British Council

Language for Resilience
—
A handbook for school managers hosting refugees

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

AEP   Accelerated education programme

DRC   Democratic Republic of the Congo

HT   Head teacher

MTE   Mother tongue education

NGO   Non-governmental organisation

OPM   Office of the Prime Minister

PTA   Parent–teacher association

SIL   Summer Institute of Language

SMC   School Management Committee

TaRL   Teaching at the right level (Pratham-inspired approaches to remedial)

WIU   Windle International Uganda

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

YARID   Young African Refugees for Integral Development

Glossary

Accelerated learning: Any learning programme in which the content of the curriculum is covered more quickly than in formal schools. Typically, in the accelerated education programme (AEP) in Uganda, children cover two years of a syllabus in one year.

Accelerated promotion: This is where a child enters one primary grade but is rapidly promoted to the next level or grade as soon as they have acquired the basic competences required for that level rather than waiting until the end of the academic year.

Bilingual or multilingual teaching: This is any lesson where the teacher uses two or more languages to explain the concept or develop the skills.

Familiar language: Any language the learner knows well. It may be their first language, their home language or the language of the catchment area, but they are comfortable using it.

Home language: This is the language children use at home with their parents and siblings. It will usually be their first language and will always be a familiar language, but in many homes more than one language can be used. Thus, a child may have several home languages.

Translanguaging: This means the ability to move between languages in a way that will most easily promote communication.

Scaffolding: Providing an outline and the key points of a lesson in a language that is familiar to the learner so that when talking in English they have some reference to help understanding.

Support language: This will be a local language which is not the language of instruction but is used regularly by the teacher or an assistant to help learners understand the lesson.

Teaching at the right level: A holistic approach to improving foundational skills, developed by Pratham, where learners are arranged by skill level and not age or grade, and each component is essential to its success.

Overview

This is one of two inter-related handbooks. The aim of this handbook is to provide guidelines for those involved in managing schools that are affected by an influx of refugees. The second handbook, *A handbook for teachers of refugees*, will be directly aimed at helping teachers in the classroom. Those managing the schools include:

- head teachers
- Ministry of Education and Sports officials at district level
- officials within the Office of the Prime Minister tasked with responsibility for education
- non-governmental organisations contracted to deliver education in these settings
- UN personnel with responsibility for education within a refugee context – including, of course, UNHCR, which has the overall UN mandate for refugees.

This handbook provides guidelines for all these stakeholders/people on how best to manage challenges that may arise in schools that are handling refugee children, with special reference to initial placement and language-related problems.

Chapter 1 outlines the aims of and audience for the handbook. Chapter 2 is addressed to the school administration and concentrates on what should be done when refugee children first arrive in the district or at your school. Chapter 3 describes examples of best practice already being used successfully in some schools hosting refugee children. Chapters 4 and 5 take these examples of best practice already in existence and build on them to provide practical guidelines to schools and those tasked with helping teachers on how to advise their teachers when handling large classes with complex language situations. Chapter 6 follows on with advice on how these teachers should be oriented prior to teaching in these schools. Chapter 7 offers advice directly to head teachers.

Contents

Chapter 1:
Introduction

1.1 Who is this handbook for?

If you are involved in managing education or in training teachers in schools affected by refugees, or if you are a head teacher, a decision maker at the district level or a stakeholder involved in supporting refugee children in schools, then these guidelines are meant for you. We hope they will help you to improve the learning outcomes of the refugee children in your care and will ensure greater consistency in the approach to teaching where refugee children are affecting the education system. In particular, they should guide you on the way language is learned and used in the school and the classroom to support learning.

We hope that all those involved with refugee education recognise that, although the numbers may create pressure for the schools, the presence of refugee children in these schools can be an advantage and also a blessing for the Ugandan children in the same schools. Provided we ensure appropriate attitudes and policies are developed, our children can benefit from living and learning with children from other cultures and backgrounds. They will develop a broader understanding of their own culture, appreciate a range of different cultures, and learn to care for others from different backgrounds, leading to a more caring and tolerant society. The refugee children will, we hope, eventually achieve their life and career aspirations and thrive and contribute to society – be it in Uganda or in their country of origin.

1.2 What is the handbook's purpose?

We hope this handbook will help you offer quality education with minimum disruption to schools and the refugee children. In particular, the guidelines will:

- improve the opportunities for all refugee children to learn English so that they can use it efficiently as the language of learning

- improve their placement and ensure a smoother transition to their new school

- equip teachers with improved methodologies appropriate to children in transition

- strengthen the way familiar languages are used to help younger children and children still struggling to learn English.

1.3 Background to the handbook

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and Sports, a number of research studies were carried out looking at the way teachers are handling the influx of refugees and looking at how the refugee children have affected the schools, and especially language policy and practice in these schools. The studies covered 54 primary schools across six districts in Uganda, especially those in settlement areas. This handbook is based largely on the outcomes of that research and on what the researchers observed in the schools. These guidelines are based on:

- examples of best practice – both from what the researchers saw and from suggestions made by teachers, head teachers and school leaders, including the community and district education officials

- practice that has been observed but needs to be improved, including aspects of traditional teaching that need to be better adapted to refugee and multilingual contexts

- findings and recommendations that have been made in other studies, especially those put forward in a Summer Institute of Language (SIL) study concerned with establishing a bridging course.

Chapter 2:
When new refugee children arrive

2.1 Observed practice

At present, learners arrive in the reception centres and are sent to register at their newly allocated neighbourhood school by the district education office and UNHCR through Windle International Uganda (WIU). The school then interviews them and may ask them about their previous school grade, which determines the primary grade in which they will be placed. This is done through an interview or through a written exam – or both. Both are in English. This placement decision is dependent on their English skills, and many children are placed in a primary grade well below their actual age, their previous school grade or their subject or academic knowledge. Frequently, older children end up in lower primary in order for them to learn English. This has led to dropouts, absenteeism, overage children and to parental dissatisfaction as they see their children having to repeat several grades after all the investment made previously in their education. There are many cases of ex-secondary schoolchildren ending up in Primary 2 or 3.

Figure 1: Examples of best practice observed in schools
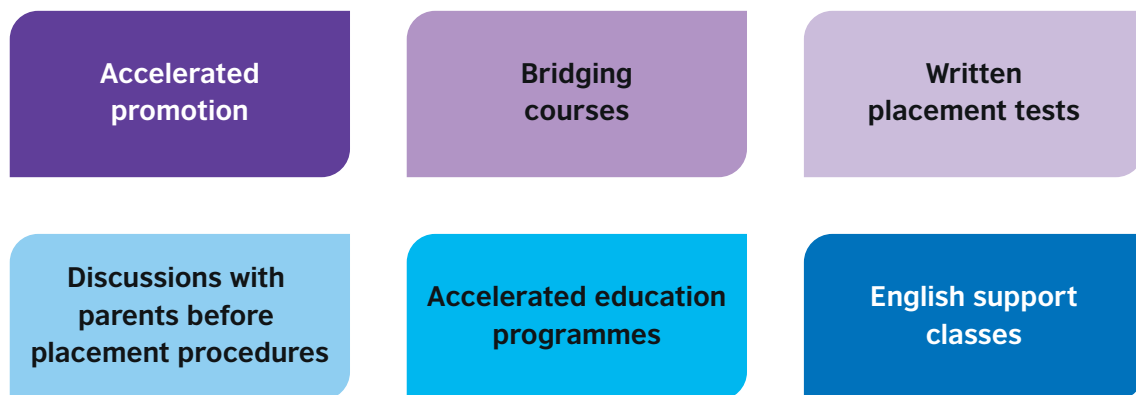
2.2 Examples of best practice observed in schools

2.2.1 Bridging programmes

We observed many examples of best practice that we would recommend to other schools or districts. One such example is offered by Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID)[1] in Kampala. They provided a class of 30 out-of-school refugee children with intensive language training along with some mathematics and science prior to them being placed in school. The children attended classes for a full year and were then placed in Katwe Primary School in Grades 3 to 5. The bridging classes were run in Katwe Primary School and learners followed the school routine. All 30 children successfully transitioned to the main school programme and their intended primary grades.

The SIL[2] report put forward recommendations for a well-evidenced and developed bridging course that can be used both in Kampala and in the settlements. This has not yet been implemented but is strongly recommended as best practice for the future. It is a three- or six-month language-intensive course for English, which will also provide literacy in a familiar language and numeracy. The decision on whether it should be three or six months can be based on the children's level of English at the start of the course and their speed of progress.

Advantages

Offering a quality bridging course of appropriate length, similar to that offered by YARID or recommended by SIL, to refugee children prior to their placement will address many challenges, including children being overage or unable to learn because they have no language in common with their teacher. It will be particularly beneficial to children coming from higher grades who have used a different language of communication. It can also be used for refugee children who are still out of school as a way of getting them back into school at the correct grade.

Disadvantages

This programme will work well provided the logistics can be worked out. However, it may not be so useful for children already in school or in situations where children come one at a time, thus making it difficult to form a class of sufficient size for the bridging course to be cost effective.

2.2.2 Accelerated education programme[3]

Several schools in Nakivale and Imvepi settlements had accelerated education programmes (AEPs). Two head teachers informed the researchers that their schools used these programmes for children who would be very overage if placed in formal school according to their English level, even though they hadn't been out of school for any length of time.

> *AEPs are flexible, age-appropriate programmes, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aim to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth – particularly those who missed out on, or had their education interrupted due to poverty, marginalisation, conflict and crisis. The goal of accelerated education programmes is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity.*

Save the Children (2019)

Advantages

Under this programme, learners with little or no English may start at the lowest level but can accelerate quickly through levels 1 and 2 – or up until they have caught up with their age mates. A few head teachers had tried this and it had worked.

Disadvantages

According to the global AEP working group chaired by UNHCR, under this programme a child needed to have been out of school for a period of time. Thus, some schools told us that this programme was not open to older refugee children who have come directly from another country, because they have not been out of school for a sufficient length of time, and in some cases because they are over the guideline age of ten to 18. The consultants were told in two schools that children of 16+ were too old for an AEP and therefore should be placed in Primary 2 as there is no age limit for formal schooling. In fact, we were also told by Save the Children that these guidelines have recently been relaxed for these very reasons, so all overage children who are new refugees in Uganda are now eligible.

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1. See https://www.yarid.org
2. See Trudell et al. (2019).
3. This programme used to be called the accelerated learning programme but has more recently been renamed AEP. Both Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council have been managing these for the ministry.

2.2.3 Accelerated promotion

An alternative strategy described by three schools was initially to put children in a low primary grade even if overage, reassess them regularly, and promote them as their English improved rather than keeping them in the same primary grade for a full year. This approach is used most successfully if combined with additional language support. One head teacher gave the example of a new child refugee who had initially been placed in Primary 3 but, within the same year, had been promoted to Primary 4 and then Primary 5, where she is now one of the top students.

Advantages

This is a great strategy and we would encourage your school to use it for any older children with weak English, especially if it can be combined with extra English tuition. It has clear advantages for children who are bright and can get extra language support. If they know they may be promoted quickly, the children will be motivated to try to catch up with their age mates and concentrate on learning English.

Disadvantages

This process is dependent on teachers being able to monitor children regularly and know their progress. This can work well in average-sized classes, but in a class of over 200, individual children are likely to be ignored and become demoralised.

2.2.4 Placement based on parents and previous school records

Three schools followed what could be described as best practice when deciding where to place refugee children. They listened to the parents and used the learner's age or previous school as a guide. Failure to do this in other schools clearly disappointed many parents. Only five per cent of parents interviewed in the focus group discussions said that the school placed their child according to the previous school records or what they, the parent, had said.

Advantages

Placement is less traumatic for learners and the parents are more involved in the child's education, if children end up in a grade close to the one they were in in their home country. They are also nearer to where their academic or conceptual level is in subjects such as science and mathematics.

Disadvantages

Very few parents will have evidence of which primary grade their child was in previously, and teachers are reluctant to believe the parents. In addition, without language support the children will not be able to understand what is being said in any subject if their previous school was not English medium.

2.2.5 Using written placement tests

Schools that use written placement tests rather than relying on just an interview are clearly showing improved practice – provided the tests are well set. In particular, tests can include items that are largely non-verbal and therefore test more than just language. The information available on this practice is self-reported by teachers, parents and the children. There were no placement procedures observed by the consultants or enumerators.

Advantages

This is a step in the right direction in assessing more than spoken language and opens the door to assessing skills and concepts within the syllabus.

Disadvantages

The tests still rely heavily on the child's knowledge of English, resulting in many who have not studied in English being demoted. According to the children interviewed, no school attempted to assess the child in the language they had used at their previous school (unless it was English).

2.2.6 Language support classes

Tuition is provided in a number of schools and with a range of different models. Some schools offer free tuition and some learners are expected to pay; some tuition is specific to English language and some is for all subjects and all learners, basically exam revision. The best model for supporting refugees is in schools that have provided free English-specific support classes for refugee children who do not have enough English, and especially for those who have recently joined the school.

Advantages

Selected learners with English language challenges can be put on an intensive programme that enables them to catch up with the others more easily.

Disadvantages

The teachers must be motivated for this to work since it needs to be a free service for learners with not enough English. Careful planning is required, and tuition should be more activity based and learner centred than present classroom practice.

2.3 Recommendations for placement

When refugees arrive in the school what should you do?

2.3.1 Recommendations for the head teacher and school management

- **Bridging course:** If possible, prior to placement, new refugees are put on a bridging course such as that designed by SIL or conducted by YARID. If this can happen, all new refugee children with insufficient language skills can receive at least three months, and where necessary six months, of English, numeracy and literacy teaching prior to their placement in a school or grade. A single school may not have enough children who recently arrived in Uganda to form a bridging class. However, if such a course is run by the district or by a settlement, numbers may be more optimal. The district education office may also wish to advocate for a return to school with parents of refugee children who have not enrolled for school since arriving in Uganda. The SIL bridging course referred to here has been recommended and would precede refugee children being placed in any primary grade. As yet, the course has not been implemented, but it is hoped that it soon will be. Those involved at school or district level should stay informed about its progress so that they can use it fully once available.

- **Placement:** Where and while the option of a bridging course is not available and placement decisions have to be made at the school level, these decisions should be based on a written test, which includes some non-verbal elements and subject knowledge as well as language. Final placement should be discussed with parents, and the final decision should be made taking into account parental wishes, age, previous school grade and test results, while also ensuring that the learner can be supported with extra English if necessary.

- **Use the AEP** if it is attached to the school for placing children who would otherwise be several years too old for their class level. Regulations have now been eased so that overage learners are eligible to join an AEP even if they aren't classified as 'out-of-school youth' or are older than the target age.

- **Accelerated promotion:** If you have to place overage children in lower primary classes because of their lack of English, then provide extra English support, reassess them regularly and promote them to the next grade as soon as their English improves sufficiently. This motivates the children and helps in retention. However, the reassessment will depend heavily on the teachers who are teaching them being able to conduct accurate assessment.

- **Provide additional language support** in the first six months for any children who have come from a non-English-medium school, who were unable to attend a bridging course/programme and who have insufficient English.

- **Closely monitor performance and behaviour of new refugees to observe:**
  - » if they can be promoted to a higher class once their English has improved
  - » if they need additional language support or tuition
  - » if they can be paired with another learner who is bilingual
  - » if they need psychosocial support.

- **Encourage parents to support their children** by giving them space for homework and encouraging them to mix with English-speaking buddies as well as friends from their own community.

2.3.2 Recommendations for refugee-impacted schools in Kampala

Schools in Kampala are in many ways in a very different situation. Nonetheless, in schools with large numbers of refugee children, refugee children will still be the minority in the class and school. Follow these recommendations.

- Use a bridging course such as that designed by SIL or implemented by YARID as the first strategy provided the numbers concerned are sufficient to form a class for three months. This may involve schools combining to provide an economically viable size.

- Where this is not possible, discuss the previous school reports, information from the parents, and then use written placement tests.

- Combine this with accelerated promotion for overage children whose language is weak, and language tuition. (See Chapter 5.3 of *A handbook for teachers of refugees.*)

- Continue to monitor new refugee children closely during their first six months.

- Assess the new arrivals' literacy skills as well as their English skills. Are they able to read in any language? If not, then consider setting up a remedial course at school or district level following the teaching at the right level (TaRL) model. (See Chapter 5.6 of *A handbook for teachers of refugees.*)

'**Language is a problem that is both immediately evident in classrooms and fundamental to learning success.**'

Trudell et al. (2019)

Chapter 3:
Best practices observed in schools

3.1 Observed practice

The key to success in every school is what actually happens in the classroom. Evidence from the research suggests that language and overcrowding are the two main challenges holding back learning for refugee children.

> *Language is a problem that is both immediately evident in classrooms and fundamental to learning success: the lack of consistently effective communication between teachers and learners [underlies] poor literacy levels, poor learner placement, learner dropout, teacher frustration, and poor learning outcomes.*
>
> Trudell et al. (2019)

In this chapter we are going to describe what we saw teachers doing in the classroom with all the refugee children.

As leaders and managers of education, it is important to recognise good practice as something to encourage and transfer to other schools.

As educationalists, we should encourage a principled use of the learner's first language where it can help them understand. Half the teachers observed used a second language other than English to support the children's learning. However, the other half avoided any language other than English in the classroom, and even those who did use a second language did so for just ten per cent or less of the lesson. A few teachers we observed were lucky enough to have teaching assistants, or a second teacher who could translate for them, but this only happened in a few classes. Thus, half the learners observed were not able to gain any benefit from what they knew best, their own or a very familiar language.

In addition, the lessons we saw were very traditional and teacher centred with little interaction between teachers and children. Very few children asked any questions, and in a majority of lessons children just listened to the teacher or listened and then repeated what the teacher said or copied it from the blackboard. Inevitably, if most of the children cannot understand much of what they hear, it is difficult to get them involved and to get reliable feedback on whether they actually understand the lessons.

Some teachers said that they never use another language when teaching English or when they teach in English, and in some schools children are punished if heard using any language other than English. It is important that at management level we avoid any stigmatisation of local languages and especially any use of punishment for those who use them.

3.2 Provision of textbooks and teaching materials

Only a few schools had libraries that were accessible to learners and timetabled access. Far too many schools were very restricted in the reading materials that were available to children and, even where available, there was a tendency for the books to be kept away from the children. The schools were lacking in both the number of textbooks available and any other reading materials. Without reading materials few children will learn to read. This is an area of provision that needs to be urgently addressed by educational managers at all levels.

3.3 Examples of best practice at classroom level

We did see many excellent lessons and examples of best practice. Before advising you how we think your teachers should be encouraged to teach, let us describe the great things they are already doing.

We saw an encouragingly large number of teachers using bilingual approaches, with half the teachers we observed using both English and the learner's more familiar language to explain concepts. This was a good technique, especially when teachers used the first language to teach a new word or concept. There were also a few good examples of teachers using the first language, or asking the learner to use the first language, to check whether children knew the meaning of certain words or had understood the concept.

In addition, we saw children helping each other by explaining what had been said or what was to be done. This seemed to be normal practice in many classes, with at least a third of lessons involving this sort of peer support. Grouping children who share a familiar language in the class so that they can help each other during the lesson was also a policy in some schools. This is clearly something to be encouraged and can be built into lessons by any teachers with multilingual classes.

There were also good examples recorded of teachers using more direct methods, including pictures, actions and diagrams, to explain their meaning. These were commented on in about 25 per cent of the lessons observed.

Figure 2: Best practice in the classroom

Bilingual language

Peer-to-peer support

English support classes

Extracurricular activities in school

Teachers learn children's language
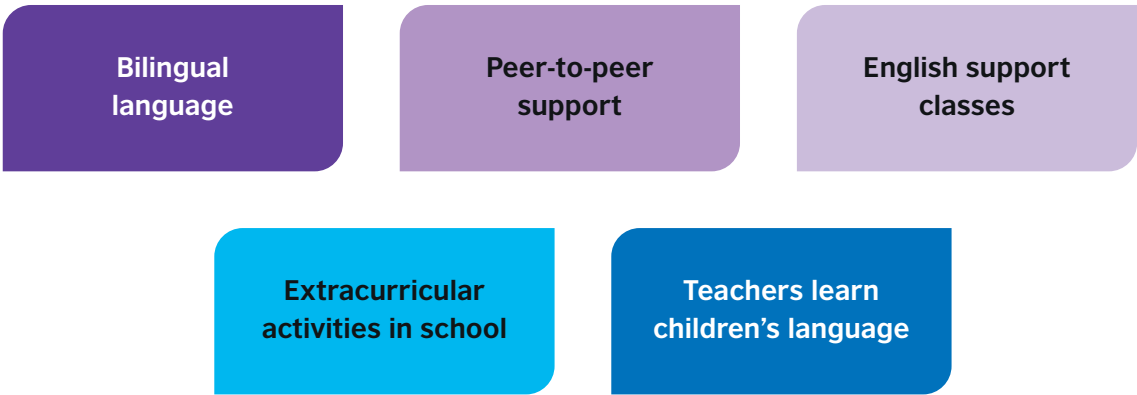
A number of schools have organised language support classes outside class time. In some schools this seems to be having a positive effect on learning outcomes, although in schools where some learners have to pay for this tuition it is less effective at helping those most in need.

The most successful activities for improving English, described by the learners, were debates, extra library and reading classes, and having friends with whom they could use English. As managers of education, we should do more to encourage debates and friendship groups across the language divide.

Several schools grouped their teachers into pairs or threes to prepare lessons and schemes of work, with at least one of the teachers knowing the most common local language of the refugees. During this preparation the group would agree the local language expressions for key terminology, so that even the teacher who could not speak that language at least knew the terms and how to explain them. This can be encouraged across schools. If schools do not have any teachers who speak a particular refugee language, a teacher could instead 'borrow' the expertise of someone in the community who speaks English and that refugee language.

In two schools visited, teachers were learning the language of the refugees and were very proud of how much they knew. In one case the refugee teacher was teaching others, and in the other the teachers had learned from the children. This is a model we would encourage where teachers are taught the learners' first language.

A few schools had libraries with a reasonable stock of books and timetabled library access for students. This was the best practice observed in Kampala schools but was lacking in the largest settlement schools due to resource restrictions. In addition, no textbooks were observed in use in any lessons. In many cases this was due to class sizes of between 100 and 200 children but only a set of 30 books available. Public libraries could help learners in urban areas to access books, while other schools could establish school or community libraries.

Some parents organised private English classes for their children. These were mainly with teachers in the same schools or a nearby school. These lessons helped the children to learn English and were reported as one of the ways parents were able to help their children learn in school. However, this is only available to parents with some money.

Chapter 4:
Advice for schools

Based on the examples of best practice in Chapter 3, we would advise you to encourage the following in your district, settlement or school:

4.1 Deployment of teachers

This should take account of the languages needed. Make sure your schools have as many teachers as possible who can speak the refugees' languages. Wherever possible, persuade the ministry to deploy teachers from the refugee community and train those who are untrained or not fully trained. It should be up to the school, the school community and the district management to advocate for this. Schools that have employed teachers from the local community have done so largely as a result of head teacher initiatives.

4.2 Volunteer language assistants

If necessary, look for ways to employ, on a local or volunteer basis, language assistants to help children who cannot yet speak English. They do not need to be trained teachers, but they do need to be bilingual and be part of, or sympathetic to, the refugee community. They must also be given some training on providing language support and on child safety and caring for vulnerable children. They may sit in the class with a group of children who are finding it difficult to understand, or they may support after-class study groups where they can discuss any problems children are having understanding a topic.

The most successful way to identify volunteers is, in most communities, through a parent–teacher association (PTA) or the school management committee (SMC), hiring members who are part of that language community and see the task as a duty to their community. The PTA or SMC can both identify appropriate assistants but also motivate them to volunteer their help in return for public recognition of the value of their services.

4.3 Language policy

Every school, in discussion with the district education authorities, should develop and agree on a clear policy on language use in and outside the classroom. This policy should align with the language profile of the school and allow for languages familiar to the refugees to be used in support of learning. The policy should be agreed with the district education office and parents, and should include a decision on the language of instruction used in pre-school and Primary 1–3. This should be consistent with Uganda's language policy and, as far as possible, ensure that every child can learn in a language, at least part of the time, with which they are familiar.

Where no familiar language can be identified that is used by a majority of learners, you may have to use English as the main language. In either case, this should not lead to a 'monolingual setting', and wherever possible teachers or teaching assistants should move between English or the language of instruction and the children's languages to ensure maximum communication between teachers and children. For this policy to be successful, the above recommendations on the deployment of teachers (see 4.1) must also be implemented.

4.4 Orientate teachers

Orientate teachers who are new to the school in multilingual approaches that involve a principled but limited use of the learners' first or familiar languages, followed by continued but decreasing use in more senior classes.

4.5 Value the local languages of the children

Be careful not to stigmatise any local languages, and do not punish children for using their own language. This does not preclude having 'language' days or 'English-only' areas and activities, but this should be balanced with activities that underline the value of the children's local languages. Schools should celebrate 'MTE days', which promote more acceptance from the parents and the entire community of local languages.

There were cases where teachers said children were beaten for using a local language in the playground. This is totally unacceptable as, not only does it denigrate the child's own language and culture, but it is totally against the Uganda Teachers' Code of Conduct, which bans beating or any form of corporal punishment.

Materials in local languages should also be available in schools where possible. Such materials are available in other districts or across the border in South Sudan or DRC. For example, materials in Kakwa are available in Koboko district, Swahili materials are available across the region, and even Juba Arabic has some written materials available in Juba.

4.6 Encourage teachers to learn the refugees' languages

Encourage schools to set up after-school classes for teachers who want to learn the basics of at least one of the refugee languages so that they can communicate and show empathy with existing refugee children and newer arrivals. In time, such classes will also help teachers to support refugee children's learning in class. A number of teachers we met had learned Swahili or Kakwa from their learners. Such a course can also cover elements of culture and traditions.

4.7 Pair refugee teachers with national teachers

Such pairings have worked in several schools and enable refugee teachers to help Ugandan teachers to prepare lessons and schemes of work, especially for the lower classes, so that language challenges can be addressed at the planning level. Refugee teachers can also provide advice on cultural challenges and how to avoid any cultural misunderstandings within the classroom.

4.8 Ask for more teaching and learning resources

Few schools have sufficient reading resources and few have active libraries that can be accessed by learners. There needs to be a massive drive, led by demands from the schools and supported by the districts, local stakeholders and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to better resource schools and to ensure that all children are able to read textbooks and other books, both fiction and non-fiction. There is an alarming acceptance of the fact that children do not read in or outside the classroom. Until they do, it is unlikely that a majority will master English as a literate language and build their vocabulary.

4.9 Improve library access

All children need to be able to access books, and therefore schools need to develop reading clubs and reading habits through such activities as 'buddy reading', debating clubs and English clubs. This is only possible once there are more books. However, starting to use what exists will make it easier to persuade others to donate books, including, where possible, e-books. Potential donors are always put off by a 'dead' library or textbooks covered in dust.

To ensure better use of existing materials, education managers should make sure that every child can access the books that exist and emphasise that, though books must be looked after carefully, teachers or librarians should not be fined if books get dirty or torn while in use. Depreciation of books is an inevitable result of their proper use.

Children can read and summarise what they have read and this can be shared with their teacher, paired learner, parents, etc.

4.10 Engage the parents

Regular meetings should be held with parents at the school, district and settlement levels, not just for advocacy or to raise funds but to involve them in their children's education. Parents can play a role in increasing the amount of time children have for learning. They can:

- involve their older children in helping the younger
- encourage their children to have friends who speak English

- ensure that they have time and space to study
- accept that they may come home a little late because they attend extra lessons
- monitor their children's daily progress, including their homework
- monitor their children's work using checklists provided by the school or teacher.

Figure 3: How to engage parents
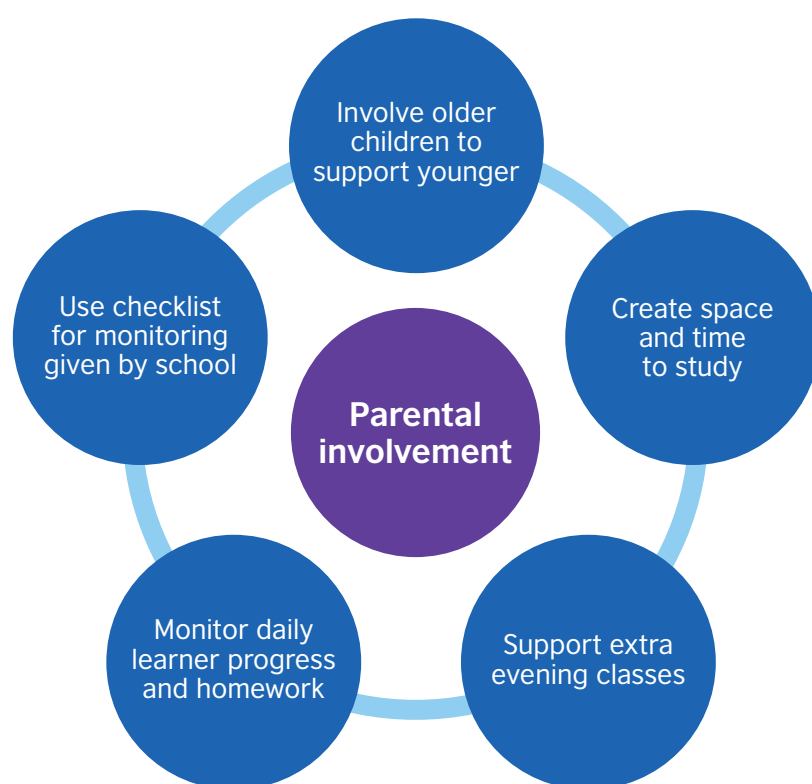
Chapter 5:
Advice to give your teachers

5.1 Why a familiar language is best

Base your advice on the generally agreed principle that children who learn through a familiar language have a major advantage over those who have to try and learn in a language they do not know well. Evidence for this can be found both in Uganda [4] and internationally, and applies to children learning subjects such as maths, acquiring literacy and learning English. Therefore, we strongly recommend that, if they can, your teachers use more than one language if they are teaching classes with many refugee children with poor English.

Teacher trainers now talk about translanguaging. This is a teaching skill that needs to be developed carefully. It is valuable when teaching any children who are unsure about their English, but especially important for refugee children who have had less exposure to English than Ugandan nationals and are new to the country.

However, this use of more than one language in teaching needs to be principled and based on what we know about how children learn and conceptualise.

5.2 Language in lower primary classes

Therefore, encourage the teachers in pre-school and in Primary 1–3 to use a familiar language that a majority of children know, if this is possible. If there is no familiar language, then English may have to be the language of instruction. However, even where this is so, encourage some use of other languages that are familiar to children so that they all feel included. Whatever language a school chooses as the language of instruction, some children may not understand it well. Advise teachers to put these children into their language groups for some of the lesson time and use the best bilingual English speakers to help discuss in their own language and translate to others what has been said. If the class has a language or teaching assistant, they may help with this.

5.3 Language in upper primary classes

Once the children are in upper primary, then English will always be the medium of instruction. However, there may still be children who haven't yet learned enough English because they are new arrivals or because they failed to do so in the lower classes. For these children, encourage teachers to use the same technique described above. Use language groups for some of the lesson so that the better English speaker can help the others understand.

Encourage groups who share the same familiar language to meet outside the class so they can review what has been taught and check that they all understand. If they do not understand, they can come back to the teacher. Arrange extra English tuition classes outside the class hours.

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4.   See, for example, Hicks & Maina (2018; 2020), Trudell et al. (2019), Ball (2010) and Benson (2004).

Maximise the time and exposure they have to read simple English or bilingual readers.

Encourage schools to set up study groups where all children with a common language can meet and discuss what they found difficult in that week's lessons. These can be carried out in their familiar language, with better English speakers summarising for the weaker English speakers or with a language assistant. (See 5.4.2 below and Chapter 5.4 of *A handbook for teachers of refugees*.)

If teachers share a familiar language with their children, encourage teachers to provide scaffolding for the lessons in languages the learners understand. They may teach the main lesson in English but use the familiar language to:
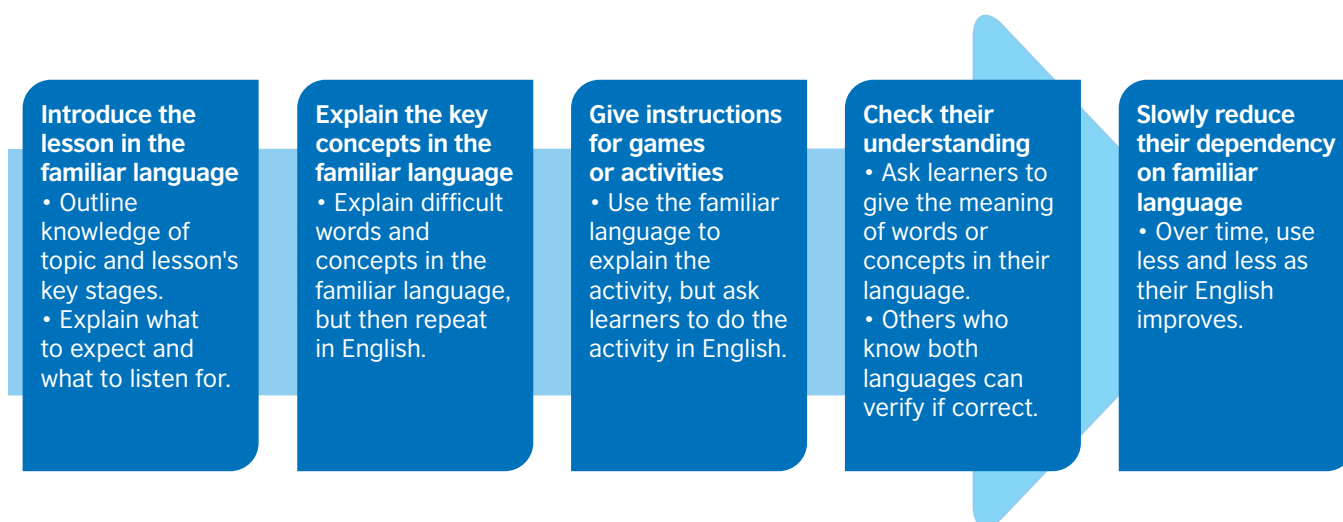
- introduce the lesson
- explain key concepts and vocabulary
- give instructions
- check learners' understanding of what has been taught in English.

More advice on how to handle these classes is given in Chapter 4.2 of *A handbook for teachers of refugees*. Make sure your teachers have copies of this handbook and that they follow its advice.

5.4 Providing additional support outside the 40-minute lesson

Refugee children who are new to a school and who have come from a different education system, with a different curriculum, are not likely to catch up with their peers if they only learn within the formal lesson time. Therefore, schools will need to try to arrange additional support for them outside their formal timetable. This will need support from the district, from NGOs and especially from the school administration and the parents so that time is given for children to learn. The following activities can make a lot of difference, but require time and commitment from teachers and learners.

Figure 4: How to switch between English and the more familiar local language

Introduce the lesson in the familiar language
• Outline knowledge of topic and lesson's key stages.
• Explain what to expect and what to listen for.

Explain the key concepts in the familiar language
• Explain difficult words and concepts in the familiar language, but then repeat in English.

Give instructions for games or activities
• Use the familiar language to explain the activity, but ask learners to do the activity in English.

Check their understanding
• Ask learners to give the meaning of words or concepts in their language.
• Others who know both languages can verify if correct.

Slowly reduce their dependency on familiar language
• Over time, use less and less as their English improves.

5.4.1 English language support

Refugee children who have not previously used English as a medium of education and have not been through a bridging course will need additional support for at least the first year. This should be provided in tutorials taught outside class time. These tutorials should give learners extra English language practice but also help with subject-specific language. In this way, each subject can develop its own 'English for the subject' mini- syllabus that can be used in these sessions. Once the materials for the bridging course have been developed, these, or an adaptation of these, should be available for use in the language support groups. These tutorials should be free so children are not excluded because of lack of money.

5.4.2 Subject study groups

In addition, and especially for upper primary grades, refugee children who speak the same language and find lessons in English difficult to follow should be organised into subject groups. Each group should have a facilitator – either a child in the same class who is bilingual or a language assistant. The group should go over the work they have found difficult in each subject and have it explained again in their own language. As with the language support group, this study group should practise language specific to each subject.

The study group should also focus on areas of the Ugandan curriculum for each subject that were not part of the refugees' syllabus in their home country. It would be very beneficial to develop simple subject topic readers for use in these study groups. In particular, these study groups can focus on gaps in the syllabuses where refugee children have missed out because their country has different topics or a different order of topics. This is likely to be particularly true in social studies, where the Ugandan syllabus emphasises the Ugandan context. But it may also be true for occasional topics in science because, although most syllabuses cover the same broad topics, the order may be different. Parents should be alerted to these study groups as they may involve their children staying after school, working at a community centre or meeting over the weekend.

5.4.3 Conversation groups and pairs

If children can be given buddies who are in their class but don't necessarily share the same language, they can practise speaking English in a more informal way. Children learn fastest when they use the language in a play setting. One can never 'force' friendship between children, but one can encourage it by giving refugee children a friend who cannot speak the same language to take the child around the school.

5.4.4 Remedial classes

In some schools there are many children in upper primary who still cannot read or write in English. Use an early grade reading assessment or similar test to see if this is true in your school. The problem may be lack or English, or it may be lack of literacy skills – that is, they cannot recognise letters or sound out words.

Once you have established how many are unable to decode (sound out words) and how many are literate but unable to operate in English, the school can arrange for those children who cannot read to have extra classes that take them back to basics and help them to acquire phonic knowledge. Classes for those children who lack phonic knowledge can follow the TaRL methodology designed by the foundation Pratham and take them back to establishing literacy in a language with which they are familiar. (See Chapter 5.6 of *A handbook for teachers of refugees*.) Those who are literate but lack English skills can join the English language support classes. (See Chapter 5.4 of *A handbook for teachers of refugees*.)

Chapter 6:
Orienting or training the teachers

6.1 Observed practice

At present, teachers who are not experienced at teaching in a refugee context and are posted or are about to be posted to such a school are usually given two or three days of orientation to prepare them. Such orientation includes aspects of the refugee culture, problems related to teaching in large classes, and challenges related to child protection. While this is excellent and very necessary, it does not specifically address the challenges around multiple language use or the classroom methodology this entails, nor does it advise on what to do about the numbers of overage children.

In addition, some teachers felt that their own orientation had been useful, but they would have appreciated a few more days of it and greater school-based support when they arrived.

6.2 Examples of best practice

The orientation described above and given by WIU with support from UNHCR is in itself an example of best practice and one that needs to be built on and developed.

One school head teacher stated that they had set up language learning lessons for teachers so that they could learn the language of the refugees. This had been particularly useful for Swahili and Kakwa. Other teachers said that they had learned the language of the refugees from the children themselves or from a refugee teacher on a one-to-one basis. This was witnessed when children spoke to teachers in their local language and the teachers also gave instructions in local language.

6.3 Recommendations

Extend the orientation period for teachers who are to be posted in refugee-impacted schools. The initial orientation that is conducted by the ministry and WIU should be expanded at the settlement or district level and should also take place at the school level.

6.3.1 Teacher orientation and support at the settlement or district level

At the settlement and district level, orientation and support should include:

- orientation on aspects of the culture of the refugees
- support on how best to understand and handle children who have experienced trauma, including where to get counselling for such children
- an outline of language policy and practice within the district, including its rationale
- training on and practice using bilingual approaches across primary grades and across subjects and strands
- training on and practice using activity-based teaching within each subject or strand
- class management training with practical examples of large and multilingual classrooms, including how to organise language support groups within a mixed language class
- training on how to carry out diagnostic assessment of literacy and English language skills
- an introduction to at least one of the languages of the refugee community.

6.3.2 Teacher orientation and support at the school level

New teachers should receive additional support once they are in their schools. This should include:

- initial orientation from the head teacher and parents in the community on the local culture, language and practices
- continued language tuition to help teachers learn the basics of at least one refugee language
- being paired with another teacher, preferably one who speaks a refugee language
- opportunity to practise teaching in pairs with an experienced or refugee teacher and, in particular, to practise key elements from orientation on methodology and bilingual approaches, as well as organising and using language groups
- monitoring teachers' progress as they adapt to the new context
- discussions of any individual challenges with traumatised children, including where and how they can be helped.

Chapter 7:
A summary for head teachers

As a head teacher, your own approach, drive and commitment is probably the single most important factor in deciding how successful your school is and whether the children in your care get the best out of their schooling.

This handbook has so far been addressed to all those involved in managing a school, including at district and settlement levels. This last chapter is aimed specifically at head teachers, and is intended to give you a brief checklist covering what you, as the school leader, should put at the top of your agenda. Use it to monitor your and your school's progress over time.

7.1 Examples of best practice observed

When visiting schools and holding discussions with head teachers, we were very impressed by the many examples of best practice that we observed. Many of these have already been listed in earlier chapters. We were also impressed by the dedication of many head teachers and their commitment to their children and to getting the best possible outcomes for their learners. Examples of this included:

- head teachers who were fluent in several of the languages spoken by the refugees in their school
- head teachers with clear policies on both language use and how to place new learners when they arrived
- head teachers who had good relations with their community and regular meetings with the parents
- head teachers who took the time to give guidance to their teachers and were able to monitor the teachers and their classes.

7.2 Advice to head teachers

This advice is based on what we have seen many of the head teachers already doing or wanting to do and what they say has worked.

- Try to ensure that all new refugee children who do not know English go through a bridging course. Where that is not possible:
  - » assess their skills via a written test and discussions with parents
  - » use an AEP if there is one and if you have older children who lack sufficient English skills
  - » use accelerated promotion where an AEP is not available for children who are several years older than their classmates
  - » provide language support classes for new children who have weak English skills, especially those who are too old for the primary class in which they are placed; this will help them to rapidly acquire the language and be promoted.
- Provide support to all new teachers who arrive in the school and ensure that they are carefully oriented to the culture and language of the refugee children, the school's language policy and its approach to multilingual teaching.
- Arrange for new teachers to be paired with experienced teachers and provide opportunities for them to learn the basics of at least one refugee language.
- Ensure that all teachers understand the language policy and how to use the range of languages when teaching. Monitor classes, especially lower classes, to check implementation of this policy and its effectiveness.

- Hold regular meetings with the community to ensure that the parents are in agreement with school policy and are also involved in helping their children to learn English by giving support at home.

- Build up the library and make sure every child has access to reading materials that are interesting and appropriate.

- Organise, or ask teachers to organise, English language clubs for learners, especially for new refugee children, which provide additional speaking practice and include activities such as debating, songs and drama.

- Assess the literacy and language skills of all children and identify those who are failing to learn to read in English.

  » Provide remedial classes for those who cannot read.

  » Provide language support classes for those who can read mechanically but do not have strong English.

- Work with the community, PTA or SMC to provide class or language assistants who are part of the refugee community and can help teachers and children learn in English using a more familiar language when necessary, especially in their first year and in the lower classes.

Being able to tick all the above is a great achievement. But remember, you are the team leader. Many of the above should be done by your team, including your teachers and your local community.

7.2.1 Parting shot

We hope these guidelines will be useful to all concerned with managing schools impacted by refugees, that you will enjoy your involvement with the children and the school, and, as a result, that you will help to produce skilled and motivated teachers who in turn produce learners who can fulfil their potential.

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'Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education.'

Dr Ekkehard Wolff, University of Leipzig, Institute of Afrikanistik

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