



Bilingual Home and School Environments Impact Children's Language and Literacy Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Education Context: Côte d'Ivoire

Key Facts:

Only 47.17% of adults in Côte d'Ivoire are literate.²⁰

Many children remain functionally illiterate at the end of primary school.¹⁸ despite high grade repetition (11.05%¹⁹ repetition rate).

Ivorian children face the challenge of learning to read in a new language (French), rather than the language spoken at home.

Over 60 local languages³ are spoken throughout the country, but the language of instruction in school is French.

How does a child's language environment impact language and literacy skills?

Language skills (vocabulary, phonological awareness) are important for reading development, in both of a child's two languages: L1 and L2.^{5,8} Early bilingual exposure is associated with language and reading advantages.¹⁰

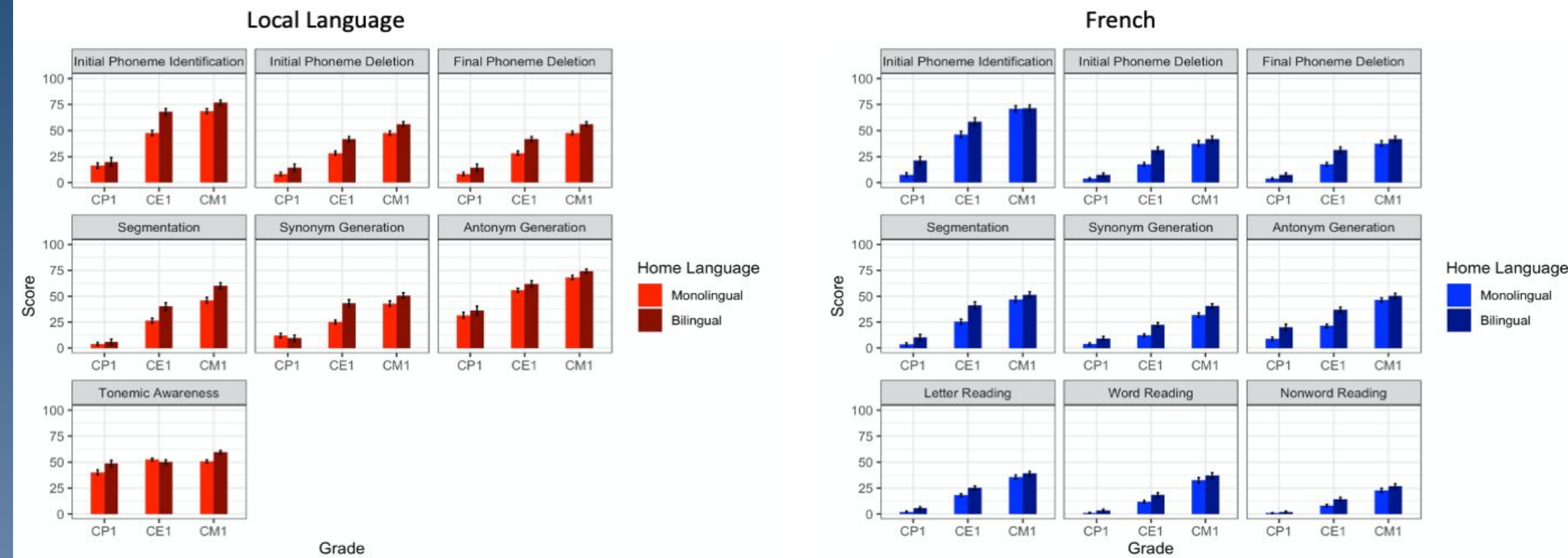
P1. Children from bilingual local language-French homes will outperform children from monolingual local language homes.

Bilingual education programs that incorporate the local language as a language of instruction are increasingly implemented in sub-Saharan Africa, including Côte d'Ivoire, as a means to bolster literacy outcomes.

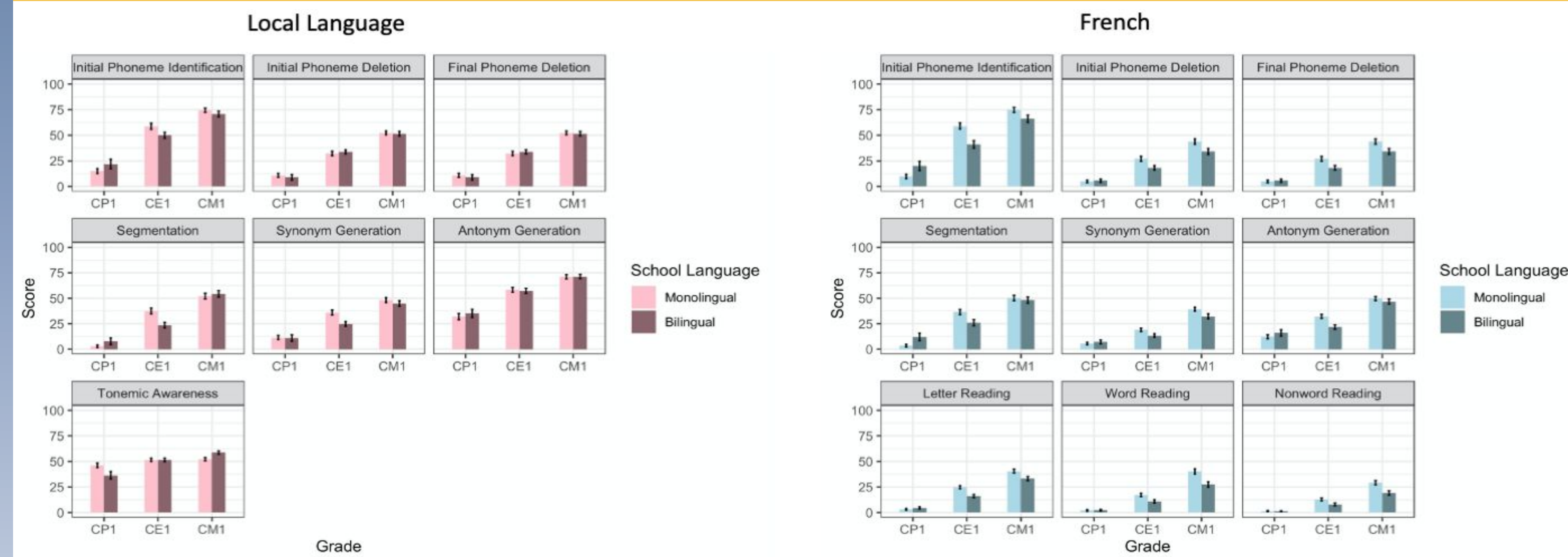
P2. Children attending bilingual schools will outperform children attending French-only schools.



Home Language: Bilingual children show better language and literacy skills in L1 & L2 (supporting P1)



School Language: Bilingual schools show poorer language and literacy skills but less grade repetition



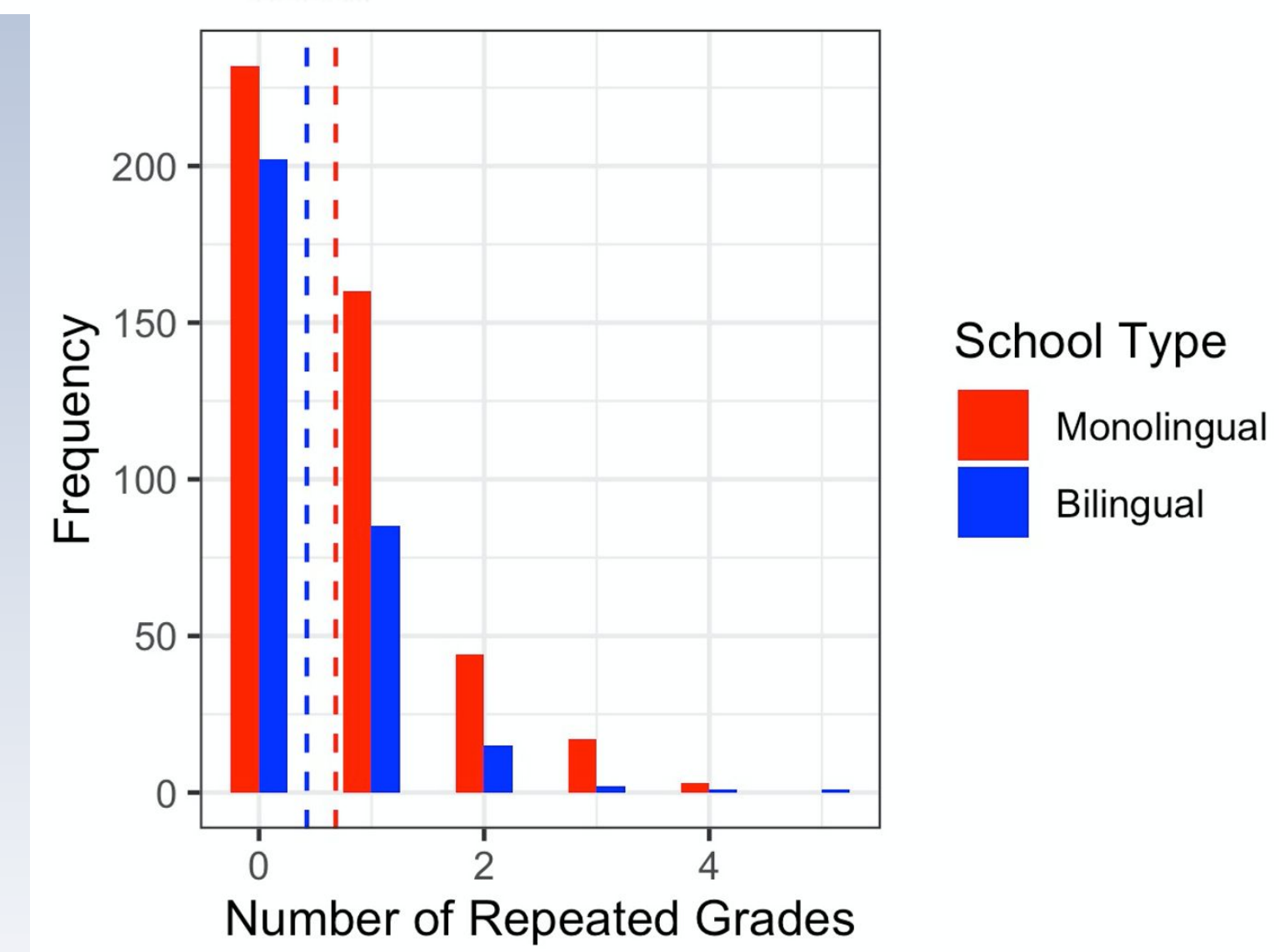
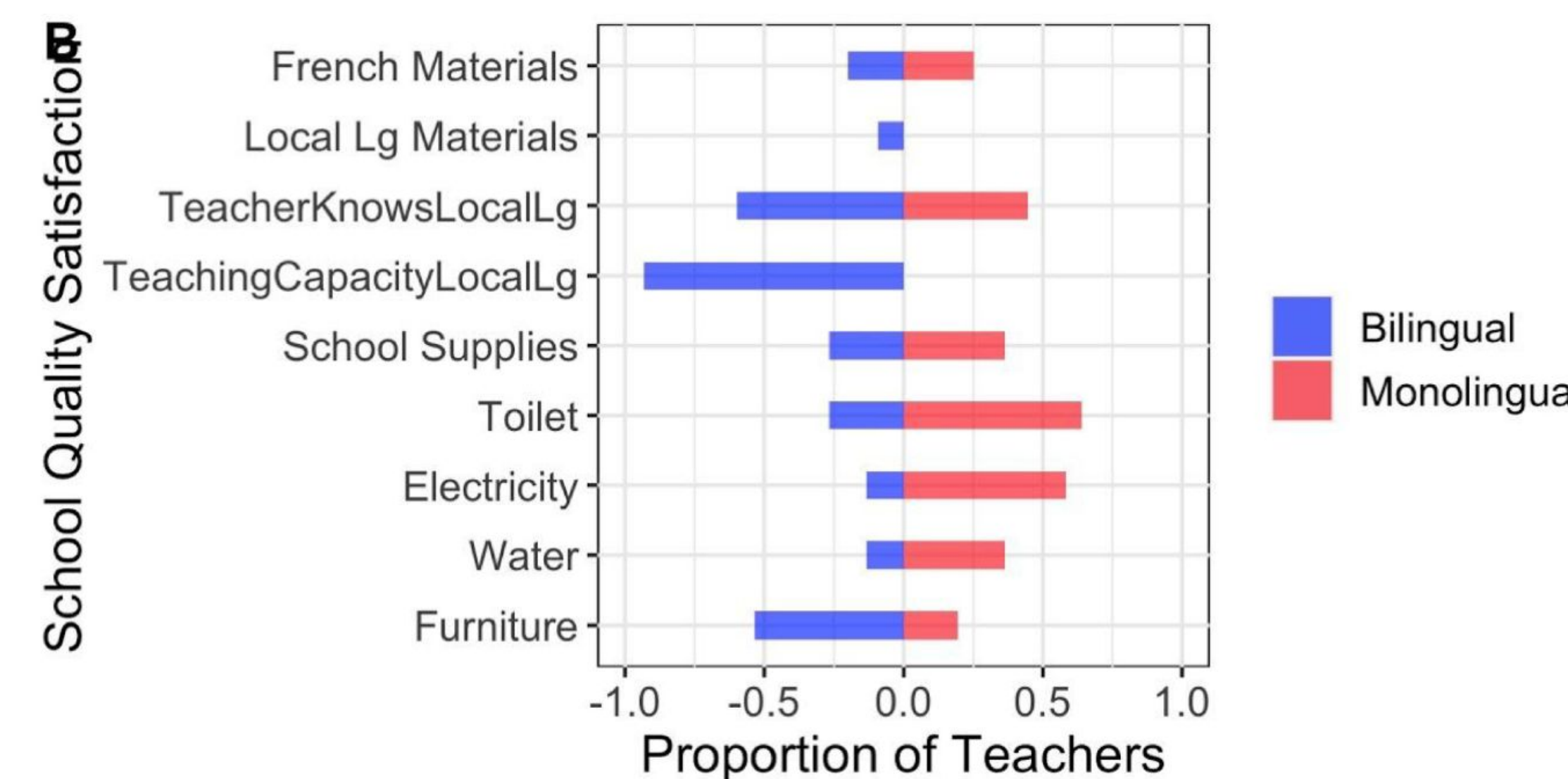
Do monolingual French and bilingual schools differ in quality?

Challenges for local language instruction may contribute to inconsistent learning outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa.^{2,14}

- Inadequate classroom materials
- Little to no teacher training

Low quality bilingual education

- Teachers were not trained in local language instruction.
- Classroom materials in local languages were inadequate.
- Bilingual schools had poor infrastructure.



Policy Implications

- Early bilingual exposure is associated with advantages for children's language and reading outcomes.
- If bilingual education is low quality, children may miss the opportunity to benefit from bilingual education.
- Bilingual education can potentially mitigate costly grade repetition.^{7,13}

Key Takeaway: Bilingual education may only be effective for improving literacy outcomes if implemented in a high-quality way.

Method

Research Q1

Children (N=830) 1st, 3rd, 5th grade

Children's Home and School Language Environments		
Home	Monolingual Local	Bilingual Local-French
School	Monolingual French	Bilingual Local-French

1. Home/school experience questionnaire^{10,11,12,15}
2. Language assessment in French^{4,6,15,21,22} and Local language (Abidji, Attié, Baoulé, Bété^{1,9,16})
 1. Phonological awareness
 2. Vocabulary
 3. Oral language comprehension
 4. Tone awareness (local only)
3. French literacy assessment¹⁵
 1. Letter reading
 2. Word reading
 3. Nonword reading
 4. Reading comprehension

Research Q2

Teachers (N=51; French schools=36, bilingual schools=15)

1. Questionnaire^{6,17}
2. Open-ended interview

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