



**Early Years English Improvement Project**

**Annual Report, 2022-23, Ethiopia**

July 2023

**Supported by**



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## Background

Together We Learn started working with Jolly Phonics in 2013 (formerly as Link Ethiopia). We delivered a three year Libraries and Literacy project that included training teachers in the phonics method to improve English literacy for students. We were excited by the feedback from teachers and children and the measurable improvement in English literacy in participating schools. Over three years we trained 111 teachers at 38 schools reaching around 20,000 pupils over the project period.

When that project came to an end we focussed on phonics training for teachers and ensuring that the training could be sustained by teachers in the long term. We began the Early Years English Improvement project in 2018, building our relationship with the Amhara Regional Education Bureau (REB), who followed the project and monitored the impact. The project was delivered over four years during which time we trained 201 teachers at 89 schools reaching around 36,000 pupils over the project period.

In 2022 we were incredibly pleased to receive the partnership support of the Amhara Regional Education Bureau (REB) who funded the teacher, venue and refreshment costs for the training of teachers at 200 schools. With their support we were able to train 359 teachers at 200 schools reaching around 359,000 pupils in a single year.

We were also pleased to start pilot projects in the Oromia region, expanding the reach of the project, where we have trained 36 teachers at 18 schools in the past two years, reaching a further 2,000 pupils.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Amhara REB and scaling up our work with the Oromia REB to spread this best practice teaching method to more schools and improve English literacy for thousands of students.

## Intended Outcomes

The Early Years English Improvement Project aims to:

- Improve the English literacy skills of early grade pupils, improving their likelihood of completing education and their employability in later life.
- Train early years' teachers and educational professionals in the Jolly Phonics teaching method to increase the number of Jolly Phonics trainers in the Amhara region.
- Build the capacity of Education Supervisors in the phonics teaching method, enabling them to support teachers to improve the quality of English language teaching.

## Summary of activities

- **Ahead of the academic year (October)**
  - Jolly Phonics materials were imported to Ethiopia by Jolly Futures, including 24,000 Jolly Phonics Pupil Books 1, 24,000 Pupil Books 2, 100 Teacher Books, 1,200 poster sets, 400 big books sets and further materials to contextualise the programme.
  - The Amhara Regional Education Bureau supported the distribution of the materials to training centres in Bahir Dar, Gondar, Woreta and Injibara.
  
- **In semester one:**
  - Thirteen 3-day training sessions were provided by trainers from Together We Learn and Jolly Futures. The training was attended by 371 teachers from 206 schools across seven areas in Amhara and one area in Oromia. 42 education supervisors and 8 curriculum department experts from the local education offices and city administrations in Amhara also attended.
  - Teachers learned all 42 English sounds, how to blend sounds together to sound out words, skills of Jolly Phonics and steps for teaching. Teachers practiced the sounds and modelled phonics lessons to each other and each school received a Jolly Phonics Basic Kit.
  - 42 Education Supervisors received two day training on the phonics methodology, how to do lesson observations and how to use the Jolly Monitor app for reporting.
  - Two members of Together We Learn staff received certification as Jolly Phonics trainers – the first accredited trainers in Ethiopia.
  - Baseline reading tests were carried out at 14 target and 4 control schools in Amhara and Oromia.
  
- **In semester two:**
  - Two-day refresher training was provided by a Together We Learn trainer for 341 teachers from all areas.
  - As well as reviewing semester 1 content, teachers learnt alternative spellings, tricky words, alphabet, capital letters and handwriting.
  - All teachers were observed by Education Supervisors and received feedback multiple times in the project year. All schools received at least two monitoring visits by supervisors
  - 19 schools received monitoring visits by the Together We Learn project team.
  - Additional lesson visits and observations were carried out at 11 schools with Together We Learn and Amhara Regional Education Bureau staff, as well as English Language and City Administration experts
  - Endline reading tests were done at 14 target and 4 control schools in Amhara and Oromia.

- **End of the academic year (July)**
  - Compilation and analysis of assessments and data
  - A qualified trainer from Together We Learn staff attended the international Jolly Phonics conference in the United Kingdom for training, sharing and learning from best practice from other countries implementing Jolly Phonics training.
  - 18 best practice teachers and education professionals were selected to receive further capacity development as Jolly Phonics trainers.

#### Other activities

- Meetings were held with two Colleges of Teacher Education (Gondar and Begemidir in Amhara) to continue capacity development training on the phonics method for pre-service teachers. The college deans, English language department heads and English Language Improvement Centre coordinators participated in a discussion on how to incorporate the Jolly Phonics methodology into English courses at the college.

Photo Report













## Project Impact

### Number of people benefiting

- **371** teachers
- **38,000** students
- **42** education supervisors
- **8** education office regional and city curriculum experts

### Impact Assessment Methodology

In order to assess the impact of the teacher training, Together We Learn randomly selected students from 12 project schools and 3 control schools and tested their ability to read and understand English at the beginning and at the end of the year.

We use EGRA-Burt tests to evaluate students in four elements of English literacy: letter sound recognition, word reading, sentence reading and aural understanding.

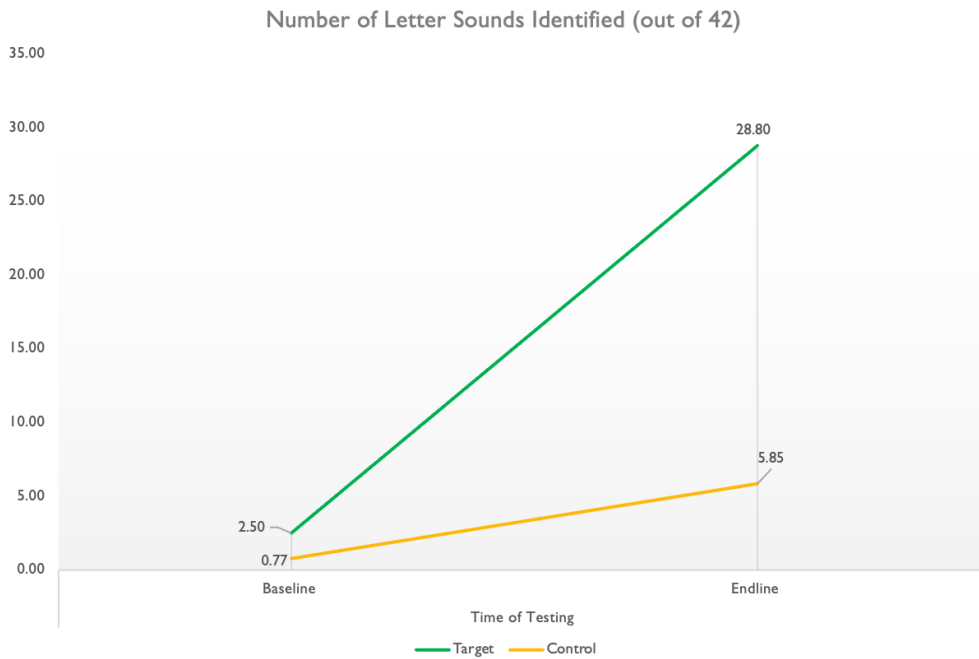
The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is an oral test designed to assess fundamental reading skills. The BURT word reading test is a word recognition assessment used to derive a broad estimate of a student's reading achievement.

Our results show that the students of trained teachers out-performed control school students in all the EGRA-Burt measures by at least 33%, and up to 63%. Below we outline the test results in detail.

### Letter Sounds

The keystone to the phonics approach is that children learn, not just letter names, but the sounds they signify. Therefore, we would expect a considerably higher performance in target schools than control schools in the letter sounds elements of the EGRA test.

**The average pupil taught by our trained teachers could identify 29 of the 42 sounds, whereas the average pupil in a control school could only identify only 6 of 42 sounds.**

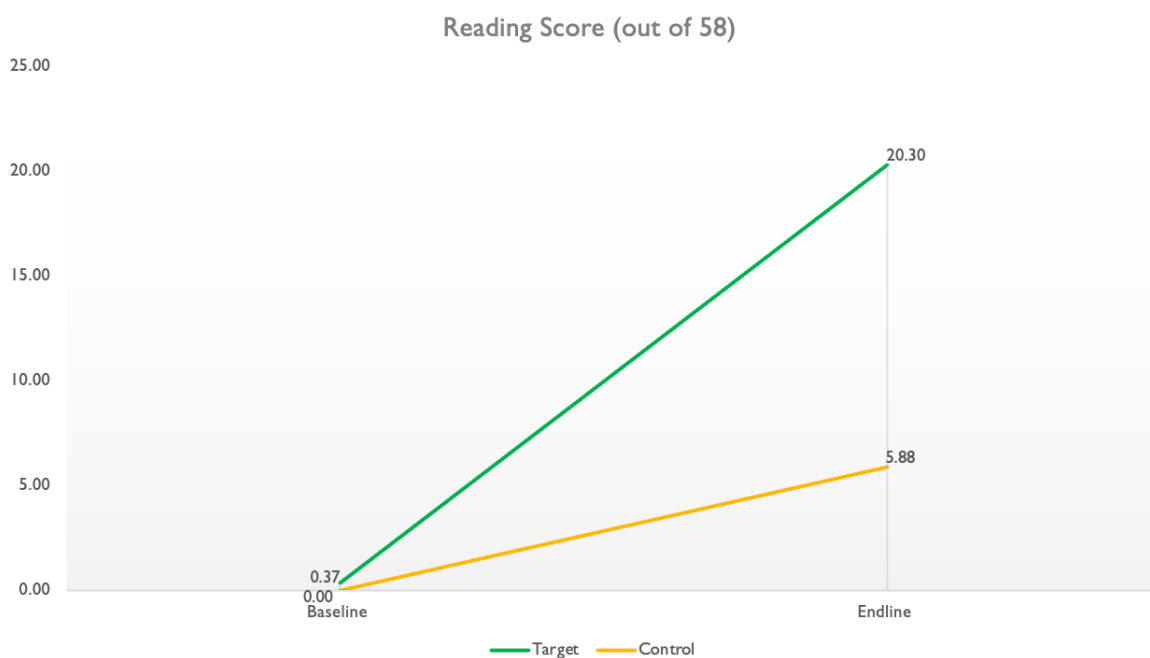


### Word Reading

The EGRA test gives students a list of 58 words of increasing complexity. The phonics programme teaches students the letter sounds so that they can ‘sound out’ and then read new words.

As expected, with an increased ability to identify the letter sounds in English, pupils in project schools were able to read more fluently at the end of the year.

**The average pupil taught by our trained teachers increased their reading score by 25% more than control schools.**

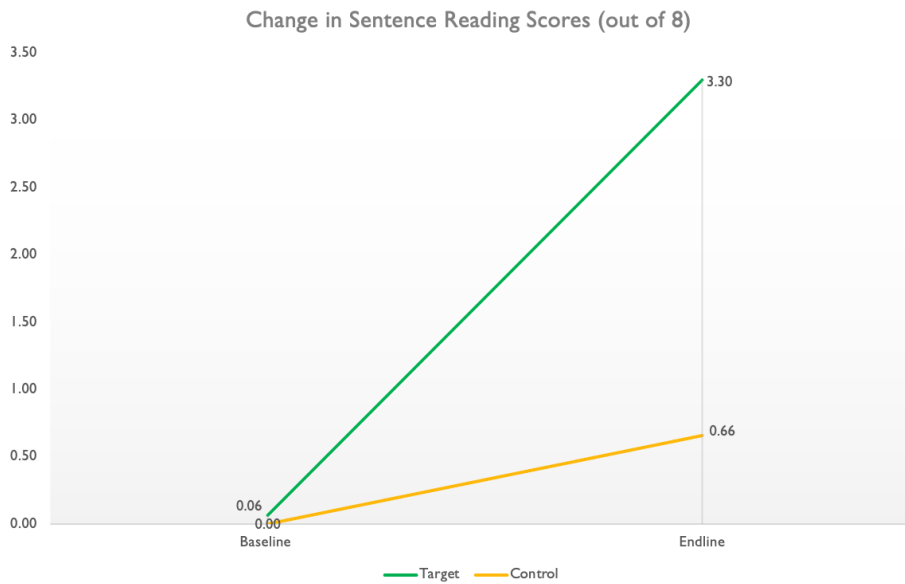


### Sentence Reading

Students were given four sentences to read and two marks for each one they read correctly.

At the beginning of the year, neither control nor target school students could read any of the sentences, on average.

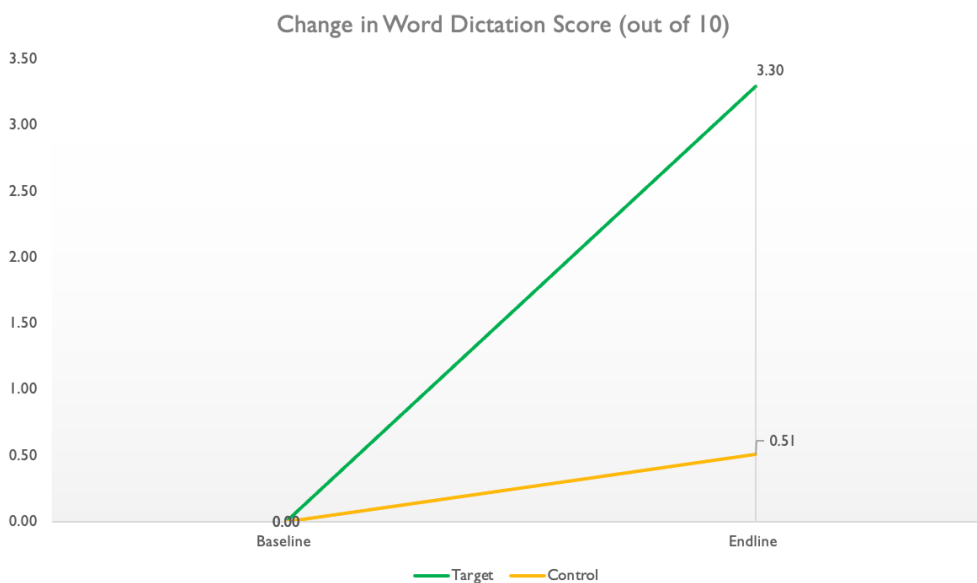
**At the end of the year, the average pupil taught by our trained teachers was able to read two sentences, (scoring 3.3) compared to 0 for those in control schools.**



### Word dictation

Students listened to 10 words read aloud and were asked to write them.

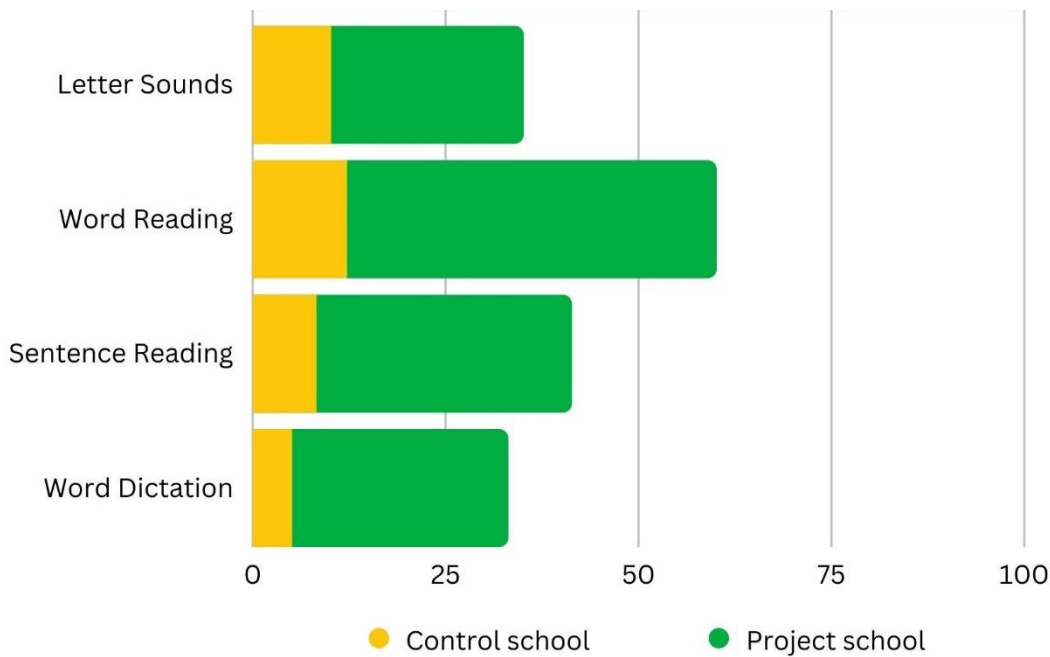
**At the end of the year, the average pupil taught by our trained teachers could write at least three words correctly compared to zero in control schools.**



### Overall Outcomes

**Children increased their English Language skills across all measures by at least 33%, and up to 63%.**

The graph below shows the achievement of control school pupils (yellow) compared to the achievement of pupils in classes with our trained teachers (green) at the end of the year.



Children will be able to build on these foundational literacy skills to increase their English literacy. They will be motivated by this to continue developing their skills, serving them in future years of education and supporting them in all areas of education from secondary level.

This will set them up for better engagement with learning for life.

### Achievements

As well as the remarkable improvement in literacy outcomes outlined above, the training has a significant positive impact on teachers. Equipped with skills, ideas and materials to provide more engaging and effective lessons, teachers are more motivated. They observe the enthusiasm and academic progress of their students when they use this methodology which inspires them in their English teaching as well as their teaching objectives more generally.

With the backing and financial support of the Amhara Regional Education Bureau in this project year we have been able to demonstrate institutional support for this methodology which empowers teachers to implement their training.

The introduction of Education Supervisors has enabled the scale up of the training, as supervisors can provide more regular in-person observation, support and encouragement for trained teachers. The observation data provided by the Education Supervisors further enables our staff to identify gaps in learning and ensure teachers get the most effective support in the semester two refresher training.

**A note from Together We Learn’s Project Manager, and certified Jolly Phonics trainer, Zemene Mersha, below, outlines the impact he has observed in this project period.**

*“Among 200 schools, I personally monitored around 20 schools, in addition to monitoring visits done by the Education Supervisors. The teachers were implementing the training at various levels, depending on the skills they have, the possibility of arranging a model class for Jolly Phonics, the number of the students they have and the commitment and cooperation of the school director.*

*I would like to present one of the best performing school’s experiences: Ewuket Fana in Bahir Dar. The school teacher is Asnaku Tegegne. In our training we taught teachers to combine the letter name and the sounds when they want to teach letter names like: my name is ‘a’ and my sound is /a/. This helps to relate the names of the letters in the alphabet, which is in their curriculum, to the sound of the word – the phonics – which helps them to read and write. Asnaku enhanced this by combining the phonics action and sound with the letter name.*

*The commitment and initiative shown by Asnaku to implement Jolly Phonics lessons and make children read and write simple and complex words has led to a huge proportion of the children improving. Moreover, the principal, vice school director and the Education Supervisor’s cooperation in arranging a model Jolly Phonics classroom at the school played a valuable part in encouraging Asnaku by giving recognition for her students’ achievements.*

*In a nut shell, I approve of the importance given to the implementation of the Jolly Phonics method at EwuketFana School. This example shows how the participation of all school stakeholders is vital for the improvement of the children’s English literacy.”*

**A note from classroom teachers and education supervisors**

Yihune Worku, an English teacher at Meseret Elementary school, in Gondar, said: *“Jolly Phonics made my students better learn how to read words and write simple and complex words. Every day my pupils wait for my lesson eagerly”*. He added *“I served as a teacher for more than thirty five years but Jolly Phonics made me learn again and teach my children in an easier way. Other grade teachers also come and visit my students when they read words and write words during dictation”*.

Aklilu Admasu, a supervisor for Bahir Dar area schools, explained: *“English language teachers trained with Jolly Phonics are implementing better, as the Pupil Books are prepared based on the training delivered. Basic Jolly Phonics kits are also helping teachers to teach their children without feeling bored”*. He also described, *“If we need to make our children*

*read and write English in a short period of time, we should use Jolly Phonics Pupil Books instead of the curriculum textbook”.*

**A note from English Language Expert from the Amhara Regional Education Bureau (REB)**

After monitoring 11 sample schools from two city administrations the REB English Language expert, Bizunesh Andargachew, put the commented as follows:

*“For me, it was surprising as I can see in person how teachers are implementing Jolly Phonics lessons based on the training by using steps of teaching Jolly Phonics and resources delivered to your schools. This is because I was concerned for how they could deliver after three days training of this new teaching methodology. I know teachers were actively participating in the training and their pupils are also participating in their lesson as I see in the classroom. This is the teachers’ own commitment for implementing it and their commitment comes, I think, since they like it. If they didn’t like it, they would struggle to implement it. Hence, I want to appreciate their performance, the support of Together We Learn by delivering refresher training and the supervisors’ support, and to thank you on behalf of REB”.*

After monitoring lessons with the team, the expert described, *“I have a lot of experience evaluating the impact of different organizations’ literacy project interventions. This project is different as it has a well-organized monitoring team scheme to support teachers. After training, the teachers were not totally left to do it by themselves, instead they were supported by the Together We Learn team, supervisors, education experts and with training in the second semester for refreshing the teachers, supervisors and education experts. This is also what impressed me in the project”.*

Bizunesh also shared, *“I have experience evaluating students of grade 1 to 4 for the last 4 years and children were struggling to say the names of the 26 letters, to read and write simple words but students taught by Jolly Phonics trained teachers can say up to 42 sounds, read simple and complex words, write words when they are told orally and even read simple sentences. This then leads me to say this methodology should be included in the curriculum”.*



## Challenges

- In the first semester, teachers from 206 schools attended the training. However, in the second semester some schools weren't able to send teachers to the refresher training due to teachers' personal situation, the transfer of teachers from one school to another or from one grade level to another. Hence 365 received the first training and 341 received refresher training.
- It is recommended that the school dedicate one classroom as a model Jolly Phonics classroom with the posters and materials on display. Due to a shortage of classrooms, most schools were unable to create a model classroom and teachers had to set up and take down materials at the start and end of lessons.
- School directors were given a brief orientation on Jolly Phonics when they collected the donated materials for their school but they were not invited to attend the training. As a result, some school directors didn't support and monitor the trained teachers' lessons at the school.
- The monitoring updates provided by the Education Supervisors was limited by different factors. Their educational background, which is not necessarily in languages, competing priorities and activities, and access or experience using their phones for reporting. As a result, not all supervisors could submit their monitoring reports and there were fewer monitoring visits than planned – most supervisors did two visits, rather than three.
- A minority of teachers lacked commitment or motivation to implement the training in their lessons. This tended to be observed more with teachers approaching the end of their teaching career, than teachers starting out.
- A small number of internationally trained staff from Together We Learn limited the frequency and effectiveness of monitoring visits for project schools.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This year's activities, monitoring and evaluations show that training teachers in the Jolly Phonics method is an effective way to improve English literacy for pupils. The teachers were able to get children to read and write words and simple sentences by using Jolly Phonics. It is therefore recommended to continue this training to reach as many teachers as possible and hence reach as many pupils as possible.

Continued collaboration with the Regional Education Bureaus and Jolly Phonics is the best way to train more teachers. Jolly Phonics is committed to providing resources, trainers and advisory support over the long-term with a vision of full regional roll outs. Sustained multi-year support and an agreed strategy with the education bureaus to train all teachers in both regions would be imperative to achieve this. Such a long-term commitment would enable Together We Learn to secure other necessary funding and to achieve buy-in from all education stakeholders.

Refresher training was valuable as it gave the opportunity for the teachers, supervisors and education experts to revise concepts that were missed in the first training and to learn from

each other's experiences of implementation. We recommend that refresher training should continue to be part of the training model.

The support given to trained teachers through the coordination of Education Supervisor visits and the Together We Learn project team's advice and guidance was valuable in supporting the teachers to implement the project based on the training content. The capacity of the Education Supervisors should continue to be developed to enable continued support for teachers and scale up of training to more teachers. The mixed results of using the Jolly Monitoring app for reporting needs more investigation to understand the particular challenges that supervisors faced so that these can be addressed by Jolly Futures or through further training.

More input from experienced and qualified supervisors, education experts and Together We Learn staff improves the quality and sustainability of teachers' implementation of the phonics method. As we continue to deliver training, this capacity will increase. Jolly Phonics' investment in providing further training, and Together We Learn mentorship, for selected motivated teachers and professionals will support this. A long-term commitment from the Regional Education Bureaus would further increase confidence for education stakeholders to commit to building their knowledge of the phonics method.

The understanding and commitment of school directors to support teachers in implementing the phonics method was also observed to have a big impact on the implementation of the training. Teachers at schools where directors supported them to set up a model classroom, encouraged teachers to use the methodology in their lessons, and recognised the positive results on pupils' literacy, were much more likely to implement the training than teachers at schools where the director was not invested in the project. It is therefore recommended that directors should be invited to attend at least the first day of training so that they understand the phonics methodology and the positive impact of implementing the training.

Finally, it was observed that teachers newer to the profession were more likely to be motivated in implementing the training in their lessons so newer teachers should be prioritised for inclusion in the training. We should also continue exploring options to include the Jolly Phonics method in teacher training at the Colleges of Teacher Education so that teachers are trained from the outset.

As the training is most effective when applied in early grades, it is most relevant for teachers in Grade 1 or 2, so it would be more effective if teachers who receive training can continue teaching at those grades, rather than moving through different grades.

## Future Plans

We welcome the continued partnership of the Amhara Regional Education Bureau and support of Jolly Phonics and other funders to help achieve the following objectives:

1. Teachers in schools who have received training continue to be encouraged by education supervisors and directors to implement the Jolly Phonics training methodology
2. The Education Bureaus in both regions endorse the methodology for English literacy education and commit to a long-term strategy on how to reach all the teachers in the regions.
3. Improve methods of making Jolly Phonics materials available in Ethiopia for new training, and develop a model for continued provision of Jolly Phonics materials for schools that have already received training.
4. Continue collaboration with Colleges of Teacher Education to incorporate Jolly Phonics into English language courses for pre-service teachers.
5. Increase the number of qualified Jolly Phonics trainers in Ethiopia through further training and mentorship.
6. Develop and improve the commitment from regional and federal level education officials through involvement in international Jolly Phonics conferences.