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UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

GUINEA

Empowering teachers in Guinea: Transformative solutions for foundational learning

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In Guinea, [approximately 1.4 million children, representing 34 per cent of the population](#), are not enrolled in school. Over 1 million of these children are youth who have never attended school. [Only 17 per cent of 10-year-olds in Guinea are able to read](#) at the grade-appropriate level, and according to the 2019 Program for the Analysis of Educational Systems of CONFEMEN (PASEC) study, Guinean students in the early grades had the lowest literacy results among the 14 participating countries.

With the generous support of the UNICEF National Committee in Spain, UNICEF partnered with Guinea's Ministry of Pre-University Education and Literacy (MEPU-A) to design and pilot a programme aimed at equipping teachers with tailored support and training that would meaningfully and equitably improve reading and math outcomes for all students. Known as the Fundamental Skills Improvement Programme (PACF), the initiative was designed based on the [Teaching at the Right Level \(TaRL\)](#) approach, which groups students by competency rather than age.

The programme kicked off with a peer-to-peer learning exchange visit to Côte d'Ivoire, where the Ministry of Education (MoE) has been successfully implementing and scaling up the TaRL approach since 2017. Staff from the Côte d'Ivoire MoE and TaRL Africa trained the national team from Guinea on implementing the TaRL approach. Subsequently, the national team trained 27 national trainers from Guinea's MEPU-A, including school directors from pilot schools, who then trained and mentored 30 teachers across 10 schools in the Kindia District of Guinea.

The pilot aimed to assess the impact of the TaRL approach on student learning outcomes, coupled with intensive mentoring and support for teachers. Across the 10 schools, 1,551 students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 underwent assessments in reading and math, and were divided into four

competency levels. From December 2022 to May 2023, students received daily 45-minute sessions in both math and French, while teachers received continuous coaching and feedback from school directors acting as mentors. Additionally, tailored teaching and learning materials based on the TaRL approach were provided for students, teachers, and classrooms.

RESULTS

- After six months of implementation in classrooms, **significant progress was observed in students' mastery of French reading and math skills.** During the initial assessment, 61 per cent of students in Grades 3-5 could not identify letters, but by the end of the programme that rate dropped to only 4 per cent. Only 17 per cent of students were able to understand sentences and paragraphs at the beginning of the programme, but by the end of the pilot, 63 per cent of students demonstrated mastery of these same texts. In math, 76 per cent of students demonstrated mastery compared to 37 per cent at the beginning of the programme.
- **Teachers expressed high satisfaction** with the programme and received regular feedback from school directors acting as mentors.
- **Continuous support was provided to teachers.** Teachers regularly used – and continue to use – a WhatsApp group that includes the national trainers, school directors, teachers, TaRL Africa, the Cote D'Ivoire trainers and UNICEF staff, as a space to troubleshoot issues and provide peer support. Weekly and monthly reports from mentors highlighted sustained implementation in classrooms, with teachers demonstrating mastery of the approach.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Tailored pedagogical approaches:** Customized teaching methods proved to be vital in addressing the diverse student learning needs.
- **Mentorship and collaboration:** Partnerships between local educators and international experts facilitated knowledge exchange and capacity building.
- **Flexible programme design and continuous monitoring and evaluation** allowed for adaptation to evolving challenges and local contexts.
- The **commitment and dedication of facilitators and school principals** are pivotal in driving positive change within schools and communities.
- The pilot identified the **need for verification exercises** during the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) testing to ensure accurate assessment of students' learning levels. Creating a conducive testing environment is crucial, as the ASER test can sometimes make children nervous. Teachers were provided with additional guidance on explaining the test to students to alleviate anxiety.

NEXT STEPS

In 2023-2024, a first phase of programme extension is being rolled out in 8 new schools to cover a total of 18 schools. This will allow the PACF to go from reaching over 1,500 to nearly 6,000 students supervised by 130 teachers. The success of the PACF pilot programme, along with committed stakeholders and available short- and medium-term financing options, positions the MEPU-A well to scale up the programme for broader impact in the future.

Cost effectiveness: During the pilot phase, UNICEF invested approximately US\$130,710 in Guinea's PACF programme, benefitting over 1,500 students, 27 national trainers and 30 teachers, making the cost per student US\$87.

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