

BEFORE “DOGE:” USAID AND NIGERIA’S EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES: A REVIEW OF EDUCATION POLICIES AND COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Austine Okere
Department of History and International Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

The recent dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the policy guidance of President Donald Trump and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) controlled by the governance philosophy of Elon Musk has brought up acute questions. These primarily cover the weaknesses of architectures of international development and its effect on the education system of the global South. Such interference is of particular importance in the situation in Nigeria, where interventions backed by external sources have been at the center stage of influencing policy frameworks and action plans of Early Grade Reading (EGR). With more than 10 years of targeted and specific investments, which include big programmes like the Northern Education Initiative (NEI), NEI Plus, and LEARN, the foundational literacy results are still uneven showing underlying structural and institutional problems. The policy environment and implementation dynamics of EGR interventions in Bauchi and Sokoto States is interrogated using this scoping review. With particular reference to the involvement of community governance structures like School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), the study utilizes policy documents, report on programmes and field-based survey information to explore how the “localization agenda”, which is an attempt to entrench development interventions in local institutional settings, has been put into practice. These findings imply that policy frameworks are well designed but there is still a lot of gaps in the implementation process. The paper claims that the recent crisis in international development assistance highlights the importance of reconsidering policy implementation strategies in EGR in Nigeria. It also raises the issue of stronger, locally-anchored mechanisms to support both educational outcomes outside the dependency of donors, as well as the wider discussion of politics of development aid and policy effectiveness in Africa.

Keywords: Early grade reading; Education; Development policy; Localization; USAID

Introduction

Available data from the United Nations Children's Fund show that while average primary school enrollment rates in both developed and developing countries are increasing (over 87 percent in 2021), alphanumeric skills and abilities in most basic literacy skills are still minimal within low and middle income countries, -e.g., Nigeria (UNICEF, 2022). Despite the potential and benefits of educating children in their formative years (because childhood is the ideal time to develop learning, reading, writing, and basic language skills -Akinnaso, 1993 & Ball, 2010), data suggests the number of out-of-school children (OOSC) is on the rise, as Nigeria ranks 8th with over 8 million OOSC of primary school age (World Bank, 2025). Regional disparities in enrollments, attendance, completion, and literacy in Nigeria, wherein some states in the North East and North West fall below the national average data, present an opportunity for governments and policymakers to correct this alarming trend by implementing programmes that can greatly improve literacy and learning outcomes for children of early schooling ages.

Within this context, Nigeria has received bi-lateral support towards improving education

outcomes which are closely linked to socioeconomic development. Early Grade Reading (EGR) has emerged as one of these potential interventions to improve literacy among school-age children within their formative years and boost their potential in advancing writing, reading, and cognitive skills while assisting school-age children's progression into other levels. EGR interventions often target girls, orphans, and school-aged children enrolled in traditional and non-traditional schools. Beyond out-of-school children, EGR interventions also focus on teaching aids, learning materials, teachers' training in local language contexts, and engagement with relevant stakeholders to improve the quality of education and service delivery. Such interventions are important as there is a correlation between the type and quality of teaching, the learning environment, and the medium of delivery of education (Tikly and Barret, 2013). The *2013 National Policy on Education*, which places a premium on primary education as the foundation of Nigeria's educational system, also recognizes the importance of EGR and support systems to improve strategies and outcomes for school-age children. The *National Policy on Education* (Section 2 Subsection 20(d)) emphasizes the potential and impact of educating children of school age in their mother tongues. It is expected that this would enable easy assimilation and the development of literacy and alphanumeric skills that can be carried into other levels of learning as well as English language.

The conception of this idea has motivated international development aid support for Nigeria's EGR agenda. Before being dismantled by Elon Musk and President Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had with the support of the Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and State Government ran a 10-year education programme aimed at improved early grade reading in Nigeria. Focused on areas with significantly higher education and learning disparities, this support was part of the *USAID Education Strategy* of 2011. It sought to support low- and middle-income countries by improve literacy rates. This programme was also aligned with the larger USAID strategy of "localization" of development aid, as implementation was designed in a way which supports a reflection, understanding and collaboration with local partners and contexts (Robillard, et al., 2021). Literacy in mother tongue, improved primary school enrollment, and community engagement were some of the key areas USAID-funded projects of Northern Education Initiative (NEI), 2009-2014, NEI Plus, 2015-2021, and Leveraging Education Assistance Resources in Nigeria to Read (LEARN), 2022-2027. These projects targeted over 1 million school-aged children, by adopting a holistic approach affecting "learning, teaching system management, parental participation, and community engagement" across two states considered "legacy states," (i.e., Bauchi and Sokoto States). Within its five years of implementation, the NEI Plus, according to reports had successfully distributed over 9 million learning materials in local languages (e.g., *Hausa*) and English to about 8,000 schools in Bauchi and Sokoto States, while also contributing to teacher capacity improvement and improving community/parents engagement through improved education standards, literacy, and attendance (NEI Plus, 2019a). The NEI plus also recorded progress in key areas of the initiatives that focused on strengthening local institutions (like Local Government Education Agency -LGEAs) in budget development and financing, supervision and training of school teachers, community mobilization/participation, development of education management committees, all geared toward improving learning outcomes and enrollment rates.

As partners in this process, the Bauchi and Sokoto State governments indicated a counterpart investment of over 3 million USD at various government level structures (including local governments) to expand early grade reading within their. From a community stakeholder perspective, the result of such investments as well as partnerships with education stakeholders in Nigeria, showed that Bauchi State (as of 2022) had improved primary school enrollment rates in

over 4,200 schools (public and private) across its 20 local government areas (LGAs), of which a 48 percent average rate of these enrollments comprised girls of school age (see *Bauchi State Annual School Census, 2022*). The improvement of girls' enrollment was seen across most LGAs in Bauchi State, with key improvements in areas like Toro, Tafawa Balewa, Ningi, Katagum, Ganjuwa, Darazo, and Zaki LGAs, with an average of 6 percent increase, while Bauchi LGA recorded a double-digit (15 percent) increase in girls' enrollment rate for the same year.

In Sokoto State, data shows that within the over 2,200 primary schools (public and private) across the 23 LGAs, overall primary school enrollment improved while average girl enrollment stood at 43 percent in 2021. This trend was witnessed across most LGAs, where over 20,000 girls enrolled and attended public schools in Sabon Bini, Bodinga, Sokoto South, Wurno, Gwadabawa, and Isa local government areas (see *Sokoto State Annual School Census Report, 2020*). In furtherance of earlier success in EGR, the LEARNto Read was one of such programmes that builds on the existing experiences and systems of NEI Plus while collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including LGEAs, formal schools, State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), Adolescent Girls Learning Centers, Non-formal Learning Centers and the Universal Basic Education Commission.

This scoping review therefore provides an overview of existing education policies frameworks across Bauchi and Sokoto States. It especially covers considerations for how community governance structures (e.g., School Based Management Committees, -SBMCs) operated within the context of this USAID funded project in Nigeria. The review is based on the policy analysis and on-field data collection activities during the project implementation between 2023 and 2024, before the cessation of activities of USAID in Nigeria. This provides an overview of experiences with the implementation of EGR policies vis-à-vis community governance structures towards improving education outcomes. The aim of this review is to position policies analysis discourse within larger literature of international aid debates under the framework of “localization of development aid.” The review also attempts to draw some lines in some identified challenges limiting EGR programme implementation in Nigeria despite the bottom-top development approach. It also presents relevant stakeholders with further opportunities for improving existing local institutional structures and partnerships for development aid.

Methodology and Review of Objectives

Documents were categorized into a two-tier system based on what was considered “very relevant” and “somewhat relevant.” The accessibility of documents was based on systematic database scanning in addition to publicly available resources from USAID, Creatives Associates International, RTI International, Federal Ministry of Education, Bauchi and Sokoto State Governments. Lastly, internet searches covering assessment of EGR, LEARN to Read, education community resource mobilization and tracking were also considered for the scoping review. Policies and publications on EGR and its stakeholder structures in Nigeria were identified, with specific reference to Bauchi and Sokoto states. Additional reference was made to publications by the Federal Ministry of Education and evaluation reports by development partners working within the scope of EGR. Systems and strategy documents on the institutionalization of EGR support (i.e., school-based monitoring committees, SBMCs) from other Northern States already implementing similar community structures also constituted part of documents for this review. Other materials that formed part of the review included peer-reviewed journal articles, policy and strategy documents on the subject matter.

To further triangulate relevant secondary policy information, a survey was designed alongside Bauchi and Sokoto State SUBEB officers to map the implementation of these policies, especially at SBMC and community systems levels. The capacity of social mobilization officers at LGEA levels (as data collectors) were built and they were deployed to monitor the collection of survey data on the state of schools and the implementation of SBMC policies in Bauchi and Sokoto States. The survey, using proportional sampling techniques, covered over 300 schools in both states across all LGAs. With support from the LGA Social Mobilization Departments of Bauchi and Sokoto States, primary data collected further fed into policy implementation and community support structures for EGR outcomes over a three-year (3) year period. However, the results of this data would not be covered in this scoping review, due to space for discussion. The overall objective of this survey in Bauchi and Sokoto States was to understand what state specific and community structure (i.e., SBMC) policies and implementation experiences are in place and identify existing gaps as they relate to improving EGR in schools from an SBMC stand-point.

Early Grade Reading Policy Environment for USAID Education Project Implementation in Bauchi and Sokoto States

To support the process of EGR, the following national/state specific legal and policy frameworks have been established at the national and state levels in Nigeria:

The *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999 (as amended), which in Chapter IV, Section 18, provides for the Federal Government of Nigeria to saddle the responsibilities of directing the policies for equal and adequate opportunities of education for all. Under this provision, it is expected that the Federal Government should enact policies to eradicate illiteracy, provide free and compulsory universal basic education, and encourage adult literacy programmes.

The Child Rights Act, 2003, embodies the principal law that recognizes the rights of a child in Nigeria. It provides for the Nigerian government to ensure the provision of free and compulsory universal basic education to all children in Nigeria. The law also provides for the protection of the Nigerian child in situations of armed conflict. States are therefore expected to adopt the Child Rights Act as an improved child's right protection law to further domesticate its provisions within the context and peculiarities of various states in Nigeria.

The National Policy on Education, 2013, stipulates the importance and need for policy coordination between multiple education stakeholders (i.e., private for early child care development and education and public for pre-primary/primary). The policy document also outlines the responsibilities of the government in terms of supervision of basic education (i.e., the UBEC) and the prescribed objectives that both the federal and state governments must achieve within the different levels of education. For 6-12 year old schoolchildren, the policy charges education stakeholders with providing systems that would “inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively.” The policy also indicates that such education at this level “shall be compulsory, free, universal, and qualitative.” In terms of EGR, this policy sets the tone for the mode of instruction, which is expected to be in the language of the environment in the first three (3) years with English taught as a subject.

The *Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act* 2004 sets both the legal and policy frameworks for uniform and quality basic education throughout Nigeria. While indicating the penalties for parents who contravene ensuring that every child has access to primary and junior secondary education, the act also speaks to the creation, composition, and financing of

institutional structures (UBEC, SUBEB, and LGEA) at different tiers of government. The Act recognizes the existence of local education authorities (LGEA) as local stakeholders in meeting national universal basic education objectives.

The *National Policy on Gender in Basic Education*, 2006, subsists on the national policy for education and emphasizes the need to promote gender sensitivity and equal access to basic education in terms of promotion, retention, and completion, with the required provision to educate disadvantaged girls. The policy also seeks collaborative support for all education stakeholders (including school management committees, communities, traditional and religious leaders, the private sector, and civil society organizations) towards resource mobilization and sustainability of programmes that encourage gender inclusion in basic education. The gender policy also connotes a combination of evidence-based strategies that encompass advocacy and sensitization campaigns, gender sensitive-education budgets, incentives for girls, capacity building and training, and the deployment of female teachers to rural areas, all geared towards improving girl enrollment at basic education levels.

The *National School-Based Management Policy*, 2016, sets the tone for the creation of quality schools with effective community participation and support. This policy emphasizes the need for a working and collaborative relationship among government (across all tiers), communities, and civil society. The objective of such a collaborative partnership is to deliver an enabling environment for meeting education outcomes and improving community ownership and participation in school development. The school based management policy intends to transfer and decentralize decision making and resources to the individual schools. With this policy, awareness creation and relevant feedback reporting systems for communities on myriad issues (i.e., school governance, management, inclusion, regulations, and learning outcomes) affecting individual schools are improved, while the capacity for communities to demand transparency and accountability from government education stakeholders (SUBEB and LGEA) is further strengthened. The policy also provides a strategic national and state framework for the implementation of school based management (SBM), wherein issues pertain to composition, criteria for membership, roles and responsibilities, inclusion, school development plans, financing, and safe school policies are documented and discussed in detail. As a national policy, states are expected to domesticate the provisions of this policy with timely reviews. In practice, Sokoto State launched its state-specific SBMC policy in 2017; however, policy scanning shows that Bauchi State domesticated the national policy but does not have an official SBMC policy that addresses the specific contexts of such community governance structures.

Sokoto State School Based Management Committee (SBMC) Guidelines, 2017: As provided for in the National School-Based Management Policy, individual states are expected to domesticate the policy to suit their context and peculiarities. The Sokoto State SBMC guideline policy thus sets the tone for the “proper execution of school based management committee activities based on the state SBMC policy.” This policy guide is expected to provide a clearer understanding to the general public, education stakeholders in the state, and SBMC members on the *modus operandi* of SBMCs in Sokoto State. The policy provides specific expectations for the roles of SBMCs in school development and improving learning outcomes. Among these are: monitoring school development work, preparing and developing a school development plan based on a school needs assessment, monitoring the utilization of funds from multiple sources like federal, state, and alternative funding (e.g., private donations). A key aspect of the functionality of SBMCs in Sokoto, as provided for by the policy, is for all stakeholders to partner towards improving learning outcomes. Additionally, the policy guide recognizes the importance of civil society organizations

(CSOs) as education outcome partners in the conduct of “Master Trainer” basic training and capacity building for members of the state's SBMC alongside the LGEA social mobilization departments.

USAID Support and Designs of Early Grade Reading Programmes in Bauchi and Sokoto States

Report suggests that, between 2010 and 2018, over ten (10) Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) have been designed and conducted in Nigeria, primarily in the northern states of Bauchi, Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara (Evans, 2019). Such assessments form part of the global efforts towards testing global proficiency frameworks (GPF) and strategies developed in USA (See Cromley, 2009) for EGR in developing countries. With funding and support from USAID, pilot studies testing the usage of Hausa as a language of instruction for EGR for grade 2 and 3 school children were conducted in 2018 as part of efforts to set global benchmarks. Bauchi and Sokoto states from the on-set formed part of the state partners tracking the implementation of EGR alongside a wide range of national (FME, UBEC, NERDC, etc.) and international (USAID, Creatives, UNICEF/DFID Reading and Numeracy Activity) stakeholders in education.

As part of efforts towards setting these global benchmarks for further EGRA in Bauchi and Sokoto states, USAID, FME, UBEC, and NERDC, with technical support provided by Management Systems International (MSI), designed baseline and midline EGR assessments that focused on the following:

- (i) confirm the appropriateness of the NEI Plus approach to improving Hausa reading outcomes.
- (ii) provide insights into potential challenges and implementation.
- (iii) identify potential limitations to potential outcomes.

With a sample size of 2330 students for the baseline assessment and 2408 students in the midline assessment (for primary 2 and 3) in both states, the EGR assessment was designed to align outcomes primarily with GPF on oral reading fluency (ORF) and reading comprehension. The baseline and midline assessment tools were designed in a way to examine comprehension reading and the ability to answer comprehension questions based on the text in these two states.

Table 1: Oral Reading Frequency Scores in Bauchi and Sokoto States

	Bauchi (P2)		Sokoto (P2)		Bauchi (P3)		Sokoto (P3)	
	Baseline	Midline	Baseline	Midline	Baseline	Midline	Baseline	Midline
Oral Reading Frequency	79 %	74 %	72 %	50 %	91 %	82 %	77 %	58 %
Reading Comprehension (out of 5)	89 %	82 %	81 %	60 %	94 %	90 %	86 %	69 %

Source: 2020 Nigeria Policy Linking Workshop Report: Setting Global Benchmark for Grade 2 and 3 Early Grade Reading Assessment in Hausa Language

Table 1 shows the results of oral reading frequency comparison with global benchmark for EGR design assessment conducted in Bauchi and Sokoto by USAID and MSI. Results showed that although baseline scores were initially high, after assessment and adoption of the NEI Plus approach, these scores declined among the selected sample of 50 students in primary schools in Bauchi and Sokoto States, respectively. From this, the NEI Plus approach to assessing EGR was scaled for adoption for most education programmes across Nigeria. The adoption and design of this model were expected to engage schools (formal and non-formal), teachers, religious and political leaders, Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), All Nigeria's Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS), Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA), MDAs structures, and community systems across Nigeria with an emphasis on areas with immediate education needs.

The design of EGR in Bauchi and Sokoto states were also based on studies and the activities of the Research Triangle Institute's (RTI) Nigeria, Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA), also funded by USAID. As a model for using multiple education stakeholders for the design, implementation, and evaluation of reading activities and outcomes, the research was designed to cover four (4) key components of EGR in Nigeria, viz:

- Developing and providing teachers and pupils with materials for teaching and learning in Hausa in the early grades.
- Training teachers and head teachers on effective strategies for teaching [and] reading in Hausa and providing them ongoing, school-based support, including cluster meetings.
- Training and supporting school supervisors to serve as reading “coaches” to provide in-class pedagogical support to Primary 2 Hausa teachers.
- Informing parents and the School-Based Management Committee of the importance of early grade reading. (RTI, 2016)

Using randomized controlled trials (RCTs) for grade 2 pupils (120 schools across eight local governments per state), the RARA approach to EGR assessment in Bauchi and Sokoto states was designed to provide answers to questions bordering on changes in teachers' instructional practices, improvement in foundational reading skills for grade 2 pupils, and the existence of coaching support for head teachers and supervisors.

EGR assessments were also modeled after findings and recommendations made by the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) framework on the usage of major Nigerian languages in EGR.⁴⁷ While setting the tone for this EGR assessment, the FME underscored its objectives to cover areas such as (i) establishing the knowledge levels in learning and understanding with native languages in compliance to implementation of the national policy for native language instruction; (ii) providing data on the level of the learning environment and school infrastructure as well as the impact of these on the learning performances of children; and (iii) assessing the awareness level among teachers on the *National Policy for Education* on the use of native language for the immediate environment and instruction for early primary levels. While the checklist contained five (5) subtasks (i.e., letter sound identification, non-word reading, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension), this EGR assessment discovered that in most schools assessed, the understanding of most teachers was to have native languages as a subject taught rather than as a medium of instruction.

⁴⁷ A pilot study was conducted in Kano, Enugu, and Ogun in 2019 and subsequently scaled up to all geopolitical zones in 2020. Publication of: Association for the Promotion of African Studies, Tansian University, Umunya, Nigeria

The EGR assessment instituted by the USAID in Nigeria also spotlights the need to redesign education policy with a thrust toward community engagement and awareness campaigns for parents and community members. This is expected to present more attitudinal change toward native languages as a medium of instruction in schools, while reminding stakeholders that they are partners in the improvement of overall learning outcomes. It also underscores the need to adopt advocacy tools (e.g., drama, radio) for community engagement, perception correction, and improving acceptance levels towards the use of native languages as a medium of instruction in the early primary stages. Although efforts are being made by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to review the curriculum of primary schools (as at the time of conducting this research) to ensure delivery in the language of the environment (i.e., mother tongue or language of the playground), based on experiences from Bauchi and Sokoto. Also, USAID inspired funding suggested that national colleges of education should be encouraged to update their curricula to reflect such strategies, best practices, and techniques.

The design of the NEI Plus by the USAIS continues to serve as a model for EGR assessment and the development of structures to sustain gains made towards improving basic education outcomes in Nigeria. NEI Plus initiative was designed for Bauchi and Sokoto states based on the hypothesis that:

Through the strengthening of local education management systems, in conjunction with existing community-based outreach activities, education access and quality for all children, including vulnerable children, will be improved and will result in significant improvements in reading outcomes for primary grade learners (NEI Plus, 2019a).

Guided by this hypothesis and EGR model design, the thinking of USAID support under the mechanism of the NEI and NEI Plus emphasize on improving existing education management systems, as this will in turn increase enrollment, completion, and transition rates. Pivotal to this USAID strategy in Nigeria was to target young girls and vulnerable school-aged populations in both formal and informal schools. Development practice view, at least before USAID ceased to operate, was that future programme to promote EGR can use existing structures, strengthen existing institutions further, and improve the already existing synergy among federal and state governments. This strategy also places a premium on schools, the community, parents, civil society organizations as key education stakeholders based on “localization” principles (Hallock, et al. 2025; Education for All, 2014). Such notion is further emphasized by studies on NEI Mid-Term Performance Evaluation (See NEI Plus, 2019b) and the Mid-Term Performance Evaluation of the Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy, and Development (LEAD) Activity. The design was also set basis on considerations for improving gross and net enrollment ratios, literacy rates, the number of non-formal education centers, as well as the percentage of qualified teachers, while reducing the number of out-of-school children (OOSC) in both Bauchi and Sokoto states, disaggregated by gender and non-formal education facilitators in each state.

USAID, Early Grade Reading and School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) Structures in Bauchi and Sokoto States

As part of efforts to institutionalize community participation in educational challenge identification, partnership with school administrators to improve performance, and decentralized school governance, the USAID EGR development support also covered School-Based Management Committee (SBMC). Enshrined in Nigeria's education development strategy, SBMCs remain a viable structure and stakeholder in the EGR architecture across all states

(including Bauchi and Sokoto states). The SBMC structure is a bottom-top approach towards ensuring community participation in education EGR policy implementation as well as improving levels of community governance structures involvement in overall outcomes across Nigeria. Guided by the desire to improve community ownership of school development and its positive impact on learning (as indicated in the *National Policy for SBMCs*), an increasing number of states in Northern Nigeria understand and have adopted strategies for community involvement in basic education development. In Sokoto state, for instance, with support from Action Aid's Enhancing Girls Basic Education in Northern Nigeria (EGBENN), the state was one of the pioneers to get support towards the establishment of 28 SMCs (School Management Committees) in 2004. Although many of these states strategies predates USAID educational development aid support in Nigeria, this support laid the foundation for renewed reforms and policy advancement towards a national SBMC policy. However, constant reviews on the SBMC State Policy have not been undertaken (at least by many states in Nigeria).

Although a national policy on school-based management committees exists, states are expected to domesticate this policy within their individual contexts and peculiarities. Furthermore, individual states are expected by the *National SBMC Policy* to reflect individual experiences across a wide range of stakeholders (state ministries of education, state universal basic education, local education authorities, and communities) in areas such as fair representation of various interest groups while constituting committees; raising awareness of school enrollment, retention, completion, and transition to other classes; improving school infrastructure with special consideration towards girls to ensure access and equality; articulating school development plans, budgets, and sources of alternative funding; and improving teaching and learning experiences for students as well as teachers. Finally, a review of state SBMC policy is expected at least every five (5) years to adjust the policy based experiences.

The importance of community participation in school development can never be over-stated. Studies have shown that this remains a reoccurring problem in developing countries (see Hossain and Hickey, 2019). However, in the context of Nigeria's EGR, this has also seen private institutions and foundations commit resources and time towards establishing high quality and functional school-based management committees (SBMCs). Within the ambit of such understanding and commitment, the Oando Foundation, under the aegis of her Adopt-A-School Initiative (AASI) included Bauchi and Sokoto states in her foundation's early grade reading mandate to ensure "quality and basic education accessible to all children irrespective of socio-economic status, gender, or location and to improve learning outcomes in public primary schools" (Oando Foundation, n.d). The initiative included an assessment of over 1700 SBMCs in seventeen (17) states, including Bauchi and Sokoto, towards capacity building in institutionalizing the community participation process, as well as working with social mobilization departments and SUBEB. The assessment conducted by the Oando Initiative indicated some challenges that most SBMCs (including those in Bauchi and Sokoto) encountered. For instance, already existing and newly formed SBMCs had poor understanding of their roles and responsibilities, along with exploring means for resource mobilization and school development plan strategies. Also, membership of these SBMCs were appointed unilaterally by head teachers, and existing Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) felt their influence weakening due to the existence of SBMCs. Assessment also revealed a low level of participation by women (7 percent) in most SBMCs surveyed, while funding (at the federal and state levels) and further training for SBMCs activities were almost non-existent. A key take-away from this assessment was the need to deploy a mentoring and monitoring system for SBMCs performance and reportage of activities in participating states. Additionally, the research data collected also corroborates this indicating a need to further contextualize a state-

specific SBMC policy, mostly in the case of Bauchi State.

From existing SBMC policy and based on on-field data collection during this research, the Bauchi and Sokoto States' experiences with SBMCs mostly reflect the general pattern experienced in most (if not all) northern states of Nigeria, with certain peculiarities of composition, structure and meetings, memberships and prescribed activities. Below presents an overview of these peculiarities as it relates to Bauchi and Sokoto States.

Composition

In Bauchi and Sokoto states, the average composition of SBMCs was between 12-18 members. This is in line with the *National SBMC policy*, which suggests between 8-20 members comprising diverse stakeholders with a distinct emphasis on gender considerations to present broader perspectives. Official policy guidelines from Sokoto State suggest that the representation of women on most of the SBMCs is well above the 40 percent prerequisite, however survey and school visits indicated differently. This representation cuts across interest groups like PTA representatives, old boys and girls associations, community development representatives, and student representatives. Survey data indicate that the expected criteria for the selection of members to compose the SBMCs are informed by characteristics that speak to the candidates' qualities of integrity, honesty, and commitment to the shared values of providing good governance in schools as provided by the state's education laws. Sokoto State further emphasized the importance of members of SBMCs residing in areas where these schools are located to ensure grass-roots participation and understanding of the issues. Although the *National Policy on SBMC* indicates that membership is "non-political" and voluntary, available operational documents and indicators from Sokoto and Bauchi States are silent on the political tone of membership but simultaneously indicate that such positions are strictly voluntary.

SBMC Structures and Meetings

In line with the provisions of the *National SBMC policy*, during implementation of USAID EGR project, the SBMCs in Bauchi and Sokoto States support between 4-5 members of the leadership structure, consisting of the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and financial secretary (among other positions). In other states (like Kaduna), SBMC policy indicates that this executive structure also includes the position of a press relations officer (see Kaduna State Government, 2010). However, this was not disclosed in the policy documents of Bauchi and Sokoto States. Expectedly, additional executive positions are added based on need and as indicated in the state SBMC policy. While a further breakdown of these executive structures is required, the Bauchi and Sokoto policy documents did not indicate criteria for selecting these members. For instance, the secretary of the committee is expected to be the head teacher of the school, and it is also expected that the financial secretary should have a working knowledge of bookkeeping and simple accounting principles. Provisions are also made in the national policy for a teacher with knowledge of these areas to become the financial secretary of the committee or otherwise assist it in its activities. Members of the SBMCs in Bauchi and Sokoto are expected to meet at least twice per term (i.e., at the beginning and end of a term) and can call for emergency meetings as the need arises. Policy documents also indicate how a quorum should be formed for decision making within the committee and the average tenure of executive members at three (3) years.

The functionality of the executive structures of the SBMCs in Bauchi and Sokoto depends, in addition to carrying out assignments on education projects, on the formation of sub-committees (e.g., a finance committee to support efforts on fundraising, management, etc.; a women's committee to promote inclusion and enable a gender sensitive approach). These sub-committees remain a viable tool for achieving many more SBMC objectives.

Partnerships and “Bottom-Top” approaches to Education Outcomes in SBMCs

Beyond the existing Parents Teachers Association (PTA) structures, the SBMCs in Bauchi and Sokoto States were expected to leverage on bottom-top approach for engagement and support towards improving education outcomes. According to their state operational documents, the implementation of SBMCs in Bauchi and Sokoto states indicates a wide-range of partnerships at various levels geared towards improving teaching and learning outcomes as well as early grade reading. At the center of this implementation system are the schools, which are expected to develop a strong partnership among the head teachers, teachers, pupils, and parents. Bauchi and Sokoto States, as further emphasized in their framework and guidelines for SBMCs, thrive on such partnerships while expanding capacity to further engage in these partnerships with PTAs, old students' associations (OSAs), and local /religious community leaders, while the states' ministries of education, SUBEB, and local administration education authorities (LGEA), provide further monitoring and guidance.

Community Integration and Participation

The integration of community participation and engagement into the SBMC structures allows for feedback on progress and activities. In Bauchi and Sokoto states, survey data indicates these feedback systems are designed to ensure community participation in planning, reviewing, and monitoring education projects for the schools as agreed upon by the community, with the SBMC linking the process across all education stakeholders to improve outcomes. With the herculean task before SBMCs, the frequency of activities like school visits, meetings, and proper planning are essential to the success of their objectives, as indicated in their individual both National and State SBMC operational documents. This partnership and bottom-top model provide a platform for the promotion of key messages on EGR and overall education within the community. Among the messages identified for promotion by Bauchi and Sokoto states are the following:

- All children have the right to education as specified by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended).
- The government has the responsibility to ensure that all children receive a good quality education regardless of their family's socio-economic status.
- All children, including those with special needs, should have access to free education, including those married and widows.
- A good education will help your child to read and write, become a responsible citizen and will help your family live a healthy life.
- It is possible to have both Western and Islamic education.⁹

Evidently, the importance of the SBMCs in improving EGR and learning outcomes cannot be overemphasized in both states. Because of this, there is a constant need to build the capacity of SBMC members in tandem with providing constant (re)training. Here, the national SBMC policy is clear on the roles of national, state, CSOs, NGOs, and international development partners to provide support for the roles and responsibilities of SBMCs via capacity building. Building on this, the Bauchi and Sokoto state governments identify areas in which the capacities of SBMCs require further support. Among these areas are school supervision, budget planning and writing, accountability and transparency, grant utilization and resource mobilization, quality assurance, project monitoring and evaluation, and school plan development for the committee. The policy guidelines specifically advocate for the use of a cluster-based approach, which involves collaborative action among stakeholders and the production of training manuals in both Hausa and English. With appropriate capacity development and a feedback mechanism in place (during

annual review meetings), SBMCs in Bauchi and Sokoto states are expected to be strengthened towards improving the voices of the community while linking the same to national, state, and local governments' objectives in education.

Conclusion: What do all these mean to Development Outcomes?

The changing nature of the international development assistance landscape, including the swift withdrawal of the USAID, calls out the need to rethink the conceptualization, structure and sustainability of external provision of education in developing situations; this change can be seen as a warning that in places like Nigeria, where development interventions in education have typically been based on the donor-driven models, there is an urgent need to develop policy architectures that locally embedded, as well as institutionally resistant. An influential policy suggestion that may be made by this review is the necessity to have a shift to non-externally based models of programmes to hybrid governance frameworks that integrate international support into nationally owned systems. Although this already sounds like localization concepts, but this should start in reverse -i.e. from countries then flowing outwards. By so doing, these systems might give importance to policy co-production among international actors, federal and state actors, and community actors. Instead of seeing localization as procedural necessity, it must be operationalized as a substantive redistribution of power, resources and accountability machinery. This would involve reinforcing fiscal and administrative independence of state-level institutions of educations like SUBEBs and LGEA but without allowing the community structures of governance like SBMCs to be formally empty but operational in decision-making process.

According to the evidence of Bauchi and Sokoto States, although SBMCs are central to bottom-top model of EGR implementation, their efficiency is limited by poorly developed knowledge or the role, poor financial literacy, and poorly developed monitoring systems. There should thus be a sustainable policy framework that is integrated with systematic training of programmes and performance-based assessment systems that help improving accountability and operational efficiency at community level. The other recommendation is connected to harmonization of policy frameworks (i.e. both national and sub-national). The differences that have been found between national SBMC policies and state domestication in areas like Bauchi depict that there is a need to have clear guidelines, review of policies after some time, and mechanism of adapting policies to local context. The gaps in gender representation and inclusion in SBMC structure, where women and marginalized groups have persistently been underrepresented in their governance processes, should also be addressed on future interventions. This is to ensure women and concern population is socially included in the governance processes.

The future studies must go beyond this scoping review and use longitudinal and mixed methods studies that can more stringently examine the effects of EGR interventions on literacy in the long-term. Comparative studies across the states and regions are also required to have the context specific factors that determine the effectiveness of these policies. These studies would help to understand the nature of localized forms of governance in relation to wider institutional structures in determining better education outcomes. Notably, the results of this research possess great implications on the topic of international development assistance at large. The case of the USAID in Nigeria shows that although donor-funded programmes can help trigger the changes in access, provisions of materials as well as stakeholder engagement, their sustainability will depend upon the depth of institutional integration and ownership by locals. The termination of USAID operations demonstrates the susceptibility of the system which are the heavy consumers of external funding and technical assistance.

Nevertheless, it offers the possibility of reconfiguration. In the case of the USAID and other development agencies, the Nigeria lesson indicate that future interventions should no longer be project-based cycles but rather be based on long-term institutional relationships where emphasis is on strengthening of the system rather than on short term deliverables. This involves an investment in data systems, policy feedback loops, and indigenous knowledge structures that will be able to maintain a process of reform without the reference of the donors.

To conclude, this paper has explored the policy designs, the interventions at the community level and implementation of Early Grade Reading (EGR) interventions in both Bauchi and Sokoto States. It has shown that although major strides have been achieved in the areas of providing access to learning resources, enhancing teacher proficiencies and establishing community presence, there are still huge challenges on how to convert these advances into lasting literacy performances. Those problems do not lie in the lack of policy, but in the intricacy of the process of implementation, coordination and adapting to the context. Such implications of such findings extend beyond Nigeria and have provided important insights on the politics of sustainable development and future of education policy in Africa (and Nigeria). With the further international development paradigm shifts, the overall challenge will be to develop systems that are not only efficient, but also self-sustaining, equitable and attentive to the realities of the communities that are to be served by the system.

Funding Statement

The author acknowledges the financial support received from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through Creatives Associates International with Grant Number: 72062022C00001, which contributed to the successful completion of this research project. The funding supported the research activities, including the data collection and analysis. However, the funders had no role in the writing of this article.

References

- Akinnaso, F. (1993), Policy and experiment in mother tongue literacy in Nigeria. *International Review of Education*, 39(1), 255-285. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01102408>
- Ball, J. (2010), Education equity for children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years. A presentation to UNESCO international symposium -Translation and cultural mediation, Paris: UNESCO, 22/23 February, 2010 on the occasion of the 11th International Mother Language Day collaboration with the International Association for Translation and Intercultural studies, 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.
- Cromley, J. (2009), Reading Achievement and Science Proficiency: International Comparisons from the Programme on International Student Assessment. *Reading Psychology*, 30(2), 89-118
- Education for All (2014), *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/2014*. Montreal: UNESCO
- Evans, N. (2019), *Overview of Reading Assessment in Nigeria: 2011 to 2018*. Washington, DC: Northern Education Initiative Plus.
- Federal Ministry of Education, (2023), *Bauchi State Annual School Census, 2022*. Federal Ministry of Education: Abuja
- Federal Ministry of Education, (2023), *Sokoto State Annual School Census, 2022*. Federal Ministry of Education: Abuja
- Hallock, J., Fox, J., Chen, N., (2025). USAID's Locally-led Development Agenda: Open Government and Independent Monitoring. *Public Administration and Development*, 1(1), 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.2109>

- Hossain, N., & Hickey, S., (2019). The Problem of Education Quality in Developing Countries, In S. Hickey & N. Hossain, (eds.) *The Politics of Education in Developing Countries: From Schooling to Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-21
- Kaduna State Government (2010). School Based Management Committee Guidebook. Kaduna: Kaduna
- NEI Plus, (2019a). *End line Performance Evaluation Report*.
- NEI Plus, (2019b). *PY4 Quarterly Report Second Quarter -January 1 to March 31, 2019*
- Oando Foundation, (n.d.) Strengthening Community Participation in School Development: School Based Management Committees (SBMCs). Available at https://oandofoundation.org/files/OF_PRODUCT_MANAGEMENT.pdf
- RTI International (2016), Nigeria Reading and Access Research Activity (RARA): Results of an Approach to Improved Early Grade Reading in Hausa in Bauchi and Sokoto States. Available at https://publicfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/public/resources/RARA_Reading_Evaluation_Report_FINAL_January_2016.pdf
- Tikly, L. & Barrett, A. (2013). Education quality and social justice in the global South. In L. Tikly & A. Barrett, *Education Quality and Social Justice in the Global South: Challenges for Policy, Practice and Research*. Oxon, Canada: Routledge
- UNICEF (2022). Global Primary Education Report. Available online at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/primary-education/#more>
- World Bank (2025), Children Out of School (% of Primary School Age). Available online at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.UNER.ZS>
- Robillard, S., Atim, D., & Maxwell, D., (2021). *Localization: A "Landscape" Report*. Boston, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University,