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Lessons on literacy training for adolescent girls: Considerations for SWEDD safe spaces

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LESSONS ON LITERACY TRAINING FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR SWEDD SAFE SPACES

Girls' and young women's literacy training can bridge the gap between girls' low rates of schooling in the Sahel region and their desire for lifelong knowledge and skills. Additionally, literacy programs may also help promote community behavioral and attitudinal change by making benefits of girls' education visible.

SWEDD has increased literacy training in order to add to adolescent girls' (AG) existing toolboxes of the assets needed to improve health outcomes. As a response to the need to strengthen literacy training components in Safe Spaces, we compiled practical lessons from evidence-based programming to inform plans for literacy training.

These recommendations center the learning experience on AG. They emphasize the need for interesting materials that actively engage participants to increase the likelihood that they will retain the new information. Within Safe Spaces, literacy training curriculum content should be informed by AG subject matter suggestions to increase its relevance to their lives. Regardless of the setting (community spaces or schools), instructors need dedicated training using simple instructions and evidence-based curricula. Community involvement in literacy trainings may help ensure long-term community support for girls' education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Make Literacy Training Relevant and Accessible

- Create engaging and context-specific literacy activities to increase student engagement and improve literacy outcomes.
 - Student interest and engagement in literacy activities were the most consistent predictor of student's literacy outcomes in Save the Children's Literacy Boost program in Rwanda.ⁱ The higher a student scored on interest/engagement, the better the student performed on reading assessments.
 - Female secondary school graduates or university graduates selected from communities led literacy classes that centered around active discussions between promoters and girls in Population Council's Ishraq Program in Egypt.ⁱⁱ Mentors interactively taught Carita's "Learn to be Free" curriculum and also served as girl advocates, provided input on the project, and linked girls and parents to the program.
- Anchor literacy training in students' baseline reading skills: when curricula and learning goals outpace student abilities, learning outcomes tend to be lower.
 - Ensure program flexibility when scheduling sessions to help reduce absenteeism and drop-out.
- Provide students with supplementary instructional materials (e.g. books).
 - Ensuring safe spaces have enough reading materials is key to teaching adolescents to read; instructional guides help boost the effectiveness of early grade reading interventions in low resource settings.ⁱⁱⁱ

i. Friedlander et al. (2016). Literacy Boost in Rwanda—Reading Assessment Baseline Report. Stanford University, 1–56.

ii. Selim et al. (2013). The Ishraq Program for out-of-school girls: From pilot to scale-up," Final Report [Arabic]. Cairo: Population Council.

iii. Graham, J., & Kelly, S. (2019). How effective are early grade reading interventions? A review of the evidence. *Educational Research Review*, 27, 155–175. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.03.006>.

Use Evidence-Informed Tactics to Train Teachers, Mentors, or Facilitators

- Train instructors using both simple instructions and evidence-based curricula proven to be effective in improving literacy.
 - Training is more effective when it focuses on a specific subject and supports context-specific literacy instruction.^{iv}
- Utilize instructional guides to train individuals (e.g. instructions shared via recorded videos).
- Train teachers or mentors by including community action activities such as book banks (communities donate reading materials) and community creation of materials (communities produce reading materials), which increases the effectiveness of literacy training.^v

Support Girls in Retaining Skills

- Support cohorts in accessing
- tutoring services after literacy training ends to help transition into further educational opportunities and maintain the social support systems built within Safe Spaces.
- This support may take the form of financial coverage of services or other inputs that will reduce barriers to tutoring.

Engage Communities

- Involve community members (parents and key community leaders) in creating literacy programming to ensure effective implementation, ownership, and sustainability of literacy programs.

iv. Friedlander et al. (2016).

v. Friedlander et al. (2016).