



Language Learning from Familiar to Formal

In several parts of the world, the language of instruction in schools differs from the language spoken at home by the learners. This challenge is faced by approximately [40 percent](#) of children, adversely affecting their learning. Developed by Pratham International, 'Language Learning from Familiar to Formal' or L2F2 is an innovative methodology that seeks to help learners in acquiring foundational skills in both the local language and the formal language of instruction. Currently, this bilingual-learning methodology has been incorporated into multiple Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) programs, including several supported by Teaching at the Right Level Africa (TaRL Africa). These interventions seek to help learners leverage their knowledge of the local language to master the foundational skills of English in an accelerated manner.

Background

Pratham helps actors across diverse country contexts to empower children in grades three to five with foundational skills in literacy and numeracy through Combined Activities for Maximized Learning (CaMAL). Globally, CaMAL is better known as the Teaching at The Right Level (TaRL) approach. In recent years, the demand for TaRL programming has increased across the world. Motivated by concerns about learning loss due to COVID-19-related school closures and dynamic conversations about foundational literacy and numeracy interventions, various actors have taken a keen interest in the approach. For instance, TaRL programs have been delivered in more than 12 countries in Africa including Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Nigeria since 2016.

TaRL interventions typically focus on assisting children to acquire foundational skills in their local language quickly. However, after grade 4 or 5, the curriculum in numerous Anglophone nations is taught in English. As a result, beyond a particular grade, children's local language or mother tongue is relegated to being one of the subjects taught in school. For many learners, the transition to learning English can be difficult. For example, if learners have minimal exposure to English — their second or third language — in the early grades, they may fail to grasp it. Learners may also lack reading proficiency in their local language, making it difficult to catch up with peers in higher grades.

Recognizing this challenge, Ms. Usha Rane, Director of Content and Training at Pratham International to develop L2F2. Visits to schools and communities allowed her to understand teachers' challenges and capacity through in-person interactions. Field visits also provided invaluable insights into the limitations posed by available infrastructure and resources across different geographies. The process of contextualization and adaptation was also

essential to developing L2F2. Her colleague Ms. Meenal Joshi helped her in creating teaching learning material which was an essential part of the process.

How does the L2F2 methodology work?

In the L2F2 methodology, English language skills are not introduced separately to learners. Rather, they are introduced and built on the knowledge that learners already have in their local language. This is done in several ways including leveraging the Latin script and using new and modified TaRL activities that encourage children to use their semantic memory to build their reading skills during an intervention.

Ms. Rane's insights from Sub-Saharan Africa influenced the adoption of Latin scripts in the L2F2 programming adopted on the continent. She noted that, except for Ethiopia, most Anglophone countries used Latin characters for their local languages as well. The script could thus be a bridge in an L2F2 intervention — helping to strengthen learners' skills in both languages.

The L2F2 methodology does not discard the local language but uses it to enhance English learning for both the learners as well as the facilitators. L2F2 is designed to recognize teachers' limitations and build their capacity to teach English through ready-to-use material. The methodology also trusts the learner's innate ability to learn, grasp patterns, and deduce information.

Components of a TaRL L2F2 program include:

1. Division of the implementation period to accommodate learning in both the local language and English. Time is dedicated to teaching both the local language and English during TaRL language sessions. The amount of time dedicated to each language every month changes as learners progress. Over the course of the intervention, the time dedicated to teaching the local language decreases and increases for English. E.g. If the language session is for 60 minutes, in the first month the time dedicated to teaching the local language could be 50 minutes and 10 would be dedicated to English. In the third month, 20 minutes of local language and 40 minutes of English. Toward the end of the intervention, the language session is conducted only in English.
2. Emphasis on first building learners' competencies in the local language. In L2F2 interventions, transitioning from one language to another is simple. Children are initially grouped by their levels in the local language. After three months, they are grouped by their English learning levels.
3. Accelerating acquisition of English language skills through level-appropriate activities. New and modified activities have been designed to simultaneously build learners' skills in the local language and English. The methodology continues to use several existing TaRL language activities as well.

L2F2 Activities

L2F2 offers a unique way of building learners' local language and English skills in a limited period. It allows learners to explore and learn both languages through engaging and level-appropriate activities. All local language TaRL activities are conducted as they would

be in a regular TaRL session. New English language activities have also been developed to introduce basic grammar to learners.

Examples of L2F2 Activities

- English Calendar Chart Reading: This activity simultaneously exposes learners to reading in the local language and English. The activity uses a calendar chart with alphabets, pictures, words, and sentences in both languages. It seeks to help learners recall words and construct sentences independently and in a non-linear way.

Letters		Pictures	Words	Sentences in Hausa	Sentences in English
B	b		Bat	Wannan jemage ce.	This is a bat.
B	b		Bag	Jakar karama ce.	The bag is small.
B	b		Banana	Wannan ayaba ce mai launin rawaya.	This is a yellow banana.
B	b		Bus	Wannan jar bas ce.	This is a red bus.
B	b		Bucket	Wannan guga ne.	This is a bucket.
B	b		Ball	Wannan babban kwallon kafa ne.	This is a big ball.
B	b		Box	Akwatin a bude yake.	The box is open.
B	b		Boy	Wannan yaro ne.	This is a boy.
B	b		Bicycle	Wannan keke na ne.	This is my bicycle.
B	b		Book	Ina fa littafi.	I have a book.
Words in Hausa		Words in English		Words in Hausa	
shudi		blue		dabba	
kwalekwale		boat		bakin teku	
bulo		brick		banki	
		beast		kundan zuma	
		beach		tsuntsu	
		bank		babba	
				bee	
				bird	
				big	

- Simple Sentence Reading: During this bilingual activity, simple sentences are translated from the local language into English. Subsequently, learners read the sentences one after the other. As the sentences are very simple, they are easy to understand in English too.
- Informal chat: The informal chat activity encourages the bilingual narration of simple stories and the singing of action songs. This activity helps children surmount their inhibitions about communicating only in English.
- 'Wh' activity: This activity helps learners understand how to frame and answer questions. Each child gets an opportunity to ask and answer a question, allowing them to speak and interact in English.
- Construction of Simple Sentences in English: This activity involves constructing sentences based on a picture in both the local language and English. A pattern of three sentences helps children to become familiar with English. All three sentences have the same meaning. However, the first sentence is in the local language. The second sentence is written with a mix of words in both languages. Finally, the third sentence is written entirely in English.

Piloting L2F2 across contexts

The L2F2 methodology has been piloted in several contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa over the past two years. For instance, TaRL Africa's partner, Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID) has been delivering L2F2 in its 'Bridging the Gap' program since 2020. The program targets learners in Uganda's Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, who often speak diverse local languages but need English language skills to access mainstream education in Uganda. In this program, L2F2 helps learners strengthen their local language skills and develop foundational skills in English simultaneously.

The methodology has also been piloted in several areas in Nigeria. For instance, L2F2 was introduced in the country's Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in September 2021. To incorporate the methodology into TaRL programming, a team of TaRL Master Trainers from UNICEF received online L2F2 training. Subsequently, this training was cascaded to the instructors. The master trainers also received support through weekly calls and refresher training. For this context, L2F2 materials used Hausa or Kanuri as the local language. Throughout the first year of implementation (2021-22), the team was in constant communication with stakeholders, teachers, and mentors to solicit feedback and make necessary changes to the intervention. Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Nigerian states of Bauchi and Kaduna are also piloting L2F2.

In 2022, TaRL programs adapting the L2F2 approach increased in number with support from TaRL Africa in Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, in Uganda, VVOB has started implementing the intervention in schools and refugee camps (Kiswahili-English). In Cameroon, TaRL Africa partners, Nkong Hill Tops Association for Development (NADEV) and Street Child, are piloting L2F2 to help learners in building foundational literacy skills in Pidgin English and English. In Kenya's Masai Mara region, a local NGO, Grassroots Nest For Innovation and Change (GRIC) has successfully piloted L2F2 for Maa and English with support from TaRL Africa's central team based in Kenya. They will continue to implement with a new cohort in 2023 as. In Kenya, the methodology was previously incorporated into a reading program conducted with RTI to help children develop basic reading skills in both Kiswahili and English.

Way Forward

In 2023, we hope to expand current L2F2 interventions and explore opportunities to pilot this methodology with more languages in the Sub-Saharan African context. As the demand to help learners transition to the formal language of instruction increases, we look forward to understanding how this innovative methodology brings us one step closer to ensuring that both familiar and formal languages can thrive together.