each lesson. The skills gained from this method are expected to help NFE students integrate the primary education of the formal system. Through this approach, the learner will, by the end of primary education, have developed the following basic and generic competencies (see **Annex 2a** and **b**; Teacher's book [2007: 10]; and the White Book [2002: 37]). Note that these competencies were developed for formal education and adopted by NFE.

The instructional methodology proposes two types of activities with different texts.

1. Functional and poetic reading: The facilitator asks general questions on some elements employed in the text such as characters, time, subject matter, setting, etc.

- Reading: the pupils read the text in turn.
- Comprehension: The facilitator explains the vocabulary, raises questions about the contents of the text, and extracts the main ideas in the text.
- Entertainment: The facilitator asks questions that motivate the learners to appreciate and derive some pleasure from rhetorical figures, poetic styles, and linguistic formulations. Questions should be appropriate to the pupils' level and knowledge, and encourage the learners to communicate.

2. Reading fluency: Reading for fluency introduces longer texts with leveled text and aims to

- encourage independent reading;
- promote appreciation of the various genres and types of works that can be read including, stories, plays, etc.; and
- encourage students to read in their leisure time.

These methods are based on the assumption that children have learned to read in level 1, and therefore the focus on comprehension and literary appreciation is similar to what is known as "language arts" in the U.S. context, for example. However, such activities, focusing on expression and listening or reading comprehension, are also appropriate for level 1 students and should not be neglected at that level. The distinction is that in level 2 children are asked to do silent and independent reading, and there is no longer an emphasis on learning small units of text, but only on more advanced vocabulary and styles. For this reason it would be important to ensure in level 2 that the students' actual reading fluency is being verified regularly, or that it was

assessed as a prerequisite to joining level 2, unless direct instruction of reading is still included in the methodology.

Conclusions and recommendations related to curriculum analysis

Conclusions. The main guide to the NFE curriculum, as well as to the standards adopted for the textbooks, is the framework document, *Choices and Orientations for NFE (2004)*. It includes the scope and sequence, number of hours recommended per year, and order of themes/concepts. It also presents competencies in three key areas—communication, reading, and writing—and associated performance objectives.

In addition to basic skills, the curriculum intends to transmit a set of values related to citizenship, modernity, and Moroccan identity, in accordance with the requirements of the National Charter. Four different curricula address the characteristics of the target groups, their educational needs, and their aspirations. Textbook guidelines are also included in the *Choices and Orientations* document, but most of the points listed are not actually present in the textbooks; for example, the inclusion of "flashcards."

The teaching methodology in level 1 (equivalent to grades 1–2 of formal education) adopts a whole language approach that starts with sentences or paragraphs to introduce target letters. Some elements of alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary-building (sight word reading) are included, but the instructional approach relies mainly on building skills implicitly rather than explicitly. By level 2 (equivalent to grades 3–4 of formal education), children are expected to have mastered fluent reading, and lessons are focused on independent reading, comprehension, and application of reading content.

Although the students' performance after the completion of the program has not been tested, some shortcomings of the program include the following:

- Decoding is not targeted as a skill, even though it contributes to more fluent reading, first of words and subsequently of phrases, which in turn contributes to comprehension.

- Neither the Choices and Orientations of NFE (2004), the facilitator's guide, nor the White Book (2002) specifies a list of functional vocabulary based on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), nor do they show how to find the keywords to target. Developing a functional vocabulary list would help to standardize achievement across the country and would facilitate interpretation of national evaluation measures.

- The absence of a list of frequently used words limits the ability of teachers and authors to develop leveled texts that would also help children understand texts more rapidly, even if they have not mastered letters or decoding skills.

- The facilitator's guide does not provide clear strategies for evaluating objectively whether values were acquired or not. As such it is difficult to plan a strategy aligned to supporting learners who are falling behind.

- The facilitator's guide discusses the mastery of the Arabic language (MSA) for social integration; however, this integration remains very general and does not take into consideration the sociolinguistic context of Morocco, especially since social integration is done in maternal languages and not in MSA.

The facilitator's guide outlines many appropriate general and specific competencies, but they could be better aligned to the instructional approaches and day-to-day sequence of content through a more structured facilitator's guide with daily lesson delivery guidance. The following recommendations also provide suggestions for how teaching, and consequently facilitator training, could be made more explicit.

Finally, there are no clear methods for evaluating mastery of competencies that are expected through NFE lessons. More specific guidelines could help teachers with both instruction and evaluation. See the recommendations section that follows.

Recommendations. The following are some recommendations to improve the textbook specifications, and content in general, although some of these elements will be reviewed in more detail later.

- The textbook should be student-centered and designed to take into consideration the learners' characteristics upon entry as well as the learning objectives expected of the children by the time they graduate.

- The textbook should reinforce harmony across all subjects in order to develop the core skills, keeping in mind the overarching principles of the curriculum.

- To improve readability, improve page layout with attention to font size, type, and line spacing, in accordance with international practice (i.e., large font, low text density) but also based on local piloting.

- Drawings, pictures, and other types of illustrations should be in harmony with the ideas they illustrate in the text and should appeal to the learner.

- Instruction should encourage questions raised by learners themselves or those from their environment, in order to adapt learning to the needs of the learners.

- The intended learning outcomes should be gradual from one year to another, and the design of the textbooks should reflect this.

- A number of conditions for Arabic reading instruction should be defined, notably:
  - Guidelines on number and frequency of vocabulary items, the rates of abstract and concrete vocabulary
  - Guidelines on leveling, especially sentences and their length, structures, and styles: their type and frequency
  - Provide sample of a style to present the content

- Provide the types of content, the values and the scientific concepts they should contain, the bridges they build between all the school materials (subjects dealt with in the Arabic course, supported by the courses of math and the sciences)

- Provide drills that encourage interaction, questions and answers that enable expression of opinion, and problem solving in reading comprehension skills

- Give strategies for learning the vocabulary based on functional language inspired by the daily life language of the learner

- The textbook producers must update the topics and exercises in collaboration with the curricula directorate.

- A professional illustrator or an artist should be part of the production committee.

- Pupils should be given a workbook, which would have to be developed, so that they can do exercises instead of copying them from the board.

- Appropriate methods for evaluating learner progress should be included in levels 1 and 2, and especially to ensure that children enter level 2 with actual reading fluency, unless direct instruction of reading basics is still included in the methodology.

It is recommended that textbooks be granted production authorization only after they are found to match the specifications. It is also recommended that the specifications of the textbooks be developed by experts in the field of literacy and Arabic language instruction, with the involvement of end users (instructors and maybe children), and that they be evidence based.

3.2　Textbook analysis

The previous section (Curriculum analysis) described many aspects of the textbooks, particularly from the perspective of the broad content objectives and sequencing. In this section, the findings describe in more detail specific aspects of the content, as described in section 1 (Theoretical framework), in particular: whether the books address the five components of reading, and how they present issues related to gender and values. Since learners are expected to read relatively well upon entering level 2, some of the analysis, for example, instruction on phonemic awareness, only applies to the level 1 book.

Presence of the five components of reading in the textbook

Phonological awareness

The learning objective related to the skill of phonological awareness is described as: "the pupil should be able to read letters with short and long vowels, *nunation*,[56] and stress" (Facilitator's guide: 10). However, activities that help develop phonological awareness were very limited.

The methodological steps proposed by the facilitator's guide to teach a letter to level 1 learners are as follows (p. 14):

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[56] A suffix that indicates grammatical case; adds the sound "*-un, -in, -an*" to the end of a word.

- Start with an introductory sentence (e.g., "The teacher instructed Meriam to write her name," Learner's textbook: 9)

- Read the sentence

- Frame the sentence (the teacher highlights the basic elements of the sentence)

- Isolate the target letter

- Rearrange the sentence (e.g., "Hakim wrote in the book / wrote Hakim in the book / in the book Hakim wrote," Facilitator's guide, level 1: 26)

- Do the reading exercises (Activity: Read and Add, example: "*K* – كَبْش [*kabš* - sheep] – كَعْكَة [*kacka* - cake] – كَبِير [*kabiir* - big]" Facilitator's guide, level 1: 26)

The exercises focus on letter-sound correspondence, and therefore reinforce phonemic awareness, but overall the proposed methodology does not adopt efficient principles of reading skills. Because the methodology starts with a sentence to introduce the letter being taught, and the learners are exposed to other letters that they may not have learned yet.

The adoption of whole language methodology is an indirect, and relatively inefficient way of bringing about phonological awareness—which is an oral skill that is developed before the introduction of written text. By understanding that words are made up of sounds orally, children can apply that knowledge to the letter-sound association later. In the NFE methodology, pupils are asked to visually isolate the letter in its different positions in a word in the first step (the introductory sentence), before being familiarized with the letter and the sound in isolation. The methodological steps associated with teaching a letter are limited to only isolating the letter within the sentence, without in-depth focus on its written form and its sound. The unit neglects other more explicit and direct ways of developing phonological awareness skills, such as the following:

- Exploring words that have similar rhythm and rhyme, such as: *maal* "money," *qaal* "he said," *Taara* "he flew" / *Saara* "he became"

- Identification of syllables in a word (through chanting, clapping, or other visual, auditory and kinesthetic methods (e.g., *cašara ca/ ša / ra*)

- Manipulating sounds in words—omitting, replacing, adding sounds together to form words (e.g., the teacher utters the word كَمال *kamaal* "Kamal" and then asks pupils how to pronounce the word without the letter ك [k])

The majority of the activities are teacher led (Facilitator's guide, level 1:26.):

- Activity 1: The teacher gets the attention of the learners.

- Activity 2: The teacher writes a sentence, reads it, and asks learners to read it.

- Activity 3: The teacher frames the elements of the sentence, reads it, and encourages pupils to read it.

- Activity 4: The teacher helps pupils isolate the letter.

- Activity 5: The teacher writes the letter, reads it, and asks learners to read it.

- Activity 6: The teacher writes the letter, then asks the learners to read it.

The activities above focus on observation, repetition, and usage. They tend to be lacking in variety and the necessary appeal that classroom activities require in order to keep learners engaged. For example, the three units include the same activities (Look at the image and extract the basic sentence/Read a new sentence, Read, Observe and Read, Read in an orderly fashion, Read and Answer, Read the following). Moreover, all actions come from the teacher to the class as a whole, and therefore do not encourage differentiated learning through peer-to-peer learning, group work, independent practice, or individual tutoring.

Activities such as matching the words with the appropriate pictures on the page and filling in the missing letter in each word are asking the students to relate the word and the picture that represents the word. However, these activities suggest a logographic recognition of the words rather than learning to manipulate symbols and syllables to read the word.

Presence of the alphabetic principle

Although the Arabic language is an alphabetic language, it has several unique features that make learning the letter-sound correspondence different from other languages. Like other alphabetic languages, words are made up of letters associated with a sound and joined together to form words; however, in the case of Arabic, the letters can be either connected (as in script) or unconnected. When connected, the same sound may be represented by a letter with a different form when it appears at the beginning (e.g., سَبُع *ṣabuc* 'lion'), middle (e.g., قِسْم *qiṣm* 'classroom'), and end of the word (e.g., رَأس *ra'ṣ* 'head'). In Arabic, there is a limited number of letters that do not connect with the following letter (e.g., [د] *'d'*, [ذ] *'đ'*, [ر] *'r'*, [ز] *'z'*, [ا] *''alif'*, [و] *'w'*, [ة] final feminine marker *'t'*. Many letters are also visually similar, distinguishable only by the placement or number of dots, which can create a challenge in distinguishing letters in a word[57] (e.g., Class 1: [ب] *'b'*, [ت] *'t'*, [ث] *'θ'*, [ن] *'n'*, and [ي] *'y'*. Class 2: [ج] *'j'*, [ح] *'H', and* [خ] 'x'. Class 3: [د] 'd' and [ذ] 'đ'. Class 4: [ر] *'r'* and [ز] *'z'*, etc.). Finally, vowel markings (diacritics) and grammatical markings can be present, or omitted, leaving it to the reader to use contextual clues to determine word meaning.

The activities proposed in the level 1 facilitator's guide for letter introduction include (p. 23):

- Introductory activity to extract the reading sentence
- Read the sentence
- Frame the sentence
- Isolate the targeted letter
- Read the sentence in a different word order

The facilitator's guide proposes that the teacher asks children to read words, either in sentence order or in a different order to avoid automatic memorization (Facilitator's guide, level 1: 27). However, the level 1 textbook also prompts the teacher to read the text, even the re-arranged text

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[57] Saiegh-Haddad, E. (ed) (2014). *Handbook of Arabic literacy: Insights and perspectives.*

activity, as many times as necessary. This encourages memorization that the facilitator's guide advises avoiding. Subsequently, teachers are asked to isolate one letter, distinguish it with a different color, and read it. The emphasis is placed on learning the name of the letter and its sound with short and long vowels.

The activities proposed by the facilitator's guide attempt to support the connection between the symbol and sound (the alphabetical principle) when teaching letters, but this is integrated into exercises that expect them to read entire sentences. The issue here is that students are exposed to letters they haven't yet covered in the preceding lessons, and therefore sequencing is not gradual and does not allow the learner time to independently learn to decode. Furthermore, the learning objectives do not include the development of learner skills to read syllables as a bridge to reading words and sentences. Words in all languages consist of a collection of syllables, and pupils' ability to read words as a set of syllables supports their reading fluency. With Arabic, in particular, the syllables and larger word roots are often morphological clues that can help readers better predict unfamiliar words and improve reading acquisition.[58]

Letter sequence. The sequence of introducing letters is an important consideration for early readers. The level 1 book uses the sequence shown in *Exhibit 16* in the teaching of Arabic letters:

Exhibit 16:   Sequence of teaching the letters

Unit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
letters	م [m] ك [k] ب [b] ت [t]	ه [h] ء ['] ر [r] ل [l]	د [d] ن [n] ي [y] ج [j]	س [s] ع [c] ف [f] ح [h]	ز [z] ص [s] ق [q] د [d]	خ [x] ش [š] غ [ġ] ط [t]	ض [ḍ] ث [th] و [w] ظ [ẓ]

Starting the teaching with the most frequent letters would allow the learners to decode a larger number of words in a shorter amount of time; however, the source of this sequence is not clear. It would be important to develop a sequence based on Moroccan texts, especially children's literature and textbooks, in order to determine the appropriate sequence. If an alternative sequence was chosen (i.e., easiest to write considering the motor skills of children, or the letters that can be written in words without joining, etc.) then this should at least be documented so that the teachers can be aware of and support the rationale.

Comparing the approach of teaching the alphabet used in level 1 formal education textbooks, *Kitaabii* and *Al-Mufiid* (*Exhibit 17*), we find two different alphabetical orders as shown in the following table. The non-formal textbook presents a similar alphabetical order as *Al-Mufiid.*

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[58] Boyle, H., Al Ajjawi, S., & Xiang, Y. (2014). *Topical analysis of early grade reading instruction* (Project report for EdData II Task Order 15: Data for Education Programming in Asia and Middle East). Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. Retrieved at:
https://www.eddataglobal.org/documents/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubDetail&ID=707

Therefore there doesn't seem to be a consensus or clear rationale for the order in which letters are taught.

Exhibit 17: Comparison of alphabet sequence in formal and non-formal textbooks

Textbook	Alphabetical order
Kitaabii fii lluġa lcarabiyya (formal education)	س، ت، ل،ب، ح، ر، م، ي، ش، ج، ف، ك، و ، ق، ث، خ، خ، ه، ء، ع، غ، ن، ص، د، ذ، ط، ظ، ز، وض.
Al-mufiid fii lluġa lcarabiyya (formal education)	م، ك، ب، ت، ه، أ، ر، ل، د ، ن، ي، ج، س، ف، ح، ز، ذ ، ص ، ق ، ع، خ ، ش ، غ، ط، ض ، ث، و، وظ.
lluġa lcarabiyya (non-formal education)	م، ك، ب، ت، ه، ء، ر، ل، د، ن، ي، ج، س، ع، ف، ح، ز، ص، ق، د، خ، ش، غ، ط، ض، ث، و، ظ.

Additionally, analysis of the words provided to teach the letters suggests that the sequence was not determined according to key words related the theme of the units or the illustrations. As we discuss in a later section on vocabulary analysis, often the vocabulary used in the units has little or no relation to the theme.

A final observation regarding the letter sequencing is that the textbook presents both a phoneme (a sound) and a morpheme (a sound that carries meaning[59])—both with the sound 't'—in one unit. The book introduces the letter '*t*' in the beginning, middle, and the end of the words as a phoneme. The children are introduced to the sound 't' at the end of the word, such as [بيت] 'bayt', [بنت] 'bint', and [توت] 'tuut'. At the same time, the lesson presents words ending with the feminine morpheme that ends with the same sound, but it is written with a different letter form [ة] '*a(t)*,[60] as in [فَتِيحة] '*fatiiHa(t)*', [تُفَّاحة] '*tuffaHa(t)*', [حفيظة] '*HafiiDa(t)*', [كرة]*kura(t)*', [صورة] '*Suura(t)*', [صغيرة] '*Saġiira(t)*', [قِطَّة] '*qiTTa(t)*', [شجرة]'*šajara(t)*'. The fact that the 't' sound in the morpheme [ة] '*a(t)*' is audible when joined to other words [كرة القدم] '*kuratu lqadami*' "soccer," but when the word is written independently, the 't' sound is not pronounced, e.g., '، [كرة] *kura'*, requires additional explanation that is not present in the textbooks. On the one hand, the choice to present this particularity early in the process of learning to read is important because it increases the available pool of vocabulary by allowing children to access feminine nouns. However, the fact that this symbol is sometimes vocalized and sometimes silent may complicate things. Teachers will need strategies for making this distinction clear to the learners. These strategies are not apparent in the textbook.

The analysis of the level 1 textbook also shows that the teaching method adopted does not include syllabic reading activities. Instead, teaching focuses on building logographic reading skills by associating a word with a picture. Due to the transparent relationship between Arabic letters and their sounds, a child would most likely be able to read syllables easily if he or she has a strong understanding of letters and their position within the word. Without practice, it is more difficult to build this skill, which is crucial to ultimately reading with fluency and

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[59] Known as 'taa marbuuta." Carries grammatical meaning and signifies feminine nouns.
[60] Here, the 't' between parenthesis means that it is not pronounced all the time but only in certain context when it forms liaison with the following part of the sentence.

comprehension. Additionally, simply repeating the word or sentence after the teacher will not support the development of independent readers who know how to decode new and unfamiliar words.

Evidence from electroencephalogram recordings and neuroscience analysis suggests that beginner readers in Arabic tend to recognize non-connected and partially connected words more quickly and easily than orthographically connected words.[61] The impact of the orthographic connectivity on the visual processing is, according to Taha (2014), more noticeable among beginner readers than skilled ones. Beginning readers learn faster when they are exposed first to words whose letters when spelled in Arabic are non-connected and partially connected (e.g., [warda وردة "rose" and nuur نور "light"] before they are introduced to fully connected words (e.g., [casal عسل " honey"]. There is no effort in the textbook to introduce unconnected words prior to connected words.

With regard to the process of word recognition, diacritic signs (vowel markers), according to Taha (2014),[62] are essential for novice learners to decode words. But, for skilled readers, diacritic signs are not considered as necessary element in word recognition process; rather, they may be cumbersome. In other words, the diacritic signs (vocalization) are essential in novice learner's textbooks in order to decode words, but upper grade textbooks may limit the use of diacritics signs.

Vocabulary

Having a rich vocabulary is critical, as we use a variety of words to express our ideas, to communicate effectively, and to learn new concepts. There is a direct relationship between learning vocabulary and academic success, as students with a stronger vocabulary are better equipped to comprehend higher levels of text.[63],[64] In the context of Morocco, vocabulary building is complicated by the fact that a different form of Arabic is often used in informal conversation and in the community. As with any language, if learners have not already developed oral familiarity (speaking and listening skills) with MSA, they will find it more difficult to learn to read MSA because they do not have the pre-existing phonological and context cues that will help decode the written words.

To analyze how vocabulary-building is addressed within the textbooks and facilitator's guides, this study looked at the following

- The relative proportion of abstract vs. concrete vocabulary

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[61] Taha, H. (2014). *The impact of the orthographic connectivity on the process of visual word recognition in Arabic.* Lecture presented at the Workshop on the State-of-the-Art on the Reading Instruction in Arabic, Rabat, Nov. 19-21, 2014.

[62] Taha, H. (2014). *The effect of the vowelization signs on the accuracy and the speed of word recognition in Arabic: A cross-sectional study*. Lecture presented at the Workshop on the State-of-the-Art on the Reading Instruction in Arabic, Rabat, Nov. 19-21, 2014.

[63] Chall, J.S. & Jacobs, V. A. (2003, Sprint). Poor children's fourth-grade slump. *American Educator.* American Federation of Teachers.

[64] Sedita, J. (2005). Effective vocabulary instruction. *Insights on learning disabilities.* 2(1):33-45

- The presentation of conjunctions and grammatical tools
- The frequency of vocabulary words in the texts
- The relationship between vocabulary and the themes of the units studied

Abstract and concrete vocabulary. Abstract vocabulary refers to ideas or concepts that have no physical reference, while concrete vocabulary designates things that can be perceived by the child using the five senses: hearing, touch, smell, sight, and taste. Studies remind us that children understand concrete vocabulary before they understand abstract words.[65] Based on this principle, we decided to make an inventory of all vocabulary words present in the text and classify them as either concrete or abstract. As conjunctions, letters, and grammatical tools are considered to be abstract words when they are out of their semantic context, this study attempted to analyze them independently from the abstract and concrete vocabulary.

The analysis of the content of the level 1 and 2 textbooks showed the following (*Exhibits 18* and *19*):

Exhibit 18: Number of abstract and concrete words in the level 1 textbook
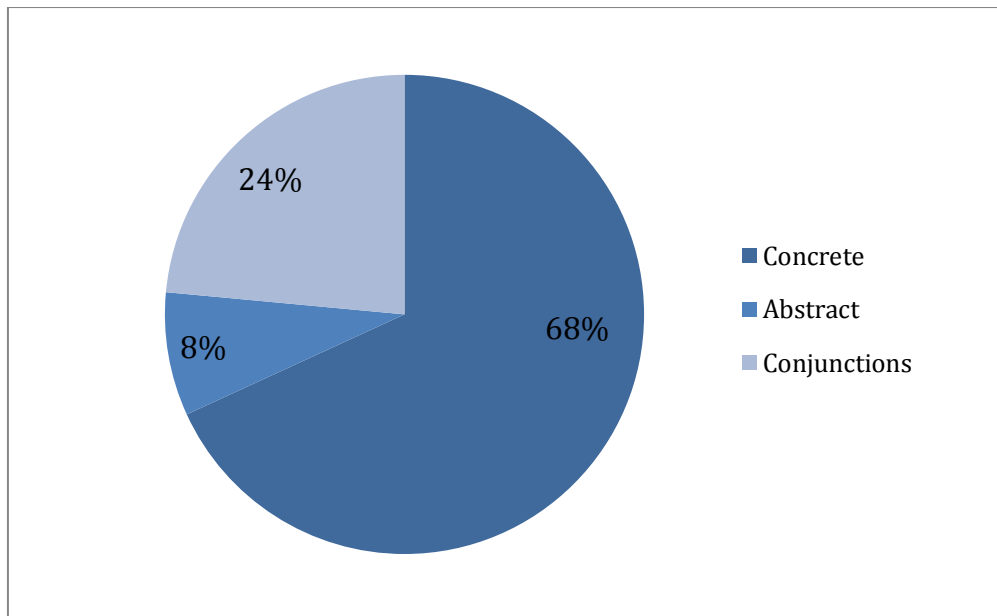
This chart shows that concrete words constitute the majority of the vocabulary contained in the analyzed texts. There are 507 concrete words, or 68% of the total words; 62 abstract words, or 8%; and 175 conjunctions, or 24%.

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[65] Youness, F. (2014). *New trends and important issues in teaching reading and building the curriculum.* Cairo:Wahba Publisher. [In Arabic]

Exhibit 19:   Percentage of concrete and abstract words in the level 2 textbook
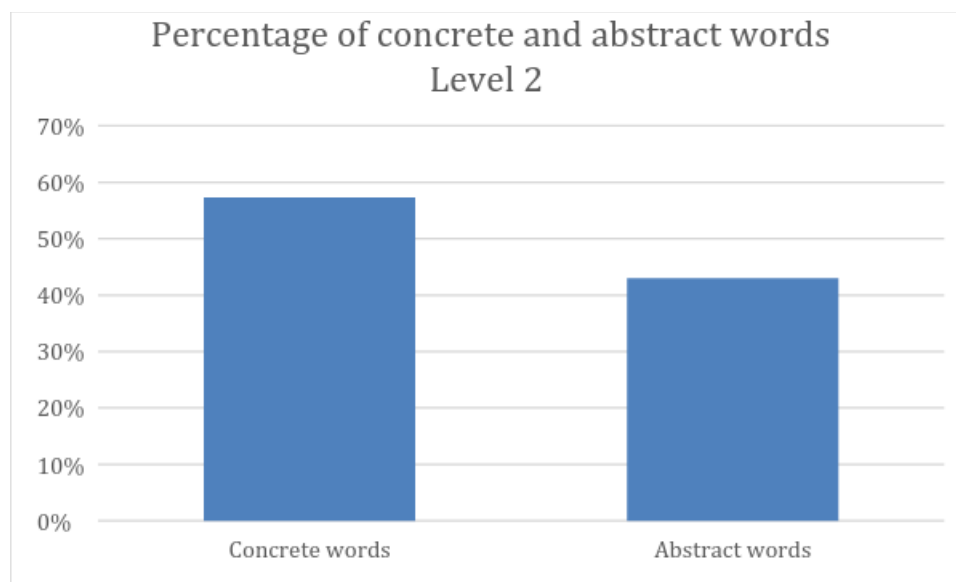
The graph in ***Exhibit 19*** shows that the three units studied of level 2 used 57% concrete words compared with 43% abstract vocabulary.

Research suggests that there should be a higher percentage of concrete words in student texts in the early grades: "Of the vocabulary in the first grade, 80% should be concrete words, and 20% only should be abstract words. In the second grade, 70% should be concrete words, and 30% abstract words, and in the third grade, 60% should be concrete words, and 40% abstract words." [66]

The analysis of the level 1 textbook shows that the percentage of concrete words in the texts is not too far from the above-stated standards. Concrete vocabulary in level 2 textbooks outnumbers abstract vocabulary; however, the percentage of abstract words is higher than the 30% recommended by Youness (2014). On the other hand, it is important to recall that the referenced standards do not necessarily align with the levels of the NFE textbooks which are accelerated, so that by level 2 a child is expected to be reading well, and therefore the ratio of concrete to abstract words may be understandably different.

Comparison of the relative proportions of the two books shows that there is an evolution in difficulty from level 1 to level 2 in terms of the introduction of abstract vocabulary in the higher level; however, level 1 textbooks may advance in difficulty too quickly. Concrete visual images help young learners process information.[67] These images help them memorize information, which means that if the learned words are used in oral communication and related to the functional words that children employ in their daily life, it will be easier for them to understand the words

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[66] Youness, F. (2014: 36).

[67] Stokes, S. (2001) Visual literacy in teaching and learning: A literature perspective. *Electronic journal for the integration of technology in education.* http://ejite.isu.edu/Volume1No1/Stokes.html

contained in the read texts. When children read a text that contains too many abstract words to which they are unable to find a corresponding visual image, the text becomes a hindrance to the learning process and may result in frustration. The best example of this is the vocabulary used in the text titled وطني *waTanii* "My homeland" (Learner's textbook, level 2: 15):

"My homeland is my land."	وطني هو الأرض
"My homeland is me."	وطني هو أنا
"My homeland relies on me and I rely on it."	وطني ينهض بي وأنهض به
"I cry when my homeland is crying."	أضمُّ صراخي إلى صراخ وطني

Although the repetition of vocabulary and sentence structure is a good strategy, these are all very abstract concepts and literary devices (e.g., personification), which may cause confusion.

The same thing applies to the text titled الكتاب "The book" (Learner's textbook, level 2: 23):

"The book is your best friend. It keeps you company, and shares your worries and joys."	الكتاب خير جليس يؤنسك ويشاركك همومك وأفراحك
"Make sure you go to libraries frequently to sharpen your mind and expand your knowledge."	احرص على التردّد على المكتبات لتصقل فكرك، وتوسع مداركك

This text is evidently not used to teach figurative versus literal meaning; however, it uses mostly figurative meaning and imagery that may be beyond the grasp of an immature reader. This common vocabulary and definitions that are somewhat familiar to learners may now be inaccurate or only approximate in some cases. Children who are learning to read need to understand the text directly without digressing into explanations of abstract vocabulary. The child also needs to build self-confidence at this age through reading simple and easily understandable texts that relate to prior knowledge. If too many words are not understood or deal with abstract issues, it means that the text does not fit the level of the pupil. The ultimate goal of providing concrete vocabulary in a text is to make it easier for readers to understand.

Conjunctions and grammatical tools. Many of these words serve sentence meanings and such as: [إذا] "if", [لا] "no", [أنا] "I", [ل] "to", [كما] "as well", [هنا] "here", [هناك] "there", [الآن] "now", [بعد ذلك] "then", [على] "on", [في] "in", [أكثر] "more", etc. When the child starts identifying 50% of the words and understands their meaning, his focus begins to be directed to the words that are difficult to understand. The textbook does not give explicit attention to conjunctions and grammatical tools, and does not classify them as vocabulary. However, this is one area where the whole word or logographic method of reading can be useful, so that children learn to recognize common words by sight.

Example 1:

"يعيش مع أسرة بهية في نفس المنزل الجدّ والجدّة من جهة الأب".
اللغة العربية، المستوى الأول، ص.
"Bahia's grandparents from her father's side live with her family in the same house."
(*lluġa lcarabiyya*, level 1: 20)

Words like أسرة "family", بهية "Bahia", المنزل "house", الجد والجدّة "grandparents", and الأب "father" are concrete words that can be understood by pupils as they are related to their daily life. Conjunctions and grammatical tools such as مع "with", في "in", نفس "same", جهة "side", and من "from" are not concrete words and thus are not meaningful unless they are put into context.

Example 2:

وطني هو أنا، أحس بوجوده كعينيّ ويديّ وقلبي، أتنقل بها من مكان إلى مكان دون أن أعي أنها معي. [كتاب المتعلم، اللغة العربية، المستوى الثاني، ص. 15]
"My homeland is me. I feel its presence like my eyes, hands, and heart because I carry them with me everywhere I go without being aware that they are with me."
(*lluġa lcarabiyya*, level 2: 15)

Words such as أنا "I", عيني "eyes", يدي "hands", قلبي "heart", أتنقل "carry", and مكان "everywhere" are concrete words, and there are 8 of them. Words like وطني "homeland" and أعي "aware" are abstract, and there are 2 of them in this sentence. Other words such as ي "my", ه "its", ك "like", و "and", ها "them", من "from", إلى "to", دون "without", أنَّها "that", "they" and مع "with" are considered conjunctions and grammatical tools, and there are 11 of them.

If we consider conjunctions and grammatical tools as abstract vocabulary, the total percentage of abstract vocabulary in the second level will be 61%, which is a high percentage for this level.

We note from the above that the textbook does not provide explicit focus on teaching conjunctions and prepositions to learners as an integral part of vocabulary building in support of fluent reading. Instead, it handles them in separate grammatical lessons and out of semantic and functional contexts.

To learn to read, pupils should learn to use a number of tools and mechanisms that help them understand the text. One such tool is the visual identification of words that frequently occur in all texts. These prepositions and conjunctions cannot be illustrated with pictures. However, most of them help pupils understand the meaning of sentences and anticipate words that follow.

Frequency of words. In order to develop learners' fluency and comprehension, studies that focused on developing reading skills suggest that to develop automatic word recognition, words "must be repeated at least 20 times the first grade, and 15 times the second grade of primary, and 10 times the third grade."[68]

The frequent use of a word in the same text or in different texts, and in different contexts, allows learners to identify it easily, read it quickly, and swiftly move to the next word. In this way, pupils will improve their reading fluency, and subsequently reading comprehension. The most frequent words include conjunctions and grammatical terms, as described above, as well as are nouns and verbs that are part of the everyday experience of the children. [69]

Level 1

After analyzing the frequency of vocabulary (nouns, adjectives and verbs) in the texts, we came up with the results shown in *Exhibit 20*.

Exhibit 20:   Frequency of vocabulary in level 1
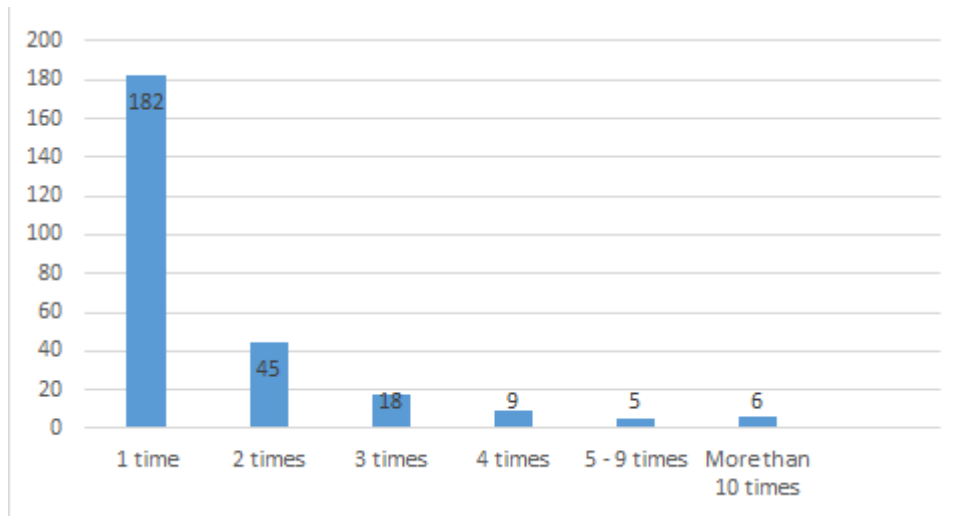
According to *Exhibit 20*, it is evident that the frequency of vocabulary in this level is insufficient. Most words only appeared once, which prevents learners from practicing them, developing their reading fluency, and consequently understanding the text with more ease.

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[68] Youness, F. (2014).
[69] Youness (2014) notes that verbs may express events in time and the concept of time is more abstract for children than nouns.

Level 2

Exhibit 21:   Frequency of vocabulary in the level 2
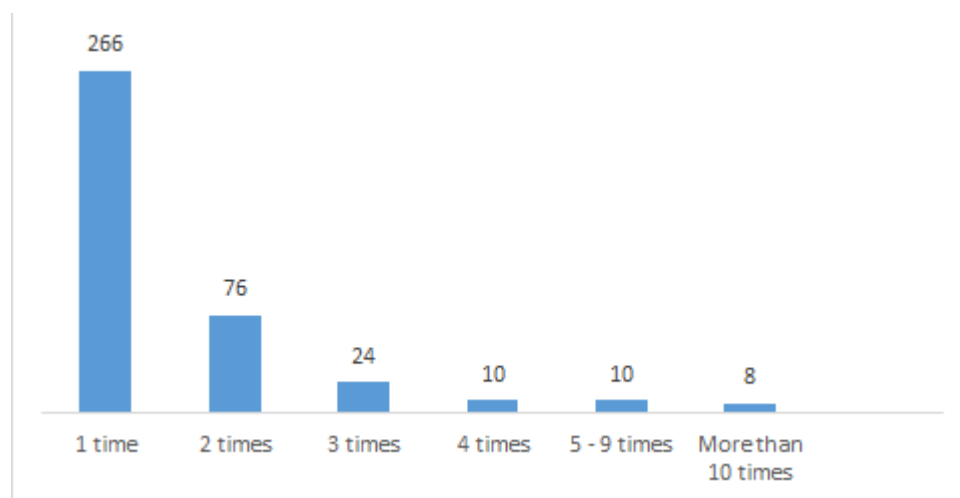
As is the case for the first level, the frequency of vocabulary in the second level is also insufficient, as shown in ***Exhibit 21***. Most of the vocabulary only occurred once; few words were repeated two or three times, which is below the required percentage. Almost no words were repeated more than three times.

It can be argued that vocabulary repetition is not only done within the textbooks; indeed, it would be impossible to repeat every word 20 times. The teacher's job should be to reinforce vocabulary through other types of exercises, and to find supplemental reading materials that reinforce certain vocabulary. However, early reading textbooks that demonstrate word repetition also demonstrate that lessons are building on prior content and are gradually increasing difficulty intentionally, while providing children with text that they should be able to decode because they have seen the words before (or have at least learned the sounds and syllables in new words being introduced).

Vocabulary and its relevance to the unit studied. Vocabulary plays an essential role in supporting the theme studied in every unit, but the inverse is true as well—knowing the context of the text (the theme) can help learners anticipate meaning of vocabulary words introduced in the text. Knowledge of vocabulary then contributes to reading fluency and comprehension. To examine how vocabulary is addressed in the textbooks, we studied the relationship between the vocabulary and the units, and how it facilitates the reading process, supports the themes studied, and helps achieve the objectives underlined in each unit. The objective of this section is to examine the extent to which the reading texts and reading activities reinforce the learner's understanding of the theme, and therefore the acquisition of the vocabulary and knowledge about the theme.

This analysis found that that in level 1 and 2 textbooks, the choice of reading texts fails to support the theme of the lessons. Moreover, the reading activities following the reading texts do not help the learner understand the theme of the unit and its component activities and do not stimulate the

learner to think about his/her relationship with the theme and provide his/her input about it. Some of the relevant data by level are presented in the following paragraphs.

Level 1

In Unit 1 in the level 1 textbook, the theme of *The Child and the School* is supported by texts that fail to address the relationship of the child with the school and the school environment. The text is about children playing, eating, family, and playing with a cat. Although these do concern children, they do not reinforce the theme of the child in his or her relationship with the school. The topics in the texts do not motivate the learners to discuss their status as school children in the space of the school and their relationships with other students, their teachers, janitors, classroom objects, and national symbols. All questions, for example, are direct recall questions with no attention to questions or activities that motivate the students to react to the text and communicate their opinions (orally and in writing) about the text and how it reflects their social really, which would support the goals of the communicative approach described by the curriculum.

The analysis of the Read and Answer activity in the first three units shows that 10 exercises out of 12—which represents 83% of the vocabulary exercises—are not linked to the theme studied, as shown in ***Exhibit 22***.

Exhibit 22:   Exercises related to the theme

The theme studied	Relationship between the content and the theme	Read and Answer
Child and School	Yes	p. 10
Child and School	No	p. 12
Child and School	No	p. 14
Child and School	No	p. 16
Child and Family	No	p. 20
Child and Family	No	p. 22
Child and Family	No	p. 24
Child and Family	No	p. 26
Child and Neighborhood & Countryside	Yes	p. 30
Child and Neighborhood & Countryside	No	p. 32
Child and Neighborhood & Countryside	No	p. 34
Child and Neighborhood & Countryside	No	p. 36

The *Read and Answer* exercise on page 14 in the level 1 textbook, for example, asks the learners to *read* the question '*what is this*?' based on a picture, and the students have to read all the options they have and choose one from two or three multiple choices.

Read the following:

   Bahia's Cat

   - Turaya plays with her cat.

   - It is under the tree.

   - It saw a mouse and jumped on it.

The text fails to support the theme and may be a cause of confusion for the learner because of the following:

1. The title talks about "Bahia's cat," while the first sentence in the text says "Turaya plays with her cat." This can cause confusion as to who the subject of the story is.

2. The textbook provides six exercises after this "cat" text that do not seem relevant to the text or to the overall subject theme, *The Child and the School*.

3. No exercise in this unit supports the acquisition or development of vocabulary related to school.

Exhibit 23 highlights the different activities of the reading lesson and their relationship with the text through the study of a single sample.

Exhibit 23: Example of lesson components

theme : *The Child and the School*	Text	Activities	Linguistic item	Skills reinforced
	Eating	1. Read a new sentence	Fatiha eats an apple p.15	Word recognition (through logographic memorization)
	Different vocabulary	2. Read	‚[t + aa= taa, تاج (تا) = ا + ت *taaj*] ت + ي = (تي) تينٌ، = *t + ii* *tii, tiin*] ت + و = (تو) توتٌ.] = *t + uu* *tuu , tuut*] p.15	Phonemic awareness and alphabetic principle, decoding
	Different vocabulary	3. Observe & Read	ت: تمر] *t: tamr*] تـ: كُتُب] *t: kutub*] ت: بيت] *t: bayt*] p.16	One vocabulary word; Phonemic awareness and alphabetic principle,
	Playing	4. Read & Answer	What did Hafida throw? • Hafida threw the ball • Hafida threw the key p.16	Comprehension
	Family	5. Read orderly	This -our family- picture-little p.16	Word recognition (through logographic memorization)
	Cat	6. Read the following	Bahia's Cat • Turaya plays with her cat. • It is under the tree. • It saw a mouse and jumped on it. p.16	Word recognition (through logographic memorization)

Judging from the analysis of three units in level 1 textbook, this textbook does not help the learner acquire the meanings and values, and associated vocabulary that revolve around the topic of the child and his or her relationship with the school, the family, and the neighborhood. All the texts chosen are unrelated to the school. They involve the child, but in different contexts such as playing and eating. Thus the vocabulary related to the semantic field of school is missing. Words like school bag, scissors, ruler, etc., and concepts and values such as respect for the school

environment, cleaning after using the school space (classroom, restaurant, toilet, etc.), respect of others' belongings and private space, team spirit, etc., could have been chosen as the subject this unit if content knowledge is expected to be an objective of the textbooks. However, it is hard to assess what pupils learn about the theme of *The Child and School* since there are no learning outcomes spelled out.

Our analysis compared the title of the theme of the unit with the content. The conclusion is that there is lack of relationship between these two things. The child, therefore, may be at a disadvantage when it comes to learning the vocabulary in the texts. Also, it indicates lack of a clear rationale for sequencing content.

Level 2

Unit 1 of level 2 starts with the theme of *Islamic, National, and Human Values*, which is laudable from the point of view of education. However, the text chosen for the theme of *Islamic, National, and Human Values* is about the exodus of the prophet from Mecca to Medina in the 7th century. While the title is about the exodus, the text talks about the reasons behind the exodus, and does not embody any clear Islamic, national, or human values. Moreover, the activities following the text itself fail to help the learner acquire the necessary vocabulary and understanding of the values intended by the title of the unit.

The analysis of level 2 stories shows that themes are again addressed in vague and abstract manner. For example:

- In the text titled الهجرة النبوية "The Hijra of the Prophet," no single word deals with Islamic, national, or human values (apart from the word "prophet," which is related to Islam in general).

- The text titled وطني "My homeland" tackles an abstract theme that is far from the daily life of children.

- Out of 146 words in the text titled العائلة "Family," only 7 words are related to this topic. Moreover, the authors do not adhere to cultural realities, such as the fact that visiting a factory in Morocco is not possible on a Sunday, because it is a weekend.

- The text titled حقوق الطفل "Children's Rights" is about a man sleeping and dreaming of one day having a wife, a home, and a child. As this dream unfolds, he has a son whom he proceeds to educate through beating with a stick. While still sleeping he takes a stick and breaks a pot of honey over his head. Upon waking he realizes that he deserves it for having beaten a child and deprived him of his rights.

- Finally, the text titled عائشة "Aisha" deals with a mother who wakes her daughter to work in the fields even though her daughter is dreaming of going to school and becoming a doctor. The mother implies that dreams do not come true.

There is a lot of potential for these short stories to provoke discussion around children's rights and girls education, as long as the teacher is prepared to offer sufficient scaffolding through vocabulary and questioning strategies. However, on their own, the stories may cause more

misunderstanding than learning about human rights and democracy, especially at a level where, by definition, the children are those who are struggling with comprehension even if they are able to read (***Exhibit 24***).

Exhibit 24: The relationship between the vocabulary and the theme of the units (level 2)
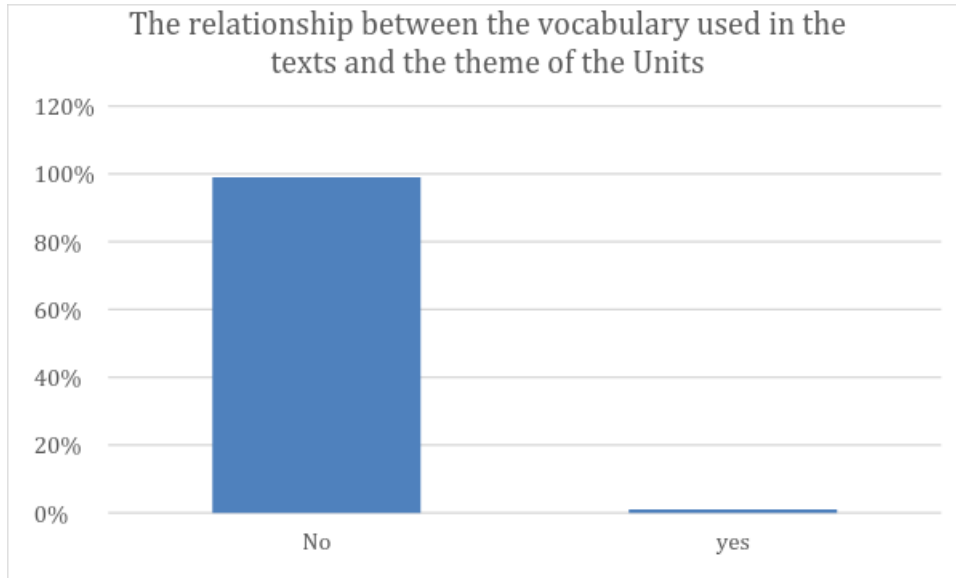
We concluded that 99% of the words in the textbooks are not relevant to the themes or units studied.

Exhibit 25 provides a more detailed analysis of the text of one unit and the activities in it.

Exhibit 25: The first functional text: "The Hijra of the Prophet"

Theme:	Text	Activities	Linguistic item	Skills reinforced
Islamic, National, and Human Values	Enrich the vocabulary (2 words)	I enrich my vocabulary	I enrich my vocabulary	Two new words
	Comprehension questions	I comprehend	5 direct and 1 indirect comprehension questions	Reading comprehension
	Written research	I research	Look for the names of the Righteous Caliphs	Research
	Fill in the blanks	I do the same	An exercise on how to use styles	Unclear
	Fill in the blanks	I practice	I practice the use of vocabulary	Vocabulary knowledge
	Oral expression	I express	Question: what occasion do Muslims celebrate on Muharram 1st?	Oral expression
	• Fill in the	Language structure	Identifying a verbal	Verb use

	blanks with the proposed words • Highlighting the verbal sentence • Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb		sentence	
	• Fill in the blanks with the proposed words • Highlighting the verbal sentence • Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb	Conjugation and sentence modifications	-Identifying the verb, the noun and the preposition	Grammar concepts

The table above shows the relationship of the text and activities to the reading lesson. Most of the eight activities accompanying each text (10 out of 16 in the two texts combined together) are not related to the topic of the text. The activities are not related to each other, and the principle of gradual learning is not taken into consideration as more difficult activities are found earlier on (p. 17: exercise 3: "Complete the table" comes after the exercise "Provide two nominal sentences," which is more difficult).

Literacy skills, particularly vocabulary and comprehension, could be supported better through a deliberate and gradual learning progression that builds on prior knowledge and supports increasingly independent learning. We conclude from analyzing the relationship between the content of exercises and the themes studied that there is some disconnect between the themes of the units and the vocabulary presented; the theme of the unit is not supporting vocabulary development, nor is the vocabulary helping to build understanding of the topic. If the topics studied are intended to be useful in the development of the child's general skills and competencies (i.e., they are not just designed to teach reading, but also to teach subject matter), then the vocabulary should reinforce the subject matter.

Although it was beyond the scope of this study to investigate further, it is possible that the lack of coherence results in other counterproductive outcomes:

- Learning in school is formal and detached from its context; it may not help the children understand and act upon their environment.

- When the learners leave class, the meanings and associated vocabulary will not be appropriate to interpret their environment and therefore will not form part of the vocabulary that they can use to improve their reading skills.

Fluency

While fluency is necessary for reading with comprehension, it is not sufficient, meaning there are other skills such as decoding, vocabulary, and background knowledge use that play a large role in understanding a text, as described above. It is important for teachers to be able to determine whether the student read at the appropriate level, in terms of his/her ability to read at an appropriate rate and understand the text.

Reading fluency is often defined as "reading accurately at a quick rate with appropriate prosody."[70] It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which a textbook promotes fluency, since much depends on how the teacher makes use of the textbook; however, it is possible for it to contain oral activities that can improve fluency. For example, students can be asked to read according to punctuation marks and other symbols that mark stress and intonation; students learn that those who read a text with fluency (i.e., with the correct prosody and at a rapid rate), as though telling the story orally, are more likely to use the patterns of rhythm, stress, and intonation that convey the connotative meanings of the text and thus betray a good understanding of the text. Fluency exercises can be used in a textbook to verify the learners' decoding ability, mastery of vocabulary, and overall understanding of the text.

Some of the things that the study looked at in order to gauge the extent to which level 1 and 2 textbooks address fluency include the following:

- Whether there is progression from simple to complex sentences and styles, and whether they are leveled appropriately for each grade

- Use of exercises that assess the learners' reading pace, prosody, and understanding

- Use a variety of sentence types (e.g., informative, interrogative, negative, imperative, prohibitive, etc.)

- Punctuation that helps in the understanding of texts and in helping the student recognize the feelings of the characters in a narrative or dialogue

- Drills that help learners comprehend appropriate vocabulary and help promote their reading fluency.

Words per sentence and sentence complexity. Studies show a strong link between the number of words per sentence and levels of learning (***Exhibit 26***); the more words per sentence, the more difficulty children have grasping its syntactic structure, negatively impacting reading performance.[71] The length of the sentence is one of the factors that lead to the structural complexity of the sentence; the longer the sentence, the more difficult it is to read and understand.[72] Although the exact number of words per sentence and sentences per paragraph is variable, sentences are more easily understood when they

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[70] Hudson, et al. (2009). The complex nature of reading fluency: A multidimensional view. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 25: 4–32. See also Hirsch (2003).

[71] Youness, F. (2014).

[72] In terms of readability, text density guidelines suggest that up to grade 3 there should be fewer than 8 to 10 words per line and 8 to 10 lines of text per page. Text density increases as the years and grades progress. See USAID, 2014.

- are simple;

- consist of a single idea;

- include repeated, familiar words; and

- are supported by pictures.

Exhibit 26: Number of words per sentence (level 1)
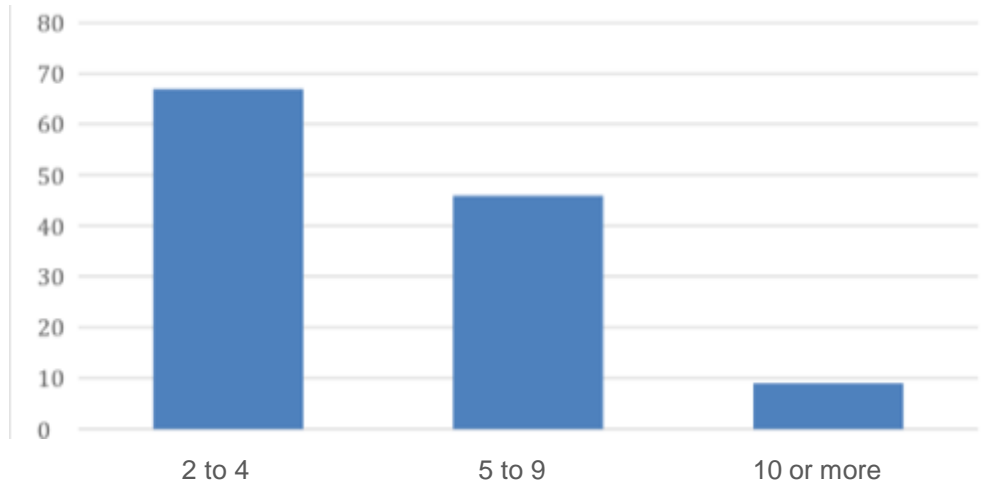
Exhibit 26 shows that over 60% of the sentences in the level 1 textbook contain two to four words and convey a single idea, which is consistent with good practice.

Exhibit 27: Comparison of number of words per sentence in level 1 in FE and NFE
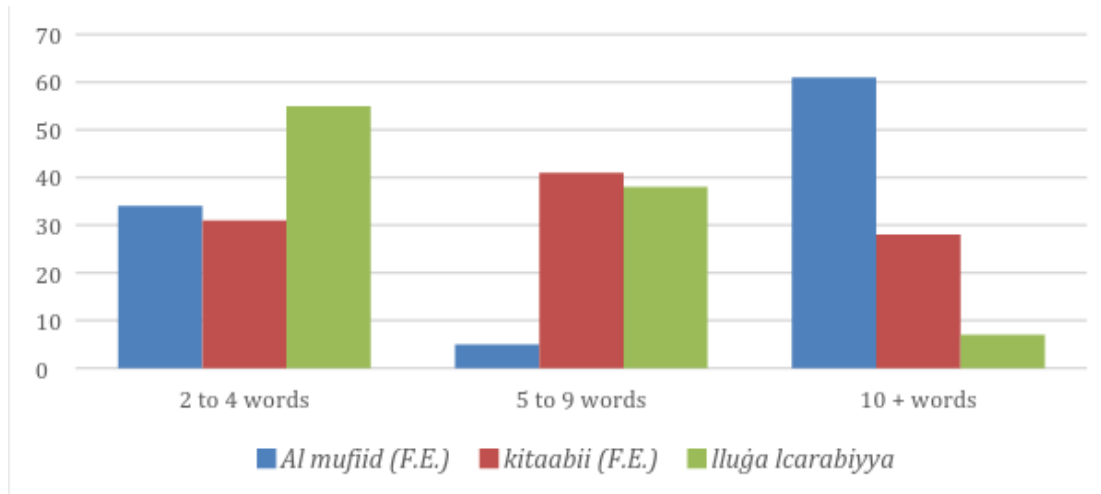
Exhibit 27 compares *Kitaabii* and *Al-Mufiid*, the two level 1 textbooks of formal schools with *lluġa lcarabiyya*, the level 1 textbook of non-formal schools. In terms of the number of words per

sentence, we found that 30 to 60% of sentences in the formal education textbooks contained 10 words or more per sentence. In the NFE books, about 55% of sentences were 2 to 4 words long and the average number of words per sentence was 7.3, whereas in FE the textbooks vary between 5.8 and 7.6 words per sentence on average.

Therefore, the NFE level 1 textbook is more appropriate in terms of the number of words per sentence to the level of the learners compared to formal education textbook. Most sentences are simple and contain only one idea and no internal punctuation (direct speech or dependent clauses, for example.) This is a positive characteristic of the level 1 textbook in that it takes into consideration the assumed low literacy level of the NFE children. The text box below shows examples of a "simple" sentence type.[73]

Example of sentences	*lluġa lcarabiyya* , level 1 (NFE)
A simple sentence	يرجع سعيد من المدرسة نشيطاً Said returns back from school happily. (*lluġa lcarabiyya* , level 1:29)

Level 2

Exhibit 28 shows the percentage of sentences that contain a specific number of words in the level 2 textbook.

Exhibit 28: Number of words per sentence (level 2)

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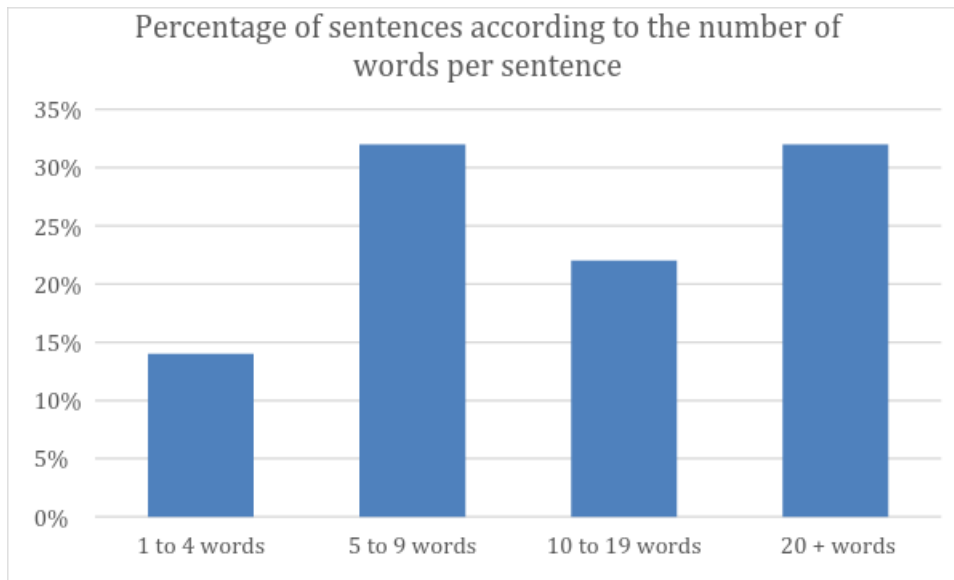
[73] This does not mean that the sentence is automatically "easy" to read. As previously mentioned, if the sentences are made up of unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical markers, and letters that have not yet been introduced, they will be complex in a different way. In this section "simple" versus "complex" refers mainly to length of sentences and whether they are made up of one idea or more, and one clause or more.

We found that 54% of sentences have more than 10 words, of which 32% have more than 20 words; only 14% of sentences contain 1 to 4 words. There is a progression in sentence difficulty from level 1 to level 2.

The study found that the level 2 textbook contains very long and complex sentences, compared to recommended standards for Arabic language. Fathi argues that one should use sentences according to a gradient based on the number of their words; in first grade, simple short sentences can consist of the verb and the subject (e.g., دَخَلَ الرّجل *dakhal arrajulu*, "The man came in"), a nominal sentence (e.g., الجوّ جميل *al jawwu jamiilun*; "The weather is beautiful"). The number of words per sentence increases in level 2 and 3 when the complex sentence, consisting of two or more connected sentences, is introduced; then the conditional, appositive, etc., sentences tend to appear in level 3.

Exhibit 29 provides samples of sentences from the level 2 student textbook.

Exhibit 29:   Examples of sentences from level 2 textbook

Samples of sentences	*lluġa lcarabiyya*, level 2 (NFE)
Simple sentences	A simple sentence consists of a verb, subject (and object), or the subject and predicate. This kind of sentence is nonexistent in level 2 textbook.
Complex sentences	The father praised his son saying: well done son, visiting relatives is a gesture that every Muslim should do, because Allah urged us in the Qur'an to do it, and the prophet said : « Muslims are like the body, if a part of the body is sick, the whole body turns sick.» *Lluġa lcarabiyya*, level 2: 27

Some of the texts contained sentences of over 60 words per sentence. For example, the following sentence contains 101 words, and several ideas that could have been separated into different sentences in terms of structure and meaning:

The leaders of Quraish consulted with each other to decide what to do to stop the prophet from spreading his Da'awa, one of them suggested to oust him from our land, a second one suggested to lock him up in his house without food or water until he dies, a third one proposed to choose a strong young man from every tribe and once he gets out of his home, all of them will beat him to death so that all tribes take part in the killing, Allah informed his prophet about their conspiracy, and ordered him to immigrate to Medina (lluġa lcarabiyya, level 2: 11).

Use of punctuation. Punctuation has a direct relationship with intonation in reading aloud and a child's comprehension of the text. Rules of punctuation are very firmly codified in many Western languages. However, the Arabic language traditionally did not use punctuation standards to set the structure of the sentence, and adopted other devices to structure the sentence.[74] Although

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[74] Wickens, G. (1980). *Arabic grammar: A first workbook.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

punctuation has been increasingly adopted, the rules are far less systematic than in English, for example.[75] The textbooks use punctuation. However, authors do not respect its guidelines. For example, a comma and semicolon play the role of a period, as in the example below.

The leaders of Quraish consulted with each other to decide what to do to stop the prophet from spreading his Da'awa,	اجْتَمَعَ زُعَماءَ قَرَيْشٍ يَتَشَاوَرُونَ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ فَي أَمْرِ الرَّسُولِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لِوَقْفِ دَعْوَتِهِ،
one of them suggested to oust him from our land,	فَقَالَ أَحَدُهُم: نُخْرِجُهُ مِنْ أَرْضِنَا،
a second one suggested to lock him up in his house without food or water until he dies,	وَقَالَ آخَرُ: نَحْبِسُهُ فِي بَيْتِهِ دُونَ أَكْلٍ أَوْ شُرْبٍ حَتَّى يَمُوتَ،
a third one proposed to choose a strong young man from every tribe,	وَقَالَ ثَالِثٌ: نَأْخُذُ مِنْ كُلِّ قَبِيلَةٍ شَابًا قَوِيًّا،
all of them will beat him to death,	وَيَجْتَمِعُونَ لَيْلاً أَمَامَ دَارِهِ فَإِذَا خَرَجَ ضَرَبُوهُ ضَرْبَةَ رَجُلٍ وَاحِدٍ،
so that all tribes take part in the killing,	فَيَتَفَرَّقَ دَمُهُ بَيْنَ القَبَائِلِ،
Allah informed his prophet about their conspiracy,	فَأَعْلَمَ اللهُ نَبِيَّهُ مَا يُدَبِّرُهُ أَعْدَاءُ الإِسْلامِ فِي سِرِّهِم،
and ordered him to immigrate to Medina	وَأَمَرَهُ بِالهِجْرَةِ إِلى المَدِينَة المُنَوَّرَةِ.

(*lluġa lcarabiyya*, level 2: 11).

Instead of presenting one paragraph that consists of one sentence, the paragraph could be split into eight independent sentences that are short and easy to read as suggested below.

(1) اجْتَمَعَ زُعَماءَ قَرَيْشٍ يَتَشَاوَرُونَ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ فَي أَمْرِ الرَّسُولِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لِوَقْفِ دَعْوَتِهِ. (2) فَقَالَ أَحَدُهُم: نُخْرِجُهُ مِنْ أَرْضِنَا. (3) وَقَالَ آخَرُ: نَحْبِسُهُ فِي بَيْتِهِ دُونَ أَكْلٍ أَوْ شُرْبٍ حَتَّى يَمُوتَ. (4) وَقَالَ ثَالِثٌ: نَأْخُذُ مِنْ كُلِّ قَبِيلَةٍ شَابًا قَوِيًّا. (5) وَيَجْتَمِعُونَ لَيْلاً أَمَامَ دَارِهِ، فَإِذَا خَرَجَ ضَرَبُوهُ ضَرْبَةَ رَجُلٍ وَاحِدٍ. (6) فَيَتَفَرَّقَ دَمُهُ بَيْنَ القَبَائِلِ. (7) فَأَعْلَمَ

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[75] Dickens, J., Hervey, S., and Higgins, I. (2002). *Thinking Arabic translation. A course in translation method: Arabic to English.* London: Routledge

اللهُ نَبِّيَهُ ما يُدَبِّرُهُ أَعْدَاءُ الإسْلامِ فِي سِرِّهِمِ (8) وَأَمَرَهُ بِالهِجْرَةِ إلى المَدِينَة المُنَوَّرَةِ.

Sentence types in the textbooks. This sub-section focuses on the various types of sentences found in the textbooks (verbal or nominal, informative, or non-informative). An informative sentence states a fact or an argument that can be either true or false; e.g.: "Science is harmful." The statement in this sentence is not true. A non-informative sentence refers to any sentence that cannot be said to be true or false, such as imperative, negation, interjection, interrogative, wishing, swearing, praising, and exclamatory sentences.

There is a general tendency for level 1 and 2 textbooks to use narrative texts (i.e., stories that describe sequences of fictional or non-fictional events. Narrative texts usually include a greater number of descriptive and informative sentences), at the expense of dialogic texts (i.e., texts that reproduce verbal interaction between fictional or non-fictional characters). Dialogic texts tend to include non-informative sentences.

As Fathi (2014: 38) argues, for early reading development, "It is advisable to avoid the use of narrative texts which do not motivate the students to learn. On the contrary, it is highly recommended to present narrative and other genres in dialogic texts that rely on interaction between the characters in the text."

Fathi adds that textbooks for teaching Arabic literacy in the early grades should continue to rely on stories and fables because they are among the genres that attract the children's attention, present knowledge to them, and promote their appropriate behavior. More research should be done in the context of Morocco to understand how children react to different types of fiction and non-fiction genres.

Level 1

The analysis of the first three units of the level 1 textbook shows that 84% of the sentences are informative, and that only 16% are non-informative (**Exhibit 30**). We also noted the absence of negation, calling, and wishing styles in the textbook. There are 4 imperative sentences, 1 calling sentence, 11 interrogative sentences, and no negative sentences.

Exhibit 30:   Styles and syntax – number of sentences per type

Level 1 sentence types						
Non-informative sentences						**Informative sentences**
Wish	Interrogative	Vocative	Exclamatory	Negation	Imperative	
0	11	0	1	0	4	84

For example, the paucity of negative structures in the reading texts in the first three units in the level 1 textbook is surprising, since communicative competency would require being able to

express both the positive and negative forms. Moreover, negation markers such as لا '*laa*', ليس '*laysa*', لم '*lam*', and ما '*maa*' are frequent words (Oweini & Hazoury, 2010).[76] Thus, there is indeed a great value in teaching negation to make sentence reading easier and more decodable for an early learner.

Level 2

Analysis of the first three units of the level 2 textbook found 24 informative sentences (57%), and 18 non-informative sentences (43%). Of the 18 non-informative there are 3 imperative sentences, 1 exclamatory sentence, and 9 interrogative sentences. Again, negation and wishing sentences are not represented in these units (***Exhibit 31***).

Exhibit 31:   Styles and syntax – number of sentences per type

Level 2						
Non-informative sentences						Informative sentences
Wish	Interrogative	Interjection	Exclamatory	Negation	Imperative	
0	9	1	5	0	3	24

There is no progression from the more straightforward informative sentences to more complex types of non-informative sentences in level 2. The tendency for level 1 and 2 textbooks to use narrative text (which usually includes a greater number of informative sentences), at the expense of dialogic texts that also include non-informative sentences, may negatively impact the learners' reading ability in that they may not be able to transfer the rich prosodic characteristics of dialog that are present in non-informative sentences (i.e., it may affect fluency and oral interaction).

Comprehension

Comprehension is the fifth component all learners need to master (see Section 1.2: Theoretical framework). This subsection examines to what extent the textbooks use appropriate strategies to promote comprehension, and what types of comprehension the children learn to do. The study shows that the two textbooks place a strong emphasis on comprehension skills. However, they do not use strategies such as prediction, verification, summarization, and other reading comprehension strategies other than asking and answering questions.

Level 1

Analysis of the level 1 textbook shows that all questions are of the direct type (***Exhibit 32***). For example, a question asks the learners to provide an answer based on a picture, as in "What does Karim do?" And the learner answers with "Karim plays with the ball" (out of multiple choice

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[76] Oweini, A. and Hazoury, K. (2010). Towards a sight word list in Arabic. *International Review of Education*, 56(4): 457-478

questions); this is a case of a very direct level of comprehension, i.e., direct recall of key vocabulary words. (See example below for the structure of this activity).

Read and Answer (12)
What does Karim do?
- Karim eats couscous.
- Karim puts books on the shelves.
- Karim plays with the ball.

In other words, the reading skills promoted in the sentences used in the textbook are only limited to answering direct questions; in the *I Read and Answer* activity, for example, the textbook focuses on the lower levels of reading comprehension (i.e., knowledge, understanding and application) and neglects questions that engage higher order thinking skills (i.e., analysis, synthesis, and evaluation).

Exhibit 32: Themes and progression in level 1

Level	Theme	Reading lesson (page)	Reading comprehension skills	Notes regarding the texts
One	First : Child and School	the letter « *mim* م » (9) the letter « *kaf* ك » (11) the letter « *ba'* ب » (13) the letter « *ta'* ت »	Direct comprehension	Appropriate short sentences
	Second : Child and family	the letter « *ha'* ه » (19) the letter « *alif* ا » (21) the letter « *ra'* ر » (23) the letter « *lam* ل » (25)	Direct comprehension	Appropriate short sentences
	ˈThird : Child and Neighbor-rhood & Country-side	the letter « dal د » (29) the letter « *nun* ن » (31) the letter « *ya'* ي » (33) the letter « *jim* ج » (35)	Direct comprehension	Appropriate short sentences

In some questions, pupils have to pick the correct answer from three choices, as is the case in the example above. But in other cases, they only have two choices:

Read and Answer (20)
What does Hicham do?
- Hicham puts flowers in the vase.
- Hicham talks on the phone.

In other questions, the correct answer is not provided among the choices.

Read and Answer (36)
Did Khadija eat a pear?
 - Khadija ate cheese.
 - Khadija ate chicken.

The question here is: How will the teacher and the student cope with this situation? Does the teacher need to add the third choice, which will necessarily be the right answer? Or does the learner have to find the right answer? The types of exercises pictured above are actually more appropriate for building vocabulary skills, but one would expect the questions to be structured with a focus on a certain vocabulary item—i.e., Karim plays with the ball; Karim plays with the bat; Karim plays with the plane.

Level 2

The study shows that reading comprehension skills introduced in the reading material in the level 2 textbook are equally limited to answering direct and indirect questions, whereas other types of questions that aim to engage the attention of the reader are totally ignored.

Exhibit 33 below summarizes the data collected from the first three units of the level 2 textbook.

Exhibit 33:   Examples of sentences from level 2 textbook

Recall	Comprehension	Application	Synthesis, analysis, evaluation	The first three units of level 2 textbook (NFE) (page)
-	5	-		The Hijra of the Prophet (11)
-	-	-	-	My Country (15)
-	4	-	1	The Book (23)
-	5	1	-	Family (27)
-	5	-	-	Children's Rights (35)
-	4	-	1	Aisha (39)
0	23	1	2	Total

Of the 26 comprehension questions in the first three units of the textbook, 23 relate to lower-level comprehension skills, and only 3 to upper-level comprehension skills. The majority of questions draw from the students' memory of the text (for example, who, what, where, when, etc.), restricting students to the lower levels of Bloom's cognitive classification (recall, comprehension, and application). There are also no strategies within the facilitator's guides that encourage students to use higher-level comprehension skills such as critical thinking, analysis, construction, and assessment.

Values and issues

Educational reform in Morocco opens up a new phase of measures to catch up with the international advances in education. The National Charter of Education has been used since 1999 as the main reference for any new revision of school curricula; for example, it stipulates that the textbooks revise the set of values and issues existing in the old textbooks and adopt new values of tolerance, gender equality, human rights, moderate Islam, civic engagement, etc. This study examines the extent to which the texts in the first three units of the level 1 and 2 textbooks try to uphold these values (***Exhibit 34***).

Level 1

Exhibit 34: Level 1 - Values incorporated in the reading texts

Unit	Text		Teacher's fuide	Value included in the text
First: The Child & the School	In the School	(p. 10)	–	Welcoming
	Going to School	(p. 12)	–	Greeting
	New Dress	(p. 14)	–	No values
	Bahia's Cat	(p. 16)	–	No values
	At School	(p. 18)	–	No values
Second : The Child & the Family	*Bahia's* Family	(p. 20)	–	No values
	Young Guests	(p. 22)	–	Tidying the house and welcoming the guest
	Visiting a Sick Person	(p. 24)	–	Visiting a sick person
	Laila's House	(p. 26)	–	No values
	My Mother	(p. 28)	–	No values
Third : The Child & His Relationship with the Neighborhood or Village	*Wedad* in the Village	(p. 30)	–	No values
	Cleaning Campaign	(p. 32)	–	Cleaning and taking care of one's environment
	In the Village	(p. 34)	–	No values
	The New Friends	(p. 36)	–	No values
	The Farmer	(p. 38)	–	Seriousness and hard-work

(-) This symbol means that there is no reference to values in the facilitator's guide.

Exhibit 34 shows that out of 15 texts only 6 incorporate values. Note that 60% of lessons do not incorporate values content.

Level 2

Exhibit 35: Level 2 - Values incorporated in the reading texts

Unit	Text		Facilitator's guide	Value included in the text
First : Islamic, National, & Human Values	Prophetic Migration	(p.11)	–	No values
	My Homeland	(p.15)	–	Taking pride in one's country
Second : Cultural & Social Life	The Book	(p.23)	–	Friendship and loyalty
	The Family	(p.27)	–	Family cohesion
Third : Democracy & Child Rights	Child Rights	(p.35)	–	No values
	Aisha	(p.39)	–	No values

(-) This symbol means that reference to values is absent in the facilitator's guide.

Exhibit 35 shows that three texts out of six in the level 2 textbook include values. Failing to promote some kind of values on three occasions may be considered a substantial oversight, given the emphasis on thematic content in the national curriculum.

Reading text topics and issues addressed

Level 1

Exhibit 36 shows the topic of the unit, the topic of each reading passage in the unit, and whether or not the text is relevant to the unit topic.

Exhibit 36:   Level 1 - Issues addressed in the reading texts

Unit	Text (page)		Learner's book	Relevance
First : The Child & the School	In the School	(10)	–	Yes
	Going to School	(12)	–	Yes
	New Dress	(14)	–	No
	Bahia's Cat	(16)	–	No
	At School	(18)	–	Yes
Second : The Child & the Family	Bahia's Family	(20)	Describing a family	Yes
	Young Guests	(22)	Preparing to welcome guests	Yes
	Visiting a Sick Person	(24)	Visiting a Sick Person and receiving guests	Yes
	Laila's House	(26)	Describing a house	Yes
	My Mother	(28)	A mother's affection	Yes
Third : The Child & His Relationship with the Neighborhood or Village	Widad in the Village	(30)	Life in the village	Yes
	Cleaning Campaign	(32)	Cleaning the neighborhood	Yes
	In the Village	(34)	Travel to the village	Yes
	The New Friends	(36)	Getting to know others	Yes
	The Farmer	(38)	The farmer's work	Yes

Note: None of the issues are addressed in the facilitator's guide, so a column has not been included.

Exhibit 36 shows that two texts fail to address issues that are relevant to the theme of the unit; e.g., on page 14 the reading text talks about "The New Dress" and on page 16 the reading text is about "Bahia's Cat," while the theme of the unit in both cases is *The Child and the School*. This is a considerable educational loss for the learners in that they miss the opportunity to learn about important issues on two occasions.

Level 2

Exhibit 37 provides a summary of the correspondence between the theme of the units and the topics of the texts.

Exhibit 37:   Level 2 - Issues addressed in the reading texts

Unit	Text	Facilitator's guide	Learner's book	Relevance
First : Islamic, National, and Human Values	Prophetic Migration	The Prophet's Migration (causes and circumstances)	The Qoraysh intention to harass the prophet	No
	My Homeland	–	Patriotism	Yes
Second : Cultural & Social Life	The Book	–	The importance of the book in the individual's life	Yes
	The Family	–	Family connections	Yes
Third : Democracy & Children's Rights	Children's Rights	–	The text is not coherent	No
	Aisha	–	A village girl's dream	No

(-) This symbol means that reference to values is absent in the facilitator's guide.

The text entitled "My Homeland" discusses pride and the sense of belonging to one's nation, yet it contains a duality of abstract thinking that may be, on the whole, difficult for the learner to assimilate. Among such examples are the following:

- "My homeland is the Earth," "My homeland is me," "We see it elevating me and I elevate it." One wonders, how can the homeland be the speaker (the learner) and at the same time the Earth?

- "Whenever my homeland is endangered, I cry as in a sports contest." This example conflates the danger of war with athletic competition—a difficult abstract comparison for early learners. Moreover, a sports discussion in a text teaching national values could be a problem.

The text entitled "The Book" addresses the issue of reading and the importance of the book in an individual's life in a philosophical manner that is not consistent with the learners' level of awareness at this age. It portrays the book as the people's loyal friend, but in abstract language that it is not within the student's grasp:

.. the book is a best friend, it keeps you company, and partakes in your sorrows and joy. The books are available in public and school libraries. Make sure that you often go there now and then to hone your thoughts, and enlarge your knowledge, and build for yourself a private library and choose for it the best of books, and most beneficial for you. (Level 2: 23)

The use of figurative language such as "partakes in your sorrows and joy," "hone your thoughts," "enlarge your knowledge," or "build for yourself a private library" (a real library or a metaphorical one, i.e., in your mind?) is likely to make the message of the text inaccessible for the learner.

The text entitled "The Family" (p. 27) presents the child's program on a weekend day (Sunday), as he wants to visit an industrial and economic city. However, that day would, in reality, be a day off for industrial establishments and department stores.

The text entitled "Child Rights" (p. 35) talks about a man sitting and dreaming, but the picture accompanying the text shows him lying on his bed. Also, the text ends with a statement: "This is the retribution of anyone who beats children or deprives them of their basic rights." As discussed previously, without proper guidance from a facilitator this text and the imagery alone might be scary and create misunderstanding.

The text entitled "Aisha" (p.39) presents several stereotypes:

- Children are made to work under psychological stress: "Can't I perform work that is more useful than what I am doing in the field?"

- The mother can be interpreted as being against education: "Get up and enough laziness"; "Do you refuse to help me, Aisha?"

- The mother is against the dream: "You are dreaming, and dreams are usually not fulfilled."

Moreover, the textbooks employ stories that depict the traditional aspects of the Moroccan society and tend to focus more on the rural and rural-urban areas of Morocco, while they neglect to introduce learners to the modern aspect of the Moroccan society.

The texts are also written from an out-of-date, adult perspective; for example, most texts fail to cater to the learners' interests in such topics as modern day and in vogue technologies such as the Internet, computers, smartphones, video games, etc. More research should be conducted to determine the subjects that attract children in the target age range of the NFE program.

The following inconsistencies can also be noted:

- There is a reference in the facilitator's guide (p. 31) to the poetic text entitled "Ramadan is here," while this text is not present in the learner's book.

- There is no time scheduled for instruction about literary texts and reading series; they are presented in the facilitator's guide in the form of sample flash cards of these texts.

Gender

Promoting gender equality is one of the fundamental parts of the work of schools and other educational institutions. In fact, gender equality is a distinctive feature of a successful education system, and of a society as a whole.

The texts in the textbooks under evaluation are analyzed against the following five benchmarks:

- The instructional materials contain equal representations of male and female characters in the texts.

- Illustrative drawings express gender equity.

- Language used promotes and sustains gender equity.

- Male and female characters are presented in roles that express equity.

- Situations presented do not support violence against one of the sexes.

The gender analysis aims to provide some guidance as to how to represent the gender of community members. The analysis contains a set of strategies for assessing the materials employed in teaching and learning with the objective of making the materials considerate to and inclusive of all children.

The analysis of the pictures and drawings of the first three units in the textbooks of level one yields the results shown in *Exhibit 38*.

Exhibit 38: Gender representation in pictures and drawings

Gender	Number	Percentage
Males	25	55%
Females	14	31%
Together	6	13%

As the table above shows, there is a clear imbalance in the representation of gender in the level 1 textbook; there 25 pictures and drawings where males only are portrayed and only 14 with females only. However, the level 2 textbook does not betray any gender imbalance in pictures and drawings.

Exhibit 39: Gender representation in reading texts

Standards	Level 1	Level 2
Gender equality representation in the reading texts	Yes	Yes
Sensitive language to gender equality	Yes	No
Features expressing gender equality	Yes	Absent

As *Exhibit 39* shows, gender equality in the level 1 textbook is present in the texts more so than the images. In the level 2 textbook, there is one example in the reading text entitled "The Family," where Ali says: "I want to go on a trip with my [male] companions"(p. 27). This may implying that girls are not allowed to travel. Otherwise, there is the text entitled "Aisha," discussed previously, in which the mother calls Aisha: "Wake up, the clock shows it is six in the morning…" "Oh mother, work has become tiresome" (p.39). This text is presumably meant to illustrate something about children's, and especially girls', rights (girls can be doctors, too; girls mustn't be deprived of going to school). However, again, without proper facilitation this could merely emphasize negative gender stereotypes (girls mustn't go to school; their place is working in the fields).

The technical specifications of the textbook

The technical aspects of textbook production are concerned with the design and content presentation. The pictures used in the two books are also examined as far as their relevance to the content and target competencies. These remarks can be summarized according to the following:

- The design of the textbook
- The form of the script (layout and font size)

- Pictures and supporting visuals.

The integration of the reading component with all other skills in one standardized textbook has resulted in one textbook that has become too dense for effective early grade reading.

Page design: The layout of the textbook lacks the necessary attractiveness in terms of page design or the way the texts and drills are presented. Pages are overcrowded, while the font in which the texts and questions are written is too small for the learners' level. This may not motivate them to browse comfortably through the pages of the textbook and to increase their demand for reading. The number of words per line should be kept to the minimum per sentence (one idea), and there should be spaces between words and lines of text.

While content density, from sentence to text, in the level 1 textbook is fair, in the level 2 textbook most pages are densely covered with texts and pictures and may not be attractive for the young learner.

Font size and type: The font size of words, whether or not in isolation, in sentences or texts, does not make reading enjoyable and does not facilitate easy

Source: Level 2, p. 27

recognition of letters in such a way that it improves a learner's fluency. Most of the text has been written in small types and sizes, despite the presence of margins and white spaces in most of the pages in the level 1 textbook. The level 1 textbook uses font size number 13 and 16 for titles and letters, and the level 2 textbook uses font size number 16. Arabic script for level 1 should start at 36 points; for level 2 it might be diminished to 34, etc. Font size can be reduced as reading skills develop.[77] Unlike in the FE textbooks, Qur'anic verses in the NFE textbooks were not written in Moroccan script (as they occur in the AlHasany Qur'an book).

Pictures and other supporting visuals. Most of the pictures and drawings of the reading content in both textbooks are unrelated to the contents of the reading texts, and thus cannot be used to enhance the learner's understanding of the texts. On the contrary, the pictures and drawings may hamper text comprehension. Moreover, the majority of the pictures are small, and their color and clarity do not help to emphasize the meaning for the learners. *Exhibit 40* includes an index of all the pictures included in both books, arranged according to the units, with an evaluation of the extent of their relevance to the theme of the units.

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[77] USAID, 2014.

Exhibit 40:   Level 1 – Analysis of illustrations

Picture or drawing	Page	Relevance to topic
A drawing of pupils in the classroom	9	Relevant
A drawing of a house	9	Irrelevant
A drawing of a sharpener	10	Irrelevant
A drawing of a boy on his way to school	10	Relevant
A drawing of boy writing	11	Irrelevant
A drawing of two children eating couscous	11	Relevant
A drawing of children playing	12	Irrelevant
A drawing of a boy + plate	12	Irrelevant
Two women	13	Relevant
A man going to the post office	13	Irrelevant
barrel	14	Irrelevant
cow	14	Irrelevant
A man drinking juice	14	Irrelevant
A girl watching TV	15	Irrelevant
A girl eating apples	15	Irrelevant
A girl throwing the ball	16	Irrelevant
Two girls watching family picture	16	Irrelevant
Set of 16 pictures on one page	17	Irrelevant (13 irrelevant and 3 relevant)
School in the background	18	Relevant
Three girls playing	19	Irrelevant
Cat + hand	19	Irrelevant
A drawing of boy using the phone	20	Irrelevant
Giving a gift to a boy	20	Irrelevant
A drawing of two children standing	21	Irrelevant
A drawing of women in a party	21	Irrelevant
A drawing of a boy filling glasses	22	Irrelevant
A drawing of two women standing	22	Irrelevant
A drawing of a boy drawing a vase	23	Irrelevant
A drawing of children on a trip	23	Irrelevant
A drawing of a boy writing	24	Irrelevant
A drawing of two children and traffic signals	25	Irrelevant
Children playing soccer	25	Irrelevant
A drawing of a girl drawing a stork	26	Irrelevant
A drawing of a hospital	26	Irrelevant
Set of 16 pictures on one page	27	16 drawings are Irrelevant
A drawing of two children in front of a mosque	29	Relevant
A drawing of children going to school	29	Relevant
A drawing of a child going to the valley	30	Relevant
A drawing of a girl offering flowers to the teacher	30	Relevant
A drawing of a grocer in his shop	31	Relevant
A drawing of a boy playing the violin	31	Irrelevant
A drawing of a girl holding grapes	32	Irrelevant
A drawing of a postal stamp	32	Irrelevant
A drawing of a boy picking oranges	33	Relevant
A drawing of a boy carrying a lamb	33	Relevant
A drawing of a shepherd playing the flute	34	Relevant
A drawing of a boy and a girl preparing sweets	34	Irrelevant
A drawing of a girl	35	Irrelevant
A drawing of a girl eating cheese	35	Irrelevant
A drawing of a girl eating pears	36	Irrelevant
A drawing of a girl standing up	36	Irrelevant
Set of 16 pictures on one page	37	15 Irrelevant + 1 relevant

The table above shows that only about 12.5% of the pictures' are relevant to the texts of the units, while 87.5% of the pictures are not relevant. ***Exhibits 41-43*** provide more information.

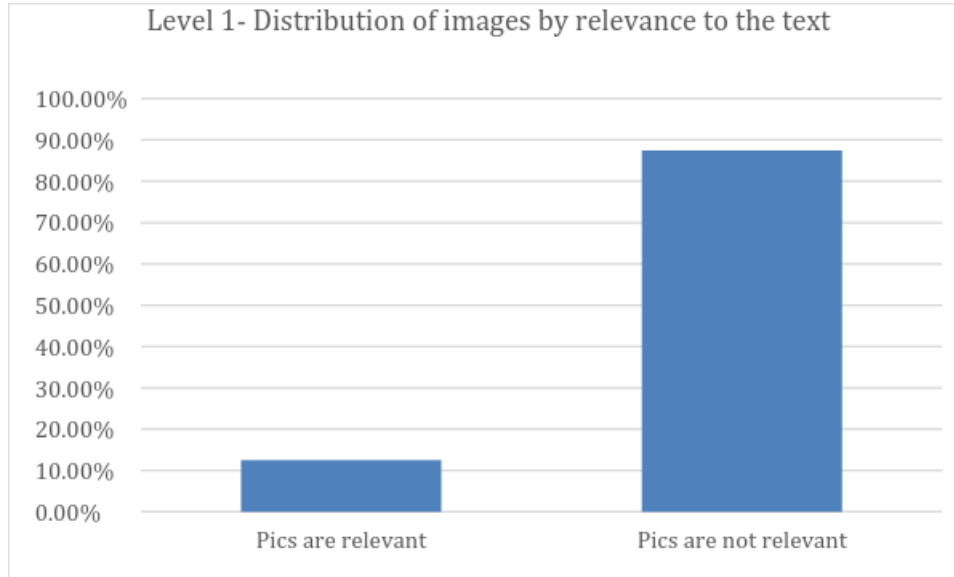## Exhibit 41: Level 1 – Distribution of images by relevance to the text

Exhibit 42: Level 2 – [First three units] Analysis of illustrations

Picture or drawing	Page	Relevance to topic
A drawing of Hiraa' Cave	11	Irrelevant
A drawing of a map and a flag	15	Relevant
Picture of Mecca	16	Irrelevant
Picture of book a cover	23	Irrelevant
Picture of book a cover	23	Irrelevant
A drawing of a tree, a fox, and a crow	24	Irrelevant
A drawing of a family in the living room	27	Relevant
A drawing of a woman in a hospital	28	Irrelevant
A drawing of women in a celebration	28	Irrelevant
A drawing of an old person and a boy on the road side	28	Irrelevant
A drawing of a man dreaming of beating a boy with a stick	35	Irrelevant
Picture of an identity card	36	Irrelevant
A drawing of two women, one is dreaming	39	Irrelevant
A drawing of a mother carrying her baby on her back while taking two children to school	40	Irrelevant
A drawing of children inside the classroom and a girl outside carrying bread	40	Irrelevant

The chart below summarizes the high number of pictures (13 out of 15 pictures) that are irrelevant to the theme of the first three units compared to pictures that are relevant (2 pictures only).

Exhibit 43: Level 2 – Distribution of images by relevance to the text
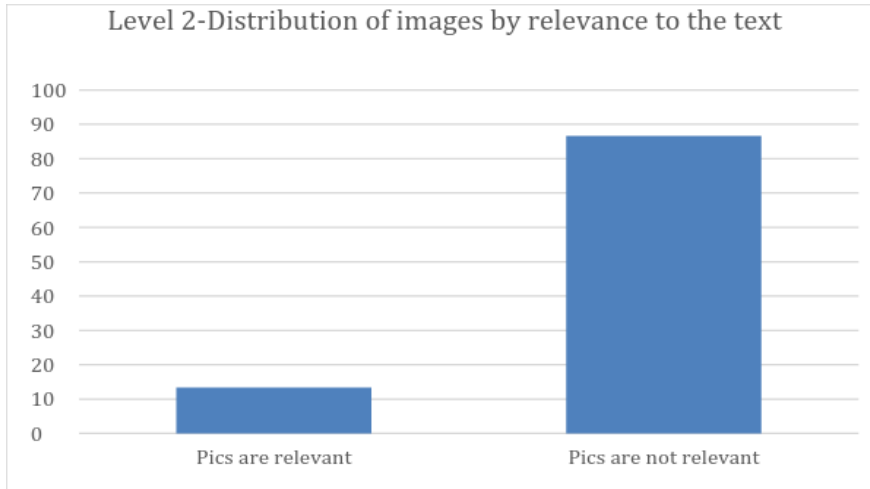
Conclusions and recommendations related to textbook analysis

Conclusions. The level 1 textbook is the main vehicle for teaching learners to read. By level 2 they are expected to read well, and the content focuses more on texts and grammar. Therefore the five components of reading—phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension—are not all present in both books, but the analysis looked at whether the overall sequence addresses the five components and progresses in a logical and effective manner to build fluency and ultimately comprehension in independent readers. The method used to teach reading in level 1 is the whole language methodology, which addresses elements of phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle, but in an indirect way. In particular, phonemic or phonological awareness exercises are limited, and no guidance is given to teachers for reinforcing this oral language skill outside of the textbook content. The whole language methodology has teachers point out the letters in the context of a sentence, but not as syllables or smaller units, including common morphological units. Moreover, the letters are shown in the context of words for which the other letters may not have been introduced yet. The methodology is very teacher centered, focusing on observation, repetition, and usage, which, in practice, reinforces a whole word memorization and logographic recognition of words rather than decoding skills. The texts for levels 1 and 2 use diacritic markings to indicate short vowels, which is consistent with best practice. However, there are no guidelines given for transitioning from voweled to unvoweled texts, which are common in most Arabic texts outside of the school system.

The level 1 texts use mostly concrete words to develop vocabulary. By level 2, the proportion of concrete words is lower, indicating that there is an evolution in difficulty between the two levels.

Nevertheless, the level 2 books include not only abstract words, but abstract and symbolic concepts (i.e., words in their literal and figurative forms) that may be difficult for children who are, by definition, readers with a low level of comprehension. The textbooks do not provide word lists of common and repetitive vocabulary, including conjunctions and prepositions. In fact, most vocabulary is not repeated at all in the texts of both levels, and often it is not relevant to the theme of the unit. Therefore the themes are not helping to provide context for the reading texts, nor are the reading texts helping to develop the subject matter awareness of the themes.

The development of fluency will already be hindered if the basics of phonemic awareness and alphabetic principle are not mastered, and if the child does not have a large oral and reading vocabulary to draw from for automatic processing during reading. Illustrations do not always support reading comprehension or vocabulary development. Fluency is further undermined by long and complex sentence structure in the texts, especially in level 2. This is partially due to the fact that Arabic does not have well-defined rules for punctuation. The study shows that the two textbooks place a strong emphasis on comprehension skills. However, they do not use strategies such as prediction, verification, summarization, and other reading comprehension strategies other than asking and answering questions.

Apart from the five components of reading, the textbooks were also analyzed for content related to values and gender, and general production specifications. We found that the textbooks present very traditional subjects, based on life in rural areas, that neglect more modern aspects of society. The gender balance could be improved, as could the page layout and design aspects, in particular the text density in level 2.

Recommendations

- Ensure adequate oral language competency in MSA prior to entering level 1, and develop phonemic awareness through oral language activities.

- Although direct and explicit instruction does tend to be teacher centered, there should be opportunities to ensure differentiated instruction and practice through peer-to-peer learning, group work, independent practice, and individual tutoring.

- Include more types of exercises to promote the alphabetic principle, including isolation of syllables.

- A list of the most widely used prepositions and conjunctions, and other vocabulary, should be provided to pupils in the first units, and they should be asked to learn them so that they can be used in later units to develop sentences that are independently decodable.

- Isolating derivational morphemes in the same way that letters are highlighted using different colors can help develop decoding skills and vocabulary knowledge.

- Assessment should ensure that learners are able to read and spell the common words in the list before the end of the first level.

- The themes of the units and the texts should be more mutually reinforcing.

- Adopt strategies for simplifying sentence length and structure in the absence of fixed rules for punctuation.
- Textbook content should be piloted with learners to better determine what type of subjects and what kind of texts (narrative, dialogical, poetic, etc.) interest and are relevant to the lives of typical learners in rural and urban areas.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

This analytical study has focused on the Arabic language (reading instruction) component of the two learner's books for levels 1 and 2, and the facilitator's guidebook for the school integrated curriculum, endorsed by the non-formal education departments. It attempted to answer the questions related to the extent to which the five components of reading are present in Arabic language instruction, the extent to which the NFE curriculum in its current format contributes to the development of reading skills for the children targeted by its programs, and whether the NFE textbooks motivate children in NFE programs to continue learning.

The analysis of the instructional approach, contents, and reading activities adopted in the textbooks as well as its design yielded a number of strengths that are worthy of mention. On the design level, although the density of words on each page is relatively high in textbook 2, text matter in level 1 textbook is permeated with plenty of space, a characteristic that may encourage better and fluent reading. As to images and drawing, despite their being often distant from the themes of the unit, their presence, colorfulness and attractiveness can be invested and cross-referred in different units to attract the learners and motivate them to decode texts and learn to read.

The paper used and the book covers are of high quality. As for the content of the textbooks, the first level textbook has succeeded in providing letters that have similar basic shape isolated from each other. For example, the textbook presents the letters [ب] "b", [ت] "t", in isolation from the letters [ث] "θ", [ي] "y" and [ن] "n"; it also presents the letter [ر] "r" in isolation from [ز] "z" and the letter [ج] "j" from the letters [ح] "H" and [خ] "x", etc. This helps the student master the letters without confusing the ones that have the same basic shapes. The authors have succeeded in introducing at the initial stages of the textbook the most commonly used letters. The diacritic signs (vowel markers) that are essential for novice learners to decode the language have been provided for all the words. The level 2 textbook has invested great efforts to cover the most basic grammatical rules needed at this level.

On the other hand, the analysis of the NFE textbooks shows that the content and methods are not consistent with good practices of teaching reading in alphabetic languages; that is, using the five components of reading as the basis for teaching reading. Although the whole language approach may eventually result in word recognition and implicit understanding of phonics, in the absence of building the learner's capacity to comprehend smaller word units using skills of phonemic

awareness and letter-sound knowledge, the student will not be able efficiently develop the skill of reading new words independently. Explicitly teaching these skills is recognized as best practice in reading instruction for alphabetic languages. The facilitator's reading of sentences as the basic reading approach, while first level pupils repeat after the facilitator, emphasizes rote learning, instead of independence and fluency.

As for vocabulary, there is a strong relationship between learning vocabulary and academic success because the students who have a rich vocabulary can understand new ideas and concepts much faster than pupils who have a limited vocabulary (see Section 1.2: Theoretical framework). Vocabulary instruction is weak in the textbooks, particularly in level 2 where many of the texts use abstract words and concepts.

One of the strongest and most effective tools that assist in building children's literacy capacity is the automatic recognition of frequently recurring words, which helps improve fluency and subsequently comprehension. Learning and including in the texts frequent words is one way to level texts so that students gain self-confidence and can become independent readers. The frequency of word recurrence in the two books is very far from the preferred rate of word frequency according to the international standards.[78]

In reviewing the relationship between vocabulary and the study units, how the vocabulary items facilitate reading, support learning, and achieve the stated objectives of each unit, it became evident that the total vocabulary used in the textbooks is often unrelated to the theme of the unit. Therefore, the theme of the unit and vocabulary it presents are not mutually reinforcing.

Concerning reading fluency, too many words within a sentence represents a structure that is too complicated for the learner to read. For this reason, the simplicity of sentence structures must be taken into consideration when writing the reading passages so that they support—and not obstruct—sentence reading and comprehension. The study team found that there are a large number of sentences with long and complex structure and many vocabulary words. This may be related to the absence of accurate punctuation to limit sentence length and guide the learner in reading with expression as well as fluency. The textbooks use punctuation inconsistently; for example, sometimes the comma or semi-colon play the same role as the full stop, and an entire paragraph is made up of one sentence. If sentences that have independent meaning do not end with a full stop, it is understandable that they may pose a challenge for the learner.

As far as the reading comprehension questions are concerned, the types of questions presented in the book are focused on direct recall and understanding, as evidenced by the use of direct questions (what, who, why, with what, did). Whereas, in order to achieve higher-level comprehension, the questions must not remain limited to the lower levels of Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy, (recall, comprehension, application), but rather drive pupils to interact with higher levels of thinking and criticism (analysis, synthesis, evaluation). This is the interaction level that is lacking in both textbooks.

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[78] Youness, F. (2014: 22).

In terms of content and themes, the textbooks do not reflect the contemporary society in which the learner is living. Thus, the meaning of the texts is not reinforced through daily interaction in society outside of school, which is a lost opportunity. Moreover, the textbooks are written from the viewpoint of an adult and have not attempted to address the learner's interests, although more research should be done to determine the subjects that interest children in the target age range of the NFE program.

From the point of view of the evaluation team, while level 1 textbook has a satisfactory text density, level 2 textbook content layout is too dense and the book format may not captivate the learner's attention. That is, it does not stimulate the learners to browse through the book in a comfortable manner and create demand for reading with pleasure.

Words and drawings are in small type and font sizes, though there are margins and white spaces in most of the pages of the level 1 book. Some pages are crowded in the level 2. Subject titles intrude in the text and may cause confusion among learners. In most cases, the content of the pictures cannot be effectively exploited because they are irrelevant to the content of the texts. In addition, the poor color features and clarity of pictures do not help.

Finally, the facilitator's guide outlines many appropriate general and specific competencies, but they could be better aligned to the instructional approaches and day-to-day sequence of content through a more structured facilitator's guide with daily lesson delivery guidance. Moreover, there are no clear methods for evaluating mastery of competencies that are expected through NFE lessons.

In conclusion, the objectives of the NFE program include developing skills in communication, reading, and writing, but also include transmitting a set of values related to citizenship, modernity, and Moroccan identity, in accordance with the requirements of the National Charter. Additionally, there are four different curricula that are meant to address characteristics of different target groups and their aspirations. However, there is only one textbook for each level. Therefore, given the range of competing objectives, the diversity of student profiles, and number of policy directives coming from different levels—the National Charter, the White Book, the NFE framework document—it seems the NFE textbooks largely imitate the model of the formal education textbooks rather than adopting a design that explicitly addresses the different needs of these learners. This is evident by the sequence of themes for the textbooks, which are almost identical for formal and non-formal education. As with the formal education textbooks, there has been no effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the books prior to large-scale, nor to update the books based on feedback from facilitators, inspectors, and even learners.

4.2   Recommendations

The following recommendations provide suggestions for how the textbooks, and consequently facilitator training, could make reading instruction more explicit. The recommendations revolve primarily around a revision to the textbooks and provide suggestions for what might be different in the revised version; however, all recommendations should be implemented only after designing and conducting formative evaluation with stakeholders and users to get evidence-based

feedback about how well-designed the materials are and what methods or activities are most effective. In line with a revision to the textbooks, the curricula for NFE should be reviewed in relation to the differences in the target groups (maturity, prior experience, etc.) and their needs. Nonetheless, the fundamental components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) and evidence-based principles of reading programs remain relevant, and curriculum revision should ensure that these are considered. The following general recommendations are organized according to best practice in design of reading programs—known as the "5 T's" in English.

Time – Reading is a skill that is acquired through practice; ensure sufficient "time on task" in and outside of the classroom.

- Increase the number of hours per week of reading instruction.
- Ensure classroom time is used efficiently, and increase the time allotted if needed, especially for remedial instruction.
- To increase contact time with reading materials, establish classroom libraries that include simple tools and multimedia, and encourage the use of public libraries for browsing different types of reading materials.
- Provide guidelines for assigning homework, especially reading exercises that make use of authentic materials from the home and community to support and enrich the content of the textbooks.
- Encourage adult literacy in parallel with their children's NFE so that parents can support literacy development in the home.
- Provide financial incentives to mothers who ensure that their children go to school and obtain positive results.

Tongue – Children learn to read more effectively in a language they already know and understand.

- Ensure sufficient mastery of MSA (speaking and listening) prior to and throughout the development of reading and writing skills.
- Capitalize on the learner's knowledge of the Moroccan dialect to facilitate the transfer to MSA by:
  – Establishing basic phonemic awareness skills using words that the child is familiar with (segmenting words) and then bridging to recognize the same sounds in MSA
  – Identifying words that are the same or similar in the Moroccan dialect and MSA and use these words to establish basic letter-sound identification and decoding skills
  – Encourage discussion of the "metalanguage" related to the Arabic language and its different forms so that the NFE learners understand and appreciate how to use the different registers in the context of their reintegration.

Teaching – Methods need to be appropriate in consideration of the characteristics of the language, the students, and the context (for example, different methods for boys and girls; methods that are proven effective for multilingual contexts; methods that consider the home environment, etc.).

Curriculum and methods

- Clearly define the teaching approach and prioritize the basic learning that a pupil between the ages of 6 and 15 must acquire for reintegration or reinsertion.

- Distinguish between skills and objectives in the facilitator's guide, and ensure that there are observable and measurable standards associated with these that can be used for continuous assessment.

- Commit to clarity and simplicity in formulating competencies (not to allow interpretation and multiple meanings); designing observable and measurable standards should help in this area.

- Although direct and explicit instruction tends to be teacher-centered, there are opportunities to diversify instruction and especially practice through the use of group-based work and peer support, which would allow the facilitator to address different learning styles and reading levels of the learners (creating heterogeneous groups, for example, where better readers can assist struggling readers; circulating among groups and providing individual attention, etc.).

- Ensure that the method allows time for children to have a chance to tackle new sentences on their own, without the teacher reading them first or choral recitation. Reading sentences in mixed-up order is not sufficient; however, children could, for example, be given word cards to put in the correct sentence order.

- Determine and decide on a sequence of teaching the letters of the alphabet that is evidence-based, relevant to Morocco, and that helps children access words independently (through decoding) more quickly.

Teacher training

- Train facilitators in reading instruction and how to develop reading activities and materials to meet the special learning needs of NFE students.

- Train facilitators on easy continuous assessment methods to monitor learning progress.

- Encourage a culture of innovation, experimentation, and sharing so that facilitators may feel free to adapt instructional methods and content to meet the needs of the learners.

- Provide ongoing supportive supervision for facilitators to continuously improve, including sharing effective practices.

Testing – Understanding what children know is important in order to tailor instruction and materials to their level and provide them with remediation before it is too late.

Placement

- Determine the conditions for entry to the first level and support the pupils who do not have the admissions conditions for the first level.
- Develop a placement test based on the expected learning outcomes.

Continuous

- Hold facilitator-pupil conferences to continually evaluate pupil progress on an individual level through short, oral assessments and individual feedback.
- Develop the assessment to allow the facilitator to use pupil assessment data at the classroom level to keep up with progress and performance.
- Determine the features of graduation for the children in NFE for each level and ensure that children master the competencies required to graduate from the program.
- Establish a certification and integration system that stimulates children to learn.
- Specific recommendations regarding assessment of the competencies:
  - **Communicative competency**: Design rubrics for evaluating the quality of communication based on measurable standards for vocabulary use that the pupils shall employ in oral expression, and the number of paragraphs they should be able to write; design drills to enable students to search for information and to express their opinions about the studied units or communicate in different situations using different styles and registers; ensure ample opportunity for learners to express themselves with unique sentences and topics that are not merely recited after the teachers model them.
  - **Reading competencies**: incorporate continuous assessment (individual or group-based) of basic reading skills, including phonemic awareness and letter-sound identification; establish procedures for ensuring that children who have not mastered early competencies can receive remedial support before moving to higher levels of the textbooks; identify frequent and functional vocabulary that reflects the pupil's environment and can be the basis for developing automatic reading fluency; and ensure that children are regularly assessed on their mastery of these key words.
  - **Writing competencies**: identify measurable standards for the assessment of the mastery of different communicative styles in writing; develop writing exercises or a writing workbook to encourage skill-building and that can be used to monitor progress at an individual level.
  - **Intellectual and methodological competencies**: develop exercises and evaluation rubrics that ask the learners to compare and judge the credibility of different written information sources (newspapers, internet); define the higher levels, for example, of Bloom's Taxonomy, as an assessment tool of the learner's understanding and

expression; support the basic learning objectives to raise the teacher's expectations and to enhance the learner's critical thinking skills.

– **Personal and social competencies**: reading texts in level 2 (when children should read well) should reflect self-awareness and awareness of the natural, social, and technological milieu; development of autonomy; and adoption of responsible attitudes and behaviors towards oneself, the other, and the environment; these should encourage work in groups to ensure cooperation and teamwork conducted with respect towards one another and accepting differences. Self-assessment and reflection exercises at this level may be the most effective, and can incorporate speaking and writing practice during this metacognitive effort.

Texts – There should be a sufficient amount of materials to read, at a variety of levels of difficulty that are matched progressively to the child's ability.

- Develop reading texts based first and foremost on the characteristics of the language (building on letters and words that have been previously introduced) and progression of skills rather than using the values content as the basis for development of the reading texts, which can result in texts that are too complex in sentence structure to support beginning reading.

- Link the text with the domain under study so that themes provide context and preparation for reading practice, and reading practice (vocabulary, stories) supports the learning objectives of the theme.

- Develop leveled texts that include short, simple paragraphs and sentences based on a defined and logical progression of content (letters, vocabulary).

- Prior to the latter, establish evidence-based guiding principles that can be used to establish the level of children's reading texts.

- In writing the texts, take into account punctuation marks and how to support pupil's ability to respect them.

- Ensure that the skills outlined in the facilitator's guide are reflected in the content of the textbook, and that the facilitator's guide helps teachers use the textbooks as well as other supplementary reading materials and teaching strategies to reinforce the skills in the textbooks.

- Organize the skills according to the principle of progressive learning, understanding that grasping basic concepts early will make teaching more complex concepts easier; enforce strategies for ensuring that learners master basic skills before moving on.

- Diversify the types of texts to attract attention and to enrich pupils (for example, fiction, non-fiction, dialogue, comic strip, adventure, etc.).

- Use illustrative drawings and pictures to support the reading comprehension

- Suggest supplementary reading texts at the end of each unit to give learners the opportunity to read independently according to their levels of reading.

Integrate the five components of reading

- Include the definition of the five components of reading in the facilitator's guide.

- Diversify and enrich the activities that assist in decoding at the levels of: sound awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, and automatic recognition of vocabulary items.

- Make use of word roots (morphological structure) as a strategy that can help increase automatic word recognition, deduce word meaning, and fluency.

- Develop a list of the most utilized vocabulary words, which should be learned week by week in a logical progression that allows children to decode more and more text. Pupils before the end of level 1 of NFE must master these words.

- Endorse functional vocabulary items that are close to the pupil's surroundings and decrease abstract vocabulary, except for in the highest levels of competency.

- Deliberately select and incorporate frequent recurrence of vocabulary items in multiple contexts according to the acknowledged international standards and provide suggestions for teachers for how to reinforce vocabulary knowledge outside the limits of the printed textbook.

- Diversify the questions that develop reading comprehension skills, and do not focus only on direct questions for understanding.

Values and issues addressed by the content

- Clearly include the values required to be supported in the facilitator's guide.

- Present the values in their cultural, social, material, artistic, and aesthetic dimensions.

- Start by emphasizing the transmission of values content through listening and speaking activities that are extensions of the textbook content, and reserve long and complicated reading texts that are primarily for instruction on values for the confirmed, fluent reader.

- Carefully link issues with the learner's reality, environment, expectations, and concerns,

- Strive to diversify issues and their appropriateness to the learners' level.

Gender

- Avoid gender stereotype pictures at the text level.

- Address gender equality deliberately in the text content and illustrative pictures.

# Annex 1: Sample activities in a session

The manual includes activities such as:

- *Reading a New Sentence*. Children are exposed to a sentence that they have not yet seen and are asked to read it (e.g., A sentence such as: أكلت رجاءٌ جبناً طَريّا ۛ] ['Rajae ate fresh cheese'] is introduced for the first time as an exercise to test the learner's gains from the preceding instruction); then in order to give them more practice on what they have learned, the children are asked in the exercise *I Read* to read a set of new words that include the target letter with long vowels (see photo below).
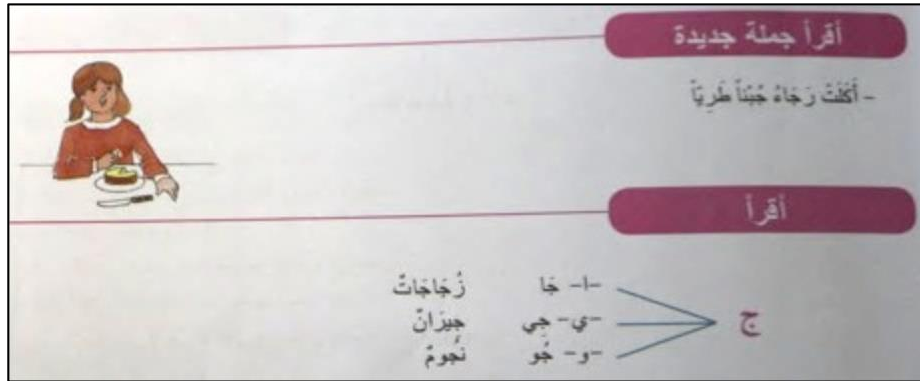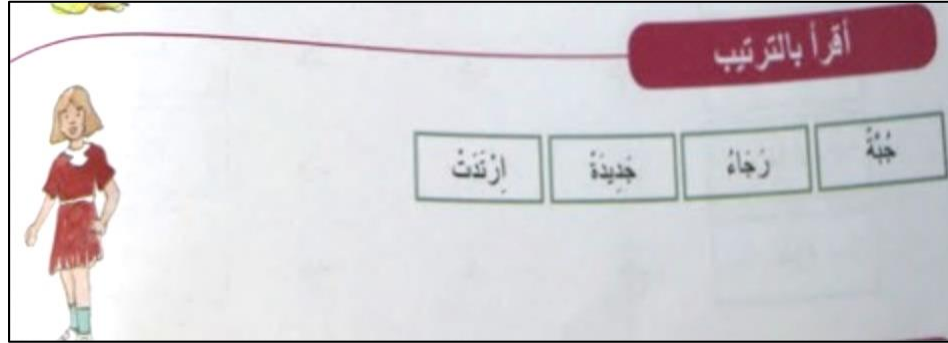

Source: NFE, Level 1, p. 35

- *Observing and Reading*. The learners are asked to examine the shape of the letter and decide whether it should occur initially, in the middle, or at the end, and then to read the new words including the letter in its three positions.
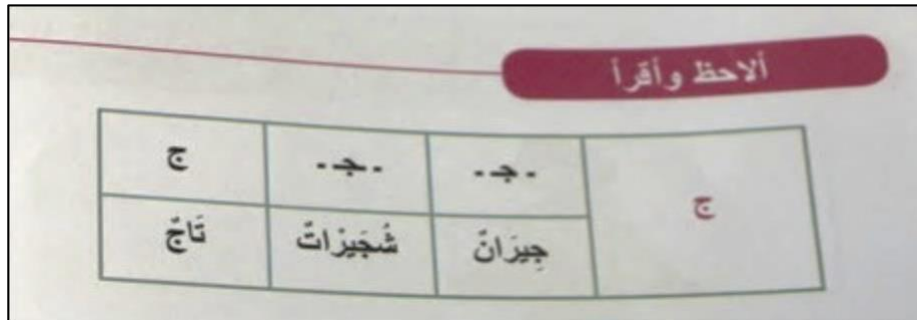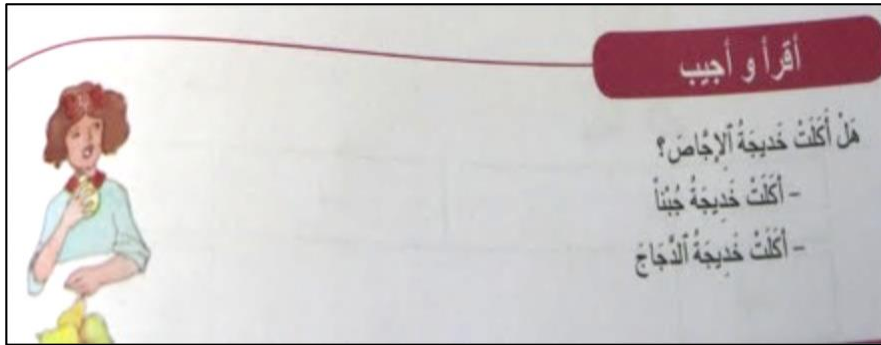

Source: NFE, Level 1, p. 36

- *Reading in Sequence* asks the learners to decode a list of words and place them in a meaningful sequence.
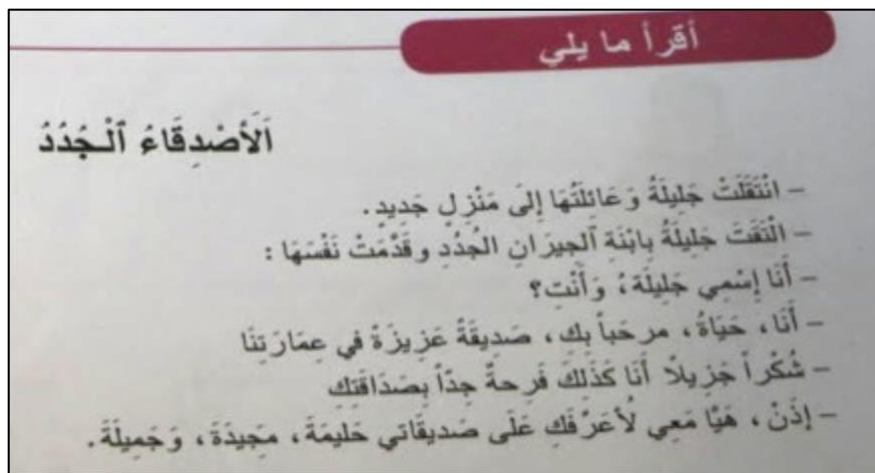

Source: NFE, Level 1, p. 36

- *I Read and Respond* activity asks a yes-no question and provides multiple choices that the student should choose from if they answer with yes or no.

Source: NFE, Level 1, p. 36

- Finally, the exercise *I Read the Following* consists of a set of new sentences to reinforce the previous gains.

Source: NFE, Level 1, p. 36

Annex 2a. Competencies in NFE Level 1 Teacher's book

Basic competencies	Specific competencies
The learner should be able to:	
Communicate in Arabic in writing, reading and expression • Express oneself fluently, using clear Standard Arabic style; • Implicitly acquire the stylistic, syntactic and morphological structures of the Arabic language, within the limits of the pupil's academic level, age and developmental level; • The use of functional standard Arabic language that leads to the growth of the learners' linguistic repertoire; • Recognize images of the Arabic letters, read them in words, sentences and simple texts; • Linear drawing of Arabic alphabet separately and in words and short sentences and paragraphs; • Use the Arabic language to learn knowledge and to acquire expertise appropriate to the child's school level; • Use the Arabic language to promote some Islamic, national and human values within the limit of the child's school level, so that it become rooted in him; • Use the Arabic language to open up to one's natural or social environment, and to discover the public life activities and creativity.	Oral expression component • Simple oral expression in description, narration, and dialogue • Expression of ideas spontaneously and in an organized way • Expression based on observation and the surrounding environment • Implicit use of the stylistic, syntactic and morphological structures of fluent language within the limits of the pupil's academic level • Use of a functional language that is in relation with his family, school, acquaintances in one's neighborhood or village, natural, social environment, food, health, sports, parties, festivals, games, creativity on condition that all of these shall be compliant with the pupil's academic level. Reading component • Read Arabic alphabet together with diacritics using a static and changing dictionary • Global reading with comprehension of the static dictionary (letters and words) and the changing dictionary (sentences, simple texts), taking into consideration the letters, articulation point, conditions of punctuation marks, spelling • Read simple prose and poetic texts, including descriptive, narrative, and dialogue texts… • Make use of meaning from simple reading text to improve thinking skills, language, and research techniques. Writing component • Write Arabic alphabet independently and in words, or simple texts characterized by their beauty, organization and clarity in accordance with the writing models offered to the child • Copy correctly words, short sentences and short paragraphs while using punctuation marks • Correct writing of some simple orthographic properties of Arabic • Complete simple exercises in writing in different styles, syntax, verb tenses, grammar

Source: White Book (2002: 24), Facilitator's guidebook, level one, (2007:10)

Annex 2b: Competencies in NFE Level 2 Teacher's Book

Basic competencies	Specific competencies
The learner should be able to:	
- Grasp the type of Modern Standard Arabic that is crucial for social integration process; - Communicate orally and in writing in subjects that are related to his/her social milieu and which meet his/her needs; - Read, understand, and use reading materials in different contexts; - Master a number of grammatical rules that he enable them to correctly use in their oral and written language activities and in communicating with others; - Understand the linguistic context and distinguish between its different levels so that he/she gradually develops the ability to make rational judgments; - Use his /her intellect to follow and observe scenes, and to question all things observed by making comparisons, inferences, and providing evidence; - Recognize Islamic, national and human values and behave accordingly; - Be open to the technological world so that he/she can adapt to it and understand its development; - Acquire the power of observation, comparison, judgment, and reaction towards new work methods; - Distinguish between the different language discourses: literary, scientific, social and others; - Demonstrate his/her work and time management skills through written work and any external research assignments and becomes accustomed to it.	- Become capable of silent reading and quality reading aloud, paying attention to correct pronunciation and intonation. This also involves a good understanding of the reading material and its implied aspects; - Listen to and understand others' loud reading; - Recognize and explore the different text types: functional, literary, (poetic and prosaic styles), documentary, scientific, social, historical, story, article, speech, etc.; - Use their reading experience to enrich their knowledge, expand their vocabulary repertoire, and enhance oral expression; - Consult dictionaries for the meaning of words; - Make sense of the reading texts and recognize the different styles, structures, morphology, grammar, and vocabulary; - Outline paragraphs from reading texts; - Analyze texts by identifying the paragraphs and finding the main ideas; - Recognize figures of speech in literary texts; - Find information and missing knowledge in reading texts in order to enrich his/her linguistic and knowledge gains, thus allowing him/her to get used to it and become an independent learner; - Read and comprehend texts outside the classroom (stories, newspapers, magazines, flyers, brochures, etc.)

Source: White Book (2002: 24), Facilitator's guide, level two, (2007:10)