Structured Pedagogy

GUIDE 1

Government Leadership and Program Adoption

INTRODUCTION

No large-scale foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) program can be effective without government leadership. Given that keystone, it is unfortunate how often donors, technical advisors, and implementers are ineffectual in creating the conditions necessary for governments to take the lead. This failure often eliminates the likelihood of meaningful sustainability of the intervention from the outset. Learning outcomes are difficult to change, as this requires tens of thousands of teachers to change their pedagogy, but when government leads and the majority of teachers adopt the program, impacts on learning are possible. This guide presents step-by-step processes to ensure that an interested government can provide leadership and increase program adoption.

In some cases, a government may internally fund and guide an FLN program, successfully embedding it within existing structures and systems. The education systems of Sobral, Brazil, and Puebla, Mexico, for example, made substantial impacts on learning while being led directly from government structures. These interventions connected the FLN program's goals to broader societal goals. In other cases, external funders may provide the initial impetus and financial support. In either instance, meaningful engagement and uptake will contribute significantly to the overall success of the program; obtaining it will take time but is essential.

Consider undertaking an institutional mapping process before any of the steps in this brief. Mapping the ministry of education will tell you about:

1 **its formal hierarchy** and how its staff make decisions;

2 **its informal hierarchy**—that is, which individuals wield power, their relationships to the decision makers, and their associated social connections; and

3 **any interinstitutional relationships**. Of particular interest are the ministry's key policy focus and its relationships with the ministry of finance, civil service, parastatals (including curriculum bodies, teacher management organizations and assessment structures), teachers' unions, teacher professional associations, and civil society.

Even if no one conducted a mapping exercise at the beginning of a literacy or numeracy program or while it was being designed, mapping can still prove helpful mid-implementation.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP STEP 1

START BY LISTENING

What are the priorities of the technical education leaders in a country? Successful FLN programs will respond to those priorities and demands. It's easy to get the official approval letter. What differentiates successful and unsuccessful FLN programs is whether the program is seen as and is actually responsive to the demands of key leaders. Whether a program is led by a team inside the government or it evolves as a partnership with a technical assistance team outside of government, a key task is understanding who the meaningful decision makers are and what are their priorities.

As noted above, undertaking a political mapping of the ministry and associated government organs—including the ministry of finance, teachers' unions, and the body representing supervising teachers—

will reveal who the influencers are. Just as crucially in some contexts, it will expose who the blockers are. **The organizers must listen, carefully, to understand what government leaders want, who makes the decisions within the government structure, and where the power poles are within the various ministry of education organs**. From a slightly different perspective, an FLN program's success depends on understanding whether and how these key leaders' short-term and career goals align with the program's objectives.

As a case in point, when a program is guided by listening, it will be easier to avoid confrontations over semantics or controversial terminology. For example, many programs funded by a larger bilateral donor have focused on *reading*, whereas the curriculum bodies they were supporting preferred the term *literacy* to include writing as well. **Simply adapting terminology to the countries' preferred own usage could sidestep a certain amount of confusion or resentment**.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP STEP 2

DEVELOP DEMAND BY RESPONDING TO LOCAL PRIORITIES

An effective FLN program not only should respond to the priorities of key actors in the system, but also will:

- **Align with the incentives of individual teachers**. How are they evaluated and what mechanisms influence their career trajectories?
- **Integrate the priorities of structured pedagogy into what the government already wants to happen and when**. In particular, too many externally sourced FLN programs implement without regard for the government's planning rhythms.
- **Understand the core budget cycle and make key asks at the appropriate moment**. This awareness will make budgetary requests as well as planning and personnel allocations more likely.
- **Watch for and exploit policy windows**. The education sector planning process provides multiple opportunities to take advantage of. The development of the education sector plan that occur every several years and the joint sector reviews that typically happen yearly are ideal policy windows. Other opportunities, such as a promise made by a politician, citizens' demands for better learning outcomes, or changes in how government officers are supervised.

Not all effective techniques for stimulating demand for structured pedagogy are technocratic, however. They often depend on soft skills, patiently and persistently navigating complex government bureaucracies and persuading them that improving FLN is a win–win for everyone. Effective FLN programs have been able to work with government partners to have them increase instructional time, institute consistent teacher communities of practice meetings as part of the week, and even budget for, purchase and distribute student books using government funds and systems. Working with the government is possible when the program aligns to their priorities and systems. In short, it is easier to swim with the current.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP STEP 3

HIRE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND RESPECTED STAFF

Because of the massive changes a system will need to undergo to implement an embedded and large-scale program, hiring and selecting appropriate staff for the task is essential. This truth applies whether the program is overseen by an external technical implementer or whether the government has its own project implementation unit.

These staff will need to achieve the role of respected advisors to the technical decision makers. In the case of external programs, they should be selected without robbing the ministry of education and associated organs of their staff; respected retired ministry officers may serve this role well. Ideally, the hiring decisions should stem from the political mapping discussed above: Who in the government makes decisions, and how might these team members connect? Former classmates and colleagues of ministry officials, if they have the required expertise, talents and skills, often make outstanding advisors. Successful staff members should certainly include technical experts in literacy and numeracy who make meaningful contributions to how these learning improvement changes can be made.

Trusted staff and advisors can assume responsibility for organizing "pre-meetings" with key ministry decision makers. At these sessions, they can describe how the FLN activity is in the interest

HIRING AND SELECTING APPROPRIATE STAFF FOR THE TASK IS ESSENTIAL

of this specific government officer. The staff also can expend their social capital to differentiate the proposed FLN intervention from previous programs that the government counterpart may have seen come and go. They can advocate for counterparts to decide this program is real and to invest their own capital in its success.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP STEP 4

AMPLIFY CHAMPIONS' IDEAS

Effective structured pedagogy programs have champions. Champions are not necessarily those Ministry staff initially most open to the idea, but instead those with influence and a desire for change.

A structured pedagogy FLN program—which many will see as primarily about teacher lesson plans and student textbooks—will be effective only if a vast number of integrated activities happen substantially differently than they typically do. That said, it would be arrogant to assume that an FLN program based on the best evidence internationally will work everywhere. The task is to be informed by the best evidence internationally, but to ensure that this is a country specific program responding to the solutions available locally. Undoubtedly, important ideas for accomplishing this goal and improving outcomes are already circulating within a given system. **The job of the FLN leader is to get access to the room where those ideas are being discussed at the national level, to amplify those ideas within the FLN program, and to give credit to the leaders—the champions—from whom those ideas came**.

Think about how your team and program can help in ways beyond the specific FLN task at hand to build trust at the ministry. Consider using your team's expertise to help the ministry with other tasks in different sub-sectors to show your value.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP STEP 5

BUILD WITH EVIDENCE

Evidence makes a difference. The opportunity to present this structured pedagogy program to the minister for the first time may be a big deal for you (whether you work in the government or are an external partner), but you may be the third of 10 different groups with new ideas she is going to hear today. There are two problems with this picture: (1) You should not be going to present a program, but to listen to ideas and ambitions; and (2) you will likely be equipped with evidence on the state of learning outcomes that are less than desirable, but also on solutions that are locally suggested to overcome the key impediments to better teaching. What proof can you offer to differentiate your structured pedagogy program from the many others in the past that had little impact on learning?

The evidence currency may be substantially different within governments than for funders or researchers. Our experience suggests that evidence from education-related randomized controlled trials can help with persuasion. But published papers seldom have the greatest effect. Instead, the best arguments are graphs that show impact, combined with interviews with teachers who have implemented, observations in effective classrooms, and field trips to see the program in operation. Effective programs do not need to script their site visits, because government leaders can tell the difference between a performance and a program that actually works. Having leaders visit schools and read or do basic math with a student in a typical school can exert a substantial impact on decision-making. A senior, and quite skeptical, Kenyan Ministry of Education leader, was consistently unconvinced by flashy figures and graphs showing the impact of the PRIMR pilot intervention results. It was during a visit to a set of rural schools, where he ignored the formalities of the visit and spent time reading with children one on one, he became convinced of the ability of PRIMR to be scaled up.

Ongoing check-ins with teams implementing across the country are a means to maintain a conversation on how to improve, allowing the team to learn and adapt to results. And even a well-designed program can benefit from seeking jointly funded, small-scale research to respond to the issues that key government leaders raise. These small investments can pay huge dividends in terms of both program quality and government leadership.

GOVERNMENT LEADERS CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SHOW VISIT WITH LITTLE SUBSTANCE AND A PROGRAM THAT ACTUALLY WORKS

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP STEP 6

FIND THE POWER CENTERS

Understanding power centers is important for pairing hopes for change with political will. Every national government has more than one decision-making center, particularly among countries that have decentralized their key functions. Local Education Groups include donors, civil society and education implementers and are important actors to understand, both their role and their influence on decision-making.

The institutional mapping process can clarify who has influence over what portions of the FLN intervention, who within that body has decision-making power, and what the sensitivities are between that group and others in the sector. With this knowledge, the intervention team can better avoid becoming ensnared in uncomfortable disagreements between rival services of the government.

Decentralized structures typically have varying levels of influence over instructional improvements. Targeting the right investments to each level, therefore, is essential.

For example, because of the financial implications and prestige, training staff from all parts of the Ministry often is raised as a high priority, even if the program design foresees a small return on such an investment in terms of the desired outcomes due to training officers who are only tangentially connected to structured pedagogy implementation. To ensure cost-effectiveness, therefore, an FLN program will need to navigate differences of opinion between power centers carefully. These choices can introduce trade-offs, though; it is possible that one group within the government will become hostile to the intervention if they perceive that they are being slighted through lack of involvement.

Countries differ in the layers of midlevel civil servants that exist between the minister and the teacher. **Regardless of the number of layers, program adoption efforts must address not only the top level, but also the middle layers and the realities of their daily professional activities and incentives**.

PROGRAM ADOPTION STEP 1

JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND INCENTIVES

How are teachers, coaches, supervisors, and civil servants in the education sector evaluated, and what are they tasked with doing? Knowing this information will indicate how best to motivate them, and also will allow the structured pedagogy program's theory of change to be aligned to individual and group incentives.

Job descriptions, surprisingly enough, may be among the most important differentiators between structured pedagogy programs that work and those that do not. **It is essential for effective structured pedagogy programs to review job descriptions, evaluation criteria, and organizational charts, and to work with government partners to align all those documents**. Some of the more effective structured pedagogy programs have committed to working with the government to change job descriptions and evaluation criteria. This effort may be as simple as affirming that existing requirements in a job description align with a program objective and that these objectives can be included in annual reviews. Or it may require modifying job descriptions to emphasize instructional support, for example, and discussing how time allocated to new responsibilities will affect compensation.

Job descriptions' close companion is individual performance evaluation. When government administrators are evaluated on the basis of structured

pedagogy interventions being implemented effectively, then the data produced by an structured pedagogy program (see **Guide 7** in this series, on data, systems, and accountability) become valuable currency, incentives change, and meaningful impacts become possible. If these changes take hold throughout the system, the administrators may begin coming to the structured pedagogy program for evidence on how things are going and taking it upon themselves to ensure that their officers implement effectively.

The ultimate goal is to have these officers operate as principal change agents who lead the debate over how decentralized funding is spent, so that the budgeted resources align with daily instructional implementation—including classroom observations, feedback to teachers, and community-of-practice meetings, depending on the design of the structured pedagogy program. It will not happen in each context in the same way, but it is possible to move from an investigation of job descriptions to meaningful leadership at the national and subnational levels emphasizing better teaching and more learning. Some programs, for example, have worked with the government to change the amount of instructional time allotted for literacy and numeracy lessons, to incorporate teacher learning and reflection meetings into weekly tasks, and to ensure that teaching the structured pedagogy lessons becomes an evaluation criterion.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS MAY BE AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT DIFFERENTIATORS BETWEEN STRUCTURED PEDAGOGY PROGRAMS THAT WORK AND THOSE THAT DO NOT

PROGRAM ADOPTION STEP 2

UNDERSTAND TEACHERS

Teachers themselves have much to contribute to the programming conversation. **FLN programs will struggle if they have not held discussions with teachers—including those in rural areas—to understand what their jobs are like, what the current barriers to improved pedagogical methods are**, or how they have responded to previous large-scale programs. Moreover, many programs have made the mistake of not considering how teachers and civil servants advance, what relationship teachers have with civil society, what structures surround teachers, and who has influence over their daily pedagogical behavior. The teachers the program should seek to reach out to should include a wide swathe of the teacher population, in terms of gender, seniority, ethnicity and location. In addition, it is critical to understand the role of teachers' unions in contributing to the status of the teaching profession and the mechanism for teacher change.

Evidence from other contexts can be a helpful starting point, but successful FLN programs will also incorporate deep local knowledge of the political economy of education in a given country. It means studying how teachers' jobs can be changed to align with other desired improvements, such as more teaching time and better use of new materials.

PROGRAM ADOPTION STEP 3

PEDAGOGICAL DECISION-MAKING

Fundamentally, the task of improving foundational literacy and numeracy hinges on raising the quality of teaching and supporting the instructional decision-making of individual teachers—tens of thousands of them, across the country. If a large percentage of those teachers teach the program competently, they will deliver program impact.

What messages will national and subnational leaders promote among their teachers about the relative importance of this program vis-à-vis other competing priorities? It is helpful to have the national and ministerial leadership, and local education leader speaking with one voice about the importance of implementing the FLN intervention. Even more consequential, however, is the experience of individual teachers. No matter what top-down messages are shared, teachers in many countries have a substantial amount of agency and decision-making power in their pedagogical decisions. **Program leaders should thoughtfully measure the level of difficulty of the FLN program for the teacher against what the teachers are used to doing. A program that teachers consider too complex will have little to no chance of being implemented consistently.**

To explain further, we offer the "swing teacher" model illustrated in Figure 1. Swing voters are the voters who do not affiliate with a particular party and can be persuaded in one direction or another. In that way, they are like teachers who can be persuaded to implement the program. Suppose some portion of teachers (the **GREEN** block) is highly motivated and willing to try new interventions even if they are complicated. Another portion of teachers (the **RED** block) will not implement the intervention no matter how teacher-friendly and effective it is. These teachers might be near the end of their career and have seen many new approaches come and go, or other factors may undermine their motivation to try new approaches, such as overloading or low pay. Illogically, FLN programs often spend too much time and resources on these two portions of the teacher population, despite the fact that no matter what the program does, there will be little impact on them, either positively or negatively.

On the other hand, a substantial number of "swing teachers" represent the middle population (the **YELLOW** block). They are not against the program, so to speak, and would implement it if conditions improved. Examples of favorable conditions would be:
- The program is simple.
- It reduces the amount of time it takes teachers to prepare lessons.
- Teachers can identify impact on learning within a few weeks.
- Teachers have the skills to implement the program.
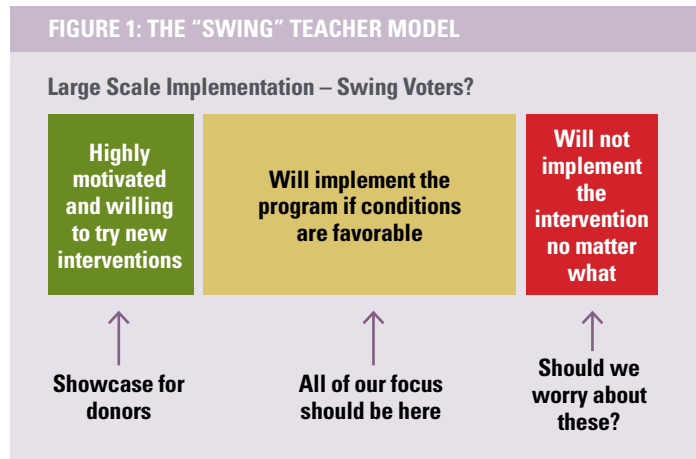- Supervisors reinforce the need to implement.

Focusing on swing teachers, like swing voters, would encourage designers to simplify their program and to reduce extraneous activities. It would prevail against having a complex set of teaching booklets, training manuals, continuous assessment booklets, and lesson plans (see Guide

IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE THE PRESIDENT, MINISTER, AND LOCAL EDUCATION LEADER SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING THE FLN INTERVENTION

4, on materials). The Funda Wande program in South Africa simplified their program, allowing them to target the teachers in the yellow, swing teacher category, rather than the green category of teachers willing to implement complex programs.

An analogy with technology adoption in education may be instructive. Early adopters will become comfortable with the new technologies quickly and use them at a high level. Targeting a large-scale, digitally focused program at their level of interest, however, would result in solutions too complicated to be implemented by the typical teacher in the system, who is less accustomed to complex gadgets. Therefore, consider simplifying the intervention to better target the "swing

FIGURE 1: THE "SWING" TEACHER MODEL

Large Scale Implementation – Swing Voters?

Highly motivated and willing to try new interventions	Will implement the program if conditions are favorable	Will not implement the intervention no matter what
↑ Showcase for donors	↑ All of our focus should be here	↑ Should we worry about these?

teacher" and maximize the likelihood that they see the program as both effective and doable.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing how much government leaders can influence FLN programs, and putting that influence to good use, can make programs have substantially larger impacts. On the other hand, it is easy to say that the government leads the FLN program and that teachers have adopted it. Far more difficult—but also more rewarding—is to actually walk through the process of developing government leadership in ways that will improve impact and last beyond the official lifespan of the program. This is the ideal way to ensure true sustainability, because programs that start with government leadership and integration into government processes are far more likely to not only be effective, but to last.

About the symbols in this guide:

⚠ Indicates "Red Alert": Something to be aware of and alert to, because it is a common problem

🗎 Indicates "Non-negotiable": a must-have

RESOURCES

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announces an increased focus on foundational literacy and numeracy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9JA7VK0e8o&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=CentralSquareFoundation

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta at the launch of the Tusome national literacy program (in Kiswahili) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zh3xl2orB4&ab_channel=TeamUhuru

Opinion piece by Piper on the proper role of international donors and technical experts on implementing education programs https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-016-9544-y

Institutional mapping tool to better understand the actors in the system, starting on page 60. https://www.urc-chs.com/sites/default/files/urc-grn-IIa.pdf

Simple political mapping tool for understanding Ministry structures, on page 21 and 22. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACA721.pdf

Important guide to understanding teachers and the social dialogue needed to consider teacher change. https://dakar.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/fields/publication_files/methodological_guide_for_the_analysis_of_teacher_issues_-_2010.pdf

Complete Series of Structured Pedagogy How-To Guides: https://scienceofteaching.site/how-to-guides/

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The original Education Reform Support series is available for download: Prepared for USAID under the Advancing Basic Education and Literacy (ABEL) program, Contract Numbers HNE-5832-C-00-4075-00 (core) and HNE-5832-Q-4076-00 (requirements). Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development and Research Triangle Institute. Volume One: Overview and Bibliography. Luis Crouch and F. Henry Healey

Guide authored by **Dr. Benjamin Piper**