

Improving Child Literacy Through the Support of Community Networks



Final - Unlock Literacy Learning Networks Research Report from Ghana



December 2022

Executive Summary

Advancement of children's literacy has been a concern to educators and other instructors in many developing countries, especially those in rural, remote, and deprived communities where government resources do not reach all and as a result are unable to provide learning resources that could benefit children in schools in those areas. The introduction of unlocking literacy (UL) and reading camps (RC) in rural, deprived, and remote parts of the country has been an important means to improve children's literacy in schools and communities in selected communities. The study aimed at investigating how the UL strategies being implemented in schools and RCs improve children's literacy development in the participating communities. The study also investigated efforts that have been made by community stakeholders towards the scaling up of the UL strategies to benefit communities that initially never had or implemented UL strategies. The study adopted a qualitative methodology. The data was gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations in some RCs. Interviews were conducted for teachers, head teachers, ministry of education officials, community action core group members, RC facilitators, faith leaders, local government officials (assembly members), and parents whose children attend RCs. The results showed that the UL strategies are improving children's literacy development. Most of the children benefiting from the UL feel confident in their reading, and have also improved on their overall academic performance. It was observed that the overall enrolment in schools with the participating communities have increased. It was observed that communities that initially never had UL being implemented in their schools and communities were making efforts to have UL/RCs to be introduced in their communities. However, in spite of the acceptability of the UL by community members, there are few challenges that are hampering the effective implementation of the UL strategies. This could also affect the smooth scaling up of the UL/RC project in the other parts of the country.

Background

Unlock literacy is an evidence-based literacy approach being used to improve children's core reading and literacy skills. The study was based on a two-year ULLN consortium which is being led by the Institute of Studies in Education University of Toronto (OISE-UT) in partnership with three countries namely Honduras, Nicaragua, and Ghana. This report is on a phase 1 data that was gathered between July and September 2021. The report recount how local communities, as well as education stakeholders, are contributing towards the implementation of the UL programme and activities in improving children's literacy at the various reading camps (RCs). The UL approaches are being implemented in schools (mostly at lower primary level 1 – 3) and are supplemented at RCs within school communities in which the UL programme is being implemented. The UL approaches are being implemented through the support of networks of stakeholders at the community and school levels. The UL model is based on the understanding that literacy development is made effective through children's local dialects. The UL approach is similar to what pertains in the country's basic education school system in which local dialects are the main medium of instruction from kindergarten to primary three, while English is gradually introduced as the children progress to the upper primary level. The UL approaches which also make use of local languages as a medium of instruction fit the new national basic school curriculum, which makes it more relevant for children's literacy development in Ghana.

This preliminary report is from phase 1 of the data collection that was gathered in selected communities in some districts in the Eastern, Oti, and Central regions of Ghana. It also explains some of the challenges that has affected the implementation process, the acceptability of the UL project and a possible scaling up into communities and areas of the contry that initially never formed part of the UL project. The scaling up also examined efforts being made at the community level as well as school level towrads the scaling up of the UL project.

The results are from responses obtained from the study which aimed at addressing the following research questions. (1) How are community members in each country adapting the UL model in terms of their actions and interactions when implementing the community-based activities of the UL project to support the literacy of girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable? (2) How are community members, including teachers and principals in each country, scaling up UL's activities, by broadening and deepening the impact of UL activities in different ways, including the propagation of ideas, approaches, activities, or underlying principles that lead to better literacy for girls and boys?

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

This report gives account of the major research findings on the UL programme which was implemented in primary schools and RCs in some selected communities. The project was aimed at ensuring that early grade teachers use child-centred pedagogies that will enhance children's literacy learning. The findings will serve as a guiding tool for teachers, education officials, parents, curriculum experts, and other education stakeholders including WVI and other NGOs that are also into literacy development. The research findings are presented based on the following thematic areas of the study;

- a) Reading Camps (RCs) and UL Activities*
- b) RCs Operation and UL Activities in Local Communities*
- c) Local Community Networks and UL Implementation*
- d) Local Community Network and Support for Children with Disabilities*
- e) Local Community Challenges Associated with RC*
- f) School Level Networks and UL Implementation*
- g) School Level Network and Support for Children with Disabilities,*
- h) School Level Challenges Associated with Implementation of UL*
- i) Girls and Boys Participation and Gender Dimension in UL*
- j) Changes in Communities and Success stories*
- k) Ways of Addressing Challenges Facing the UL and RCs*
- l) Impact of COVID-19, Post-COVID-19 and Weather Conditions*
- m) Sustainability of the UL Project and Possible Scaling Up of the Project*

Biodata of Participants

A total number of 1704 individuals participated in the investigation. Some of the respondents took part in focus groups discussions, while others were on one-on-one interviews. A total of 56 teachers were interviewed to gather their views on the UL and any information about their knowledge of the RCs that the children attend in the communities the schools are located. The biodata was obtained from the teachers on the following: sex, class/grade taught, number of children in the class, and students with disabilities or special needs in their class. Out of the fifty-six (56) teachers interviewed, 30 (53.6%) of them were females and 26 (46.4%) were males.

Table 1: Class/Grade Taught

Class/Grade	Frequency	Percent (%)
BS1	15	26.32
BS2	21	36.84
BS3	21	36.84
Total	57	100.00

Table 1: shows that 21 (36.8%) teachers teach BS2 and the same percentage also teach BS3, while 15 (26.3%) teach BS1. With a total population of one thousand seven hundred and four students (1704), nine hundred and eighty-one (981) that is 57.8% of that number were females, while the remaining eight hundred and twenty-three (823) that constituted 42.2% were males. The class enrolment numbers has been shown in table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of students in class

Number of students	Frequency	Percent (%)
30 or less	39	69.64
31 – 40	13	23.21
41 – 50	3	5.36
51 and above	1	1.79
Total	56	100.00

Table 2 represents the students' population in classrooms taught by teachers who participated in the study. Table 3 above indicates that 39 (69.6%) teachers teach in classes with a students population of 30 or less, 13 (5.4%) teach in classes which had a class size of between 31-40, while 3 (5.4%) of the teachers teach in class sizes of between 41-50. However, out of the total number of 56 teachers who participated in the study only one teacher teaches in a school with a class size of 51 pupils and above. Another issue that remained significant was the gender

distribution of pupils in the schools of the children who participated in the study. Out of the 1,504 pupils who attended schools within the catchment areas, the study took place, 48.1% (723 pupils) were girls, while 51.9% (781 pupils) were boys.

The Local Government officials, commonly called Assembly members, who participated in the study were 17 in number (4 females and 13 males). Three (3) of the Assembly members have been in their position for less than a year because they had recently been elected as assembly members. Twelve (12) have been in the position for between 1 and 5 years, while the remaining have been assembly members for over 5 years.

The CACG members were 8 (2 females and 6 males). All the 38 faith leaders who participated in the study were males. This is likely due to the fact that most religious groups have males as Head pastors and Imams. Out of the 75 parents who were interviewed, 34 were females and 41 were males. Slightly more girls than boys participated in this study: one hundred and fourteen girls (52.8%) and one hundred and two (47.2%) were boys.

There were 19 RCs observed during the investigation. A total of 42 facilitators (19 or 45.2% were females and 23 or 54.8% were males) worked in the 19 RCs. At least 2 facilitators were observed facilitating at each camp, although in some of the camps the facilitators were more than 3, while some camps had just facilitators. The total number of children observed at the camps during the study were nine hundred and forty (940) children, 46.6% (438) of whom were girls and 53.4% (502) were boys. The number of out-of-school children who participated in RC activities was 34, 20 were girls and 14 were boys. Table 3 below shows the number of children who participated in each RC and the number of facilitators who worked at each camp.

Table 3: Biodata of Children and Facilitators at RCs

No. of Reading Camps	No. of Reading Facilitators	Boys	Girls	Total NO. of children for the 19 reading camps.
1	4	10	14	24
2	2	0	0	0
3	4	48	22	70
4	1	12	18	30
5	3	19	21	30
6	3	14	18	32
7	3	18	20	38
8	3	47	30	77
9	4	48	0	48
10	1	15	8	23
11	2	23	7	30
12	1	39	45	84
13	1	29	21	50
14	2	15	20	35
15	2	35	25	60
16	3	10	20	40
17	1	43	45	88
18	1	45	49	94
19	1	32	54	86
Total	42	502	438	940

There were also 11 children among the 940 children who had some form of disability, 5 of whom were girls and 6 were boys. Of the 19 RC observed, 10 were conducted under trees in the open, 3 in classrooms, 2 in churches, 2 in community centers, and 1 in a community member's home.

(a). Reading Camps (RCs) and UL Activities

The idea of reading camps (RCs) has been a key component in the UL programme. The RCs are in the communities. The camps are places that the children visit to learn how to read and

participate in other literacy activities. At the camps, the children are supported by at least 2 facilitators who are mostly volunteers. In some of the RCs, the facilitators were about 4. The facilitators use basic skills such as play and games to do the facilitation work at the camps. Learning through play is the way for children to learn. Data from the RC facilitators and PTA members revealed that all activities at the RC are play-based and child-centered. The play activities include:

- Sign in or free play
- Storytime
- Journaling

Most children learn how to read fluently in the local language and the English language through UL strategies and approaches like songs, storytelling, phonemic awareness, sound identification, and syllabic method.

Selection Criteria and Children’s Attendance to RC

The study showed that there were no selection criteria for children who attended the RCs. Every child is allowed to go to the camp and read. Although there are no selection criteria yet very old children and children that are in upper primary (Primary 4 to 6 and Junior High School) are not supposed to attend RCs. Rather, the camps are for children in kindergarten and lower Primary (Primary 1-3). The willingness of the parents to permit the children to attend also plays a very significant role. Therefore, there is no discrimination in the areas of religious background, gender, disability, ethnicity, or tribe when children are attending the RCs.

The study also revealed that 57.3% of the 75 parents interviewed had more than one child participating in RC activities, with 21.3% having 3 or more of their children attending a reading camp. The table below shows the number of parents and the number of their children who go to the RCs.

Table 3 Showing Number of Parents with Children Attending the RCs.

No. of parents	No. of children
32 (42.7%)	1 child attending a reading camp
27 (36%)	2 children attending a reading camp
12 (16%)	3 children attending a reading camp
4 (5,3%)	5 children attending a reading camp
Total 75	

As to how long the children of these parents have been attending RC, the parents gave varied answers. Of the 75 parents interviewed, 17 (22.7%) indicated that their children have been attending the RCs for less than a year, 11 (14.7%) said their children have been attending the RC for a year, 31 (41.3%) said their children have been attending a camp for the past 2 or more years. One-fifth (16) of the parents interviewed were uncertain of the number of years their children have been going to a RCs. Table 4 below indicates how long parents reported their children have been attending the RCs.

Table 4: Number of Parents and Years their Children have been Attending RC

No. of Parents	Duration
17 (22.7%)	Less than 1 yr.
11 (14.7%)	1 yr.
11 (16.7%)	2 yrs.
14 (18.7%)	3 yrs.
6 (8%)	4 yrs. and above
16 (21.3%)	Uncertain
Total 75	

During the second round of data collection it became evident that children’s attendance to-RC has changed. In some of the communities it was observed that attendance of some of the children to the RC was very encouraging, while in some communities attendance has reduced. The lack of motivation on the part of the RC facilitators was observed to be contributing to the reduced number or rate of the childrens’ attendance to the RCs. If there were no facilitators at the camps, parents would not allow their children to go to the camp. In some communities, boys attendance were better than girls and vice versa. For instance, in one of the communities some CCAG members observed during a focus group discussion that the attendance of the girls at the RC are better than the boys.

One of the members said; *“the children are doing well with the participation, and attendance. They do come all the time, but in my place, the girls are many and their attendance is better than the boys”*. (FGD B, CACG 2).

Another CACG member also stated that; *“because of their distance, most of the children always came late so, they don't get a full session of the camp. Most of them get to the camp to fifteen minutes then we will be leaving.* (FGD C, CACG 3).

Another CACG member also added, *“some children have to cross the road and the risk is that they may end up being knock down by a vehicle”* (FGD D, CACG 4).

This normally happens in very scattered communities, where some of the roads divide the community into two. In that situation, depending on the location of the RC, some children have to cross the road. Some parents who do not accompany their children to RC may feel reluctant to release their children to attend RC for fear of being knocked down by vehicle.

Other factors that the study noted has been hampering the children attendance to RC include;

- Assisting parents to do their household chores during attendance of RC.
- Children joining their parents to farms.
- Some children participating in labourer works with adults to make money.
- Some children especially the girls taking care of their young siblings after school.

The development of attendance of the children to RC seemed improved, because of a number of factors. The sensitization drive of the World Vision staff about the importance of the RC towards improvement of the children's literacy development as well as overall academic performance contributed very significantly. Again, the communities acceptance of ownership of the RC as a place that would benefit and improve their children's learning is very significant.

Seven months after the first round of data collection the activities at the camps were still active as indicated by the respondents. During the second phase of the data collection it became evident from the CACG that the camps were functioning well with an increased in children's attendance. This is what a male CACG member during a focus group discussion said, *“for the past seven months if I can recall our camps still active, the attendance of the people is increasing. Readiness of the parents are also there; parents are allowing their children to attend the camp as expected”* (FGD D, CACG 4).

Similarly, another male added: *“I have realized that the girls fancy reading, but the boys often want to go where they are playing football also because reading camp, we don't entertain through. We make the reading look fun so the children enjoy being at the camps always”* (FGD D, CACG 4).

Some of the CCAG members attributed the success of the RC program to the commitment and of the facilitator's parents and the opinion leaders in the community. One member during the FGD mentioned that: *"I believe the facilitators are well committed and are well root in the RC procedures, so the knowledge they bring to these sessions is enormous". Also, they prepare this print-rich materials to teach at the camp sessions" (FGD C, CACG 3).*

Another member of CCAG indicated that parents releasing their children to attend the RC is also a contributing factor to the success of the RC. He responded, *"I can say part of the success of RC is from the participation and support of the parents. The parents support by releasing their children for RC sessions. (FGD C, CACG 3).*

(b). RCs Operation and UL Activities in Local Communities

It was observed that most of the children arrived at the reading come on time. It was observed that the children went to RCs unaccompanied by a parent, sibling, or an adult. The facilitators received the children nicely and in a friendly mood. In all, only one facilitator was observed never received the children in a friendly way. Most of the facilitators checked attendance apart from 5 of the facilitators who never checked the children's attendance before the session began. All the facilitators ensured that materials being used in the camps were prepared arranged nicely before the camps start. Only one facilitator was found preparing the camp after several children had arrived.

All the RCs had print-rich materials displayed for the children to see and read, except three camps that never had print-rich materials. Most of the camps were very spacious enough for the children except about two which spaces were not accessible enough for children with mobility problems. The places being used were not spacious enough for facilitators to move around freely to attend to every child during camp sessions. It was observed that 12 out of the 19 RCs, the children and facilitators strictly obeyed Covid-19 protocols by ensuring that the children used sanitizers and washed their hands before, during, and after the RC sessions, while 7 RCs did not adhere strictly to Covid-19 protocols.

Observation at the start of RC session

Manila cards with the title of some names in the locality were hanged on the lines for the children to read. Charts and pictures were displayed on the walls of the RCs. The charts are in large prints which helped the kids to read. Some of the posters had pictures of animals and trees. Materials displayed were alphabets, objects that could be found in the communities or homes as well as various occupations.

Observation before actual RC activities.

After setting up the place, the facilitators made sure all children washed their hands with soap and water. Before the camp activities start, some of the facilitators marked the register and gave out books to the children to read, asking the children about the things they learnt the previous day's session. The facilitators engaged the children who reported ahead of time by allowing them to draw anything, write their names, or write some sounds. The facilitators prepared the grounds and hanged the print-rich materials on a rope. In almost all the RCs, the facilitators began the session with either a slogan, a song or began with an Ice Breaker to capture the attention of children. The facilitators assembled the children, guided them to sit properly on their mats before the books and any other learning material were given to them.

During the session, the facilitators moved around the room and made sure that mats, reading books, learning materials, etc are properly gathered and arranged for the session. They made sure that all the children were properly seated on their mats without anyone seated on the floor. The children sang songs about the parts of the body, waved their hands with interests while looking at the action the facilitators performed. The facilitator later allowed the children to display their works for observation and assessment. This brought joy to the facilitators and the children.

During the RC session

The facilitators took the children through the day's activities through song time, reading time, story time, activity time, and make and take. There were enough print-rich materials available for children to use during the sessions. During the sessions, sometimes girls and boys worked in pairs and sometimes in small groups. In 11 RCs the facilitators organized children in single-sex groupings (boys with boys and girls with girls) while in 8 RCs the facilitators had boys and girls working together.

All the RC facilitators observed called on the children by their names. The facilitators encouraged many children to participate rather than focusing on the same few children to answer

questions and/or perform activities. The facilitators used question and answers to enhance the children's understanding of all activities. Facilitators effectively used TLMs to enhance the children's understanding of the session's activities. In fifteen (15) of the RCs the children are allowed to talk to each other during session activities while at 4 RCs the facilitators did not allow the children to talk to each other while the RC activity was ongoing.

In all the RCs, children were seen drawing, writing, and physically doing some form of activity. Many of the children asked questions about the story and other activities performed in the RCs. Some parents and members in the communities who do not have children in the camps visit the camps to see what goes on. The physical environment of the RCs was safe for children, free from hazards such as broken equipment, hazardous materials, and thus conducive for children's learning.

Observation made at the end of the RC sessions.

At the end of the camp activities, the facilitators removed the posters. Children who expressed interest to borrow books to read at home were given books. The details of books taken by the children were taken and the children were encouraged to return the book when they return to the camp the next day. The facilitators encouraged the children to pick books to read at home. The children felt very happy after each session because they continued to hang around the facilitators after the session. The demeanor of the facilitators demonstrates they feel happy working with the children at the camps. After the session, the older children assisted the facilitators to remove posters and cards that were used and sent them home for safe keeping. In camps where the session took place in permanent accommodation, the facilitators stayed behind to make sure that all the materials are properly packed and that none of the children had left any belonging behind before they left the camp.

UL Activities at the RCs

To ascertain the nature of activities that go on in the RCs, the children were asked questions about what children do at the RCs, what motivates them to attend the RCs, and why they have to continue going to the RCs. The children stated some of the activities that they do when they go to the RCs. They stated among others that.

- They are allowed to learn how to read and write,
- They learn how to pronounce different words and sound words and
- The facilitators teach them singing and listen to stories being told by the facilitators.

- They are also allowed to borrow books from the RCs and take them home to read when they are not going to the camps or during days that the camp is not in session.

Some of the children explained how they enjoy going to the RCs. They stated some of the interesting books they read at the camps as, “*Nuku*”, “*Kese*”, “*okraman*”, “*Afiyo*” “*Gyata ne Akuraa*”, and “*Tawia Awuda*”, as some of the books they enjoy reading.

The responses the children gave when they were asked why they enjoy going to the camps and what they liked about the RCs, they enumerated:

- Listening and telling of stories when they go to the camps,
- They get gifts when they go to the RCs,
- The way the facilitators teach and assist them with their reading and writing also motivate them to continue visiting the camps and
- They play games at the RCs they always like going to the RCs.

Some unified response was, “*R5- we can borrow books home to read*”.

Benefits of Children’s Attendance and Participation in Activities at the RCs

Attendance of the children to the various RCs has been very encouraging and beneficial. The children participate in the following activities; learn to sing songs, how to read, learn how to sing and recite poems, learn story telling, play games and also learn to improve on their vocabularies and pronunciation of words. The parents pointed out that, they have seen a significant improvement in the reading ability of their children, so they will continue to allow their children to go to RCs. Some of the changes the parents believed they have observed include:

- Children’s ability to do their homework independently
- Children’s ability to read the Bible in church.
- Children can read story books in the local language at home.
- Confidence to read books on their own and are always happy when they are given books to read.
- The children enjoy going to the RCs and feel motivated to participate in the camp activities.

The CACG members who support the facilitators at the various RCs and the facilitators also enumerated some of the benefits the children receive through their attendance to the RCs.

- The children have developed the passion for reading.

- The children can use sounds well in their reading and pronunciation has also improved.
- There is a general improvement in the children academic performance due to the attendance of the RCs.
- The children feel very confident to read and that serves as a motivation for them to go to school.
- The children engage more in RC activities and so do not loiter around the communities after school as compared to the past when there were no RCs.

Some of the teachers at the schools also confirm that the children who attend the RC do well at school. A male CCAG member explained that, *“the teachers too are testifying that the children do well in school. If you compare children who attend RCs to those that don't attend RCs, there is a great difference. Those that attend RCs do better than, those who do not attend RCs” (FGD B, CACG 2)*. This is a very significant development and confirmation of the importance of the UL project and the RCs to the children’s literacy development.

The faith leaders also expressed some level of satisfaction about the implementation of the UL and the RC activities for the children in their communities. The expression of the faith leaders indicates that the children’s reading skills have improved and the level of children’s participation in the RC and UL activities has also increased.

One of the faith leaders commented that *“The RC has helped the children to read, and they now travel to neighbouring communities to part take in the reading competitions and quizzes which is very encouraging for parents. (FL14)”* Another faith leader added that the reason why the RC is working well is that, *“academically the literacy level of the children has increased because now even the children at kindergarten level can combine sounds to pronounce words. (FL2)”*.

The comments from the faith leaders have also shown that some of the benefits of the UL and RC activities have been very encouraging for both the children and the communities.

Two of the faith leaders who expressed satisfaction with the children’s participation at the RC and UL activities said.

“As for the benefits, we have achieved a lot. The reading ability of most of the children has improved and this has manifested in their performance in school. (FL6)”

Another faith leader also added that *“in this community, most of the girls never used not to go to school but through the reading camps, most of the children are motivated to go*

to school and to learn well. Now they stay in school till the end of the school day, which never used to happen (FL3).

Majority of the faith leaders attested to the fact that the RC has improved the reading of the children. One of the faith was emphatic and said, *“the RC has improved the reading abilities of the children. The children enjoy learning now and this is because the RC has aroused their interest for learning”.* (FL 13)

Probing further to ascertain what actually has been contributing to the success at the RCs over the last seven months after the first round of data collection, one of the faith leaders stated that the contributing successes of the RCs can be attributed to three factors. He explained further as, *“the willingness of the children to attend, the willingness or motivation of the facilitators to do the work, the commitment on the part of the children to attend to the RCs, the willingness of the parents to allow their children to be trained or to be educated at the RCs”* (FL 35).

Similarly, one of the traditional authorities also had this to say, *“Okay, I have seen that many of the children who could not read previously are now able to read when they come home”.* (TA 9)

The LGOs also enumerated the following as benefits they observe with the children’s involvement in the UL activities and the children's visit to the RCs. They include the children's love for learning, children's ability to read with confidence, the enthusiasm at the camps. One of the local government officials made this comment at the end of the interview; *“the reading camp is very good to us in our community. So, I want to thank the world vision for their support (LGO2). At least after each school day, the children have a place to go and learn which is very good for the parents and the community.”*

One of the LGOs also explained that, *“to me what has gone well is that, formally the children reading habit were not encouraging but there has been a significant improvement in their reading abilities”* (LGO 5). The LGO noted that the reading abilities of the children has gone up so a lot of the children can now read on their own.

This was confirmed by the WVCDF who explained that,

“For the RC, the one that we have visited, we even asked the parents and they have testified that the RCs has really helped their children especially those who were not able to read their local dialect to read in their local dialect. Some even read in church and even during the

reading festivals you can see that the children are now reading very well. Some of the children also testify themselves that because they now learn the letter sound in the RC, they are able to transfer it to English and then it's making it easier for them to identify words in English".
(WVCDF 1)

The general comments show that there is a very good and observable improvement in the children's reading skills. While a lot of children now go to school and stay at school till the end of the school day. The children now enjoy going to school.

As to whether the UL and RCs are impacting their learning of literacy, the children gave a resounding "yes" to the question asked if going to the RC helped them with their school activities. These were some of the comments the children made:

"I like going to the camp because I can read very well at school S1".

Another child interrupted by saying *"my teacher gives me a gift because I read well so I enjoy going to school every day S2".*

Another child also added; *"the sounds I learn at the RC help me to pronounce words in the classroom, so I enjoy reading at school. S4".*

Besides the one-on-one interviews, there were some FGD that also took place during the data collection. So the participants were asked whether the activities at the RCs helped them at school. Almost all the children answered and attested to the fact that the RC activities are helping them to improve significantly in the classroom. For example, in one group discussion and child said, *"yes we are benefiting from attending the RCs. The activities at the RC helps us at school. We can read well" (FGD A, CHILDREN 1).*

In response to the same question a female teacher also said, *"for my class, it helps my children to be able to pronounce the letters and can also pick the sounds" (FGD H, TEACHERS F8).*

Similarly, another female teacher added,

A male teacher also responded, *"You can easily fish out those who attend RC compared to those who don't attend RC when it comes to reading the sounds. You know we use the same approach at the RC to teach in the classroom". (FGD R, TEACHERS M18)*

Some of the teachers also mentioned that the RC is impacting positively on the academics of children who attend. For instance, a teacher had this to say, *"Those who go to the RC, when we*

come to the classroom you see the reflection. They don't struggle in terms of reading. When you put a letter on the board and you ask them to pronounce, they will pronounce it. This makes teaching for easy for me". (FGD B, TEACHERS F2)

One of the children a girl during one of the focus group discussion had this to say, *"We learn how to read and pronounce words" (FGD C, CHILDREN F3).*

According to one group of children, they listen to folktales and dance. One of the children explained that, *"we engage in storytelling and also dance at the reading camp" (FGD L, CHILDREN F 12).*

Besides, there were divergent views as to why the activities at the RC help children at school. For instance, majority of the children attested to the fact that the RC activities make learning interesting, easier and faster. One of the children who is a boy responded, *"The activity at the RC makes learning easier and interesting. Learning at school becomes easy for me". (FGD A, CHILDREN M1)*

Similarly, one of the children who is a boy had this to say, *"RC activities help me to understand what my teacher teaches me at school better". (FGD F, CHILDREN M6)*

According to some of the children, the RC activities have enabled them to develop desirable moral values when they go to school. For example, one of the children who is a girl stated, *"I have learnt to be generous at the reading camp. So, when I go to school and I have two pencils and my friend doesn't have, I give her one of my pencils". (FGD E, CHILDREN F5)*

Similarly, another boy added, *"I have learnt that sharing is caring so, I have to share what I have with my friends". (FGD J, CHILDREN M10)*

Probing why children are motivated to attend the RCs, some children responded that they are motivated to read and speak the English Language. During FGD, a group mentioned, *"I'm motivated to attend because I want to speak English". (FGD A, CHILDREN F1)*

Another girl also added, *"I am motivated to attend because I want to learn how to read both Ghanaian and English Language". (FGD A, CHILDREN F1)*

One boy stated that he is motivated to attend the RC because he enjoys listening to stories, songs and free plays. He explained, *"The story telling, free play and songs motivate me to attend the RC because I like playing football and am also allowed to take work home to show to parents and friends. The facilitators give me story books to take home so that my brothers and sisters will help me read. (FGD G, CHILDREN M7)*

One of the children who is a girl said, *"Am motivated to attend the RC because I want to read well to become a doctor in future". (FGD E, CHILDREN 5)*

A boy had this to say, *“The drawing and journaling aspects motivates me a lot because I like drawing”*. (FGD R, CHILDREN M18)

The experience of the children after the seven months of the first round of data collection was not different from the time the research team did the first round of data collection. The study noted that the children attendance to the RCs had improved.

Another boy also indicated that the RC has enabled him to write well. He said, *“The RC have enabled me to learn how to write and pronounce letters”* (FGD A, CHILDREN M1).

During FGD, when the participants were asked to identify what they have learned since their participation at the RCs, majority of the children mentioned that they have acquired new vocabularies and learned to read. For instance, a group indicated, *“I have learned that if you are reading and there is a word and you cannot pronounce, you have to break the words into smallest unit and use the sounds to mention it* (FGD L, CHILDREN F12).

The parents also expressed their satisfaction with the manner their children’s literacy had improved as a result of the children attendance to the RCs. A parent who participated in one of the fous groups discussions expressed her satisfaction had this to say.

“We are proud when we listen to our children Reading Twi. In the past, the children could not read Twi but now every slight chance he gets I see him with books. Even at the school, teachers are saying the RC has made their teaching easier because the children are taught all the basis at camp”. (FGD , Parent, F6)

Benefits of RC activities towards children’s literacy development.

Community stakeholders have observed and attest to numerous and varied benefits associated with the introduction of RCs in their school communities by RC by World Vision. A lot of successes have been chalked by the RCs and this motivates the parents and other stakeholders to participate in the activities of the RC. Respondents provided many of such diverse benefits which include the following:

- There is an observed improvement in children's interest in literacy activities and corresponding improvement in their literacy skills in the school communities. All respondents agree that there is a heightened interest in literacy activities among children in the communities and that there is an improvement in the children's literacy skills as a result of the RC in the communities. They are now able to identify letters, combine two-letter words and also read fluently. R1: *“Children's reading skills have improved”*. *“The improvement in the reading abilities of the children is the most*

significant change because for the community to develop, education is key". [WVIDF2].

- children have developed a love for reading, they can read in their local languages are confident to speak in public. . *"Children a read something before going to bed"*. (CF 16)
- Children can read Bibles at home and the churches in the local languages very well and also in English. R1: *"Kids are reading Bibles at churches and home for their parents"*. (CF 5)
- Children are interested in the RC activities and eager to attend/participate in the RC activities. They are motivated by the RC sessions and activities. Children in the school communities no longer roam about aimlessly after school hours. They are rather engaged positively after school by their participation in RC activities.
- It is generally observed and believed that the introduction of RC in the communities has brought about an interest in education and improvement in education.
 - Improvement in parents' interest in literacy development and education of their children.
 - The successes of the RCs motivate the parents and so continue to allow their children to participate in the activities of the RC.
- Improvement of parent-children relationship.
- Improvement in the Children's behavior in the communities. They respect, speak and dress well. R5:

According to the RC facilitators, the provision of facilitators' guides, teaching materials, and book banks has contributed to the literacy development of the children in the communities. The head-teachers also indicated significant improvement in the teaching of literacy in the early grade classrooms because of the UL approaches.

So when asked about what has gone well with UL activities and the RC over the last seven months, majority of the respondents mentioned that the reading ability of the children has improved significantly. Yet the respondents explained what has actually gone well with the UL and the RCs towards the children's literacy development. For instance, a female teacher explained that *"what has gone well is the reading ability of the children which has improved. Let me say that about 80% of the children in my class can now read well"* (FGD A, **TEACHERS F1**). Another male parent during one of the focus group discussions also stated that,

“for me I am very happy that my child is attending the reading camp meetings. We suffered a lot because we did not attend school. So, I will be a liar to say that I don’t appreciate the reading camp concept. It helps children to learn new things and read very well. For me, I cannot read but if you give something to my child, my child can read” (FGD N, PARENT M 14)

To ascertain what has actually contributed to the success of the UL approaches and RCs activities, some of the teachers attributed the success to the commitment and selfless dedication of the facilitators. The facilitators are very committed and have the children at heart so they do their best for them. For instance, one female teacher said *“I can say that the facilitators have contributed to the success. Sometimes, I will be around and after they have finished the RC activities you will be hearing the learners reciting the poems or songs that they have been taught” (FGD D, TEACHERS F4).*

Another teacher also pointed out that the UL has benefited the children as well as the teachers themselves. She explained that,

“actually, what has gone well with is the children are able to understand the L2 and then they can also Speak by transferring the knowledge of their mother tongue to the L2 and understanding of the L2 becomes better since we use their mother tongue as a transfer of knowledge from known to the unknown” (FGD J, TEACHERS M10).

Similarly, to the above a male parent during the one of the parents focus group discussions also stated that *“I allow my child to go to the RC because I have observed that the RC enhances the reading skills of the children, and it makes my child socializes with other children in the community” (FGD L, PARENT M12).* According to some children, they have become confident answering questions. They children also explained that they do not feel shy to talk in public or when there people around. One male child said, *“I have become confident, and I don’t feel shy any longer, because I talk always at the reading camp” (FGD A, CHILDREN M1).*

Attesting to what the child stated, one female teacher also responded by saying that, *“To me, what I have realized is that the children learn a lot from the RCs. They have gotten that confidence to also say something or ask questions in class. So that is what I've seen, that the RC has helped to boost their confidence” (FGD K, TEACHERS F11).*

The children have actually benefited from the UL project and the RC activities towards their literacy development.

RC Activities and Children's Interest

The activities of the RC have generated interest among children who visit the RCs and have sustained their interest in literacy activities in the local and rural communities. The headteachers made the following observations to confirm what they mean by sustained interest:

- Children are now able to identify letters and pronounce their sounds as well as blend the sounds. Some children are now reading fluently, especially in their local language.
- Most children can read with understanding fluently read them children can read and write as well.
- Children can express themselves in the English language and their confidence in reading has improved.
- The usage of TLRs at the RCs enables some of the children to interact and engage with the content. For instance, pictures of the aid of the alphabet in the identification of sounds.

The children are eager to go to the RCs because most of the facilitators relate well with them in a friendly manner and attend to most of them in terms of their individual needs. However, when the children were asked what they do at the reading camp when they go there, here are some of the responses of the children.

"We learn the Twi language" (S1).

"The facilitators tell us stories" (S3).

"We engage in free play and journaling, which I like very much" (S4).

"We do make and take" (S6).

"Sometimes we sing at the RC and the song I like best is " Kuli" and " Mekko" "(S3).

"I go round and learn from the materials posted at the RC" (S5).

"When I go to the RC, I borrow books to read at home and it improves my reading skills" (R1)

When the children were asked about the nature of support they receive from the facilitators when they go to the RC, they overwhelmingly agreed that the facilitators assist them in several ways. These are some of their responses.

"Sometimes they group us when we are during the main tasks of the day. That is the activity time" (S1).

"Sometimes the facilitators discuss with us the word of God and teach us how to pray" (R3).

“The teachers teach us about Coronavirus. What to do so that we don’t get coronavirus and the safety protocols” (S6).

“My facilitator helps me when I have challenges in reading” (S3).

It became evident that the children enjoy going to the RCs and explained that during the investigation. However, the children had variable reasons for going to the RCs. Some of the reasons the children gave have been stated below.

“I want to learn how to read well” (S1).

“Because I want to read and become a doctor in future” (S4).

“I want to read and become a teacher” (S5).

“I want to read to help my family” (S4).

The study revealed that the children enjoy going to the RCs and appreciate the benefits of going to RCs.

A female teacher who felt the UL and RCs are benefiting the children share her experience with the research team and explain that,

“Again, I was having a learner in my class who was not able to write well. He will always write from the back page but as he has been attending the RC and the activities they have been doing there, and he comes to school and we also do the same thing, he has been taught because the facilitators attention and teachers in the school, he has improved” (FGD K, TEACHERS F11).

Some other teachers also expressed similar sentiment about the UL and RC activities and its associated benefits to the children and even the teachers themselves. As one teacher explained during one of the focus group discussions, that *“I have also been a witness, last we went for a training and the head teachers were involved in the training that we were given, it is helping a lot, in terms of how to deliver reading and even how to make the reading interesting for the kids” (FGD Q, TEACHERS F17).*

From the data, it was evidenced that the print-rich also contributed to the success of the UL program and the RC activities. According to a female teacher, *“The provision of the teaching and learning Materials, that is the print-rich environment has contributed to the success”.* (FGD H, TEACHERS F8)

(c). Local Community Networks and UL Implementation

The study indicated that the UL is making an impact in the lives of the children in the local communities and the children in lower primary schools, everything has been possible because of the network of stakeholders in the local communities. The level of social capital and the synergy within the local communities has been contributing positively towards the implementation of the UL pedagogies through activities at the RCs. At the local communities' level, the following stakeholders have been working in different roles and capacities to support the implementation of the UL. They include parents, assembly members (local government officials), faith leaders, local community leaders, RC facilitators, CACG members, and World Vision staff.

CACG Members and Support to UL implementation

As for CACG members, although they also have a role to play in the communities, their roles and responsibilities are more focused on supporting RC activities. In this study, they pointed out that they monitor the RC activities and support the work of the RC facilitators, sensitize the parents about the camp activities and the need to encourage their children to attend the RCs, and organize training workshops for the RC facilitators. The training and support are provided to the RC facilitators by the CACG members under the supervision of the WV staff. So, the study sort to ascertain the nature of support being given to the facilitators, and how it is benefiting the programme and the children who visit the camps.

The nature of training given to the CACG members about the UL and RCs is very important to the UL programme, because the CACG members are responsible for providing support to the RC facilitators. The presence of the CACG group is very significant to the UL and RC programme so the WV staff provide training to the CACG and help in monitoring their activities as well as effective implementation of the programme in the various communities. All the CACG members who participated in the study pointed out that they were effectively trained by WV staff regarding the execution of their duties. These were some comments made by the CACG members;

“R1- We were trained for five days by World Vision about the UL activities and how we could provide support to the facilitators. (CACG1)”

Another CACG member (R2) also added that *“we were trained in 2019 by a WV staff in Kumasi for a week and we were taken through all the approaches of UL and ways of supporting the facilitators were made known to us through the training.*

We were told to train the volunteers as such we were given other games to support the training of the volunteers and to help the children read with ease. (CACG 3)”

Some of the things the CACG members mentioned they learnt from their training included the following:

- Techniques for effectively teaching children how to read.
- How to use the strategies to be in line with curriculum implementation.
- Blending teaching with games and other creative activities.
- How to sensitize parents who are not educated about the UL and RCs.

The CACG members added that World Vision gave them materials during and after the training and the materials were useful in the delivery of their work.

The CACG members also explained the training they give to the facilitators and any form of support being provided.

- Monthly reviews of activities RC facilitators perform at the camps,
- Provision of financial support for the development of teaching and learning resources being used at the RCs, and
- The CCAG members train the RC facilitators and support them to effectively implement the RC activities supervision, monitoring, and coaching.
- Train RC facilitators on areas or topics that the WV staff find relevant to the UL and RC activities.

One of the CCAG members a male during a focus group discussion explained how the RCs activities have been going on after the first data collection, the CACG member said, *“I think so far, so good things have been going on well. Attendance is encouraging, and the children's learning has also improved, their reading ability has improved, and they can read on their own. Most of them read in the churches, the read the Bible as well”*. (FGD A, CACG 1)

Parental Support and UL Implementation

Parents play a significant role in the education of their children because they have a responsibility of providing for the basic needs of their children. For this reason, the WV staff organizes sensitization meetings on the UL programme for all parents whose children are supposed to attend the RCs to enlighten them on how beneficial the UL programme will be to the children. A total number of 75 parents (41 males and 34 females) whose children or wards attended RC meetings were interviewed. The study noticed that the parents have a good

knowledge of RC and its activities. All the 75 parents who participated in the study explained that the level of community sensitization and awareness about the RCs is good. More than three-quarters of the parents (77%) interviewed stated that they have attended community sensitization meetings about the RCs and how they must support their children in literacy learning at home, while 20% said they have never participated in any community sensitization about RCs. Even though 58 parents said they were informed about RC, only 40 stated that they attended the UL sensitization meetings. [This last sentence is unclear to me.]

It became evident from the study that the parents learn a lot of things during the sensitization meetings. They pointed out the following as some of the benefits they had from attending the sensitization meetings:

- Parents learned how important it is to allow their children to attend RC meetings regularly.
- Parents need to ask their children about what they learn during their visit to the RCs and how they could support their children.
- Parents learned about community synergy which is very important because parents can contribute by identifying what is needed at the camps and how they can assist the facilitators.

Parents learned about the importance of using the mother tongue language to support their children to develop their literacy skills.

The parents pointed out that they would have appreciated their children to help them on the farm help them sell in the markets, however following the sensitization that they received from WV, they have realized the need to allow their children to go to RC. The parents gave reasons why they consider their children's attendance at the RCs very important. Some of the reasons enumerated are:

- To let them learn how to read in the L1.
- To prevent the children from lazing about and playing after school.
- Some of them (parents) did not have the opportunity to be educated. So, they are not able to teach their wards at home. RC will therefore be of great help to them.

During the FGD when the respondents were asked to describe how the family members support the children literacy learning most of the parent interviewed indicated that their family support the literacy learning of their children at home that; one father mentioned that “*The participation of the grandmother in their learning is exceptional*”. (FGD B, PARENT M2)

One of the children who is a girl mentioned that she is assisted to do her homework. She indicated, *“My sister assists me with my homework and helps me to read.”* (FGD A, CHILDREN F1)

A parent also mentioned that *“As for my child, the older sister assists her to learn at home”*. (FGD I, PARENT M2)

Two boys in a group also responded, *“Yes, my mother helps me read at home. My relatives help me read books and those I cannot read; they help me to read and pronounce the words”*. (FGD I, CHILDREN M8)

-
- Similar to the above responses, all the children in this group stated, *“Yes, our relatives, friends and parents help us at home”*. (FGD A, CHILDREN 1)

Assembly Members (Local Government Officials) and UL Implementation

Although the local government officials have different functions in the communities, the study identified the following functions that are related to their position. They visit schools to ensure that children attend school. They also organize communal labour to clean up schools and support educational activities. The sensitization of Local Government Officials about RC was also significant, according to this study. Of the 17 local government officials who participated in this study, 11 (64.7%) have not participated in any World Vision training or sensitization meetings about the UL programme or RCs. One official stated

“I have only heard about the reading camp and what I see is the engagement of children to keep them learning (LGO4)”.

Roughly one-third of officials (6 of 17 or 35.3%) had been trained or sensitized on UL activities by the WV staff.

As one official noted

“I had a day training by WV staff (LGO9)”. Another official described how *“the training is about the reading of Twi books, and I was trained for one week by World vision (LGO11)”*.

The local government officials (assembly members) also pointed out that some activities/ duties they do to support the UL activities and effective operations of the RCs include;

- Provision of financial support to the RC facilitators to purchase materials they use for their training and activities.

- Help sensitize the whole community on the benefit of RCs through announcements made at the community information centers and
- Regular visitation to the RCs to observe the children learn and monitor activities at the camp while encouraging the children to take the RC activities seriously.

Faith Leaders Support to UL

In Ghana, faith leaders play a very significant role in the moral upbringing of children as they instill the beliefs and values of their religion into the children. As a result, faith leaders were asked about the extent to which they are involved in the UL programme. Of the 38 faith leaders who participated in the study, 23 (60.5%) stated that they were sensitized by World Vision on RCs while 14 (36.8%) mentioned that they have never had any sensitization on RCs. One faith leader did not respond to this question. The majority of the faith leaders stated that the sensitization programme took place in their churches or community centers and focused on the following:

- The importance of using local dialect (mother tongue language) to educate children.
- How to teach letters, sounds, and words.
- How to involve themselves, as faith leaders, in improving the children's reading abilities.

The involvement of the faith leaders in the study was very significant because most of the faith leaders are leaders of the various churches and mosques [if they are not leaders of a church or mosque, what are they?]. In the churches, children are taught how to read the bible in the local language, while in the mosque's children visit *madrasas* to study the Koran. Therefore, the training that was given to the faith leaders was very significant to the UL programme. Besides, the moral upbringing of the children which is significant to the faith leaders, they can also support the work of the RC facilitators.

The faith leaders are contributing positively towards the implementation of the RCs and UL implementation. Out of the 38 faith leaders who participate in the study, 24 indicated that they have been visiting and participating in RC activities regularly, 11 had never been to the RC personally before and 3 did not take stands as to whether they are involved in the RC activities or not.

The support given to the RCs by the faith leaders includes:

- Contribute financial support for the RC activities,

- Advising parents and community members (especially those who go to church) on the importance and advantages of RCs to the children’s education.
- Organization of workshops for RC facilitators as to how to support the children in moral training.
- Pray for the children and the stakeholders towards effective implementation of the RCs and UL activities.
- Advise the RC facilitators to put in their best in helping the children.
- Educate parents on the benefits of RC to the children and
- Pay periodic visits to children at the RC and give them gifts and encouragement to patronize activities at the RCs.

However, to ascertain whether the children benefit from the work of the facilitators, the children were asked how the facilitators help them to perform activities in the RC. The children pointed out that;

- Helping us to read and pronounce and sound letters,
- They helped us to compose and sing songs,
- They told us stories, guiding us to write and draw in our books and
- Giving us materials such as books (reading books and exercise books), pencils, crayons.

Faith leaders and Traditional authorities make announcements for parents to take advantage of the RCs and allow their kids to attend the RC.

WV Support for RC Facilitators towards Implementation of UL

For effective implementation of the UL through activities at the RCs, the RC facilitators also receive enormous support from WV. The support being received towards the implementation of UL is in the form of:

- ❖ Training of volunteers to work as RC facilitators “*World Vision organizes training for us*”. (CF 3) “*They also organize review meetings for us and train us on how to help the children learn how to read*”. (CF 7)
- ❖ Provision of transportation support. “*They give us transportation when we attend training and workshop*”. “*WV provide us with bicycles*”. (CF 1)
- ❖ Provision of TLRs for the RC activities. “*They give us books, markers, and other relevant teaching and materials*”. (CF 2) “*They provide books and books banks*”.

- ❖ Monitoring and review of RC activities. *“They monitor our work”*. (CF 9). *“They also organize review meetings for us and train us on how to help the children learn how to read”*. (CF 7).

Analysis of the data shows that the backbone of the RC/UL is the support the program receives from WVIDF. It was revealed that WVIDF supports the RC/UL in the following ways;

- They visit the communities to coach the facilitators.
- Officials act as Liaison Officers between the community and volunteers.
- WVIDF holds monthly reviewing meetings with volunteers to address their challenges.
- They monitor the activities at the RCs.
- Provide teaching and learning materials for both the facilitators and children.
- Educate all stakeholders on their roles.

Apart from WV the RC receive support from community stakeholders. It was indicated that:

- Community members visit the reading camps to encourage facilitators.
- Facilitators are volunteers from the communities who do not receive any monetary rewards for their services.

Although the facilitators’ work is voluntary, they remain committed to the work. According to some respondents’ the facilitators spirit of volunteerism, their attitude and response to duty is commendable to the success of the RCs. One of the traditional authorities had this to say,

“When I observe the lady facilitator, she is very committed to the RC because she has time for the children and is very passionate about her work. When you come to the RC you will realise that she is patient with the children. So, the facilitation is going on well and I think that makes the children very happy”. (TA 14)

Similarly, one of the headteachers commented that the facilitators use the UL strategy well. He had this to say, *“I think the facilitators are applying the strategy very well as expected to relate with the children and this makes them feel at home to be able to learn as they play”* (HT 12).

Again, a faith leader gave similar explanation in support of the work the facilitators. He said,

“I have been to all the three camps but the one near me is the facilitators teachings. So, I can say the facilitator is patient and takes time teaching the children and that has contributed to this achievement. The way the facilitators have been trained to adopt games in their teaching and look after the children. This permits the children to get closer to the facilitator when in need” (FL 16).

WV Ghana Support for Implementation of UL

The literacy improvement started with Reading Improvement in Primary Education (RIPE) and later it was turned into Unlock literacy programme. Although WVI introduced the concept of RCs to improve literacy in the selected communities and the use of UL approaches in support of the delivery of literacy in the schools, the children attend the RCs, and provide support in several ways to improve the programme. The sustainability of the RCs is dependent on the level of support being given to the programme and to individuals who in diverse ways also support the implementation of the programme. It became evident from the local government officials (assembly members) that WV support the UL and RC activities by providing the camps with the needed materials (reading books, pen and pencils, manila cards, and crayons) to enhance the activities at the camps. They also build the capacity of the facilitators with the needed skills, advised the children, and sensitize parents on the importance of RCs and the benefits that go with if their children visit the camps.

Similarly, WV and GES also support the UL by providing transportation in a form of motorbikes for DTST members and training materials to be used at the RCs. One DTST member said that *WV supports us in terms of transportation and training materials*. WV also provides fuel to those with motorbikes from the districts and their local staff to the RCs. The WV also provides materials for the training of facilitators and the schools with reading material. One head teacher in an interview said, other external support received from WV to enhance the implementation of RC/ UL activities is as follows.

- They visit the camps to encourage and motivate the facilitators.
- They support by giving them structures to facilitate the implementation of RC.
- Together with the assembly members, they discuss how to raise funds to support the RCs.

From the data, a reasonable number of respondents agree that stakeholders support RC activities in various ways. The traditional authorities, families, community members and PTA visit the RC to motivate/ encourage facilitators for the voluntary, selfless, and dedicated nature of the work.

However, they revealed that the WV support the implementation of the RC activities in the following ways;

- WV provides all TLM such as books, crayons, posters, pencils, manila cards, cardboards, etc. For instance, they provide A4 sheets for drawing and the mats children sit on to enhance RC activities.
- Organize training programmes for the facilitators to help them teach literacy effectively and encourage them to work hard.
- WV visits the camp to observe and supervise the activities of facilitators and children at the RCs.
- Provide bicycles to the facilitators to carry children from long distances to the RC.
- Training of DTST and CCAG members on the use of the UL/RC model of teaching literacy and supporting RC facilitators and teachers.
- The Children and community stakeholders are also sensitized by World Vision.
- Provision of all TLRs such as books, crayons, posters, pencils, manila cards, cardboards, etc. For instance, they provide A4 sheets for drawing and the mats children sit on for RC activities.
- Organize training programs for the facilitators to help them teach literacy effectively and encourage them to work hard.
- Visits the camp to observe and supervise the activities of facilitators and children at the RCs.
- Provide bicycles to the facilitators to carry children from long distances to the RC.

(d). Local Community Network and Support for Children with Disabilities

Children with Disabilities and Special Needs

The study aimed at ascertaining how children with disabilities are supported or benefited from the UL. Although Ghana is supposed to practice inclusive education in their special needs schools across the country, teachers assume that children that have special learning difficulties are supposed to learn with their counterparts in special schools. Therefore, teachers sometimes take little notice of children with special learning difficulties or attribute such issues to behaviour problems. Teachers were asked to indicate whether some of the pupils they teach have any form of disability. A reasonable number of the teachers (59%) explained that there are children with disability in their class. While 38% of the teachers said they do not have children with disability in their class. The remaining 3% never responded to the question. The teachers mentioned the following as some of the disabilities identified with some of the children at the RCs

- Visual impairment,
- Hearing impairment,
- Speech impairment,
- Dyslexia,
- Myopia,
- Long-sightedness
- Physical impairment
- Other learning disabilities

Although there are some children with behaviour difficulties in class, the data could not specify the nature of behaviour difficulties and physical disabilities the teachers indicated in their class. In terms of support given to children with special needs and learning difficulties, the teachers indicated that the TLMs used in the delivery of lessons are designed in such a way that all children including those with disabilities also benefit from what is being taught. It became evident that the approach being adopted to teach UL is child-centered so no matter the situation every child benefited in the end.

The UL is a very significant component of the RC activities, however, the gender dimension, as well as the participation of girls and boys at the RCs is another crucial aspect that needs to be highlighted. One unique aspect of the UL and the RCs is the nature of girls' and boys' participation and how the stakeholders see it and provide support. So, the study sort to ascertain if there are any differences in terms of girls' literacy learning compared to boys' literacy learning. In other words, this question was unique, so the views of the different participants were sorted.

The respondents attested to the fact that the UL approaches are effective and useful in supporting children struggling with literacy development to overcome their challenges and make improvements. According to the GES/MoE personnel, the UL approaches have the potential of supporting children struggling with literacy development and children with disabilities in several ways. The GES/MoE enumerated the following as some of the benefits being derived from the application of UL approaches:

- The practice of inclusivity by admitting regular students and students with disabilities in the mainstream so that every child has a sense of belongingness. This includes students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, and students who are impaired physically as well as students with learning abilities.

- Encouraging teachers to use the balance score sheets to address the challenges of children with disabilities.
- Some children with disabilities were grouped to help teachers attend to them so they are not discriminated against and receive equal chances in the classroom.
- Some children with learning abilities have improved. This has made teaching easier because with the introduction of the UL/RC, parents are getting interested in their children's education making teaching easier thereby improving the literacy rate.

(e). Local Community Challenges Associated with RC

Faith Leaders Challenges

Although the UL has been in operation in some communities for some time there are some challenges that the participants enumerated hampering the effective implementation of the UL and RCs to improve literacy. Just like any new initiative, the UL was not void of challenges. Some challenges the faith leaders pointed out during the investigation include:

- Limited days/time for the sensitization session and
- Language barrier during the sensitization process.

For instance, one participant who lamented about some of the challenges they face had this to say: *“the sensitization focused entirely on the Ewe language, meanwhile, this community is predominantly Akan and that was a worry, we could not understand exactly what the programmes was about although we knew it was about the RCs. (FL32)”*. This was an indication that, some faith leaders did not understand the Ewe language that was used for the sensitization workshop.

CACG members observed challenges

According to the CACG members, there are a lot of difficulties in locating a good venue for RC activities in some communities. This is because people are not willing to release any unused or empty accommodation, they may have for the children to do their reading camp activities. Those who have places may not disclose, while some communities are not ready to build permanent structures for the RC activities.

An example from one CACG member in one of the focused group discussions explained that *“the camp is organized in the center of the community in an unconfined environment and so the noise from nearby houses distracts the camp sessions. We cannot find a good place for the*

session so it is difficult for the facilitators to do their work (CACG1).” The CACG members also stated the following challenges they are currently facing that are making their work difficult.

- Lack of permanent facilitators to help the children in the camps.
- Facilitators frequency of leaving the voluntary work affects the children’s performance because there is little continuity in terms of literacy support given to the children.
- Some parents do not see the relevance in RC activity so do not allow their children to attend RCs.
- Lackadaisical behaviour on the part of some RC facilitators due to lack/no motivation affect their performance and effective implementation of the UL.

When the CCAG members were asked about the challenges they encounter with the RC activities over the last seven months after the first round of data collection, the CACG members pointed out that the mobility of volunteers still remain a challenge for the UL and RCs. During FGD, a male mentioned, *“I think frequent travelling of the volunteers at the community level is a big challenge. Sometimes you go to the camp and the facilitator has travelled to maybe Accra or Kumasi you have replace with another volunteer so that is another challenge.” (FGD D, CACG 4)*

Similarly, another CCAG member added,

“Our challenge has been with the facilitators. You know, this is a voluntary work. They will be here, they're working, they're not paid. Though they come for camp review meeting, we just give them their TNT and feed them for the day. They relocate. Sometimes, some of the schoolteachers help at the RC”. (FGD E, CACG 5)

Another challenged addressed by the CCAG members is the venue for the meeting being not appropriate. During this FGD, one member stated, *“One challenge is that the place that, we are doing the reading camp, the place is not good so, we need a safe place” (FGD B, CACG 2).*

It was evidence from the data that parents sometimes engage children with household activities during RC activities. This was a response from one of the respondents *“Parents who misunderstand the RC activities rather engage their children sometimes preventing them from coming to the camp. A big challenge” (FGD A, CACG 1).*

Challenges Faced by Parents

The parents also indicated that some challenges affect the RCs. However out of the 75 parents who were interviewed, only 24% (18) of the parents whose children attend the RCs mentioned that they face some challenges. Some of the challenges they indicated include:

- The inability of children to assist parents with house chores
- The inability of children to run errands for their parents after school.
- Unequal distribution of gifts to children at RC.

The majority of the parents that is 76% (55) indicated that they do not experience any challenges associated with their children going to the RC. That is very encouraging and significant because the reasons that the 24% indicated are not very tangible because using the children to run errands or supporting parents at home after school should not be encouraged. Therefore, if a majority of the parents do not have problems with their children attending RCs then it is very encouraging and must be applauded for the good nature of the reading camps.

Local Government Officials (Assembly members) observed challenges

The local government officials explained that the greatest challenge they faced in the process of working with community members to support RCs for children was parents constantly engaged their children in farming activities and in the marketplaces to sell for them. They also pointed out that some of the RCs are held under trees which does not make the facilitators do effective work because when it rains the camps cannot run. One of the assembly members said, “*the community lacks the resources to put up a place the children can use for their camp activities (LGO2)*”.

General Challenges Affecting the Children’s Learning and the UL in Particular

Besides the challenges that were highlighted by the stakeholders above, there were some challenges that according to some of the stakeholders affect the children school attendance and for that matter the UL activities. According to one of the headteachers, some parents do not support their children in terms of education but overload them with house chores. One of the headteachers during an interview had this to say, “*parent’s enthusiasms towards the program are not encouraging. Some of the children go to school without books, pencils, pens, etc. because they do not have they borrow from friends which slows the progress of the lesson when they are given class exercises*” (HT 7).

Poor parental attitude towards education is one of the numerous challenges addressed by some of the faith leaders. In addition, some parents do not really understand the concept of the RC so they complain bitterly when ever children attend the RC session.

For instance, one of the faith leaders responded,

“The problem is that the attitude of parents towards learning is not encouraging. Some parents don’t understand the RC so, they are not interested in the camping activities. Because of that they don’t make effort to buy things like a book, a pen or sandals, school attire. So, a lot of children are involved in farm labour because most of the children need basic things for school like shoes, socks, etc. because they can only get these things when they involve themselves in farm labour to get money so they afford these things. So normally, when it is time for the RC, you will see some of these children involved in farm labour”. **FL 9)**

Furtherance to the above, one of the headteachers expressed his worries about how children absent themselves from school because they walk long distance to their house after school. This is what one had to say, *“The community is scattered. At times, the children walk about 2km to the school and maybe threatened by the weather, so, they are unable to come to school. Sometimes, because of the long distances they walk they get tired so they will not go to school the next day”* (**HT 11**).

Some of the head teachers who participated in the study also enumerated other challenges affecting the implementation of the UL. Some of the headteachers are of the view that financial constraints and shortage of teachers hinders the practicality of the UL programme. For instance, one had this to say,

“Because most of the activities are practical. The challenges we have is insufficient materials WV is providing for us. So, that limits us from buying enough materials and buy what teachers need to suit the children’s learning abilities...”. (**HT 2**)

Another headteacher agreed by adding,

“Though we have the teachers, we are not up to the number. Even though I am a headmaster, I have to combine KG 1, KG 2 and class 1 to teach. Sometimes I only focus on one class leaving the others and it is very difficult. Right now, the pupils are in the classroom making noise, if we are to have enough teachers, they will teach the children in their separate classrooms and that makes them teaching according to their levels” (**HT 20**).

These are some of the challenges that have been affecting the successful implementation of the UL and even at the RC where the UL strategies are also being implemented to help improve the children literacy development.

Another crucial challenge that was mentioned by one headteacher is the issue of government interference. According to the headteacher the GES interference with the UL programme is one of the causes of the challenges faced by teachers. The headteacher stated that, *“there is a GES policy called ‘T to E’ is also a challenge. This policy cannot be integrated but the UL strategies can be used to teach all the subjects. However, GES give us directives to stop the teachers from using the UL approaches and strategies”* (HT 3)

During an interview, one of the traditional authorities had this to say, *“One challenge I have seen is that the facilitators like travelling to the capital because the community does not support them so the RC is solely left in the hands of one female facilitator”*. (TA 14)

Similarly, a faith leader added,

“I have observed that because the camp facilitators are not paid, at times when they are going through economic stress they leave to look for jobs as a result they stop going to the camps to teach the children. At times too, when the farming season starts, the facilitators concentrate on their farming and leave the camp sessions. Normally, the facilitators will go to the farm and not return early enough to come to the camp...” (FL 19)

Similarly, the WVCDF also emphasized on a challenge that they have been facing with respect to selection and retention of volunteers for the RCs. One of the WV staff gave this explanation.

“The major challenge we face now is that the number of children keeps increasing in each camp and because of that we have to break some camps into two and others into three. RCs most challenge is getting committed Volunteers to carry out the camps. Initially, the volunteers will tell you, they will do the work. May be their perception that if they join, once a while they will get something. And if it's not coming, they are demotivated to continue volunteering. Hence, we are unable to get volunteers in most cases. So, sometimes we have one facilitator supporting the RC through out each section. As am Speaking now, we have a short fall of about thirty RCFs to fill. We have to now fall back on the community to provide other volunteers for us to train and it is a challenge for us.” (WVCDF 2).

The WVCDF also noted that,

“To select a facilitator for the reading camp we have criteria that we follow. That is, we don’t have to just select people who can do the facilitation work, but we pick facilitators who can read and write especially the local language is our main criteria but it is a challenge to identify facilitators who can facilitate using the local language. So, until we are certain that a person has the capacity to facilitate in the local language, this becomes a challenge” (WVCDF 2).

It was observed from the study that although getting facilitators is a very difficult challenge, retaining the volunteers is also becoming a very difficult challenge. This is because they are not remunerated so anytime they get any paying jobs, they leave the RC. It was further indicated that some volunteers are not dedicated and committed to the work because they consider the work as less important. It was also observed that the ever-increasing nature of the camper meant the demand of more volunteers was becoming a challenge.

(f) School Level Networks and Implementation of UL

At the school level, some key players also work in synergy to support the UL implementation through different pedagogies in the schools, support from the head teachers through supervision of the work of teachers, education officers support to schools through the provision of TLR for teachers, and inspection of the work of teachers. At the school level teachers, head teachers, education officials at the district education offices, and DTST members also provide training and support for the teachers towards their teaching and effective implementation of the UL.

Teachers Support for UL implementation

In terms of who supports the teachers receive towards the implementation of UL approaches in the classroom, the teachers explained that their work is being supervised by the head teachers in their schools. They also receive support from World Vision Staff, Parents Teachers Association (PTA), Parents, School Improvement Support Officers, and DTST staff. Some of the major areas they receive support from are the provision of TLMs, in-service education, and training organized by the Education Directorate for the teachers to improve their skills, refresher courses to build their capacity in the teaching of UL, among others.

Ascertaining whether the teachers have been trained is very important because they are supposed to apply the UL approaches in their literacy teaching in the classroom. Of the 56

teachers who participated in the study, 44 (78.6%) have been trained in UL by World Vision staff, 7 (12.5%) have not been trained and 5 (8.9%) did not respond to the question about the UL training. The 7 teachers who have not been trained on UL are likely to be either new teachers or have not been at the schools for a long period. Some teachers who were trained on UL by World Vision mentioned that they were trained on the following topics: phonic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, how to teach reading using TLMs, assessment, and reading, among others. They pointed out that the training was very significant to their lesson delivery, more especially in the teaching of language.

The teachers explained how they use the strategies in the UL to teach literacy in their schools. When asked to explain how they use the strategies some of the teachers interviewed had these to say.

“I write materials on the board and treat the keywords. I write the key words on the board, and I call the pupils to try and pronounce them. If they are able to pronounce them, I continue. If they are unable, I assist them by breaking the words into syllables and assist them also to identify the various letters which helps them to pronounce the words correctly. The UL strategies are very good for teaching literacy at lower level” (T13).

Another teacher also stated that *“I use the blending methods by putting the words together. I also use substitution method by asking pupils to fill the missing spaces with words. I also use phonological awareness method” (T30).*

I teach the letters and sounds for the children to know so that at least at the end of the lesson the children will be able to learn some sounds that they will be adding up to what they already know. And then as the lessons progress, I pause and ask them about the sounds to see whether what I taught them has been understood. (T47)

It became evident that the UL approaches have improved the skills of the teachers in the teaching of literacy. The strategies have also equipped the teachers to support children with disabilities to learn language more effectively. As to how they assist children with disabilities to learn literacy here are some of the responses of some teachers.

“With the learning materials (print rich) pasted in the classroom, the children can learn while the teacher is not with them. Especially they can identify the various pictures on the materials posted in the classroom” (T9).

“Depending on the disability of the child, the UL approach can help to support. For instance, mildly disabled children can cope with the approaches, unlike the profoundly disabled children who are not able to pronounce some sounds” (T41).

“Yes, it does because there are some of the pupils who have challenges in identifying alphabets but now they are picking” (T52).

Because of the training, we have learned that we have to give extra time to the slow learners and give them extra attention. So maybe when they are going home and they are not able to do the sounds and other things, the sounds would be written on paper for them to go home and they will come and read it for us to know. (T54)

Head Teachers Support for UL Implementation

The head teachers also key players in the implementation of UL in the schools they manage. The study showed that the head teachers were given some training to enable them to support, monitor, and evaluate the work of the teachers who are supposed to apply the UL approaches in the classrooms.

Explaining the training received from WV facilitators, one of the head teachers said;

“The training helped us to train lower primary how to read, letter knowledge, identify phonic awareness, to blend sounds, to form words, reading fluently, vocabulary then comprehension and ability of the child to read and do test” (HT 4).

Another head teacher also had this to say;

I learnt a lot. I learnt that before the child can read unless they know phonemics awareness and letter sounds. There were situations where teachers were using letter names to teach, and it was not helping the children. But using the right approach as taught by WV staff through the use of phonemics awareness and blending at letter sounds it makes the work easy and pupil understand what was taught and feel motivated to learn. (HT 6)

The head teachers use the strategy to supervise and monitor the teaching of literacy at the lower primary level. The headteachers indicated that the teachers' teaching has improved and is impacting on the performance of the students. These were some of the voices of head teachers who explained how the UL is improving the teaching of literacy and the student's overall performance.

“My teachers’ method of teaching has improved. Now they use advanced methods received from the training” (HT 1).

“It has enriched teaching. That is the positive aspect of the effects. Also, children give responses to questions asked by their teacher since they understand them well in their language (HT 5).

“The teachers were taught a lot of approaches of literacy, and I see teachers using them in classrooms. Because of the approaches students are improving in letter knowledge. Again, the use of points- rich materials enhances the teacher’s teaching delivery in the classroom” (HT 7).

Another teacher who elaborated his experience of the UL implementation had this to say;

Before UL approaches teachers were reading paragraphs for the children and asking questions but UL gave an understanding that words written on the board may be difficult for children to read since they do not know the sounds of the alphabets. A child must know the sounds and the alphabets to be able to read, blend sounds, and produces a word to be able to read. (HT 8)

Another head teacher explained that, *“formerly we were having a lot of challenges but after teachers attended unlock literacy training, they can now muster on how to go about reading, writing, and comprehension and so pupils have also benefited (HT 13)*

When the head teachers were asked whether their teachers use the UL approaches to teach in their schools, all the 19 teachers agreed the teachers use the approaches. However, when asked to explain how the teachers use the approaches these are some of the responses.

The best way to assess the teachers is through the performance of the pupils. A child in KG 1 can identify the sound and blend letters to form words. A child in P2 can read a simple sentence that hitherto could not do. The way the teachers prepare their lessons

and how they use TLMS demonstrate that the UL is assisting the teachers to literacy well to their students. (HT 4).

Some of the head teachers also explained how the UL is improving the performance of the children in their schools. *“It is improving because at first, the people were not able to read fluently but now, they can read perfectly as the UL approaches introduce (HT. 12)*

The teachers’ attitudes have changed due to UL. The teachers also use 30 minutes every day to teach reading and writing before the normal class lesson starts HT14)

“The use of the sounds helps the children put two letters’ words together to help them read and because of their print-rich classroom they can see some of the drawing and writing on the walls” (HT 17).

The head teachers explained that the UL is improving the performance of the children in their school concerning those in their schools. One head teacher explained that *“I am saying this because over the years now students struggle in reading but since the implementation of UL the children can now read on their own. The children can now break words into syllables and pronounce them” (HT 15).*

Another head also said, *“the concepts unlock literacy has enriched the teachers and with that understanding the teacher have taught knowledge well imparted to the kids” (HT 16).*

Although the head teachers ascertained that their teachers use UL in the teaching of literacy some challenges also hamper the effectiveness of their work in class. They explained that the lack of TLR has been a challenge. Some of the materials they need to make their classrooms print rich are not available. It is very difficult to get all the TLRs to make their lesson delivery better.

DTST Members and their Support for UL implementation

Data revealed that most respondents had played their various roles between 1-10 years. Their roles include District Director of education, SISOs, PTA executives, basic school coordinators, assistant, and general classroom teachers, primary school head-teachers, language coordinators, and early childhood coordinators. This was what one respondent had to say, *“I have been a circuit supervisor for the ten years now, (District Training Support Team (DTST))”*. The DTST are usually personnel from GES district offices who work closely with WV on the UL programme constitute the DTST members. They are District Education Public Relations Officers, Basic School Coordinators, Training Officers.

The Head-teachers, MOE, and DTST members promote effective teaching and learning according to the guidelines of GES. MOE and DTST members also visit, supervise, monitor, control, and report all educational-related issues to municipal/regional and then to the national level as far as education is concerned in other that teachers and students will be punctual to ensure effective teaching and learning in the school. The DTST members visit and support the KG teachers who mostly use the UL strategies and approaches in their teaching to help improve their performance in the classroom. One of the DTST members in response as to how they support the teachers said,

“We visit the KG teachers to observe how they use UL approaches in their teaching. We coach and support the teachers on how to implement the UL”.

The study reveals that DTST members were trained on the UL topic areas about the five core reading skills. They are phonological awareness, phonemics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. The use of known language and the introduction to the unknown language were later focused on. Components such as letter-knowledge, and reading fluency were considered as indicated by one member,

“The five core reading skills. We have phonological awareness, phonemics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary”. (DTST5)

The implementation of UL training was the best approach to train children in the lower primary because the programme was solely about literacy. According to head-teachers, MOE, and DTST members, the training adopted the teaching of literacy through the utilization of UL approaches and strategies such as letter knowledge, phonics awareness, breaking words into syllables, blending sounds to form, vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and reading fluently. The DTST members explained that how the children break down and pronounce complex words with phonic and syllabic methods demonstrates an improvement in their spelling and pronunciation of big words. The head-teachers added, the training helped them to relate well with the community on how to create a peaceful atmosphere for the teachers

The majority of head-teachers were of the view that the UL training has given teachers different approaches and techniques in teaching literacy thus making lesson delivery at the lower primary level very easy. The teachers have also been aided in the preparation of TLMs. The teachers are supposed to guide the children in reading by blending letters and sounds. One respondent a DTST member who takes part in the training of teachers had this to say,

“From observation, the teachers who have had UL training are now able to blend letters and sounds to guide the children in their reading. Even though not all the schools in the

district are under the UL programme, however when you compare the performance of the children in the schools under the UL programme to children in the schools that the teachers have not had UL training, you can see a very great difference” (DTST3).

Observation made by the DTST members indicates that there is a significant improvement in the reading abilities of the children. Another respondent also indicated that,

“There is obvious improvement in the reading abilities of the children who are taught by the train teachers” (DTST4).

Most teachers who gained knowledge about the UL have become more experienced in supporting children who are struggling to read. According to one of the DTST members,

“Those who have benefited from the training are more experienced than those who have not (DTST5)”.

Some MOE officials as well as members from the DTST have been trained on UL/RCs activities. According to one official from the MOE the UL training involved coaching, monitoring, and supervising the DTST members and the facilitators (some teachers who volunteered to facilitate with regards to the strategies and approaches as well as the RC activities. Emphases were placed on monitoring and report writing.

The majority of the DTST members stated that the training given to them was properly organized and executed. The facilitators were given opportunities to observe demonstration lessons which and equipped with mastery components of the UL skills we need to deliver their lesson for the children. In addition, the training was practical and full of activities that also covered every aspect of language literacy. One respondent indicated that,

“There was enough time for the training, the facilitators had mastery of every component they were supposed to be using for their teaching. The participants were punctual (DTST5)”.

Another DTST member also indicated that,

“We were taken through the rudiment of literacy in general, how literacy should be handled. The last training was in 2018. The training was organized by WV staff. It was for about five days. It started from identification of the letters, sounds, blending of both and strategies involved teaching literacy as well as how to teach songs and poems (DTST4)”.

Most head-teachers were also trained to use UL approaches and strategies to enhance RCs activities. The UL training involved literacy at the lower primary on how to teach children using UL approaches and strategies like letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and how to learn letter sounds so that children can write.

The DTST members stated some of their responsibilities as:

- Monitoring and evaluating the teachers to see if UL is yielding results in the classroom.
- Supporting teachers in the WV assisted schools to ensure effective teaching and learning and find ways to address any challenges encountered because of the implementation of UL programme.
- Coaching, organization of refresher courses, and observation of teachers on how they are implementing the UL strategies in the classroom.
- Finding out the progress the teachers are making concerning the implementation of the UL.

Data reveals that head-teachers and DTST members stated that the step-by-step training approaches used for the training were very useful and made participants understand the context in which they have to work. The participants were provided with the opportunity to learn new approaches and strategies for teaching literacy effectively. The training improved the knowledge base of teachers about the language literacy level of the children at the lower primary level. One DTST member noted that they were able to learn the five core reading skills needed to implement the lesson. According to the head-teachers, the training was relevant and effective because:

- They realized how their leadership style could affect their relationship with teachers on board and the community.
- It helped them to relate well with the teachers.
- It motivated them as head-teachers to organize in-service training for teachers who could not deliver UL approaches in the classroom to serve as capacity building in teaching literacy.
- The head-teachers felt motivated to supervise teachers in using the UL approaches and strategies.

Because the UL project targets children at lower primary and KGs, the DTST members also participate in the literacy training organized by World Vision staff so that they can support,

monitor, supervise and coach teachers on how they should teach literacy to children at lower primary. This is what one respondent had to say.

“I wanted to become a DTST because the literacy level in the district was poor and I had the intention to join in introducing new methods to improve the literacy and report to the district director”.

Another DTST member also explained that it was mandatory for those of us who are SISO to join so if you are SISO then you have no option but to join. Another respondent who is also a DTST explained that,

“The passion we have for the programme especially when we discover that the teachers are using the pedagogy appropriately motivates us to support them. Besides, knowing that there are issues with literacy in the schools, children cannot read well and I am part of the team helping the children to read fluently motivates me a lot to be part of the solution to children’s literacy challenge” (DTST5).

The awareness of the district’s deficiency in terms of literacy and taking the challenge in addressing such issues is another factor that motivated the activities of DTST members’ motivation to support UL/RCS.

Other reason that sustained the interest and how DTST members support the UL/RC activities includes:

- The welfare of children.
- It helps to introduce new methods in teaching literacy.
- Imparting/transferring knowledge to teachers on what they’ve learned. *“The programme targets lower primary and KGs and being the coordinator of early childhood education, I stand the chance to join and learn to transfer the skill set to the teachers in the”.*
- Support teachers to improve their teaching skills through capacity building.
- Supporting teachers to organize internal or in-school workshops and refresher courses with local experts.

The DTST members explained the support they give to the UL programme as;

“We train teachers and also visit the schools to coach the teacher on the best ways of implementation (DTST2)”.

“DTST supports the teachers in displaying some of the print-rich so that even in the absence of the teacher, the children can learn on their own. We also do monitor and coach the trained teachers in the UL implementation (DTST2)”.

“We also do follow up to assess the learners just to make sure they are following what the teacher is teaching (DTST3)”.

The DTST members organize refresher training workshops for teachers and take them through the components of UL and towards the successful implementation of the RC. They also monitor how the implementation of the UL is done by observing lessons as well as guiding them on aspects where they have challenges. Besides the DTST member make periodic visits to the classrooms to make sure the teachers are implementing what they are supposed to be doing in the classrooms. Furthermore, they support the teachers in displaying some of the print-rich materials in the classroom so that even in the absence of a teacher, the children can learn on their own. They also use the lesson notes, observation template being used in the schools to observe if the teachers are doing what is expected of them towards implementation of the UL and if it is impacting on the children’s learning of literacy.

Another DTST member said,

“Assisting teachers to create their teaching and learning materials by demonstrating how to introduce print-rich for the classroom to be effective. Another respondent had this to say, “We assess the children’s performance through their lesson notes and advise the teacher accordingly”. (DTST2)

Members of DTST stated that their training depended on whenever WV organizes workshops for teachers in groups by taking them through the components of UL measures and implementation. For instance, one member had this to say, *“We group the teachers and take them through the components of UL and measures of implementation. We also do refresher training for them and monitor how the teaching is going. (DTST3).*

The head-teachers provide TLMs in the form of manila cards, felt pens, cardboard, print-rich, pamphlet, pens, pencils, flashcards, reading materials, and writing materials manuals to teachers towards implementation of UL approaches in the classroom. However, other support given to teachers towards the implementation of UL approaches in the classroom according to DTST members include:

- ❖ observing and guiding teacher lessons on aspects of the UL programme where they have challenges.
- ❖ Assist in the organization of refresher training courses for teachers to carry out demonstrations during the coaching process for mentees to learn and introduce print-rich classrooms to them. One DTST member said, *“We do a lot of demonstration during the coaching process for the mentees to learn and we also remind them to use the display. R2- in addition to that, the introduction of the print-rich, classroom is getting full and effective. (DTST1).”*
- ❖ Assist the teachers in creating their TLMs

Data reveals that the DTST members train, coach, and monitor teachers’ classroom activities to determine whether a teacher is making an impact on the children by visiting the teachers at the selected schools. One respondent indicated that, *“We train teachers and also visit the schools to coach them on the best ways of implementation”.* (DTST1).

The DTST members also support teachers in displaying some print-rich so that children can learn on their own in the absence of their teachers. Members use lesson notes to observe and assess teachers as a means of doing follow-up.

The majority of the DTST members stated that, schools have print-rich classrooms and that helps the children to improve upon their reading skills because of the introduction of UL. They further explained that the print-rich materials created by the teachers and the pupils could be seen all over the classrooms whenever they go for monitoring. This is an indication of how the teachers are implementing and supporting the UL programme. One DTST member said, *“teachers now teach with the teaching and learning materials since the UL allows them to have supplies of manila cards, crayons, pencils that they can easily use to prepare well before they teach (DTST2).”*

Another DTST member also said,

“because of the introduction of UL, schools now have print-rich classrooms and that helps the children to improve upon their reading skills. The evidence is clear because, during our monitoring, we take pictures of what we see in the classrooms and all the print-rich classrooms. We show to other schools and teachers as to how they can also improve their teaching of literacy through the introduction of print-rich materials (DTST3).”

The use of UL and teachers' strengthened ability to support children's literacy are indicated below is evidence of how the UL is impacting the children's learning.

DTSTs organize workshops for schools that are part of the UL project.

The DTST members support teachers to effectively implement the UL approaches and strategies through supervision, monitoring, and coaching. They also generate a report on the implementation of UL in each school.

“DTST supports the teachers in displaying some of the print-rich so that even in the absence of the teacher, the children can learn on their own. We train teachers and visit the schools to coach the teacher on the best ways of implementation (DTST2)”.

“We do monitor and coach the trained teachers in the UL implementation”. We also do follow up to assess the learners just to make sure they are following what the teacher is teaching (DTST3)”.

Nature of training materials received

The workshops equipped DTST members with relevant information about the UL programme. The training materials given to us were very useful and it helped us to follow and practice the demonstration sessions. The training materials received from WV according to MOE and head-teachers were

- ❖ Training kits
- ❖ Reading materials like course handbooks and storybooks.
- ❖ Writing materials such as manila cards, felt pens, cardboard, print-rich, pamphlet, pens, pencils, flashcards, reading and writing materials
- ❖ Other supplementary materials like a timetable.

Although the materials were useful and contained necessary need skills, however, some of the participants explained they were bulky to read.

The data showed that all the DTST members agreed that the training in UL pedagogies had contributed to their ability to support the UL programme. They enumerated the following benefits.

- ❖ Improved knowledge base and performance on the reading skills.
- ❖ Awareness and acquisition of knowledge on the UL programme and RC activities have allowed understanding the rudiments of literacy which makes the teaching of literacy easier.

- ❖ Better understanding as to how the five core reading skills can be implemented during lessons and how teachers could be supported.
- ❖ Ways of building teachers' capacity in teaching literacy effectively and have become more competent in supporting the teachers.

The head-teachers also stated that their relationship with teachers in their schools had improved because they assist in the implementation of the UL programme. This is what one head-teacher had to say,

“Yes because some of the topics treated came with some materials which help in making references and assistance in the execution of the programme. It has helped us relate well with the various teachers” (HT5).

The DTST members also indicated the training has brought a lot of benefits. They stated the following benefits.

- ❖ Most teachers can now prepare and use TLMs and other print-rich materials that make the classrooms child-friendly and makes children enjoy the teaching of literacy.
- ❖ It offers the opportunity to train the head-teachers to serve as immediate supervisors when it comes to UL in the school.

Despite the benefits of the UL/RCS, few members of the DTST raised concerns about the fact that they were not aware of the content of the training as indicated. One DTST member said,

“I can't tell because it depends on the topic given to them to facilitate and it was my first time to be trained” (DTST1)”.

Another respondent also indicated,

“No, just that, the training was packed and so there was no time for relaxation and some participants got very tired. No. however, there is the need to extend the training days to seven (7) days” (DTST2)”.

While another DTST member also said,

“The training did not address how to manage the training of a group with multilingual feature (DTST4)”.

SMC/PTA support for UL Implementation

Majority of the PTA executives/SMC act as mediators between schools and communities during decision making. They also support schools and the communities for the smooth running

of the schools by organizing meetings involving parents in the organization of PTA meetings discussing the needs of the schools and taking decisions as to how to support them. In addition, they promote cordial and healthy relationships among teachers, pupils, and parents in order to ensure that teachers are not harassed by community members. Furthermore, the PTA help headmasters in running the school and help repair any damaged school properties. The following are other responsibilities as pointed out by the PTA during one of the focus group discussions.

- Ensure the smooth running of the SMC and see to it that there is unity among the community and the school.
- Address disciplinary issues that may escalate into conflict within the communities. And assist the teachers to address issues of stubborn children in the schools, problematic parents, and teachers.
- Seek for the welfare of both teachers and teachers.
- Help find solutions to problems confronted by the schools.
- Ensuring that the pupils do not loiter in the streets or bushes during school hours.

A female facilitator observed that the “ *some of the SMC/PTA members gave us space for the RC. They also encourage the children to attend RCs. They also visit the children’s homes to invite them to the RCs. There is community awareness sessions that are organized for members about the UL/RC project.*

The PTA members indicated they gained the following from the community awareness program organized by WV:

- Informed about how the implementation of the RC/UL program would aid children’s improvement in reading with fluency from KG to primary three.
- Informed about what they could do to secure a better future for their children.
- Informed about the importance of the RC and how it will help the children improve when it comes to literacy.
- Motivated to allow their children to attend RCs to learn to read fluently.
- Informed about how to care for children because they are future leaders.
- Educated on parental responsibilities in improving literacy and taking advantage of the free nature of the RC.
- Educated about the benefits of the RC and encouraged all parents to allow our children to attend.

From the data, a reasonable number of respondents agree that stakeholders support RC activities in various ways. The traditional authorities, families, community members and PTA visit the RC to motivate/ encourage facilitators for the voluntary, selfless and dedicated nature of the work. Faith leaders and Traditional authorities make announcements for parents to take advantage of the free nature of the RCs seriously and allow their kids to attend the RC.

On the other hand, WV support the implementation of the RC activities in the following ways;

- WV provides all TLM such as books, crayons, posters, pencils, manila cards, cardboards, etc. For instance, they provide A4 sheets for drawing and the mats children sit on to enhance RC activities.
- Organize training programmes for the facilitators to help them teach literacy effectively and encourage them to work hard.
- WV visits the camp to observe and supervise the activities of facilitators and children at the RCs.
- Provide bicycles to the facilitators to carry children from long distances to the RC.
- The traditional authorities, parents, community members, and SMC/PTA members visit the RCs to motivate/ encourage the RC facilitators for the voluntary, selfless, and dedicated service to render in the community.

The SMC/PTA feel encouraged to support the UL/RC activities because they testified to the fact that the project is improving the children's literacy development. This became evident during one of the focus group discussions with the SMC/PTA one of the communities. One of the committee members said this during a focus group discussion. *"What I will say is that before we came here my children could not speak the Ewe, but because of the RC my children are able to communicate in the Ewe. At my old place there was no RC. The RC is really helping children literacy"* (FGD F, SMC 6). The lady's testimony signifies the benefits of RC/UL to the children in the communities.

GES/MoE Support, UL Implementation and its Alignment with School Curriculum

The implementation of the UL has been successful because it is in line with the National Curriculum at the Basic Level. As far as teaching and learning are concerned, MOE/GES has a general policy on literacy in the education curriculum. A tool has been developed for teaching and learning for children at the KG. The policy spells out what should be measured to ensure effective teaching and learning at that early level. Such measures include the provision of infrastructure, TLMs as well as teacher selection, and the choice of language to facilitate literacy at the lower level (from pre-school to primary 3).

The MOE through GES works collaboratively with WV to support the implementation of the UL programme in the schools in various ways. These include:

- Organization of workshops for DTST members and empowering them to perform UL activities.
- Provide feedback from the activities of DTST through monitoring and reporting for the next line of action.
- Visiting and organizing monthly reviews and coaching support for the office on how to collect data from RCs for future use.
- Helping to train and retrain classroom teachers in their various schools as well as supporting in monitoring data collected on RCs.
- The officers play a supervisory role in place of World Vision.

As to whether the UL approach is in line with the National Curriculum, a majority (87.5%) of the teachers maintained that the UL is in line with the National Curriculum. While 5.4% stated they think the UL is not in line with the National Curriculum, the remaining 7.1% did not comment. Since some of the teachers either might not have participated in UL training before, it was going to be difficult to comment about whether the UL approaches are in line with the National Curriculum or not. The teachers gave examples of areas in the UL that support their claim that it is in line with the National Curriculum and stated reading, comprehension, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and fluency as some of the areas from the National Curriculum that the UL also highlight.

The data obtained from the MOE revealed that the Ministry is not aware of any agency implementing other literacy programmes. However, one respondent stated that a few agencies are also implementing some literacy programmes. According to MOE, the implementation of the following education policy documents regarding early grade literacy by some NGOs include:

- the introduction of NALAP at the lower primary on how to combine local language (L1) and English language (L2) to improve reading and writing.
- Learning 360 sponsored by USAID was being implemented as a transition through the English language
- Introduction of UL programme and RCs activities has been piloted from the KG to Primary 3 in five selected district schools.

- GALOP has also been introduced in schools and the purpose is to enhance pupils' academic performance even though not all teachers in the schools in the study area use the GALOP approach.

It became evident that the GES/MoE training to support the UL programme was very significant in several ways. They indicated that the training equipped them to be aware and provided them with knowledge in coaching, monitoring, and supervising teachers, especially with regards to literacy. However, the success of UL implementation depends on what sustains the interests of those who are actively involved and how they support the UL. The GES/MoE liaises with the training officers and subject coordinators, the school improvement support officers, to monitor what is being done in the various schools towards implementation of UL.

(g). School Level Network and Support for Children with Disabilities,

Girls' and boys' participation of RCs: Faith Leaders Perspectives

In responses to the gender equity and social inclusivity question, many of the faith leaders lamented that girls were victims of not attending school regularly. Their reasons were that; most parents could not provide their girl child with basic needs. One faith leader commented that, *“mostly, some parents do not provide the necessary support such as buying them sanitary pads among others and these girls turn to follow boys for financial assistance which sometimes result in pregnancy or dropping out from school. (FL3)”*. Another faith leader pointed out that the boys faced many challenges as compared to the girls. In making a point to support his argument the faith leader (FL9) pointed out that *“the boys are made to go to the farm, so they don't get the time to attend reading camp”*. Some faith leaders agreed that, both girls and boys faced different challenges and examples of such challenge given by one faith leader are *“Financial difficulty, broken homes, and poverty (FL18)”*.

Girls' and boys' participation of RCs: Local Government Officials Perspectives

The local government officials also explained that in their opinion the girls were disadvantaged as compared to the boys. One of the officials stated that *“because of girls' engagement in household chores, they are not able to participate in RC. Some of the mothers make the girls assist them in taking care of their little siblings at home (LGO2)”*. All the local government officials agreed that the boys are disadvantaged as compared to the girls. Although apart from LGO2 they could not give specific reasons to support their claim. Three (3) of the officials stated that both genders faced diverse challenges due to poverty and farming activities in the communities.

Girls' and boys' participation in RCs: Facilitators Perspectives

Most of the respondents indicated that girls and boys are given equal opportunities to participate in the RC activities. The head-teachers indicated that they give equal opportunities by;

- ❖ Distributing questions equally without gender discrimination so girls and boys would have the same chances to ask questions.
- ❖ Activities like debates are organized to motivate both girls and boys to develop their confidence in speaking fluently.
- ❖ Most teachers clarify strategies to both girls and boys in the classroom to encourage equal participation.
- ❖ Students are grouped according to their sitting arrangements, heights, gender, and learning abilities so they could collaborate.

(h). School Level Challenges Associated with Implementation of UL

UL implementation Challenges faced by Head teachers, Teachers and DTST Members

Most reading camps had yielded positive results in the communities, however, the analysis indicated that some challenges need to be addressed for successful implementation. These challenges cannot be overlooked. Thirty-eight (38) out of the 56 teachers interviewed teachers mentioned that they face several challenges in using the UL approach. Some of the challenges mentioned include unwillingness of Head-teachers to release money for the purchase of TLMs, the inadequacy of TLMs, challenges in involving children with disability, difficulty in reading on the part of some pupils despite using the UL approach to teach them, limited period of instruction, absenteeism of pupils, etc. while the remaining 25% of the teachers stated they do not have any problem using the UL activities in their teaching. However, 7% were silent about whether they have some challenges with the use of UL or not. The teachers explained that there are some gaps with the training they receive for the UL activities.

According to the perspectives of head-teachers, MOE, traditional authorities, RC facilitators, DTST, the PTA, teachers were confronted by some challenges in the following ways. The stakeholders also mentioned the challenges that affect the implementation of the UL as well as the RCs as; .

- Inadequacy of training materials for the training programmes.
- Limited time for the WV staff to give them adequate training.

- Difficulty in getting means of transport to the training centers, which results in some teachers not participating in some training sessions.
- Language of instruction during the UL training is also a problem because they sometimes use the local language (Twi) for the training. For instance, one of the teachers indicated that “*Twi was used during one of the training workshops. I suggest English must be used during the training so that every teacher understand what is being taught*”. This indicates that some teachers did not understand the Twi language, yet Twi was used as a medium of instruction for some of the training workshops.
- The teachers also maintained that some of the parents do not honour invitations by the teachers to attend to issues concerning their children’s schooling.
- Some of the parents also do not attend PTA meetings. This is unfortunate because at PTA meeting those issues affecting the children’s education are discussed. Therefore, if the parents fail to attend meetings it becomes very difficult to pass information that could be beneficial to the children to the parents. This is very significant because it is an opportunity for the teachers to have face-to-face interaction with the parents about the performance of their children.
- ❖ Little time and duration for the training to enable DTST members to get an in-depth knowledge of the training being delivered by the facilitators. One DTST member explained further that, “*the training was packed so it needs to be extended to seven (7) days or more to enable us to have a better understanding (DTST2)*”. Another DTST member also added that, “*the training did not address how to manage the training of a group with multilingual feature (DTST4).*”
- ❖ Unreliable and inadequate means of transportation make the facilitators of the workshop go to the training sessions late which affects the starting and closing times of most training workshops.
- ❖ The training should be organized for all teachers so that transferred and reshuffled teachers could also benefit from any literacy training so that they can also teach literacy effectively with the UL approaches and strategies.
- ❖ Teachers who vacate their posts or classrooms for days or weeks to train other teachers also affect the children they are supposed to teach.
- ❖ The training sessions that are organized during school days affect the children.
- ❖ An uncondusive learning environment for the RCs.
- ❖ Insufficiency and non-availability of workshop manuals.

- ❖ Alterations, resignation, and transfer of teachers trained with UL pedagogies from the schools make it very difficult for newly trained teachers without the knowledge about UL to teach literacy with the appropriate UL strategies and approaches.
- ❖ Inadequate and lack of funds of supplying TLMs and monitoring associated with the UL/RC activities.
- ❖ Because the majority of the RCs were under trees, hanging TLMs and print-rich were very difficult so the children could not learn on their own during break time. For instance, a teacher said, “*The challenge is that we need to use TLM all the time so I think so getting it sometime is a challenge*”. Financial constraints lead to Unavailable and inadequate access of TLMs to the teachers. In some cases, the classrooms were not print-rich friendly since the children also destroys them creating shortages.
- ❖ Financial challenges lead to an unconducive environment for the RC. The RCs are not roofed so when it rains most children do not attend the RCs regularly and even sometimes the RCs are close. On most occasions, the RC activities come to an end when it rains. In addition, most of the RCs are not spacious enough and print-rich-friendly.
- ❖ Absenteeism, truancy, and lateness on the part of some children do not aid the continuity in the use of the UL approaches since some of the children are slow.
- ❖ Insufficient reading materials for children.
- ❖ Language barrier because the curriculum at the RCs is not written in the local dilate.
- ❖ Lack of interest and commitment to supporting the RC financially in providing learning materials for their wards.
- ❖ The duration at the RCs is not enough and because the training manuals are directly in English therefore, translating them to the local language was very difficult and time-consuming.
- ❖ The facilitators struggle to gather the children to the RC cause the RC is far from the houses of most of the children.

In response to other challenges teachers were confronted with in the implementation of the UL, the head-teachers also stated the following;

- ❖ Some teachers find it difficult to speak their immediate community’s local languages and so they find it difficult to pronounce certain words.
- ❖ Adapting and implementing the UL approach was difficult because some teachers have not been trained on knowledge of UL approaches.

- ❖ The majority of teachers have forgotten about the strategies of the UL approaches since the implementation of the training took a long time.
- ❖ Laziness on the part of teachers implementing the UL approaches especially when they have not prepared home before that day's lesson.
- ❖ Teaching, learning, and coordinating activities of the children become difficult because most children from diverse age groups are mixed up.
- ❖ Insufficient sleeping mats
- ❖ Insufficient teaching and learning materials.
- ❖ The uncondusive learning environment,
 - “Some have their class under trees due to lack of classroom facilities and so they cannot hang the TLMs. No desks for the children to sit on if they want to draw or write. (DTST1), “Poor ventilation in some of the classes is a challenge to some of the teachers in the implementation of UL”. (DTST3), “because in, also most of our classes are opened so pasting print-rich materials is always a problem as some materials get stolen and others damaged. (DTST2*
- ❖ Financial crises and lack of involvement on the part of parents, *“Some of the children don't have the basic materials like pens, pencils, and books and this impedes the progress of teaching and learning. (DTST5 some parents refuse to buy exercise books and pencils for their children”.*

For example, one of the headteachers indicated, *“Some of the challenge is the UL programme has been structured in such a way that it should flows sequentially and when the children miss a lesson, they are not able to cover a certain lesson the teacher has to go back to be able to help them read”.* **(HT 6)**

Similarly, another headteacher added, *“For the challenge, some of the pupils did not start the program with their classmates. They come in and the teacher has to take the pupils back. They come in and the teacher has to take the pupils through. And you know some of them have taken the step and they are now going back.”.* **(HT 7)**

According to some headteachers, the nature of the UL program is not applicable to learners with different abilities. This is what he had to say,

“Okay one thing is, sometimes when you want to apply what you have learnt from the workshop. Because of the children learning abilities, sometimes the teacher will have to do a lot of changes to meet their level. What am trying to say is that you learn a strategy and it's a general one and you are applying it because you cannot compare the children in this communities to those in big towns. Their ability to understand is that fast enough” **(HT6).**

Another headteacher agreed by adding,

“Sometimes too, you will realize that because of the language barrier the kids do not get what you teach. The kids speak predominantly ‘kotokoli’. But as a teacher you will observe that communication is a problem especially trying to teach in the local language in the various classrooms. That is because we don’t have any ‘kotokoli’ teacher in the school teaching the UL in kotokoli is difficult” (HT 11).

On the other hand, one of the headteachers, mentioned that some teachers were transferred without replacement. This is what he had to say, *“Some of the teachers who have been trained on the methodologies and the approaches of the UL are transferred without replacing them” (HT 2).*

In addition, members of DTST also indicated the following as additional challenges that were associated with the UL work and they are:

- ❖ Insufficient teachers, *“some schools one teacher teaches both the lower and upper primary and hence teachers will have to share the period between these two classes and children do not benefit fully from this”.*
- ❖ The language barrier, *“Language barrier is a challenge is a challenge”. DTST4*
- ❖ Time factor, *“The time factor. After the COVID, the contact hours have reduced so teachers now complain of time limit”, “at the multi-grade each child is supposed to benefit from the instructional period but that is not the case” (DTST2) R1-*

(i). Girls and Boys Participation and Gender Dimension in UL

Teachers Perception of Girls’ and boys’ participation in RCs

As to how the teachers perceive the participation of girls and boys’ activities at the RCs, 39 teachers out of the 56 teachers maintained that there is a great difference between girls’ and boys’ participation in the learning of literacy. Only 15 stated there is not much difference between girls’ and boys’ learning of literacy. The ways of ensuring equity, as mentioned by some of the teachers include equal treatment for both genders, pairing both girls and boys in classroom activities, using both genders for demonstrations and illustrations in class, etc. There is no preferential treatment for some gender and not an element of discrimination is experienced in the classrooms or on the school compound. Both girls and boys are treated equally.

The UL seeks to improve reading among both girls and boys. Teachers' response to the question that seeks to inquire which gender of pupils is more vulnerable/disadvantaged when it comes to participation in RC indicated that both girls and boys are treated equally and none of them is disadvantaged. Reasons such as

- Lack of parental support for their children's education.
- Poverty which may prevent some parents to buy the materials needed by their children.
- lack of learning materials
- Laziness on the part of the children towards attendance to the RC
- Parents' involvement of pupils in farming activities
- Language barrier – that is some teachers who may not be able to speak and write local language being spoken in the area that is making it difficult for some teachers to support the children literacy development.
- Children walking long distances from home to school and to RC
- Absenteeism and truancy
- Lack of education on the parts of parents, excessive involvement of children in household chores
- genetic factors were some of the factors that make some children feel disadvantaged. Even then, those are not peculiar to any specific gender. The study noted that these problems affect both girls and boys equally.

Community stakeholders Perception of Girls' and boys' participation in RCs

Besides the experience the teachers have had with the children attendance to the RC, the community stakeholders also had their own perspective about the children's attendance and participation in the RC activities. So to ascertain whether there had been any changes with respect to the children attending to the RCs over the last seven months after the first round of data collection, participants gave variable responses as to the nature of attendance of girls and boys attendance to the RCs.

For instance, one of the LGOs stated that, *“with the attendance, the girls are more than the boys because the population of the girls in this town are more than that of the boys that is why the attendance of the girls are more than the boys” (LGO 11).*

Similarly, one member of the traditional authorities also attested to the fact that the attendance rate of the girls is far better than the boys. He had this to say,

“I’ve got children and grand children who attend the RC. The girls have always been asking permission that they are going for RC. So, I noticed the girls are more than the boys. You see this time if you look at the rate of birth and the population, you will see that the girls are more than the boys. That is why the girls attend the RCs more than the boys (TA 15).

Another LGO also added that, *“most girls attend the RC more than the boys because the boys are playful. The boys like playing football during the time for the RC activities. So in most cases it is the girls who attend RCs”.* (LGO 16)

Similarly, another traditional authority who also participated in the study also pointed out that the attendance of the girls is better than the boys. He explained that, *“all girls and boys attended but the girls attended more than the boys. Ok eh! You see, issues about boys are complicated. Because of football and other plays, they don’t get time but the girls you don’t have a lot of things to do so they go to the camp all the time”.* (TA 12)

The WVCDF also responded, *“I visited Denkyira Obuasi RC just last week to assess it how the RC was working and even though I didn’t really count the number of boys and girls, I think I saw as many girls as I saw boys. Probably if there were sharp disparities, then maybe I didn’t notice it”* (WVCDF 5).

Again, a faith leader agreed by adding, *“In the camp, I see more girls attending than the boys. Because the boys are very stubborn and they go out to play football when they close from school. Unlike the girls who are obedient and they will do their chores early to be able to go to the camp”.* (FL 10)

Similarly, another faith leader had this to say, *“what I have observed is that for the RCs, more girls are attending than the boys. Because we have realised that in this community, girls are supported to attend the camping sessions from their homes. I see that parents do not support the children to go to the camp more often in the case of the boys”.* (FL 9)

Furtherance to the above, data adjudged that some the faith leader also mentioned that at a particular season the attendance of boys was more as compared to the girls. For instance, this is what a faith leader had to say,

“During the cabbage season, the girls go and carry loads for money so, they are not able to attend the RC. At the age of 8 years, girls have to look for money to take care of themselves. The cabbage era is from June to August. So, the girls normally carry

“Aaaaa” more than the boys and that is why the girls do not attend the RC than the boys”. (FL 18)

Similarly, another faith leader added,

“The children do go to the RCs in their numbers. I can see that the boys are more than the girls because when it getting to the evening time, normally the parents want the girls to come home and help them in the kitchen so sometimes some of the girls don’t attend the reading camp in their numbers”. (FL 2)

In spite of the varied responses about the attendance of the children, all the traditional authorities attested that more girls attended the RCs than the boys. One had this to say,

The girls attend the RC in large numbers compared to the boys because the boys sometimes go to the bush and play soccer so you can’t reach out to them. The girls are always in their house; all you need is to tell the girls that the RC will be coming off and they are the ones who goes around to inform their friends as to when the RC would be coming off. For boys, it is very difficult to reach out to them. (TA 13)

Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Children in UL Programme

Some issues that make literacy delivery are teachers' and facilitators' knowledge about children who are vulnerable or disadvantaged and how best to assist such children to benefit from UL and RC activities. The study showed that the MOE and other stakeholders have several ways to support vulnerable early primary school-age children, particularly concerning literacy. These include:

- ❖ G.E.S works with the department of social welfare to identify needy children to give them free school uniforms.
- ❖ The introduction of a school feeding program in selected schools makes it possible for all children to access early grade irrespective of potential barriers of social-economic backgrounds of some of the children. It also promotes nutrition, child health, and the development of all early graders.
- ❖ MOE has an inclusive education policy that makes it possible for all children, abled and disabled to be able to access the mainstreamed education environment which is responsive to the learning needs of diverse learners.
- ❖ MOE, GES, and the MMDAs construct school facilities including KG in many rural, far-to-reach communities to support the education of the early primary school-age

children. This is to ensure that those young children do not walk long distances to attend schools.

- ❖ CHRAJ and NCCE have a program that engages the communities through sensitization and collects data on such vulnerable and needy children.

According to the respondents, the most disadvantaged/vulnerable with the education of all early school-age children are:

- ❖ Most girls in the rural, far-to-reach communities.
- ❖ Children from poor homes
- ❖ Children with learning disabilities.
- ❖ Children who do not have special educators in their schools to identify and assist them, especially those with down syndrome.
- ❖ Teenage mothers. The school dropout related to teenage pregnancy affects the girls and so most of them are unable to continue their education after getting pregnant.

Unfortunate thing is that most schools lack special educators who are specially trained to identify and provide support to such children. As a result, they are handled in the same manner in the mainstream making it difficult for them to learn effectively.

Children (i.e., boys and girls) who are most disadvantaged or vulnerable face different kinds of challenges because:

- ❖ The mentality and customary belief that boys should be more educated than girls puts the girls at a disadvantage point. Therefore, girls may be married off soon after primary education to begin a life. So much attention and opportunities are given to boys in terms of education
- ❖ Financial challenges on the part of some parents make it difficult for them to buy materials like books for their children while the activities of the reading camps do not benefit those who are physically challenged.
- ❖ Girls are likely to be absent from school or come to school late since community culture and gender issues do not allow them to come to school every day and on time. Parents who engage their children in household chores at the times they are supposed to be in school but most girls in situations that make them disadvantaged in terms of education.
- ❖ most schools lack special educators, trained to identify and provide support to such children as a result the vulnerable, disadvantaged, and disabled are all handled in the same manner in the mainstream making it difficult for them to learn effectively.

All respondents indicated that although, girls and boys have equal opportunities to attend the reading camp activities however some community factors affect girls and boys differently on their participation in RCs. These differential issues have implications for gender and education in the communities. These factors are:

Some parents engage their girls during market days while most boys are engaged in farming during the rainy seasons which hinders them from attending RCs.

“We have some girls engaged during market days to sell as well as boys in the farm when it is farming or fishing seasons”.

“In the Island communities where most of the boys go on fishing, the classes are filled with girls and that makes them perform better in school and at the reading camps compared to the boys”.

Girls are likely to be engaged in household chores in the afternoon and evening while boys have time for after-school activities. Almost all respondents agree that most girls wake up very early to start their house chores whilst boys stay in bed and this makes the girls tired even before coming to school and that affects learning abilities negatively compared to boys

“From observations, I realized that the boys are normally in their numbers when you visit the schools or reading camp. This is because the girls are home attending to the house chores and this puts them at a disadvantage academically. “Most girls are usually engaged in household chores whilst the boys have time to either play or study their book” (LGO6).

Some of the parents are also not supportive towards girls' education because they believe the girls will marry when they complete that level of education and so are always supportive of the boys in terms of materials such as pens, pencils, etc.

“I once witnessed a girl who picked her books to go to the reading camp and her mother stopped her and asked her to go and fetch water, I had to intervene and explain to the mother the need for the girl to attend the reading camp and she should schedule the chores so that the girl can do them way before the reading camp time”. ((PTA 2)

(j). Changes in Communities and Success stories

Nature of Changes

The introduction of the UL in the selected communities has not only brought some changes in the literacy development in the children living in those communities but also changes in the

communities where the UL programme is being implemented. Concerning the nature of change in community members' support for children's literacy, the data shows that improvement in children's literacy skills led to the renewed interest of community members in children's literacy development and their commitment to supporting their children's literacy activities at RC, schools, and homes. The data reveal the nature of changes in community members' support for children's literacy:

- ❖ PTA members and parents visit their children in the schools and help their children to study at home especially when they bring homework home.
- ❖ Parental awareness about the benefits of UL/RCs has increased in the communities. Parents now take a keen interest in the RC and advise their children to participate in it.
- ❖ There is optimal cooperation among stakeholders on the RC activities which is leading to improvement in the children's literacy and academic performance.
- ❖ Some community members act as volunteers to facilitate activities at the RCs
- ❖ Community members/ facilitators encourage all children to attend and actively participate in the RCs activities.
- ❖ Improvement in children's interest in reading. The majority of the children were now seen reading in groups, especially during after-school hours.

The CACG members affirmed that they have noticed changes in how community members are supporting children's literacy in the community since the reading camps began. The nature of the changes observed include;

- Parents' provision of learning resources to their children in school.
- Community members' willingness to support RC activities.
- Parents' willingness to assist their children to read at home

The CACG members explained that all those observed changes could be attributed to the World Vision officials, UL programme, RC facilitators, and how the community members also support the RC activities that have contributed to any changes observed in the communities. The UL approach which makes use of the local language in teaching the child has brought about significant changes in children's reading, children's active interest in school, and their involvement in the RC activities.

The parents also indicated that they have observed changes in the community and among the children since the inception of reading camps. Some of the changes they have observed include;

- Children's ability to read texts in the local language.

- Some of the children can read the Bible in the church, which is very good.

Most children no longer roam about after school.

Significant Change

Most of the respondents believe that the observed improvement in the children's abilities to read is the most significant of all the changes associated with the introduction of RC in the school communities. The change is very significant because the children can read books fluently, they can identify and mention words on their own.

“The improvement in the reading abilities of the children is the most significant change because for the community to develop, education is key (WVIDF2)”.

Contributing Factors to the Observed Changes

The respondents provided many factors that have contributed to the observed changes, which were all connected with the UL/RC project:

- ❖ Workshops organized for teachers on the UL approach by WV and refresher courses to update teachers’ knowledge and skills on more child-friendly pedagogical skills which they apply in the literacy delivery. For example, the children can read, they start from the letter knowledge and sounds, which they use to blend, form words and sentences. Then they can read paragraphs.
- ❖ Teachers’ ability to adapt, practice, and implement UL strategies and approaches after they receive pieces of training.
- ❖ Personal qualities of trained RC facilitators, their level of commitment, and dedication to the RCs.
- ❖ Sensitization and engagement of the community aided positive parental attitudes toward their children’s education.
- ❖ Collaboration and the willingness between various stakeholders to be involved and allow their children to participate in the UL/RC project.
- ❖ Regular attendance of the children at the RCs to participate in RC activities.
- ❖ The motivation of children to read fluently by the constant use of print-rich materials and improved teaching methods.
- ❖ Provision of book-bank with storybooks, teachers guide, pencils, and erasers by WV.

As indicated above, the UL/RC project in the schools and communities by WV and its activities is the main factor accounting for the observed changes concerning literacy development in the school communities.

The study identified changes in the children's literacy development in the school community because of the introduction of UL/RC. Some of the changes relate to the introduction of the UL/RC that have contributed to children's literacy development include:

- Most children have developed an interest in literacy due to the child-friendly approaches and strategies adopted on the UL program such as phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, syllabic, blending, and picture drawing.
- The regularity and punctuality of the children are improved since they are excited to take part in activities in the classroom and the school.
- Adoption and application of UL strategies and approaches teachers received from the training lead to improvement in reading abilities in the classrooms.
- The use of a balanced scorecard helps the teachers to identify their children's needs accordingly.
- Children motivated to read fluently by the constant use of print-rich materials, improved teaching methods.
- Parental engagements on sensitization and awareness about the RCs.
- The establishment of the reading camp and the introduction of UL approaches and strategies.
- The facilitators' training, commitment, and dedication.
- Regular attendance of the children at the reading camp initiated the change at the RCs.
- Children borrow books from camps to read at home
- Community members' attitude towards education has changed.
- Children who had no interest in school have developed massive love for school due to the RC activities.

Changes in the Lives of Facilitators

The RC facilitators indicated their participation in the RC activities has brought a lot of changes and added value to their lives in many ways. The changes that the study noted have occurred in the lives of the facilitators because of their involvement in the RCs include:

- ❖ Confidence-building *“I was very shy, but they will give us work to do and present it and it has helped me to put that shyness away”*. (CF 5)
- ❖ Improvement in their love for children *“My love for children has deepened (CF1)”*.
- ❖ Development of patience in working with children *“I have become more patient with children than before”*. (CF 8)
- ❖ Improvement in their knowledge on literacy *RI: “Acquiring of in-depth knowledge on letter sounds”*
- ❖ Learning teaching skills and improvement in teaching practice. UL strategies have added to their existing knowledge of teaching children. The interest in preparing teaching and learning materials has been aroused *“It has helped me to become a better teacher. I have improved upon my skills”*. *“It has developed my methodology and skills in teaching”*. *“I have gained more strategies to teach children how to read and also how to create materials for teaching and learning”*.
- ❖ Building of relationships with parents and community members *“It has built a good relationship with the community members”*. (CF 14) *“It has promoted a special relationship among teachers and parents.”*

Changes in the lives of children

The use of the UL approach in the school together with RCs in the communities has contributed to children’s literacy development. The observed changes include:

- ❖ Improvement in reading abilities with regards to literacy. This is because the children have developed confidence since they can read fluently.
- ❖ Most of the children have developed a love for literacy since they can express themselves in public especially during the school assembly, while those who go to church can also read the Bible.
- ❖ The children can also read without the guidance of their teachers or parents.
- ❖ The enthusiasm of the children to go to RCs after school is high hitherto when the children used to loiter around because there was nothing for them to do after school.
- ❖ Children’s interest to go to school is high because of their confidence to read fluently.

Contributing Factors and Success Stories

The intervention of UL approaches being used to teach the children in school and the UL strategies being used at the RCs has contributed to the success as manifested in the improvement in children’s literacy skills and love for reading.

- ❖ The implementation of UL approaches and strategies in the schools and the introduction of RCs in the rural communities by WV.
- ❖ The support from WV through parental and community sensitization and awareness about the RC contributed to the success.
- ❖ At the RCs, children learn through role-play and games. This makes it easier for beginners in reading to develop interest.
- ❖ The willingness and interest of the children to attend RCs and learn.
- ❖ Children taking leadership roles due to their confidence to read in public as a result of their participation at the RC.
- ❖ Most parents are supporting their children learning in many ways that is very encouraging and motivating for the children and even the facilitators and teachers.

(k). Ways of Addressing Challenges Facing the UL and RCs

To make the UL and RCs activities sustainable the participants made several suggestions that stakeholders must take into consideration. The CACG members suggested that;

- There is a need to motivate the RC facilitators so that they can devote their time and assist the children because it is just voluntary work and not salary work.
- The sensitization exercise must not stop and should be regular in the communities and homes so that parents who do not allow their children to go to the RCs stop using their children on farms and in their businesses so that the children can also benefit.
- Teachers who receive training in UL techniques, as well as the DTST, should mentor the facilitators to improve upon their work at the camps.
- The parents must be discouraged from making their children assist them in the preparation of their house chores so that the children can participate in the camp activities because it improves their learning.
- Occasional distribution of gifts to children at the RCs which some parents think is a way of motivating them should be fairly done to ensure that no child is left out.

The DTST members also indicated some of the things that could be done to overcome some of the challenges the study identified hinders effective implementation of UL:

- ❖ Pleading with District Director of Education to liaise with the HR to ensure that trained teachers remain at the post for two or three years in order to deal with teacher deficit and rampant transferred teachers from the district.

- ❖ Pairing DTST members so that those without motorbikes can benefit from those who have through their rounds.
- ❖ DTST members reach out to their constituency Parliamentarians to speak to the Minister for Education in order to facilitate the posting of more teachers to the district especially those from the district.
- ❖ Organizing refresher courses as a capacity builder for those to be newly trained in the UL pedagogies.

The efforts of the head-teachers to overcome the challenges include the following:

- ❖ Making provision for TLMs from the capitation and IGF by working with the community through SMC and PTA whenever SPIP was prepared.
- ❖ Ensure new teachers put up their best in the implementation of UL approaches.
- ❖ Swapping a class teacher with a teacher good in their immediate L1 to takeover whenever students have literacy lesson. One respondent said “*What I use to do..... Since it from class 1-3, anytime it comes to this literacy lesson I seek for an Ewe teacher to come and swap with him*”.
- ❖ Organizing In-service training and staff meetings for teachers to support the UL approaches.
- ❖ Fixing of doors, windows, and fence the KG block with wire mesh to prevent people from destroying the learning materials.

In order to address various challenges associated with the implementation of UL programme, the PTA mentioned that:

- Parents and entire community members must help in putting up a better place for the children at the RC. For example, looking for a permanent shed for the RCs and providing a roof top to protect the children during rains.
- Children who are punctual and regular at the camp should be rewarded in order to motivate other children to emulate.
- The meeting days at the RCs should be changed from after-school sessions to the weekends.
- Facilitators should be motivated financially.
- The UL syllabus should be written in the native language for easy understanding and translation in order to deliver effectively.

- Intensive sensitization on parental awareness of RC/UL to help other parents understand and see the need of sending their children to the RCs.
- Children should be grouped into age groups such that each age group is assigned to a facilitator for easy coordination and teaching.

These are voices of some DTST members addressing the question of how to overcome the challenges of the RC;

“There must be continues training for teachers and those without desks and classrooms need to be provided with those facilities”. (DTST1)

R1- ‘Resources such as books to aid the children to learn is very important therefore parents need to be educated on their responsibilities regarding their children’s education’.

R1- “Teachers who can use the local dilate need to be trained so that they can teach well with the use of the local dilate. R2- We can also encourage GES to post teachers to the communities where they can speak their language”. (DTST4)

(I). Impact of Covid-19 and weather conditions

Impact of Covid-19 on UL/RC

The study sort to ascertain the effect that COVID 19 has had on the UL and RC activities from the participants. However, 53 out of the 75 parents who participated in the study explained that COVID 19 also affected activities of the RCs, since the government made people suspend any activity that involved public gatherings, the RCs were also closed at some point in time. Even after the government permitted some churches and some public gatherings to start with some COVID 19 protocols in place the number of children that did go to the camps was reduced. Some parents did not want their children to go to the RCs. Like one facilitator pointed out;

“We cannot force the parents to allow their children to attend RCs, because everybody was aware of the pandemic. Even adult was afraid of the virus so there was no way to compel parents to allow their children to go to RCs. After all, schools were even closed so why ask children to go to RCs to learn (FL9)”.

Another facilitator had this to say; *“although all the places the RCs exists are all villages and people knew that the virus was predominant in the big cities, most parents did not want their children to attend the RCs (FL3)”.* This was a genuine reason that affected activities and

operations at the camps until the government allowed schools to re-open, and the children began to go to school.

All the parents affirmed the effect that COVID 19 had on the RCs and their related activities. Like the parents, all the CACG members also admitted that the COVID 19 pandemic affected the smooth activities of the RC. Some CACG members explained that; *R3- During the lockdown, we were not able to monitor the camps because of the restrictions. This is because the facilitators were not meeting the children (CACG1)*". Another CACG member said.

"Because of the COVID 19 the parents were afraid to allow their children to go to the camp meeting due to the COVID 19 so camp activities were limited to only book borrowing. That is the children will visit and borrow the reading books and the facilitators will explain to them the number of days they can keep the books and the date they should return the books (CACG2)".

Another CACG member said, *most of the reading camps are organized under trees and so whenever it rains, the facilitators are not able to meet the children (CACG1)*".

Another CACG member who responded to the COVID 19 question also pointed out that; *"we are unable to go for monitoring when it rains because some of the communities are in the hinterlands, which are difficult to reach when it rains. Camp meetings are always suspended whenever it rains because most of the camps are organized under trees (CACG2)"*.

One of the local government officials (an assemblyman) also explained that; *"the pandemic has caused fear and panic in both parents and children. This has affected the children's attendance to RC (LGO12)"*

The faith leaders also made their comments about how COVID 19 affected the RC/UL activities. *"We couldn't meet for camp for almost a year because it was against the public health laws (FL2)"*. Another faith leader added, *"due to the fear of our children contracting the virus from their colleagues, most parents prevented their children from going to the camp and this halted the progress they were making with regards to their reading skills (FL4)"*. Even if the facilitators were even prepared to assist the children in their learning of literacy, the government policy that prevented big gatherings was not going to allow the RCs to function.

The DTST members also indicated the following as how COVID-19 negatively impacted activities at the RCs and schools.

- ❖ The COVID 19 pandemic led to the closure of schools by the government which halted the implementation of UL in the schools. This was what one DTST respondent had to say *“schools were closed down for about eight months and schools had to resort to virtual teaching and learning which was not effective considering the poor access to radio and internet”*.
- ❖ COVID restrictions by the government of Ghana on social gatherings affected the RC since the activities at the camps were put on hold. COVID restrictions on the size of people meetings affected the ability of the children to meet and learn at the RCs. Again, most parents did not allow their kids to attend the RCs due to fear of contracting the virus.
- ❖ Training, monitoring, and supervision of teachers on the implementation of the UL were not done because of the COVID restrictions. As indicated by one respondent *“We could not also attend any training and could not also train any teacher”*. *“The reading camps were closed down due to the covid restriction and that affected reading levels of the children”*. (WVIDF2).
- ❖ The majority of parents who benefited from the labor of children in terms of support with income ventures, assistance on farming activities, and house chores became reluctant to allow or encourage their children to return to participate in the RC after the lockdown.
- ❖ Children from poor homes, rural and far-to-reach communities who had no access to national radio and television were left behind since they could not benefit from virtual lessons. As a result, they were unable to catch up with academic activities and some did not want to return to school.
- ❖ Most boys who went into the trade to supplement the income of their families and to make money on their own have decided not to return to school.
- ❖ Some children also lost interest in the RC activities due to the impact of the pandemic.

The closure of schools and RCs due to COVID-19 led to learning loss and eroding of some of the gains made as most children forgot most of the things they have learned.

It must be noted that WV was particular about the observance of COVID-19 protocols at the RCs during the peak of the pandemic and when the restrictions were lifted and the children started attending to the RCs.

“When the lockdown was lifted, we provided the RC with nose-masks, hand sanitizers, and handwashing facilities to be able to observe the safety protocols while having training”. (WVIDF1)

After the lifting of the COVID-19 protocols the children's attendance to the RCs went back to normal, although at some of the camps, attendance had reduced. Either some of the children were not attending regularly as expected, although majority of the RCs were receiving high rate of attendance.

Bad Weather Conditions: Rainfall, floods, and other natural disasters affect Children and RC activities

Apart from COVID 19, rainfall also affects activities at the RCs. Most of the communities do not have a structure for RC hence RC meetings are mostly held under trees as earlier explained by the CACG members and the RC facilitators. When it rains, the RC activities are affected because the children can't learn under the trees in the rain. Besides, younger children living in communities across rivers are also affected by rainfalls and floods. According to the respondents, rainfalls and floods have negative effects on the activities of RCs.

- ❖ Since most of the RCs are held in places that are not roofed or under trees, rainfalls disrupt activities at the RCs. It causes the abrupt end of the sessions and prevents children from attending RC.

“Most children are unable to attend camp sessions whenever it rains since the RCs are held under trees and not enclosed rooms disrupting and bringing the RC sessions to a halt”. “The camp session is done at an open place so whenever it rains, we are unable to go to the camp (CF 7).”

- ❖ Another added, *“When it rains the children do not come out to attend a reading camp”. (CF 8)*
- ❖ Rainfall sometimes gets reading materials like books, posters get wet.
- ❖ Flooding of river bodies, gutters, and low-lying communities prevents children from attending RC and schools. Some area gets flooded and so most children who live around those places are not able to make it to the camps.

UL/RC and the Way Forward

Even though the UL activities are being used by teachers and RC facilitators to assist children's literacy development at the RCs as well as children in lower primary schools, the study suggested how stakeholders wish to see the RCs in the future.

- There should be continuous sensitizing meetings and workshops for community members on the benefits of the RC

- Certificates should be provided for volunteers/facilitators as a form of recognition of their work and evidence of what they do.
- Facilitators should be given a token or monthly allowance should be given to them as a form of motivation to enable them to do the work well.
- The UL program should be extended to the upper primary because it helps improve children's performance in reading and other literacy activities.
- There should be regular workshops and in-service education and training for teachers who teach at the lower primary level to build their capacity on the UL.
- A permanent structures should be put in place for the RCs activities.
- WV and organizations that are in children's literacy development should help to provide teaching and learning materials at the RCs.
- WV should find a way to scale the UL/RC activities to cover schools and communities across the country so that more children can benefit from the UL program.
- The duration of the training workshop for teachers and RC facilitators about the UL program should be extended so that participants can have a better understanding of the UL teaching strategies and approaches to enhance their performance.
- In-service training and continuous professional development must be conducted periodically to enhance the skills of old teachers and for newly appointed teachers as well as teachers who have been transferred to schools to enable them to be able to apply UL strategies and approaches effectively
- The work of teachers who teach literacy must be monitored so that the skills they acquire through UL training are effectively utilized for the benefit of the children.
- The UL program should be adopted nationally so that all teachers would benefit from it.
- The number of facilitators should be increased at the RCs so that at any time there are camp activities.
- There should be a provision of more TLMs, training manuals to teachers, etc.
- Government should adopt the UL program so that it will be extended to other parts of the country.

m). Sustainability of the UL Project and Possible Scaling Up of the Project

One major concern about the UL was how to sustain the project and a possible scaling-up to other communities in which the project was never implemented and could be implemented in the future for children within those communities to benefit. The participants were asked what could be done to help sustain the UL project. A member of the CACG explained during one of the focus group that without the support from World Vision they will continue to provide support for the facilitators to continue their activities at the RC because they love the children. He pointed out that, *“most of us we loved to work with the children. So, in the absence of World Vision, some of us will take it upon ourselves to support the RC with the necessary materials and training of facilitators. So, we will continue the camp work”*. (FGD C, CACG 3).

The CACG members pointed out that, sustainability of the RC will depend on the elders and people in the communities. They noted that the community members must own the RC and support its activities because it is for their children. They suggested that even the churches can come together and support the RC activities.

During the focus group discussions with the parents it became evident that almost all the parents also wish the RCs to remain in their communities. They pointed out that their children have been benefiting a lot from the RCs. It has improved the literacy development of the children so they will do everything they can to make sure the RC remain in their communities. Some of the parents expressed their feelings and observed the operations of the RCs noted that; *“the facilitators have gone through adequate training by World Vision so they can continue working with the children at the RCs. Some of our children who are matured can also volunteer to support the running of the RCs, in case some facilitators are not around or stop the work”*. (FGD B, PARENTS M2). Another parent also indicated that, *“the community elders can meet and think about the future of the children concerning the RC (FGD F, PARENTS F6)*.

Although majority of the parents during the focus group discussion felt the need to do their best and sustain the RCs. Few of the parents believe the RC or for that the UL project will collapse. According to the parents they think the RCs will collapse due to the following reasons. That there is not unity in some of the communities. While some of the parents are not committed to the UL/RC project.

Some of the children expressed their concern about how they will wish to see their RCs should World Vision stop supporting the RCs. In a focus group discussion with the children who participate at the RCs one girl pointed out that she will suggest to her elder brothers to facilitate

at the RCs. She observed during the focus group discussion that, *“if World Vision is no longer working in this community; we will tell our teachers to allow our seniors to come and teach us at the camp”*. (FGD F, CHILDREN F6). Another child also said, *“I will tell my mother to buy some mats and books to be used at the camp. My mother can buy books too”*. (FGD E, CHILDREN 5). The children also suggested that they will tell their parents to contribute money to buy materials for the RCs.

Some of the children also suggested that they will seek permission from their parents so that they organise the RCs so that they do not stop learning how to read. During one of the focus group discussions this was what the children said, *“we will organize ourselves to continue doing our read with permission from parents. We will talk to our parents to support the volunteers so that they do not stop teaching us how to read”*(FGD G, CHILDREN). This explains how passionate the children feel about their RCs. Although the children could not emphatically talk about sustainability but their explanation demonstrated that if they have their own way they will continue running the RC even if World Vision leaves the community. Another girl who also participated in one of the focus groups also suggested that the parents who have money must provide teaching and learning materials they will need at the RCs so that they will have enough materials even if World Vision stops supporting the RCs.

Some children suggested pleading to the chief and parents to contribute money in order to support facilitators. One of the children, a boy had this to say, *“We will plead with our parents to go and tell the chief to look for volunteers to come and teach us at the RC. We will keep our left-over money to buy materials for the RC. I can also give my money to the facilitators”* (FGD F, CHILDREN M6)

The following were some of the suggestions made during the study to ascertain how the UL project could be made sustainable in the communities.

- Lobby with the District Assembly to engage and provide some incentives for the volunteers and youth members in the communities to facilitate at the RC so that the children can continue learning literacy when world vision stops supporting the RC.
- Make financial contributions to support the facilitators at the RCs. *“Because they are not paid for the work they do if World Vision leave this community they will also stop teaching our children”* (FGD C, PARENTS F3)
- The community members should be making voluntary contributions to motivate the volunteers. The contribution could be in a form of food stuffs, money, or any other incentives since they are not paid for the facilitation work they do.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of data and discussion of results, it could be confidently concluded that the UL/RC project is a context-appropriate intervention and game-changer concerning working together with community stakeholders to improve the literacy skills of children in the deprived, rural, and remote communities. This is due to the following reasons:

- There has been a great improvement in the children's literacy skills in the school communities because the teachers applied UL strategies in schools and children's participation in the reading camp activities. Most of the children in the communities can read both fluently and confidently in the schools and communities. The improvement in the children's literacy skills provides a strong foundation for the children's overall academic development.
- The UL/RC project has revolutionized the interest of children and family members in reading and literacy-related activities. It has generated interest of the children in reading and literacy activities at the schools, reading camps, and homes. The children enjoy reading, enthusiastically attend reading camps, and actively participate in the reading camp activities. Parents have also developed an interest in their children's reading and literacy development and encourage their children to participate in the reading camp activities.
- The UL project has improved the teacher's literacy skills and pedagogies. It has enhanced the teachers' capacity and resourced them to deliver literacy lessons in an environment that is engaging, print-rich, child-friendly, and inclusive.
- The UL/RC project has the overwhelming support of the community stakeholders in the school communities. Parents, traditional and religious leaders, local government representatives, etc. support the project, especially activities at the reading camps in different ways. Some of the community members have volunteered as the reading camp facilitators. The support from community members for the project is influenced by the community sensitization and awareness workshops organized for stakeholders in the school communities by World Vision Ghana. Effective community mobilization by World Vision and a sense of community ownership are good for the sustenance of the UL/RC project.

- However, there are a few challenges associated with the implementation of the RC that would require attention and consideration. For example, the condition of the reading camp facilitator would need to be reconsidered by the stakeholders.

Recommendation

- a. The use of local language by facilitators at the various RCs to support the children in their literacy development and improvement through the UL project was observed to have contributed significantly towards the development of the children's literacy. The study, therefore, recommends that the medium of instruction at the early grade which has been the use of local language at the basic school level exist in the early grade education policy so should be enhanced to improve children's literacy development and improvement.
- b. The teachers' application of UL strategies in schools and children's participation in the RC activities has brought improvement in children's literacy because a lot of children in the communities can read fluently and confidently in schools and the RCs. The improvement in children's literacy skills through the UL and activities at the RCs is a very strong foundation for the children's literacy development, as well as their overall academic performance.
- c. The UL must be incorporated into teachers' professional development programmes and should be incorporated into the curriculum of the Colleges of Education and curriculum of institutions that offer initial teacher training programmes because it will help improve the skills of beginning teachers' literacy delivery skills and pedagogies. The UL approach enhances and resources teachers with skills and techniques to prepare materials for teaching and delivering literacy lessons in an environment that is engaging, child-friendly, inclusive, and print-rich.
- d. The involvement of local community members in support of the provision of accommodation, resources (both material and human) in support of RCs activities is very significant and should be encouraged and supported. The local authorities more especially the district assembly should find better and more permanent places the communities can use for the RC activities because it could serve as a mini-library for the children.
- e. Parental engagement in children's education has been demonstrated through this project as a very useful tool to improvement children's literacy and their overall academic performance. It is therefore recommended that parents must be encouraged to become

active members in their education by ensuring that they support the children at home in terms of supervision and monitoring of their learning.

- f. There should be regular and refresher trainings and workshops organized by World Vision and the GES for the teachers and facilitators to enhance their capacity in the UL strategies delivery. This will help offset the regular transfer of teachers from schools that has implemented the UL strategies and the turnover of RC facilitators to sustain the UL project and enhance continuity. According to the teachers it enable those who may have forgotten the UL strategies to improve their skills.
- g. It is recommended that the government through the District Assembly should find a better and more sustainable way to remunerate the volunteers who facilitate at the various RCs. By so doing the volunteers will feel motivated to continue their facilitation activities at the RCs.
- h. There should be regular refresher courses and training workshop to improve the skills of facilitators. This is important because since the facilitators are just volunteers who leave the job any time, regular training will give new volunteers the opportunity to participate in the training so as to build their capacity to be able to teach and facilitate using the UL strategies.
- i. There should frequent monitoring of activities at the RCs as well as the schools in which the UL project is being implemented so as to assess any progress, problems and challenges that may face the implementation. It will give the community stakeholders the opportunity to rectify any problem that may arise before it affect the success of the project.
- j. The parents should be encouraged to make regular or periodic financial contribution towards the purchase of items that the facilitators will need to make their work effective.

- k. Since the UL project is improving the reading skills of the children in the Ghana Education Service should find a way to encourage or compel teachers in WV assisted schools to stay at post at least for a period of time to help support the children towards improvement of their literacy development. The GES should not encourage the transfer of teachers who have been trained on the UL to stay and impact their skills for the hildten.

- l. The number of subjects being taught at the lower grades should be reduced. The reduction will make way for the UL to be given prominence since literacy development is good for children overall academic improvement. Subjects such as Religious and Moral Moral Education, Social Studies and History should be studied at Upper Primary and Junior High School so that space could be created for UL activities and training.
- m. The districts should encourage a lot of volunteers to help the teachers towards the teaching of UL at the RCs and even in schools that do not have enough teachers. Since the volunteers live in the communities and speak the local language, and the UL model adopts the use of local language, involvement of local people will go a long way to improve the teaching UL at the RC and schools. The volunteers should be given some financial incentives to motivate them to support the children at the RC.
- n. The community members must enhance its sensitization effort to make the parents to become aware of the relevance of UL and the RC and how it can impact on the literacy improvement of the children. The district assembly should be actively involved in the sensitization drive to make it sustainable.
- o. The classroom walls should be designed with wooden boards or perforating materials for easy pasting of print-rich materials the teachers design for the children.
- p. Government through the GES and MoE should find a way of including the UL strategies into the school's language development and training policy from the lower grades as well as its introduction into the training of teachers in the colleges of education as well as universities.
- q. UL model should be scaled up to cover all schools throughout the country for every child to benefit.
- r. Government through the GES and MoE should provide the needed resources to train practicing teachers in the UL pedagogies. That is funds should be made available for the design of print-rich materials to be used to train the children's literacy.
- s. The district assembly should find or put a team in place like the WV Community Action Core Group to monitor and supervise the activities at the RC to make them effective and sustainable. This should be done to make the programme successful when it is completely rolled out to all communities throughout the country.
- t. The print-rich materials should be laminated so the facilitators can use them at the RC for a very long time. The same must be done for those prepared in schools.

- u. Funds released to the schools by the GES should be released early so that the school authorities can have access to purchase print-rich materials for the teaching of literacy or for the purpose of UL.
- v. The GES training officers must encourage the teachers to see consider the UL strategies as a pedagogical tool and not a replacement of the curriculum. That means there is the need for more intensive training to be organized for the teachers so that they can use the approaches in their teaching.
- w. Headteachers should be advised not to more teachers who have been given training in UL strategies to stay at the lower levels, until a teacher who is to take over has been given UL teaching skills before such a move is initiated.

Appendix 1: Biodata of Participants

A Table Showing a List of Research Participants (First Round of Data Collection)

Tool type	Type of Participant	Number of Interviews/Discussion groups	Number of Participants
Focus Group Discussion	Reading Camp Facilitators	20	49
	Children participating in reading camps	20	216
	Community Action Core Group (CACG) members	5	5
	District Training Support Team	5	17
	Parents' Association (PTA)/School Management Committee (SMC)	20	93
Interviews with Key Informants	District Education Officers	5	5
	Head Teachers	19	19
	Teachers	56	56
	Assembly Members	17	17
	Mothers and Fathers who send their children to RCs	75	75
	World Vision International Staff	1	1
	World Vision National Level Personal	1	1
	WV Local Staff	1	1
	World Vision Community Development Specialists (CDF)	3	3
	Faith Leaders	38	38
Traditional leaders	19	19	
Observation	RC observation	19	19
Total		324	634

Appendix 2: Biodata of Participants

A Table Showing a List of Research Participants (Second Round of Data Collection)

Participants	Female	Males	Total
Traditional authority	4	16	20
Reading camp facilitators	22	28	50
Faith leaders	4	32	36
CACG	3	12	15
Mothers/fathers	69	22	91
WV International staff	1	0	1
WV National staff	x	x	x
WV Local staff	1	4	5
Head teachers	4	16	20
Teachers	28	26	54
Ministry of Education	1	4	5
Children	53	55	108
DTST	2	12	14
PTA/SMC	26	39	65
Reading camps observations	143	97	246
Total	361	358	730