

RIGHT TO READ (RTR) 2016/17 Report



29% Improvement in English skills between March and August

1. Background To The Project

The Love Sierra Leone (LSL) “Right to Read” (RTR) sponsored project has, from 2015 to 2017, been piloted at Ahkom School, Kono district. The school locality is characterized by *economic deprivation* with *learners coming* primarily from poor economic backgrounds *and school settings that* are weak in infrastructure with lack of access to the Internet, shared computers, limited access to *the* software, and weak classroom facilities.

RTR aims to improve learner English language skills in comprehension, vocabulary and fluency; specifically through the use of multi-sensory technology assisted English Language teaching as demonstrated by “English Helper” (EH) in its 2013/2014 India study which utilized the company’s ReadToMe (RTM) software. The RTM product:

“verbalizes any text, including students’ textbooks. It provides a multi-sensory experience that enhances the learners’ engagement and improves retention.”

Despite the infrastructure limitations at Ahkom school and the deprived background of learners:

“Assessments of changes in proficiency levels [revealed] significant gains...across different facets of language learning – reading, reading comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and grammar.”

Right to Read (RTR) is the brainchild of Love Sierra Leone, a charity whose general aim is to improve education outcomes in Sierra Leone.

2. Target learner group 2016 to 2017

Initial target were 160 male and female Junior Secondary School (JSS) pupils of Ahkom School located in Junior classes 1, 2 & 3 respectively. Of this number 32 dropped out in the early part of the study for various reasons but primarily because of inability to pay school fees.

3. Project Methodology

Due to insufficient funds the scale-up planned for 2016/17 did not happen. Rather, there was extension of the pilot phase already based at Ahkom School.

In the main delivery method remained the same. There were, however, some notable departures from the 2015/16 pilot. Namely:

- Holding RTR classes during normal class periods and not after school. This meant both pupils and teachers felt less fatigued by not having to stay the additional two hours, often in very hot conditions, after normal school was out at 2pm.
- Change in the marking grid from 0 – 10 to 0 – 100, prompted by the teachers’ feeling the latter better captured the “holistic” perspective of learner performance.
- Thirdly, the formal inclusion of “learner attitude” as assessment criteria; but not one that threatened the primary criteria of speaking, comprehension and understanding grammar.

4. Instrumentation

In the just concluded program the same instruments of *interview, focus group discussion and observation* were utilised to garner feedback from teachers, learners and independent observers. The practise continues to be useful in determining whether or not real improvement was occurring in learner performance and if it was, that it was genuinely acquired.



5. Results

Final assessments were conducted on the 7th, 8th, 9th & 10th of July 2017. The results were as follows:

Junior Secondary Class 1 Age 11 – 1

In the first assessment for JSS 1, learners were given a short passage to read from New Focus English Book 1 - “MOVING TO NEW RESTAURANT”. In the second assessment learners were asked to read out loud a poem, “MORNING HAS BROKEN”, followed by a brief discussion to gauge comprehension.

Junior Secondary Class 2 Age 12 - 13

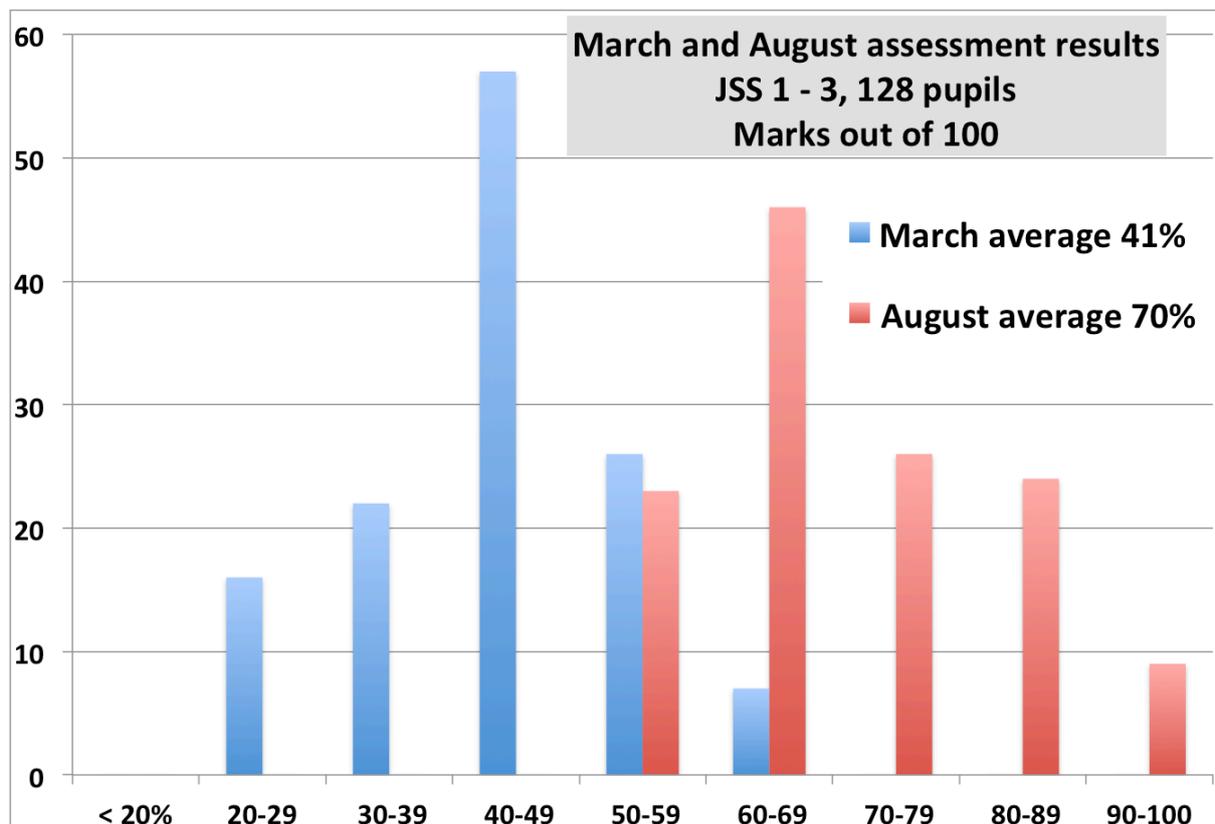
In the first assessment for JSS 2, learners read a short passage from New Focus English Book 2 - "A THING FROM SPACE". A poem, "THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES", was read out and discussed for the final assessment.

Junior Secondary Class 3 Age 13 - 16

JSS 3 learners for their first assessment read the passage - "EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS " from New Focus English book 3'. In The second assessment the poem, "BALD HEAD", was read out and reviewed as above.

All the assessments focused on the following language skills: fluency, word recognition, pronunciation, punctuation discipline, speaking and comprehension. The impact, where noted, of learner "attitude" was also recognised.

CLASS	Number of pupils	Class average % in March test	Class average % in August test	Improvement over the year
JSS 1 (Age 11-12)	48	33	67	34%
JSS 2 (Age 12 – 13)	41	45	67	22%
JSS 3 (Age 13- 16)	39	48	78	30%
AVERAGE	43	41	70	29%



6. Observations

- For consecutive years the first assessment grades for JSS1 have been low. This again validates the finding of Sierra Leone Ministry of Education research that current crop of primary school pupils were growing up with very poor English language skills:

“After three years of schooling: (i) the great majority of children do not master the alphabet correctly or understand how it works; (ii) reading and comprehension skills are weak, as children show great difficulty in reading simple words and make little meaning of a reading passage; and (iii) the majority of Grade 1 children (53 percent) could not write their own names and were reluctant to even attempt writing a simple sentence.” (MEST, 2013)

- We also noted an almost 25% improvement across the board in the final assessments following RTR intervention; further consolidating past observation that showed pupil exposure to RTR resulted in marked improvement in their English Language skills. The rapidity of the improvement led, that year, to our description of RTR as a “Quick Impact” tool.

For such an outcome to be achieved not once but twice further validates EH assertion that: *“multi-sensory technology can improve English language proficiency levels and reading skills dramatically, with less effort, and potentially in a shorter time period.”*

- All three forms showed significant improvement; more so JSS 1 & 3 although JSS 2 also showed marked improvement. For JSS1 it reflects improved delivery by teachers which in turn indicates their growing conversance with the RTR program. Improvement by JSS2 & 3 is further testimony that gains from last years RTR classes were not transitory but permanent and has left them better equipped to meet the challenges of a higher class.
- Unlike the 2015/16 pilot, final assessment grades of the extended 2016/17 one do not show the dramatic drop in final grades. These we determined were caused in the main by pupils refocusing attention to their promotional examinations coupled with the pressure of having to attend after-school pre-examination study classes. (Note: in Sierra Leone failures repeat the year. This will have financial implications by way of payment of school fees and other school costs, for pupils most of whom hail from predominantly impoverished homes).

By holding the classes within period time pupils were able to concentrate more effectively on their RTR program and in the process achieve better results. The claim by English Helper that RTM for school going pupils is best delivered during normal class time therefore garners some justification.

- Following on from the above, it goes without saying that out of school hours RTR classes are therefore best suited for individuals who have the time at hand to effectively access them. Such as workers and other non-school going persons.
- The level of learner interest in RTR remains high for all the reasons previously mentioned

