

## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION TRANSITION IN EDUCATION (LITES): A MULTI-COUNTRY STUDY ON STRENGTHENING EVIDENCE ECOSYSTEMS FOR EFFECTIVE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The design and implementation of Language of Instruction (LoI) transition policies are critical for improving literacy and educational outcomes in multilingual, low- and middle-income countries. However, a significant evidence gap persists regarding the specific factors that enable or impede the success of these policies. The Language of Instruction Transition in Education (LITES) study, a sub-set of the Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE) Initiative, addressed this gap through a multi-country, mixed-methods research program. This research brief outlines LITE study's overarching goal, methodology, and key lessons from its initial phase*

*of Ecosystem Diagnostics in six partner countries of Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, the Philippines, Mozambique, and Mali. A central finding across all contexts was the critical importance of actively engaging diverse stakeholders—from government ministries to local communities—to build consensus, clarify ambiguities in policy, and ensure that research is actionable and grounded in local realities. The LITES study demonstrated that strengthening the entire evidence ecosystem is a foundational step toward generating high-quality, relevant evidence that can inform more effective and equitable LoI policies.*

**Key Words:** Audio-Visual Aids, Deficit, Early-Grade, Learners, Motivate

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, an estimated 37% of children in low- and middle-income countries are taught in a language they do not speak at home (World Bank, 2021). This disconnect between home language(s) and the language of instruction is a significant barrier to

achieving foundational literacy and subsequent educational success. In response, many countries have adopted mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) or other transitional bilingual education models. However, the implementation of these policies is often fraught

with challenges, including a lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and ambiguous policy guidelines.

The Language of Instruction Transition in Education (LITES) study, implemented under the Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE) initiative, sought to fill this critical evidence gap. Its primary goal was to investigate how different LoI transition policy approaches, system-level factors, and local-level conditions explained variations in students' reading outcomes in their first (L1) and subsequent (L2+) languages. This research brief presents LITE study's framework and synthesizes the preliminary insights gained from engaging with the evidence ecosystems in six diverse country contexts.

### **THE LITES RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

The LITES research goal was to generate rigorous, context-specific evidence on designing and implementing effective LoI transition policies, with a specific focus on learners' L2+ reading skills as the primary outcome measure.

The central research question was: How do different LITES policy approaches, system factors, and local-level conditions and practices explain variations in key language and reading outcomes in target languages in primary grades?

### **METHODOLOGY: A MIXED-METHODS**

### **APPROACH**

The LITES study employed a concurrent mixed-methods design to capture both the breadth and depth of the LoI transition phenomenon.

### **QUALITATIVE METHODS**

To gain a multi-faceted understanding of the educational landscape, the study employed a qualitative approach at the school and system levels. A diverse sample of six schools per country was selected for in-depth investigation. Within these schools, we conducted interviews with teachers and school leaders, alongside classroom observations to document instructional practices.

To capture broader systemic and community perspectives, interviews were also held with system-level leaders, including ministry officials and policymakers, while focus group discussions with parents provided vital community insights. This design allowed for methodological triangulation, ensuring a more robust and comprehensive analysis.

### **QUANTITATIVE METHODS**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing existing secondary data where feasible, complemented by a primary survey conducted in two distinct language regions within each participating country. The sampling framework encompassed a total of 60 schools. From each

school, 10 learners were randomly selected from both the third and fourth grades, yielding a robust sample of approximately 1,200 learners.

The data collection involved administering standardized reading and language assessments to these learners to evaluate proficiency in both their first language (L1) and a second or additional language (L2+). Further qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through learner background surveys, as well as teacher surveys focusing on their training, instructional practices, and attitudes. This was supplemented by rapid classroom observations to capture a snapshot of teaching practices in situ.

### **COUNTRY CONTEXTS AND LOI MODELS**

The comparative study was conducted across six nations—Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, the Philippines, Mozambique, and Mali—selected for their distinct linguistic and educational policy landscapes. This strategic selection enabled a robust examination of how different language-in-education models function in diverse contexts. The countries and their respective approaches are characterized as shown below.

Kenya operates within a complex linguistic ecology of 67 living languages. Its policy follows an early-exit transitional model, where instruction transitions from the mother tongue to English as the primary medium of instruction in Grade 4. This stands in sharp contrast to Rwanda, a

predominantly monolingual Kinyarwanda (L1) context with four national languages. In a significant policy shift in 2020, Rwanda moved to an L2 immersion model, introducing English as the primary language of instruction from Grade 1.

Senegal, with 38 languages (six of which are widely spoken), implements a dual language, gradual transition model. Guided by its MOHEBS strategic plan (2018-2028), this mid- to late-exit approach phases out the first language gradually between Grades 4 and 6.

Similarly, the Philippines, a nation of approximately 200 languages, has a theoretical framework for a gradual transition, mid- to late-exit model under its Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy, though this policy is currently under review, indicating a period of potential flux.

In Mozambique, which has approximately 43 languages, a gradual transition model is mandated by Law nr. 18/2018, with the transition to Portuguese occurring between Grades 3 and 6. Finally, Mali presents a critical case of policy implementation under duress. Despite a linguistic landscape of 80 languages (13 recognized as national) and a policy mandating a gradual transition (Grades 4-6), its educational system has been operating within a context of multidimensional crisis since 2012, which profoundly impacts the practical application of its

language model. This varied and purposeful sample provides a powerful foundation for analyzing the intersections of language policy, pedagogical models, and socio-political realities in shaping educational outcomes.

## **KEY LESSONS FROM ECOSYSTEM**

### **ENGAGEMENT**

A foundational phase of the LITES study involved Ecosystem Diagnostic Workshops that brought together key actors in each country. The lessons from this engagement are universally significant. A recurring theme was the lack of clarity in policy specification and the need for stakeholder alignment.

In Kenya, the workshop revealed that the under-specification of the LoI policy created confusion and inconsistent implementation across the system. Crucially, it was the first time this particular group of actors had been assembled for a systems analysis, leading to valuable consensus-building.

In Senegal, the workshop highlighted the importance of the national MOHEBS framework for scaling bilingual education. It spurred a desire among authorities to systematically involve all identified stakeholders in the policy process. In Mali, the diagnostic process was so impactful that it directly influenced the government's decision to relaunch its bilingual education program, demonstrating how research engagement can

catalyze policy action.

The workshops served as a platform to surface perspectives that are often excluded from policy dialogues. In Rwanda, the workshop amplified the voices of communities and local actors whose opinions had not been consulted during the rapid transition to English. A key tension was identified between the policymakers' preference for a rapid transition and the communities' advocacy for a more gradual transition. This sparked a critical debate on the optimal balance between Kinyarwanda and English in schools to effectively facilitate learning.

In Mozambique, engaging a wide range of stakeholders revealed that each group held distinct opinions and recommendations on how to improve bilingual education and tackle high school wastage rates, setting high expectations for the LITES study to provide actionable solutions.

The initial phase of the LITES study underscores a foundational principle: that high-quality, impactful research cannot be conducted in an institutional vacuum. Central to its methodology is the active cultivation of an evidence ecosystem, which comprises both generators of data (such as research institutions and government units) and its critical users (including policymakers, implementing partners, educators, media, and civil society).

This engagement did more than just inform the

research design; it served to identify and validate effective practices already in existence on the ground. In the Philippines, for instance, direct discussions with implementers uncovered local success stories of the MTB-MLE policy, providing crucial, context-specific narratives of what works to inform national-level reviews.

The lessons from the six participating countries demonstrate that strengthening this very ecosystem is a critical outcome in itself. By fostering dialogue between disparate actors, clarifying ambiguous policies, amplifying community voices, and building consensus on shared challenges and priorities, the LITES study has laid the essential groundwork for relevance and trust.

This process-oriented approach ensures that the subsequent quantitative and qualitative research is not developed in isolation but is instead directly responsive to the realities and needs of national stakeholders. Ultimately, this significantly increases the likelihood that the study's final findings will lead to actionable recommendations and tangible improvements in language of instruction policy and practice.

### **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

The LITES study represented a significant investment in understanding the complex dynamics of language transition policies in diverse, real-world contexts. The preliminary findings from the

ecosystem engagement phase highlighted that the challenges of LoI implementation were not merely technical or pedagogical but were deeply rooted in systemic, political, and social factors.

The key takeaway was that successful policy reform requires co-creation and sustained dialogue among all actors within the evidence ecosystem. As the LITES study progressed to its data collection and analysis phases, it would continue to leverage these strengthened networks. The ultimate aim was to provide robust, comparative evidence that empowers policymakers, educators, and communities to make informed decisions that would improve literacy and learning outcomes for all children.

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