

Language for Resilience

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# A handbook for teachers of refugees



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# Acknowledgements

This handbook was developed with, and is thus dependent on, the invaluable support of those who assisted with the full research. We thank the Office of the Prime Minister, the camp co-ordinators and UNHCR officials for providing us with the necessary support and the necessary permissions to engage with the beneficiaries. We are also grateful to the British Council for offering us the opportunity and supporting the research both logistically and financially.

We are also indebted to all Windle International Uganda (WIU) officers who supported the study at various stages and locations, and we extend our gratitude to the working groups for their professional input and guidance during the planning process. Specifically, we wish to thank Lameck Ageta, the chair of the working group, who made all necessary arrangements for meetings, connected us to the partners who were instrumental in the research, and reached out to professionals who provided further feedback. The continuous support and guidance of Margaret Atim and Julie Olule, the project and fund managers, is also greatly appreciated.

The key figures in helping us to develop this handbook were the teachers, head teachers and district-level education managers who so generously gave their time to discuss their experiences and best practices.

We are very grateful as well to all those who reviewed the initial handbook and made such valuable contributions, leading to significant reformulation of the work. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the detailed and useful feedback given by members of the taskforce and especially Rachael Corbishley of SAVE, Mauro of Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education (LGIHE) and Lameck. We hope we have reflected their inputs and are appreciative of how they have enriched the final product.

However, we should emphasise that the final views presented in this handbook are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by those named above.

# Abbreviations

<b>AEP</b>	Accelerated education programme
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>EGRA</b>	Early-grade reading assessment
<b>L1</b>	First language
<b>MTE</b>	Mother tongue education
<b>PP</b>	Pre-Primary
<b>SIL</b>	Summer Institute of Language
<b>SS</b>	South Sudan
<b>TaRL</b>	Teaching at the right level (Pratham-inspired approaches to remedial)

# 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 primary grade as soon as they have acquired the basic competences required for that level rather than waiting until the end of the 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.

**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

**The aim of this handbook is to provide guidelines to teachers who find themselves teaching classes with children from many different backgrounds and with many different languages. If you are in this situation, we hope these guidelines will help.**

Chapter 1 gives the background to this handbook and explains why we thought it was needed. Chapter 2 describes what you can do when a new refugee child first arrives in your class. Chapter 3 gives examples of best practice that have already been observed as successful and that you can build on. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 offer practical guidelines to teachers on how to address the issues that arise when teaching in multilingual classes with large numbers of refugees.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Who is this handbook for?

If you are a teacher supporting a number of refugee children in your class and find the complexity of the language situation challenging, then these guidelines are meant for you. We hope these guidelines help you to improve the learning outcomes of the refugee children you teach and make your own task easier and more rewarding. In particular, the guidelines should advise you on the way language is learned and should be used in your classroom and school 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, we hope, will 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
- equip teachers with improved methodologies appropriate to children in transition from one education system to another
- strengthen the way familiar languages, usually local 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 what the researchers were told by teachers and what they observed in the classrooms. This included:

- examples of best practice – both from what the researchers saw and from suggestions made by teachers, head teachers and school leaders
- practice that has been observed but needs to be improved on, including aspects of traditional teaching that need to be adapted better to refugee and multilingual contexts.

# Chapter 2:

## When a child refugee arrives in your class for the first time

### 2.1 Help the child feel at home

The child will have been assessed before being placed in your class. You may or may not have been involved in that decision, but, if the child is quite old for your class or was in a higher grade at their last school, you may need to know the reason for their placement. Frequently, it is because their English is weak or they may have just done badly on a test. If you are lucky, the child may have been through a bridging course to strengthen their English. If this is the case, their English should be sufficient for their grade. However, you should still monitor them. More advice on placement is given in *A handbook for school managers hosting refugees*.

As teachers we always welcome new children to our class and try and make them feel comfortable. We also introduce them to the rest of the class and find them somewhere to sit – even if the classroom is very overcrowded.

However, don't stop there. Find out as much as you can about their background and what school and class they were in before. Find out if they know any English and what their first or familiar language is. If possible:

- talk to them in their first or a familiar language for a few minutes – even if you only know the greetings in their language, it will reduce any sense of them being a stranger
- sit them with a group of children who share the same first or familiar language and tell the others to help the new child fit in and catch up
- at the end of the first lesson and on other occasions during the week, speak to the child and check how they are feeling and whether they are managing to understand
- if other teachers teach the same child, then, after one or two weeks, discuss the progress of all the new children in a staff meeting or in an informal setting
- make contact with the parents so that you know a little of the background and can advise the parents on how to support their child.

### 2.2 Monitor their progress in the first month

This can be quite challenging if you have many newly arrived children and a very large class. However, it is important that all new children are monitored by their teachers in the first months. You need to know:

- Are they progressing?
- Are they understanding your English?
- Are they in the correct class or should they be in a higher or lower class?
- Are they in your class just because they can't understand English, or is it also the correct level for other subjects, especially maths?
- Do you need to recommend that they are given extra English tuition or remedial literacy or numeracy support?

### 2.2.1 How to monitor

This does NOT mean you give the new children any extra tests. However, you should try and do the following regularly in the first month.

- Get them to read to you from their English textbook at least twice in the first month – or, if their textbook is too difficult for them, try with a simpler reader. Do this as part of normal classroom practice. They should read to you quietly, or you can listen in to a paired reading. Do NOT ask them to read out loud in front of the whole class or in front of lots of other children. If they find reading more difficult than others in the class, get them to read individual words and check if they can recognise those. If this is difficult, check if they can sound out the letters. If they can't do this, they need remedial classes in literacy (Chapter 5.6) not just extra English (Chapter 5.2).
- Check their regular classwork exercises. Set written work for the whole class or in groups. As you check all the children's work, pay special attention to the new children. Are they managing or do they need help? Or, are they finding the work too easy and should be considered for promotion to the next class?
- Check their numeracy at least once a month to make sure they can do the operations that other children can do by marking a regular exercise.
- Have regular conversations in English in addition to their familiar language, to assess how well they understand you. For lower classes this can include simple directions such as:
  - » Mahmoud, can you collect everyone's books/clean the board, etc.?
- For higher classes, in a particular subject lesson, tell the child that you want them to note down the three most important things from your lesson. Check to see that they have managed to do this.
- When teaching or revising a topic or theme in a subject or strand, ask the child if they studied this or related topics at their old school. If they didn't, be understanding and ask another child to help them catch up. In particular, ask this about topics you covered before they arrived but they need to know either for exams or because it is assumed knowledge for the next topic.

### 2.3 Accelerated promotion

One strategy used by some schools to avoid too many overage children in the lower classes is to put a new child initially in a lower grade than is normal for their age, but monitor them regularly and promote them as soon as their English improves rather than just keeping them in the same primary grade for the whole year. This approach is used most successfully if combined with some additional English language support. In some schools children who started the year in Primary 2 ended it in Primary 5 just because they learned English quickly.

We would encourage you and your school to use this strategy of accelerated promotion combined with extra language tuition for newly arrived overage children who do not know English, especially those from French, Somali or Arabic medium education systems.

#### 2.3.1 How to accelerate appropriately

- Start by monitoring in the same five ways described above (Chapter 2.2.1).
- Rely on the child's classwork and homework to see if they are doing as well as or better than others.
- If the child is doing as well as or better than others in the class, and their English is improving rapidly, consider whether they should be promoted.
- Discuss with other teachers, especially the teacher who will teach them if they are promoted to the next class level.
- Check if there are any major topics that the child will skip in any subject if they are promoted. Check if these were covered in their school of origin. If not, or if you are in doubt, give some reading and writing assignments from the textbook that cover these topics before you promote them. Discuss with the parents.
- If everyone is in agreement, promote the child to the next class where they will again be monitored as if they were a new child for the first few weeks.

## 2.4 Other support for the new child

### 2.4.1 Psychosocial support

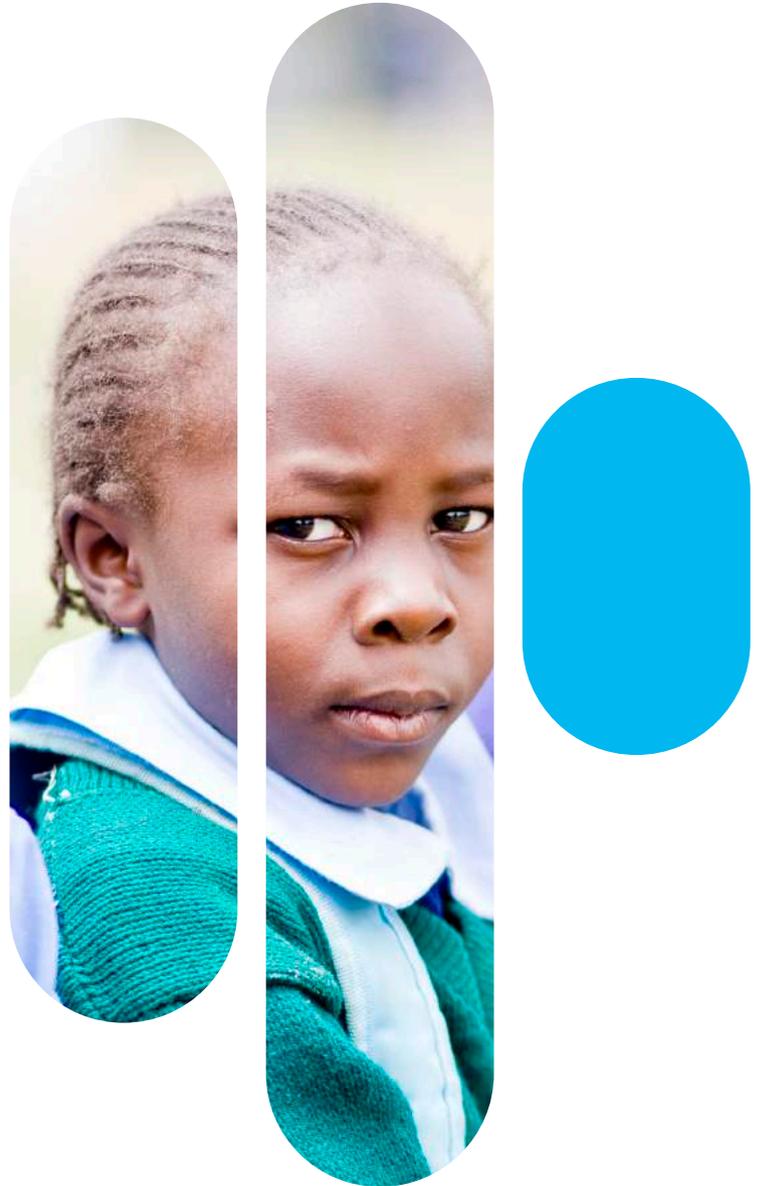
As you monitor the new child, language may not be the only issue. As recent refugees, they may be suffering as a result of violence or as a result of having to leave their home, friends and family. If you feel the learners need any psychosocial support, then seek advice from others trained in this area.

### 2.4.2 Buddies and friendship pairing

To help the newcomers improve their English they also need two types of friends. They want to have a friend who is also a classmate and is bilingual, speaking both their language and English. This friend can support them in the class and make them feel more at home. However, this friend is unlikely to do a lot to strengthen their English. Therefore, if possible, try and match new children with a second friend or set of friends with whom they have to play in English. Many successful refugee children in the study reported that they had learned most English from their friends.

### 2.4.3 Remedial classes

You may find that the new child in your class isn't just finding English difficult but actually has not learned to read properly in any language. This may be part of a wider problem within the school. The best schools set up remedial classes for all children in upper classes who remain unable to read in any language. This tuition will be based on the reading levels of the child and not on their present primary class level. More detail on how to conduct these lessons is given below (Chapter 5.6).



# 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 the refugee children. As teachers you probably have to teach large classes, on average over 100 learners, with children who speak different languages. Based on our findings, half of you tried to use a second language other than English to support the learning of the children. However, another half avoided any language other than English in the classroom, and many of the teachers who did use a second language did so for 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.

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 from the blackboard. Inevitably, if many of the children cannot understand much of what you say, it is difficult to get them involved and to get reliable feedback on whether they actually understand your lesson.

Some teachers said that they never use another language when teaching English or in English and, in some schools, children are punished if heard using any language other than English. This is a pity as using the languages children know can help them so long as they are used with care and the children still hear lots of English.

### 3.2 Provision of textbooks and teaching materials

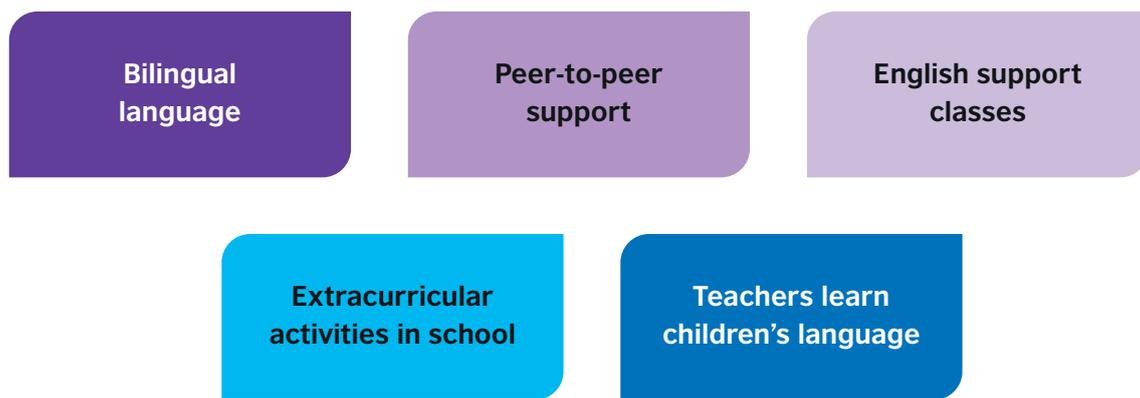
Although a few schools did have libraries that learners could access and did have timetabled library lessons or access to the library at other times, these were few in number. Far too many of the schools were very restricted in the reading materials that were available to children and, even if available, there was a tendency for the books to be kept away from the children. Schools were lacking in a sufficient number of textbooks and most were lacking in any other reading materials. Without reading materials few children will learn to read. This is an area of provision that needs to be addressed.

### 3.3 Examples of best practice at classroom level

We did see many excellent lessons and excellent examples of best practice. Before advising you how we think you should teach, let us describe the great things taking place in your classrooms.

- 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 if they 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. We would encourage this and urge teachers not to get anxious if children are talking to each other in their first language in lessons provided they are talking about the lesson. In Kampala, this was a structured approach observed in two classes, while in other locations this was a child-led initiative to enable them to follow class proceedings.

Figure 1: Best practice in the classroom



- 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.
- 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 learners have to pay for this tuition it is less effective at helping those most in need. Language support classes, both recommended procedures and how they can help, are described in detail in Chapter 5.3.
- 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. Thus, we would encourage all schools to set up clubs such as these so that children practise English outside the class but within the school environment.
- Several schools organised their teachers to work in pairs or threes as they prepared lessons and schemes of work, with at least one of the teachers in each group knowing at least one of the local languages of the refugees. During this preparation they 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.
- 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, even if only initial greetings and simple expressions of support and encouragement.
- As stated earlier, a few schools had libraries with a reasonable stock of books and timetabled library access for students. This was best practice as observed in Kampala schools but lacking in the largest settlement schools due to resource restrictions. In addition, no textbooks were observed in use in the classrooms. 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 libraries while other schools could establish school or community libraries.

# Chapter 4:

## Advice to teachers in the classroom

We have based the advice that follows 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<sup>1</sup> and internationally, and applies to children learning subjects such as maths, acquiring literacy and learning English. Therefore, we strongly recommend that, if you can, you use more than one language as you teach classes with many refugee children.

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 children 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. You also need to combine translanguaging with more activities and use deductive methods when teaching. That is because these methods rely less on the learner and teacher having mastery of a common language and call on all the child's senses. If language is a problem, then children who want to learn should not have to just rely on learning by listening to a language they hardly know.



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

#### 4.1 Supporting children in the classroom in Pre-Primary and Primary 1–3

- As already stated, use the majority familiar language as the main language of teaching. This may be Swahili, Arabic, Kakwa, Luganda or similar, depending on the school. If in your class there is no familiar language common to most children, use English. Whichever language you use as a main language, feel free to also use other languages you and some of the children know as support languages. This will help to make everyone feel included. If you cannot speak their language, use a language assistant; if you do not have one, use children who are bilingual to help you. Always try and learn at least a few words of every child's language so they can feel included.
- If you are teaching in Pre-Primary (PP) or Primary 1–3 using a familiar local language but have children who do not understand that language yet, put them into groups or pairs with children who are bilingual in their language and the language you are using. In Kampala, for example, this is likely to be Luganda and the refugee child's language. In some schools in Isingiru or Kyangwali, it is likely to be Swahili and the child's language.
- Whether you are teaching in a local language or in English, at the start of the lesson, try and talk briefly to those children with a different language or ask someone else to do so for you. Explain briefly in the children's language what the lesson is about and what they will be asked to do.
- Make sure in every lesson the children have lots of activities to do in pairs or groups. As they are working

on the activities, go to, or send an assistant to, any group that has difficulty understanding the language so that they can explain in a language they understand. Let groups report back to you on their work in the language they find easiest, and translate for them into the language most learners understand.

- Conclude the lesson using both languages if possible. If you wish to assess how much of a topic children have understood, use the language in which they are most comfortable, even if this means rephrasing a question in several languages or asking for replies in several languages.

#### 4.2 Supporting children in the classroom when English is the language of instruction

Whatever the language used in Primary 1–3, you will use English as the language of instruction (LoI) in Primary 4 and above. Imagine you are teaching in English, but know that most of your learners find the language difficult. Below are some suggestions to help you. If you can speak the languages that are familiar to your students, what follows will be easy. If you do not know their language, when it says 'use a familiar language':

- **either** use a language assistant
- **or** use a good student who speaks both languages.

They can then explain to the group of learners in their language. If there are several languages, you may need to divide the class into language groups and have at least one person who can explain to each group.

This is how you can switch between English and the more familiar local language:

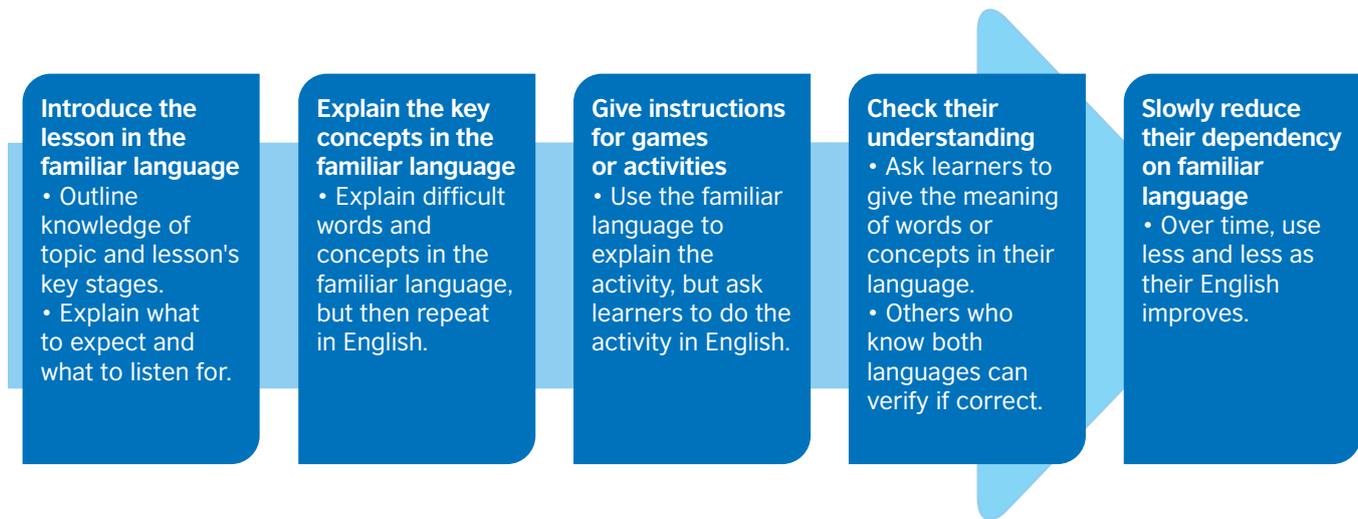
**4.2.1 Provide peer-to-peer support**

If you have children in your class who find English difficult, then put them in a pair or a group with others with the same familiar language who can help them during the lesson. They can explain what you have said and describe the activities, including any homework, that you have asked them to do. If there are a group of such learners, encourage them to operate as a group and meet both inside and outside the class. If possible, provide a language assistant to support them.

**4.2.2 Provide ‘scaffolding’ for the lesson in languages the learners understand**

A builder uses scaffolding around the outside of the house to support it as it is built. We can use the familiar language in the same way, to support the lesson as we teach it. The house will be built in English, but the familiar language is used to help learners understand the structure of the house and climb up to the bits that are more difficult to understand. Look at Figure 2 below. Does this help you understand how you may scaffold a lesson using the familiar language and English?

**Figure 2:** How to scaffold a lesson



### 4.2.3 Sample outline lessons showing how to scaffold using two languages

Below is the layout of a typical lesson using two languages. For simplicity we imagine some children can speak Swahili and others Kigegere. (We have used L1 to mean familiar language even if it isn't their first language.)

**Table 1:** A typical lesson using two languages

Lesson aim/Learning outcome	Learners will be able to explain how the heart works	
Stage	Activity	Language use
Revision/warm-up	Questions and answers about textbook pictures from last lesson.	Use English apart from occasional questions in L1 to check comprehension.
Introduction	State that they will learn about their hearts. Everyone feels their heart. Tell them that by the end of the lesson they should be able to answer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many parts are there in the heart?</li> <li>What makes the blood flow?</li> </ul>	Explain initially in L1 if you can. If not, use English and lead learners translate into Swahili or Kigegere. Use the L1 to check that everyone understands the two questions they should answer.
Key vocabulary	Teach <i>flow</i> , <i>heart</i> and <i>pump</i> as vocabulary using demonstrations of action.	These words are explained in the two L1s and written in their word banks in both L1 and English.
Presentation of information	Use the diagram of the heart to demonstrate how the blood is pumped from one ventricle to another. Let them feel the pumping by finding each other's pulses. Give the word <i>pulse</i> as new vocabulary. Ask who usually feels their pulse (district nurse).	This part of the lesson should all stay in English supported by the visual aids and the actions. Avoid translating this part of the lesson The only place where you may need L1 is giving the instruction to find each other's pulses.
Practice	Tell children to draw and label the diagram in their books.	They work individually but support each other in their groups. Where possible they talk in English but allow for any who haven't understood instructions to be told in an L1.
Production	Children describe their drawings and the way blood flows to each other in their groups.	Encourage them to try and use English but allow any who are struggling to first describe in L1 and then repeat in English.
Assessment	Check and mark their drawings and labelling. All labels should be in English. Ask them to answer the two lead questions in groups and as a class.	All in English – apart from asking for the key vocabulary to be defined in the L1.
Homework and follow-up	Set the reading text as homework. They are to summarise the passage with four points they will remember.	All in English, but those who still have difficulty with English can be helped to summarise the passage orally in their L1 and then write a short summary in English.

### 4.3 Supporting children in the classroom when the subject being taught is English

Many teachers are happy to translanguage when teaching any subject other than English, but believe that they should avoid ever using any other language when teaching English as a subject. While this is understandable and has been a rule within the traditional direct method approaches to language teaching, modern thinking now encourages more use of the familiar languages.

Although most of the lesson (at least 85 per cent) should always be in English, there are a number of occasions when using a more familiar language will make learning English easier. Times when the local or familiar language can be used, especially in the early stages of learning English, are as follows:

- giving the meaning of new words or phrases that cannot be easily demonstrated
- setting tasks and activities that will lead to learners using more English
- any gentle correction of mistakes when explaining why something is wrong
- checking that they understand a word or concept by asking learners to say the word in their language
- explaining any grammar rules in the simplest terms. (Note that we do not want much grammar explanation but any given needs to be in a familiar language.)

With the exception of the grammar rules, anything said in the first language should be repeated in English so that the target for the lesson is always English.

Thus, although an English lesson will have less use of the familiar language, you should still feel free to use the local language on the specific occasions suggested above. However, if you find you are using the local language for more than 20 per cent of the lesson, then you are not allowing children to get enough exposure to English. The local language should only be used to make learning English easier and quicker.



**We recognise the  
hard work you do  
each day to make  
learning happen.**





# Chapter 5:

## Supporting children outside the lessons

Just teaching the timetabled lessons and then going home will not be enough to help the many refugee children catch up with Ugandan nationals or others who have been in Uganda for many years. Learning doesn't stop at the classroom door. Based on the examples of best practice in Chapter 3 that have been shown to work, we would encourage you to do the following in your schools. This can be organised by you as teachers, but needs the full support of the head teacher and school management if it is to succeed. In many cases it will also need community support, especially if the community can provide people who can help translate between the familiar language and English.

### 5.1 Language policy

As a school, develop a clear policy on language use in and outside the classroom that allows for languages familiar to the refugees to be used in support of learning. The policy should be agreed and accepted by all teachers, the district education office and parents, and should include a decision on the language of instruction you use in pre-school and Primary 1–3. This should be consistent with the Ugandan language policy and, as far as possible, should make sure 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. But this should not be a 'monolingual setting', and wherever possible teachers or teaching assistants should move between English and the children's languages to ensure maximum communication between teachers and children.

In addition to the language of instruction there should be agreed supporting languages that will help children understand their subjects and new concepts. Clearly, a support language would be needed whenever there are enough learners with the same familiar language to form a group and with some in the group unable to understand English. Such groups should have at least one learner who is able to use both languages with confidence. They can

then summarise what is said in English in the familiar language. Note that we suggest summarising rather than exact translation as the latter can be very difficult for young children. However, once learners have become comfortable in English, then you no longer need them to form a separate language group. In fact, you may wish to break up such groups and create multilingual groups to encourage them to use more English.

### 5.2 Respect the children's own language

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, and reinforce the message that using local languages in schools preserves indigenous languages and culture and facilitates the transition into English.

There were cases in the study 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.

### 5.3 Provide English language support classes

Refugee children who are new to your 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, as a teacher and as a school you will need to try and arrange additional support for them outside their formal timetable. This will need support from the school administration and from the parents so that time is given for children to learn. The following activities can make a lot of difference, though they will take teachers' and learners' time.

Tuition is provided in a number of schools and with a range of different models. Some schools offer free tuition and some paid, some tuition classes are specific to English language and others are basically exam revision classes for all subjects and open to all learners. For supporting refugees, the best model is in schools that have provided free English-specific support classes for refugee children who do not have enough English, and especially those that have recently joined the school. What follows is focused on new children but could apply to any children who are struggling because their English is weak, whatever their primary grade.



### 5.3.1 An approach to language support classes for those who lack English

Avoid just giving a typical language and grammar class. If the child is having problems understanding English but can read and write in another language, then they probably need help in three key areas:

1. listening and understanding
2. expanding their vocabulary, especially the vocabulary for their subjects
3. transferring this to reading in the subjects they study.

Try and use the materials that are available in the school. These may include simple readers. If so, then learners can read at least one reader a week outside the lesson. If not, try and use textbooks, including those for other subjects, that are at least two grades below their actual primary grade level so that they are easy to read. In a typical English tuition lesson you can follow these steps.

- **Extended reading:** If possible, make sure every child reads something each week outside the class. It should be a simple reader or part of a textbook from a lower primary grade. Start your lesson with the children reporting on what they read and exchanging their books with others in the class.
- **Listening practice:** Practise listening by giving some simple commands (lower primary grades), telling a story or reading a short description to the learners (upper primary grades). They should listen but SHOULD NOT see the text. Discuss the story and see how much they understood – or, if you gave commands, how well they responded. They can practise both giving and obeying the commands.
- **Problems in the week:** Ask them any two things they found difficult to understand in class. Get them to tell you about the lesson and why it was difficult. Encourage them to keep a diary about what they find difficult to understand in their regular lessons.
- **List the key vocabulary items** that they had difficulty understanding. Make sure they are keeping a vocabulary list with explanations of meaning or translations for each subject. They can use this to revise and memorise new words for each subject.
- **Add four or five new vocabulary items** related to a subject or topic if upper primary or a theme if lower primary.

- **Read a short passage** from the subject textbook at their primary grade level with the learners. If you have several levels, they will need to do this in groups and you help each group. They then answer the questions at the end of the paragraph.
- **Oral practice:** End the lesson with a language game or song, or, for upper classes, a debate on a simple topic relevant to them. Encourage all to say something.

### 5.4 Provide subject study groups

In addition, and especially for upper primary grades, refugee children who find English difficult but speak the same local language or French should be organised into subject groups, with a facilitator – either a bilingual child from that class or a language assistant. They should then go over the work they have found difficult in each subject and discuss it again in their own language. The main aim is to help them understand what has been taught in that week, but, as with the language support group, this study group should include practising the language for the subject.

In addition, the study group should also focus on areas of the Ugandan curriculum for that subject that were not in the refugee's syllabus for the home country. It would be very beneficial to develop simple subject-related topic readers for use in these study groups. In particular, these study groups can focus on gaps in 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 it may involve their children staying after school, studying at a community centre or meeting for lessons over the weekend.

#### 5.4.1 Sample study group lesson for those speaking Kakwa or Swahili

**Aim:** To revise subject lessons using a more familiar language. The questions and answers are all in Kakwa, Swahili or a similar language familiar to the group. We have used a topic from history and one from maths to illustrate the stages.

**Table 2:** Sample study group lesson for those speaking Kakwa or Swahili

Typical stages and responses	Key questions to ask in Kakwa/Swahili	Typical answers for history (Primary 5)	Typical answers for maths (Primary 2)
<b>Define the key topics that need reviewing</b>	What did you learn in history/maths this week?	The Buganda Kingdoms.	Measuring our desks using our hands.
<b>Identify problem areas that made them difficult to understand</b>	What was most difficult to understand?	Who is the Kabaka? Why did the Kabaka leave Uganda?	Why not use a ruler? Why is our hand span important?
<b>Facilitator’s or other learners’ response</b>	N/A	In L1 or French discuss the questions and suggest answers.	Talk about informal measuring in home and in traditions.
<b>Vocabulary: Key and difficult words</b> Take the English word and discuss meaning in L1 or French	What English words did you not know? Are you keeping a bilingual vocabulary list to help you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kingship</li> <li>• Autocracy</li> <li>• Benevolent</li> </ul> Discuss meanings in L1 or French.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Span</li> <li>• Difference between length and width. Are they the same?</li> </ul> Meaning explained in L1, demonstrated and translated
<b>Looking for parallels where relevant with country of origin</b>	Are there kingdoms in SS/DRC? Tell me about them. How do you measure things at home?	Yes. Many are in their SS curriculum. Kingdoms in SS/DRC are different. Discuss what they know in L1.	We always used metres and centimetres. Traditional measures in home country.
<b>Finally, unlock the textbook</b> Give a reading assignment or some exercises to do	Present and read with them the text in the textbook. Or do exercises.	The learners paraphrase the text about the Kabaka in their textbooks in L1.	They read activities or exercises and translate or paraphrase into the L1. They then do the activities.

### 5.4.2 Let's paraphrase the textbook

Another lesson for the study groups, especially for upper classes, can be to select a passage from their subject textbook that they find difficult or cover a topic they missed. They read the passage in English and then discuss what it means and paraphrase it in their own language. They should:

- **either** try and summarise the text in approximately half the length of the original
- **or** make notes, starting by listing the three most interesting points in the text.

## 5.5 Conversation groups and pairing buddies

If children can be given buddies (or can be guided to select buddies) who are in their class but not necessarily sharing the same language, then they can practise speaking English in a more informal way. Children learn fastest when they use the language in a play setting. You can never 'force' friendship between children, but you can encourage it by giving the child refugee a friend who cannot speak the same language to show them around the school.

## 5.6 Remedial classes

You may have many children in upper primary in your school who still cannot read or write in English. This may be specific to refugee children, but it can apply across the school. As a school use an early grade reading assessment (EGRA) or similar test to see how many learners cannot read or write. The problem may be lack of English or it may be lack of literacy skills. Once you have established how many are either not able to read anything or are still unable to operate in English, arrange for these children to have extra classes where they are taken back to basics.

Classes for those who are not literate – that is, still fail to decode (sound out) simple texts – can follow the methodology recommended by teaching at the right level (TaRL). First, take them back to establishing literacy in a language with which they are familiar. They may also look at the literacy programme attached to the new bridging course once established. Those who are literate but lack English can join the language support classes described above.

### 5.6.1 TaRL classes

You would only use the TaRL approach, devised by the Pratham Foundation, for learners who cannot recognise words or letters in English or in their own language, i.e. whose problem is literacy rather than just English. Under TaRL, you first assess whether they can sound out letters and words using simple EGRA tests. You divide the learners up according to their reading levels.

- **Level 1 (non-readers):** Those who cannot recognise or sound out letters.
- **Level 2 (non-readers):** Those who recognise letters but can't sound out words or phrases.
- **Level 3 (emerging readers):** Those who can recognise words and letters but cannot read with any fluency at the paragraph level.

It doesn't matter which primary class the children come from, for remedial lessons they are grouped by their reading ability. Level 1 and 2 would concentrate on developing phonic knowledge in their most familiar language so that they recognise the meaning of words once they sound them out. Level 3 would move the learners from reading in the familiar language to reading in English so that they transfer their newly acquired phonic skills into the less familiar language.

Note that classes need to be regularly monitored and learners assessed so that they can be promoted to the next level as soon as they are ready.

## 5.7 Learn the language and culture of the refugees

Would you like to be able to speak the language that your refugee learners speak? Would you like to learn Arabic, Swahili or Kakwa, for example? Many teachers have achieved this, though often only to a small extent. In your school, consider setting up after-school language 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 with newer arrivals.

Pair refugee teachers with national teachers so that the former can help the latter in preparing lessons and schemes of work, especially for the lower classes. In this way, language challenges can be addressed at the planning level.

## 5.8 Expand and use teaching and learning resources

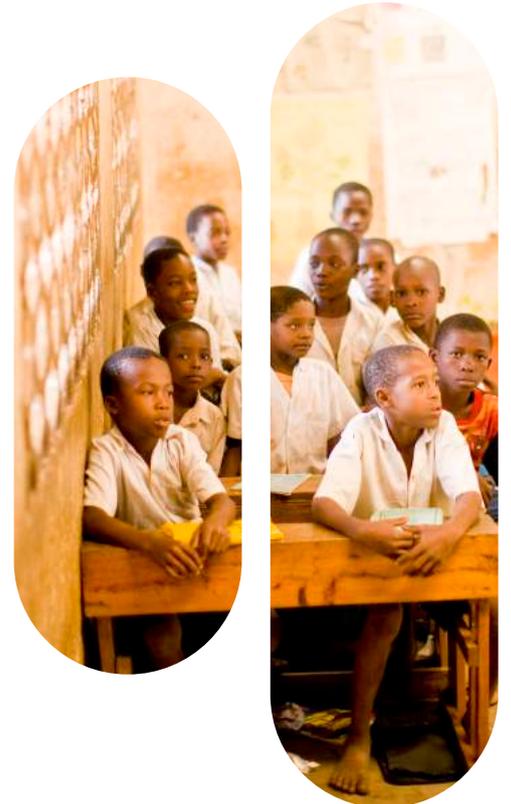
Ask for more teaching and learning resources. Few schools have sufficient reading resources and few have active libraries that can be accessed by learners.

There needs to be a massive drive, led by demands from schools and parents, to better resource all schools and to ensure that all children are able to read textbooks, simplified readers 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 with a vocabulary that can support learning in other subjects. Where possible, create activity-based learning using local materials, e.g. flash cards and word cards made with local paper. Also develop materials for games that enable vocabulary building and help children who are weak in English.

Expand library access to all children, and develop reading clubs and reading habits through such activities as 'buddy reading' and other English clubs. This will only be possible once there are more books. However, starting to use what exists will make it easier to persuade others to give you more 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.

This also applies to textbooks. Use the resources you have. Don't let textbooks sit in the library or office unused. Nobody will be rebuked or penalised for book usage that leads to more wear and tear. Children can be trained on the proper handling and care of books and then allowed to borrow and return.

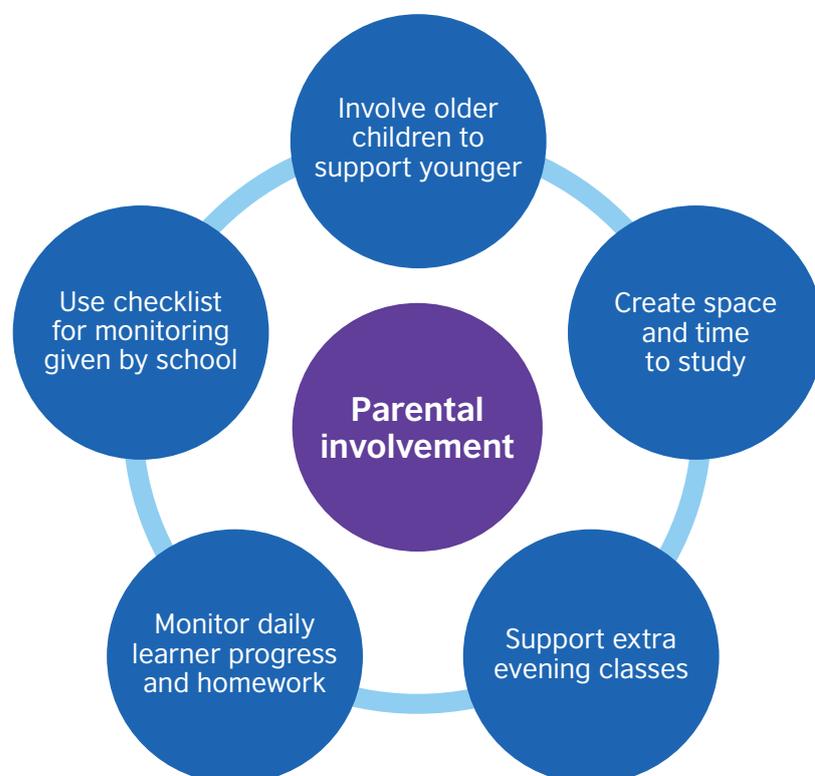


### 5.9 Engage the parents

Parental engagement is important to enhance positive behaviour among children and also to synchronise what the teachers and parents want to do together. As teachers it is important that you hold regular meetings with the parents of the children you teach to involve them more fully in their children's education. Meet at least once a term. 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
- be given checklists by you, the teacher, which will help them monitor their children's work
- be personally involved in any roles they can play in helping reading, telling traditional stories, supplying local materials and so on – parents don't have to be good readers to listen to their children reading.

**Figure 3:** How to engage parents



# Chapter 6: Summary

## 6.1 How to make you an even better teacher

From the research carried out we recognised the hard work you do each day to make learning happen, and the efforts involved to do this in such challenging settings. You also work in a tough environment thanks to class sizes and language barriers. In this chapter we summarise the main points that we think will make you an even better teacher, and especially a better teacher of the refugee children in your class.

1. Learn the children's culture. Understanding someone's culture can help you to understand them. Where did they come from? What is important to them? What may offend them?
2. Learn a language. Learn one of the main refugee languages so that you can at least greet the children, empathise with them and help them understand the subject you teach. You don't have to master the language or speak it like a native, but learn enough to be helpful to them as a first step.
3. Learn some of the key concepts of the subject you teach in their language. You can do this if you plan your schemes of work with someone who speaks that language.
4. Learn when and how to use more than one language in the classroom – without undermining English as the language of instruction.
5. Be proactive when new refugee children join your class by welcoming them, helping them fit in and giving them buddies who can help translate for them if needed and a friend with whom they can speak in English.
6. Help to set up and teach an extra language class for those of your children who need it, or help to teach initial literacy using a TaRL approach.

### 6.1.2 Parting shot

We hope these guidelines will be useful to all concerned with teaching in schools affected by refugees, and that you will enjoy your teaching and, as a result, will produce skilled and motivated students 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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