MAPPING EXEMPLARS OF GOOD PRACTICE

IN FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN AU MEMBER STATES

African Union

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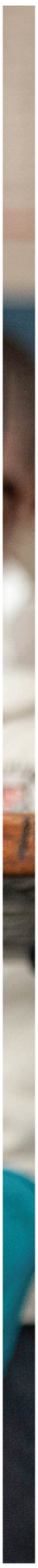

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Foreword by AUC-ESTI

Prof. Saidou Madougou
Director for Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
African Union Commission

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) constitute the bedrock of all learning and are indispensable for the development of skills, lifelong learning, and active citizenship. Without the foundational ability to read, write, and perform basic mathematical operations, millions of children across Africa remain excluded from the full benefits and transformative power of education. The African Union Commission underscores that addressing this foundational learning crisis, especially among vulnerable and marginalized populations, is pivotal to the realization of Agenda 2063, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), and the global Education 2030 Agenda.

In this regard, the African Union Commission, through the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, in collaboration with UNICEF, is pleased to share this Report on Mapping Exemplars of Good Practice in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in AU Member States. This initiative is a core component of the continental campaign to End Learning Poverty for All in Africa (ELPAf), and aims to catalyse progress towards inclusive, equitable, and high-quality foundational learning outcomes, particularly in the early years of schooling. By capturing and highlighting Member States' innovative policies, impactful programmes, and measurable results, this report aspires to promote peer learning, foster cross-country collaboration, and support the scaling up of successful approaches.

From locally driven early childhood interventions and national reading initiatives to digital learning innovations, inclusive teaching methodologies, and teacher professional development models, the good practices showcased in this report reflect the ingenuity, determination, and leadership of African education systems in confronting the challenge of learning poverty. These insights not only enrich our continental knowledge base but also contribute to global efforts to ensure foundational learning for all.

As the African Union launches the Decade of Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills Development in Africa (2025–2034), this report serves as a compelling reminder that sustainable transformation begins with strong foundations. I commend the collaborative efforts of the African Union Commission, UNICEF, AU Member States, partners, and technical experts who made this work possible. I further urge all stakeholders to deepen their commitments, invest in evidence and capacity, and take bold, coordinated action to ensure that no child in Africa is left behind.

Foreword by UNICEF

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Representative to the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

UNICEF celebrates the important advocacy undertaken by the African Union (AU) on the right of every child in Africa to quality education. Through the leadership of the Department of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) significant milestones were achieved during 2024 celebrated as the AU 'Year of Education'.

This report serves as a key resource for teachers and policy makers in AU Member States, and for technical partners, seeking to strengthen foundational learning and numeracy (FLN) throughout Africa, adopting evidence-based approaches and taking these to scale, with a view to eliminating learning poverty in Africa, and ensuring all children have access to quality education, and prosperous futures.

It is important to recognise the positive achievements made to date: in Africa, we already have workable, and successful practices of good practice in foundational literacy and numeracy, which can make a difference. This report confirms what we already know: improving foundational learning at scale is possible, but it requires strong political will, sustained investment and leadership - to reform classroom practices and support teachers by scaling proven methods.

UNICEF has prioritized the partnership with the AU and to have supported the preparation of this knowledge product. We are grateful to the AU Member States who have actively participated in the development of this resource either by responding to the online questionnaire or attending the validation workshop organized in July 2024 in Addis Ababa. We are equally grateful to the technical partners involved directly in implementation on the ground for their expertise and feedback. The contribution of these actors has ensured a range and depth of approaches that are showcased herein.

Against the backdrop of the launch of the new Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2026-2035), the ongoing continental ELPAf Campaign, and AU decision to declare 2025-2034, the **Decade of Accelerated Action for the Transformation of Education and Skills Development in Africa**, it is anticipated that this resource will support education stakeholders in working practically to eliminate learning poverty in Africa.

Yes, it is possible to end learning poverty in Africa. The evidence-based case studies included in this publication present viable, and scalable solutions to end learning poverty in Africa.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIR - American Institutes for Research
ASER - Annual Status of Education Report
AU - African Union
AUC - African Union Commission
BRN-E - Big Results Now - Education (Tanzania)
BtL - Build to Last (UNICEF framework)
CESA - Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CSO - Curriculum Support Officer
ECD - Early Childhood Development
EdoBEST - Education Basic Education Sector Transformation (Nigeria)
EGMA - Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA - Early Grade Reading Assessment
ELPAf - End Learning Poverty for All in Africa
EMIS - Education Management Information System
ESTI - Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation
FLN - Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
GALOP - Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project
GEEAP - Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel
GES - Ghana Education Service
GPE - Global Partnership for Education
J-PAL - Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab
LMIC - Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MINEDUC - Ministry of Education (Rwanda)
MoE - Ministry of Education
NEI Plus - Northern Education Initiative Plus (Nigeria)
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
NHGSFP - National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (Nigeria)
NIED - National Institute for Educational Development (Namibia)
NST - National Standardized Test
PRIMR - Primary Math and Reading (Kenya)
PRIMR-MT - Primary Math and Reading - Mother Tongue (Kenya)
RCT - Randomized Controlled Trial
RTI - Research Triangle Institute
SD - Standard Deviation
SDG - Sustainable Development Goal
SHRP - School Health and Reading Program (Uganda)
SISO - School Improvement Support Officer
SLEIC - Sierra Leone Education Innovation Challenge
SMC - School Management Committee
SPIP - School Performance Improvement Plan
STH - Soil-Transmitted Helminth
TaRL - Teaching at the Right Level
TVET - Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO-UIS - UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund
USAID - United States Agency for International Development
WFP - World Food Programme
WHO - World Health Organization

Glossary of Terms

Ability-based grouping - An instructional approach that groups students according to their current learning level rather than their age or grade, as used in Teaching at the Right Level methodology.

Baseline assessment - Initial measurement of student learning levels before an intervention begins, used to establish starting points and measure progress.

Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) - The African Union's comprehensive framework for education development across the continent from 2016-2025, with a new strategy (2026-2035) currently under development.

Deworming - Medical treatment to eliminate parasitic worm infections, typically administered through schools to improve children's health, attendance, and learning capacity.

Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) - A standardized tool used to measure foundational reading skills in early primary grades, including letter recognition and reading fluency.

Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) - A standardized tool used to measure foundational numeracy skills in early primary grades, including number recognition and basic operations.

Effect size/Standard deviation - A statistical measure of the magnitude of difference between groups, used to assess the practical significance of interventions (e.g., 0.3-0.6 SD gains).

Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) - Basic reading and mathematical skills that children should acquire in early primary grades, forming the foundation for further learning.

Learning poverty - The World Bank's measure of the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a simple text, used to assess the foundational learning crisis globally.

Mother tongue instruction - Teaching children in their first language or the language most spoken at home, typically in early grades before transitioning to official languages.

Oral reading fluency - The ability to read text aloud accurately and quickly, typically measured in correct words per minute.

Randomized controlled trial (RCT) - A research design that randomly assigns participants to treatment and control groups to test the effectiveness of interventions.

School Management Committee (SMC) - Community-based governance structure that includes parents, teachers, and community members to support school improvement and accountability.

Structured pedagogy - A comprehensive approach to improving instruction that includes detailed lesson plans, teacher training, student materials, and ongoing support to ensure consistent, high-quality teaching.

Synthetic phonics - A method of teaching reading that systematically teaches letter-sound relationships, enabling children to blend sounds to read words.

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) - An instructional approach that groups students by learning level rather than age or grade, providing targeted instruction to help all children master foundational skills.

Year of Education - The African Union's designation of 2024 as a year of special focus on education transformation across the continent, emphasizing foundational learning.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report brings together a series of case studies that highlight practical and evidence-based efforts to improve foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes across Africa. It is intended primarily for policymakers, technical advisors, and practitioners (including classroom teachers) seeking to understand what has worked, or shows potential, in tackling learning poverty, and to identify interventions that may be adapted or scaled in their own national contexts.

Methodology

The mapping employed a mixed-methods research design, combining systematic literature review with stakeholder consultation. Case studies were selected based on evidence of strong performance, implementation at scale, potential for cost-effective expansion, and high levels of government engagement. The analysis used the UNICEF Build to Last framework and incorporated methodological approaches from Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) and the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre.

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Key Findings

The report documents eleven evidence-based interventions across two main categories:

1. **Pedagogic/Learning and Teaching Interventions**
   - **Mother Tongue Instruction:** Implemented across 10 countries, showing gains of 0.3-0.6 standard deviations in reading outcomes
   - **Teaching at the Right Level:** Reaching over 5 million children across 4 countries, with significant improvements in literacy and numeracy
   - **Structured Pedagogy:** Demonstrating 1-2 years equivalent learning gains in countries like Kenya
   - **Early Grade Assessments:** Providing diagnostic data that informed successful programs like Kenya's Tusome
   - **Innovative Teacher Recruitment:** Operating across 8 countries through networks like Teach For All
   - **Synthetic Phonics:** Implemented in 8 countries, showing significant reading improvements

2. **Enabling Environment Interventions**
   - **Deworming Initiatives:** Reaching over 200 million children continentally, reducing absenteeism by 25%
   - **Family Engagement:** Demonstrating learning gains of 0.12-0.25 standard deviations through parent communication
   - **School Feeding:** Supporting 65+ million children across multiple countries
   - **School Improvement and Leadership:** Achieving 38% literacy mastery and 62% numeracy mastery in Ghana's GALOP program
   - **Teacher Accountability:** Showing improvements in reading outcomes through performance monitoring systems

Operationalization

Successful implementation requires several critical factors: political commitment and leadership, policy integration within existing frameworks, sustainable financing through multiple channels, systematic implementation pathways from piloting to scale-up, robust evidence generation, and South-South collaboration. Countries implementing these interventions have achieved sustainability through system integration, local adaptation, continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and early sustainability planning.

SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

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Learning poverty remains a pressing issue across the continent. While access to education has improved in many countries, large numbers of children still reach the end of primary school without having mastered basic reading or arithmetic. This undermines the broader aims of education systems, and leaves students without the foundational skills required for further learning. National assessments, international benchmarking, and classroom-level data consistently point to wide gaps in learning, particularly in the early years of primary school.

In response, governments and education partners have begun to trial and scale a range of interventions aimed at improving teaching, strengthening school leadership, increasing community engagement, and making education systems more responsive to student needs. The focus across all the examples in this document is on foundational learning, specifically, the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills in the early years of primary education.

These foundational learning initiatives operate within a robust continental and global policy framework that prioritizes early literacy and numeracy. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025 has guided continental education efforts, with the African Union currently developing CESA 2026-2035 that explicitly focuses on early learning and foundational, socio-emotional, and 21st century and labor market skills as a core strategic area. The African Union's designation of 2024 as the Year of Education has provided momentum for education transformation across the continent. The Nouakchott Declaration emerging from the inaugural Continental Education Conference called for a decade of accelerated action for education in Africa (2025-2034), with foundational learning as a core priority. These continental commitments align with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and its indicator 4.1.1(a), which measures children's minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics in grades 2/3. The recently launched End Learning Poverty for All in Africa (ELPAf) Campaign provides the operational framework for implementing these commitments.

The case studies presented here vary in scope, approach, and level of maturity. Some, such as Kenya's Tusome programme or Ghana's GALOP initiative, are government-led and embedded within national systems. Others, such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), began as NGO-led interventions and have since been adapted and scaled through government partnerships. It was introduced in Namibia in 2020

through a grassroots pilot led by a passionate team of educators, with support from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. The programme results quickly gained national attention and led to its integration into Namibia's broader learning support strategies. Central to this success is the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology, which emphasises targeted instruction through a "play-and-learn" approach that is hands-on and multi-sensory. By engaging learners in activities that incorporate movement, visual aids, and manipulatives, the method fosters deeper conceptual understanding and sustained learner engagement. Today, TaRL Namibia collaborates closely with government departments, teacher training institutions, and youth volunteers to provide this learner-centred instruction across multiple regions, working to close learning gaps and lay a solid numerical foundation, with a specific focus on Senior Primary where urgent catch-up is essential due to the widespread prevalence of numeracy learning poverty. The examples also differ in their points of focus. Some prioritise pedagogy, others use data, school leadership, or accountability mechanisms, but all target improved outcomes in FLN, particularly for the most marginalised learners.

In most cases, the initiatives documented here are still in progress. Many are being adapted to new contexts or undergoing changes in delivery as national priorities shift. As such, the lessons shared should not be treated as fixed models, but rather as reference points for adaptation and further research. Where evidence is limited or early-stage, this is noted.

The aim of this document is not to provide definitive answers, but to offer a curated set of examples that may support better policy and programming. The case studies focus on what has been done, how it was implemented, what challenges were faced, and what evidence exists of progress. In doing so, they aim to support more informed decisions on how foundational learning can be strengthened across the continent.

This is particularly relevant for countries launching national ELPAF Campaigns, seeking to maximise the impact on Foundational Learning in their distinct contexts.

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Approach to Mapping Exemplars of Good Practice in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Why is This Mapping Needed?

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) is fundamental to developing human capital and overcoming the impacts of learning poverty. Learning poverty, which the World Bank defines as being unable to read a simple text by the age of 10, has been assessed by the World Bank and UNESCO's Institute for Statistics. Their data suggests that 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school; in the poorest countries, this can be as high as 80% (UNESCO-UIS & World Bank, 2021).

FLN is a core component within an ecosystem of childhood developments, with a strong correlation between FLN achievement and success in later learning as would be expected. Effective basic education can help increase literacy and numeracy achievement, setting children up for success in secondary education. Foundational learning interventions aim to reduce the gap in literacy and numeracy achievements between low-income and high-income countries, as in the former 90% of children cannot read or write after primary schools compared to 90% who can in the latter (UNESCO-UIS & World Bank, 2021).

Research has shown the value of early interventions to improve FLN, including early childhood education experiences that can lay the groundwork for later academic success. A longitudinal study by Duncan et al. found that early mathematics and reading skills at school entry were the strongest predictors of later academic achievement (Duncan et al., 2007). Similarly, the Lancet series on Early Childhood Development highlighted how early learning opportunities before primary school significantly enhance children's readiness to acquire foundational skills, with children who attend quality pre-primary programs being more likely to develop age-appropriate language and cognitive skills (Black et al., 2017). This connection between early childhood education and foundational learning is particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, where access to quality early childhood education has been shown to reduce grade repetition and improve learning outcomes in primary education (Yoshikawa et al., 2018). Further, researchers have posited that literacy and numeracy are important for developing critical thinking skills, analytical ability and other broader intellectual developments (Sthapak & Sawlani, 2024).

Interventions during basic education are critical, and a focus on reinforcing learning improvements, improving structured pedagogy, and scaling best practices have created improvements in the literacy and numeracy achievements of children in school (RTI International, 2021). A strong approach to FLN across early and basic education provides the greatest potential for benefit realisation and future attainment.

While the importance of FLN is clear, countries still face challenges in identifying, adapting, and scaling effective solutions. This is where a systematic mapping of good practices is essential. Such a resource can:

1. **Demonstrate what works:** Evidence of effectiveness is often scattered or context-specific. Mapping best practices highlights interventions that have delivered measurable impact, guiding policymakers and practitioners toward approaches backed by data and helping to avoid duplication of ineffective strategies.
2. **Build coherence in approach:** FLN interventions are often pursued in fragmented ways, leading to overlapping efforts and diluted impact. A shared reference point of good practices enables alignment across policies, curricula, teacher training, and assessment systems—ensuring coherence and maximizing impact.
3. **Facilitate cross-learning and cooperation:** Many countries face similar challenges in tackling learning poverty, but opportunities for structured peer learning remain limited. A global mapping of best practices provides a platform for countries to exchange lessons, adapt innovations to local contexts, and scale solutions more effectively, fostering a community of practice that accelerates collective progress toward SDG 4.

FLN good practices cover a broad scope of interventions, but have been categorised by the FLN Hub into four domains; Enabling Environment, Supply, Demand, and Quality. The exemplars can then be assessed against criteria, including: cost effectiveness, strength of evidence, equity, and outcomes and scale (FLN Hub, 2024).

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Methodological Approach Adopted

As such, the following methodological approach was developed to shape the process of collating case studies setting out exemplars of good practice in FLN in Africa.

These were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Case studies should provide examples of strong performance, as evidenced in robust studies and/or on the basis of emergent data from within the past 5 years, with relevant programming undertaken in the same period; and
- Case studies should exemplify projects already deployed at scale (i.e. the projects must have been implemented in multiple schools, at a regional, or national, level), rather than in small-scale pilots (i.e. in a single school or in very limited capacity as a proof of concept); and
- Case studies should demonstrate potential and scope for wide-scale, cost-effective, sustainable expansion, i.e. at a regional and/or national level; and
- Case studies should demonstrate a high level of government engagement, i.e. 'Ownership' by the Ministry, or with the Ministry acting as a key actor, implementation partner, and/or funder.

The mapping of exemplars employed a mixed-methods research design, combining systematic literature review techniques with stakeholder consultation and expert analysis to ensure comprehensive coverage and rigorous evaluation of FLN initiatives across the African continent. This methodological approach was designed to capture both the breadth of interventions being implemented and the depth of evidence regarding their effectiveness and scalability.

During the mapping process, a review of a wide range of contexts throughout the African Union were considered, including a review of interventions operating in all regions of the African Union.

To facilitate this, a survey was developed with a view to gathering insights from key stakeholders, including representatives of Member States, as well as implementing partners, donors, and other actors within the education sector throughout the continent, and internationally. The survey development process was undertaken in collaboration between the UNICEF Office to the African Union Commission and UNECA, and the Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation Team within the African Union Commission, with technical support from specialized consultants experienced in digital questionnaire design and administration. The questionnaire was designed to capture comprehensive insights into scalable, evidence-based approaches for strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) across African contexts, with particular attention to identifying promising practices that could inform the continental resource mapping exercise. Survey administration was monitored to ensure broad participation from AU Member States and development partners, with results analysed to complement the systematic literature review in this report.

The survey successfully engaged stakeholders across 21 African countries, representing diverse regional, linguistic, and developmental contexts. Countries represented in the analysis included Algeria, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This geographic spread ensured representation across regions of the African Union, capturing varied implementation contexts and approaches to FLN interventions.

Table 1 - Achieved Sample

Member States Survey		**Implementing Partners Survey**	
Country	**# of Responses**	**Country**	**# of Responses**
Algeria	2	Burundi	1
Botswana	2	Cameroon	1
Côte d'Ivoire	2	Senegal	1
Liberia	1	Somalia	1
Malawi	1	Tanzania	1
Namibia	3	Tunisia	1
Nigeria	1	Uganda	1
Tanzania	1	Zambia	3
The Gambia	1	Zimbabwe	2
Tunisia	1	**TOTAL**	**12**
Zimbabwe	1		
TOTAL	**16**		

GRAND TOTAL	**28**

The survey data analysis is detailed further in Annex A and provides additional insight into perceptions of initiatives detailed in the case studies presented in this report. These findings provide a range of perspectives reinforcing the relevance of the initiatives identified during the course of the wider desk study, to technical partners, and Member States.

The analysis confirmed a high level of alignment with the mapping report; the initiatives highlighted through the survey largely reflect those already identified through the desk review and case study selection. There was substantial overlap in the points raised by survey respondents and the thematic priorities outlined in the original mapping, indicating that the original mapping accurately captured the key initiatives, approaches, and areas of focus across the case study countries. Both partners and Member States reported widespread implementation of early grade literacy and numeracy assessments, structured pedagogy approaches, and mother tongue instruction initiatives, reflecting the same intervention types highlighted in the mapping. Similarly, approaches such as targeting instruction by learning level and systematic teacher training were identified consistently across both sources, confirming their prominence in national and regional FLN strategies. Perceptions of effectiveness also showed broad convergence; early grade literacy and numeracy assessments, structured pedagogy, and mother tongue instruction received consistently positive ratings from both stakeholders, reinforcing the relevance of the interventions already documented. Given this substantial overlap, the survey findings did not necessitate updates to the original mapping. Instead, they serve to validate and strengthen the existing content rather than introduce new, divergent information.

A small number of exemplars were also selected from other development contexts, where these would be particularly relevant to the Africa context. To this end, the research employed a phased methodology, with the research team initially undertaking a high-level overview of potential case studies to establish a long list of relevant examples. This was further narrowed down to a final selection/short list of case studies for an in-depth review of good practice. In order to create a meaningful comparison between the eventually selected case studies, the research employed the UNICEF Build to Last (BtL) framework to guide the analysis. The framework encompasses several key areas, including five components that describe the core functions of Foundational Learning, as well as a focus on the overall enabling environment (UNICEF, 2022).

Figure: Built to Last Framework

The Built to Last (BtL) framework offers a comprehensive and internationally recognised foundation for evaluating the structural, process, and contextual factors that contribute to the quality and sustainability of national education systems. The framework also provides additional tools and valuable guidelines for analysing good practice in the education sector.

The BtL framework was utilised in case study analyses, by which countries can be identified which notably exceed those of other countries on average, allowing the identification of 'positive deviance' case studies where relevant.

Elements under consideration were:

1. **Enabling environment:** A supportive or enabling environment which includes factors that can help leverage the necessary resources for FLN. In particular, the following was addressed, where relevant:
   - Ministerial Leadership
   - Policies and Legislation
   - Public Demand
   - Financing

2. **Planning and budgeting:** Responsive sector planning and budgeting, including a clear outline of the aims and strategies education systems, and strong links between the ECEC and primary education sectors.

3. **Curriculum and pedagogy:** A developmentally appropriate curriculum framework that supports children's holistic development and learning.

4. **Workforce development:** Robust planning and implementation of staff capacity development and strengthening, and a workforce that can deliver quality pre-primary services with appropriate qualifications and standards, and sufficient initial and continuous training and support.

5. **Quality assurance:** A coherent monitoring and quality assurance system, with defined regulations and standards.

6. **Family and community engagement:** Clear structures for engagement with families and communities.

Together, these parameters provide a robust framework for identifying and analysing promising FLN interventions across the African continent. By grounding case study selection in relevance, scale, evidence, and system alignment, this approach aims to support decision-makers in identifying models with the potential for meaningful impact.

The table below provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the eleven foundational literacy and numeracy interventions documented in this report. This matrix enables policymakers, technical advisors, and practitioners to assess interventions across key dimensions including geographic coverage, intervention type, target populations, documented learning outcomes, implementation scale, government ownership levels, and scalability potential. The analysis reveals the diversity of approaches available to countries seeking to improve foundational learning, while highlighting common success factors such as strong government leadership, evidence-based design, and adaptability to local contexts. Countries developing national ELPAf campaigns or implementing foundational learning reforms can use this comparative framework to select interventions that align with their specific priorities, resource constraints, and system capacities.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Interventions across African Union Member States

INTERVENTION	COUNTRIES	TYPE OF INTERVENTION	TARGET POPULATION	FLN OUTCOMES	SCALE	GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP	SCALABILITY
Mother Tongue Instruction	Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Mozambique, Niger	Language of instruction reform	Grades 1-3	Kenya (PRIMR-MT): 0.3-0.6 SD gains in reading; Uganda (SHRP): 71% vs 30% reading fluency; Mozambique: 4.9% to 43.2% reading proficiency	National/ Sub-national	High - integrated into national policies	High - proven across diverse contexts
Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)	Botswana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia	Ability-based grouping and instruction	Grades 1-5	Botswana: 34% to 8% innumeracy; Nigeria: 50% improvement in math operations; Zambia: 34% to 52% reading proficiency	National - over 5 million children	High - government-led implementation	High - low-cost, adaptable model
Structured Pedagogy	The Gambia, Liberia, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda	Scripted lesson plans + coaching	Grades 1-3	Kenya (Tusome): 1-2 years equivalent learning gains; Gambia: significant reading improvements	National - thousands of schools	High - ministry-led programs	High - standardized approach
Early Grade Assessments	Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda	Diagnostic assessment systems	Grades 1-3	Kenya: Informed Tusome design; Rwanda: 13 percentage point improvement in benchmarks	National assessment systems	High - integrated into national M&E	High - relatively low-cost
Innovative Teacher Recruitment	Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda	Alternative teacher pathways	Pre-primary to Grade 6	Nigeria: 18% to 42% reading benchmarks; Ghana: improved BECE pass rates	Multi-country - 1,500+ fellows	Medium - partnership model	Medium - requires sustained support
Synthetic Phonics	Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa	Systematic phonics instruction	Grades 1-3	Nigeria: significant word reading gains; Gambia: 3x reading improvement in RCT	Multi-country - millions of children	High - integrated into curricula	High - low-cost, proven method
Deworming Initiatives	Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Rwanda	School-based health intervention	Ages 1-12	Kenya: 25% reduction in absenteeism; improved cognitive capacity for learning	Continental - 200+ million children	High - ministry of health/ education	High - WHO-recommended, low-cost
Family Engagement	Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia	Parent communication and support	Pre-primary to Grade 4	Zambia: +0.25 SD literacy improvement; Botswana: +0.12 SD math gains; Ghana: 11 percentage point increase in girls' return	Multi-country programs	Medium-High - integrated into systems	High - technology-enabled, low-cost
School Feeding	Continental (Multi-country)	Nutrition and attendance support	Pre-primary to Grade 6	Nigeria: reaches 9 million children; improved attendance and learning capacity	Continental - 65+ million children	High - government-led programs	High - established infrastructure
School Improvement & Leadership	The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone	Comprehensive school support	Grades 1-6	Ghana (GALOP): 38% literacy mastery, 62% numeracy mastery; Sierra Leone: +0.175 SD English, +0.292 SD math	National - thousands of schools	High - government-led reforms	High - systematic approach
Teacher Accountability	Kenya, Tanzania	Performance monitoring and support	Grades 1-7	Kenya (Tusome): 25 more words per minute reading; Tanzania: +0.14 SD test score improvement	National systems	High - government-led	Medium - requires robust systems

To complement the UNICEF Build to Last (BtL) framework analysis, this mapping exercise has incorporated additional methodological approaches drawn from recent comprehensive work undertaken by Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) and the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge in their 'Mapping foundational literacy and numeracy research in sub-Saharan Africa' initiative (Acquah et al., 2024)

The ESSA/REAL methodology provides a robust complement to the BtL framework by incorporating systematic bibliometric analysis techniques specifically designed for the African FLN context. This approach enables deeper analysis of research outputs, collaboration patterns, funding landscapes, and evidence accessibility—critical factors for understanding the scalability and sustainability of FLN interventions across diverse African contexts.

This work is particularly pertinent in the context of Member Countries seeking to launch ELPAF Campaigns, building on commitments made to End Learning Poverty in Africa, in line with the calls for a decade of accelerated action for Education in Africa at the inaugural Continental Education Conference in Nouakchott, and subsequently endorsed at the AU Summit.

This serves as a resource for member states seeking to address these goals, in alignment with broader commitments under Agenda 2063, and in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The identification of exemplary FLN initiatives across Africa employed a systematic literature review approach (Denscombe, 2010) to ensure comprehensive coverage of documented interventions with evidence of effectiveness and scale across the African continent. The search strategy encompassed multiple databases and grey literature sources to capture both peer-reviewed research and implementation reports from practitioners and policymakers.

Database Searches: Academic databases including Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, JSTOR, and specialized education databases were systematically searched using predetermined search terms.

Grey Literature Sources: Recognizing that many significant FLN initiatives are documented in implementation reports rather than academic publications, extensive searches were conducted through:

- World Bank Open Knowledge Repository and education sector reports
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Education publications
- USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse and country program documents
- RTI International and other major implementer publication repositories
- J-PAL Policy Publications and randomized evaluation databases
- African Development Bank education sector analyses
- Government ministry websites and national education sector plans
- Global Partnership for Education country-level documentation

Citation Analysis and Reference Tracking: Initial literature searches generated a foundational set of interventions, which were expanded through systematic citation analysis. References from key studies were examined to identify additional relevant interventions, while forward citation searches revealed more recent implementations or evaluations of similar approaches.

Further to this, a Validation Workshop on Scalable Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Practices to End Learning Poverty in Africa was convened by the African Union Commission (AUC) in collaboration with UNICEF. The workshop took place on July 22-23, 2025, at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Key areas of feedback and technical recommendations on the approach adopted, case studies identified, and key lessons to present within the resource were garnered during the workshop and are reflected within this report.

These include:

- **Open Dialogue:** The importance of open discussions, networking, and direct engagement with country representatives was highlighted to gather deeper insights and refine strategies.
- **Inclusion and Vulnerable Children:** There was a strong call for the report to include strategies for inclusive education and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This would ensure that the needs of all children are considered, especially those with disabilities, or those who have experienced trauma due to conflict or natural disasters.
- **Strengthening Early Childhood Development (ECD):** Member emphasised the importance of stronger connections between ECD and foundational learning. They suggested that the report should emphasize the technical aspects of how pre-school activities, such as graphic expression, prepare children for primary school.
- **Curriculum, Assessment, and Time Management:** Discussions highlighted interest in addressing curriculum reform and the need for effective time management in schools. The point was made that while many interventions are 'curriculum neutral,' the report should still consider the role of time-on-task and the 'regulation of learning' beyond , and in addition to, traditional assessments.
- **Holistic School Health:** The feedback suggests expanding the focus on health, to include a range of initiatives, including deworming, in addition to to a more comprehensive set of school health program initiatives, including screening for vision and hearing problems to ensure that health-related barriers to learning are identified and addressed.
- **Addressing Teacher Challenges:** The discussion identified two critical issues related to teachers including teacher training – the quality of teacher education as a major concern and, gender equality - addressing the gender imbalance in teaching, specifically by developing interventions to attract and retain more male teachers in the profession.
- **Evidence-Based Approach:** A key consensus was that any new case studies or interventions included in the final report must be supported by publicly available, high-quality research from credible sources. This ensures the document serves as a reliable guide for national policy and implementation.
- **Expanding the Resource:** It was suggested that the mapping report should be expanded to include countries with proven success, provided their work is backed by publicly available research or official reporting.

What is the Intended Purpose / Anticipated Usage of the Mapping Resource?

The value of mapping exemplars is that it creates a repository of good practice that can serve as case studies to shape future programming in African Union nations. The resource can also be used to strengthen teacher capacity by informing pre-service and in-service training on effective pedagogical approaches. By translating evidence of what works into practical guidance for teachers, the mapping supports improvements in day-to-day classroom practice.

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Cross-Cutting Themes

The foundational literacy and numeracy interventions documented in this report operate within a broader framework of inclusive, equitable education that must address the diverse needs of all African children. While each intervention demonstrates specific approaches and outcomes, their effectiveness ultimately depends on how well they incorporate cross-cutting themes that ensure no child is left behind. This section examines key principles that should inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of all foundational learning interventions across the continent.

Inclusion and Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles provide essential guidance for developing foundational literacy and numeracy interventions that are accessible to all learners from the outset, rather than requiring costly retrofitting (CAST, 2018). The Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability provides a standardized framework for identifying children who may face barriers to learning, including those with difficulties in seeing, hearing, walking, remembering or concentrating, self-care, or communicating (Washington Group on Disability Statistics, 2020). These criteria can help education systems move beyond narrow medical definitions of disability to recognize functional limitations that can impact learning when appropriate supports are not provided.

Effective foundational learning interventions incorporate UDL principles through multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. For children with vision impairments, this includes providing materials in large print, high contrast formats, or tactile alternatives, alongside audio content and screen reader compatibility for digital resources. Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodologies exemplify inclusive approaches by using hands-on, multi-sensory activities that accommodate diverse learning needs and preferences. Mother tongue instruction inherently supports inclusion by removing language barriers that disproportionately affect children with disabilities, who may struggle more than their peers when instruction occurs in unfamiliar languages.

Structured pedagogy approaches can be designed to include built-in accommodations, such as visual schedules, clear routines, and varied instructional formats that support children with autism spectrum conditions or attention difficulties. Early grade assessments must be carefully designed to distinguish between lack of foundational skills and barriers created by assessment format, ensuring that children with disabilities are accurately identified for appropriate support rather than being misclassified as having learning difficulties.

School health and nutrition programs such as feeding and deworming initiatives provide critical health foundations that are particularly important for children with disabilities, who may face additional nutritional challenges or health complications. Family engagement strategies must recognize that families of children with disabilities may need additional support and information to advocate effectively for their children's educational needs.

Gender Lens and Gender Equity

Gender equity considerations are fundamental to achieving universal foundational literacy and numeracy. The interventions documented in this report provide specific evidence of approaches that can address gender disparities in education outcomes across Africa.

Family engagement initiatives have demonstrated notable success in addressing gender disparities. As documented in this report, programs in Ghana achieved an 11 percentage point increase in girls' return to school through targeted SMS messaging to parents (IPA Ghana, 2021). These interventions work by challenging parental assumptions about the relative value of education for boys versus girls and providing concrete information about learning progress.

The evidence from mother tongue instruction programs suggests these can particularly benefit girls, who in many contexts have less exposure to official languages of instruction outside the home. The foundational learning benefits of beginning instruction in familiar languages can help ensure that girls are not disadvantaged by additional language barriers.

School feeding programs often provide particular benefits for girls, as documented in the continental programs described in this report. These programs can reduce opportunity costs of school attendance when girls might otherwise be expected to contribute to household food preparation. The design of school infrastructure, including separate toilet facilities and safe spaces, is critical for supporting girls' continued participation in education, particularly as they approach adolescence.

Structured pedagogy approaches must explicitly address gender dynamics in classroom interactions, ensuring that teaching materials represent girls and boys in diverse roles and that instructional strategies encourage equal participation. Early grade assessments should be analyzed for gender bias in content and format, while teacher training programs must address unconscious bias that can lead to differential treatment of boys and girls in classroom settings.

Education in Emergencies and Minimum Standards

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards provide crucial guidance for maintaining foundational learning opportunities during crises, conflicts, and disasters—situations that affect millions of African children (INEE, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both the vulnerability of education systems and the importance of adaptable approaches to foundational learning that can continue despite disruptions.

Several interventions documented in this report demonstrated remarkable adaptability during the pandemic. Family engagement programs proved particularly resilient, with SMS-based communication and radio programming continuing to reach families when schools were closed. As documented in this report, Ghana's GALOP program adapted through remedial learning initiatives, including home-based learning kits and virtual teacher training, demonstrating how comprehensive school improvement approaches can maintain momentum even during significant disruptions.

Teaching at the Right Level methodologies, with their emphasis on simple, low-cost materials and flexible grouping, proved adaptable to home-based learning contexts and community-led education initiatives. The approach's focus on oral assessment and basic materials meant that learning could continue even when formal school structures were disrupted.

Mother tongue instruction becomes even more critical in emergency contexts, where children may have limited access to resources in official languages and where familiar language provides psychological comfort and cognitive accessibility. Emergency education responses must prioritize foundational skills in languages children understand, as this provides the strongest foundation for resilience and continued learning.

Structured pedagogy approaches designed for emergency contexts must balance the need for consistent, evidence-based instruction with the flexibility required for diverse and rapidly changing circumstances. This includes developing contingency plans for material distribution, alternative delivery methods for teacher training, and modified assessment approaches that can function in unstable environments.

School feeding and health interventions take on heightened importance in emergency contexts, where malnutrition and health crises can severely impact children's ability to learn. As documented in this report, these programs often serve as entry points for re-establishing educational services and can provide stability and normalcy for children experiencing trauma.

Integration Across Interventions

These cross-cutting themes are not optional add-ons to foundational learning interventions but rather essential design elements that determine whether interventions can achieve truly universal impact. The most successful programs documented in this report demonstrate integration of these principles from the outset, rather than treating inclusion, gender equity, and emergency preparedness as separate considerations.

Countries must embed these cross-cutting themes into their foundational learning strategies, ensuring that policy frameworks, financing mechanisms, and implementation approaches explicitly address the needs of all children. This requires systematic attention to data collection that captures disaggregated information on participation and outcomes, teacher training that addresses bias and inclusive practices, and community engagement that reaches the most marginalized families.

The evidence demonstrates that interventions designed with these cross-cutting themes in mind not only reach more children but often prove more effective overall, as they address the multiple, intersecting barriers that prevent children from achieving foundational literacy and numeracy skills. As African countries scale successful interventions, maintaining this focus on inclusion, gender equity, and emergency preparedness will be essential for achieving the goal of foundational learning for all.

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SECTION 2:
Breaking Through Learning Barriers: Continental Success Stories in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

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Part 1- Pedagogic / Learning and Teaching Interventions

Mother Tongue Instruction

Delivering literacy education in the language children speak at home, to address language barriers to foundational learning.

Case Study Countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda

These case study countries were selected to represent diverse approaches to mother tongue instruction across different regions of Africa, demonstrating implementation at scale with documented learning improvements. The selection prioritized countries with government-led initiatives, strong evidence of effectiveness in foundational literacy outcomes, and varying linguistic contexts that offer lessons for adaptation across the continent.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

In many multilingual countries across the African continent (UNESCO; ADEA), including those in West Africa (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana), East Africa (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania), Central Africa (e.g., 3), and Southern Africa (e.g., South Africa, Zambia), children frequently begin school in a language other than their mother tongue (i.e., the primary language they speak at home). This disconnect between the language of instruction (which varies significantly throughout Africa, including English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, and national languages, such as Swahili, Hausa, and Yoruba) and the child's first language (mother tongue) significantly hinders early literacy development, while, conversely, mother-tongue instruction garners strong results. Research from across Africa, including Kenya (Piper et al., 2019), Ethiopia (Seid, 2018), and Uganda (Brunette et al., 2019), shows that this disconnects results in low reading proficiency, high repetition rates, and early dropout.

Furthermore, language barriers contribute to significantly poorer educational outcomes, particularly for marginalized and rural populations, who often face additional challenges in accessing quality education. While language-instruction policies supporting mother tongue instruction are increasingly adopted, implementation faces persistent logistical, political, and cultural barriers (Kyalo & Matu, 2023).

Initiative Goal

Recognizing that children learn best in a language they understand, Mother Tongue Instruction programmes support a gradual transition to national or international languages as learners progress through the education system. This approach is particularly critical for initial literacy development, as research demonstrates that foundational reading skills acquired in the mother tongue provide a stronger base for later academic success regardless of the medium of instruction used in subsequent educational levels. The cognitive and linguistic foundations established through mother tongue literacy instruction enhance children's ability to transfer reading skills to additional languages, supporting overall academic achievement even when instruction later shifts to national or international languages (Piper et al., 2018; Brunette et al., 2019)

Mother-tongue instruction seeks to:

- **Improve Foundational Learning:** Enhance early literacy, numeracy, and comprehension by teaching children in a language they understand best (World Bank, 2021).
- **Promote Inclusion and Equity:** Reduce learning barriers for marginalized and linguistically diverse groups through inclusive, context-sensitive instruction (Seid, 2016).
- **Enable Smooth Language Transitions:** Create structured pathways to help children move from mother tongue to second-language learning while maintaining proficiency in both (RTI International, 2014).
- **Build Teacher Capacity:** Train educators in multilingual pedagogies and equip them with appropriate resources for effective delivery.
- **Inform Policy through Evidence:** Use real-world data and rigorous evaluations to guide national education strategies and future scale-up (Piper et al., 2016).

In summary, the goal of mother-tongue instruction interventions is primarily to support foundational learning outcomes by using mother tongue instruction in early grades (typically Grades 1–3). By teaching children in a language they understand best, such initiatives aim to improve literacy and comprehension (World Bank, 2021), increase school participation, reduce dropout rates, and build a stronger bridge to second language acquisition (RTI International, 2014). Furthermore, such efforts seek to assess the effectiveness of this approach under real-world conditions and provide rigorous evidence to inform national education policy and scale-up strategies.

Target Beneficiaries

Initiatives across Africa continue to strengthen the use of mother-tongue instruction to improve foundational learning, particularly targeting children from linguistically marginalized communities who speak indigenous languages at home but face difficulties in school where instruction is often delivered in a second language.

In Mozambique, a bilingual education reform has been rolled out in primary schools, beginning instruction in local languages and gradually transitioning to Portuguese. This has led to measurable gains in reading comprehension and numeracy

(UNESCO, 2025). Similarly, Senegal has advanced bilingual and multilingual learning through targeted support for local language integration in early education, particularly in underserved regions (AIR, 2024). In Nigeria, the PROPELCA initiative emphasizes mother-tongue-based multilingual education, enhancing student comprehension and classroom engagement through the structured inclusion of indigenous languages (Global Partnership for Education, 2025).

In Kenya, for instance, the PRIMR-MT programme focused on children in Bungoma and Machakos counties, where Lubukusu and Kikamba are commonly spoken (Piper et al., 2016). In Ethiopia, beneficiaries were students affected by the 1994 reform enabling local language instruction (Ministry of Education, Ethiopia, 1994). The programmes also indirectly benefited teachers, school administrators, and education planners by providing them with tools, training, and data to support better instructional delivery and decision-making. Namibia will align mother tongue instruction with structured pedagogy through decodable readers in African languages and bilingual phonics scope-and-sequences. The national roadmap offers a dual-language model that supports early literacy without sacrificing transition to English, particularly through teacher training in language-sensitive pedagogy.

These initiatives reinforce the critical role of language in learning, especially for children from linguistically diverse and rural communities. They also highlight the importance of equipping teachers and education planners with the tools, training, and policy support necessary for effective implementation.

Specific beneficiaries include:

- **Children from Linguistically Marginalized Communities:** Many children in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda speak indigenous languages at home but face difficulties in school where instruction is often delivered in a second language. The initiative aims to improve their foundational learning by introducing mother tongue-based instruction (Benson, 2021).
- **Students in Rural and Underserved Areas:** Children in remote regions often lack access to quality education resources in their native languages. By integrating mother tongue instruction, the initiative seeks to bridge the learning gap and improve school participation (Global Partnership for Education, 2021).
- **Teachers and Educators:** Mother tongue initiatives benefit teachers by providing training and resources to effectively deliver instruction in students' home languages, enhancing teaching quality and classroom engagement (HundrED Foundation, 2022).
- **Parents and Communities:** By promoting mother tongue education, parents become more engaged in their children's learning, fostering a stronger connection between home and school environments (Global Partnership for Education, 2022).
- **Education Policymakers:** The use of mother tongue instruction supports decision-makers in designing evidence-based policies that enhance learning outcomes and promote linguistic inclusivity in the education system (Patil et al., 2023). Policymakers benefit from the implementation evidence and outcome data generated by mother tongue instruction initiatives, which inform national

education strategies and language-in-education policies. The documented learning gains and successful implementation models provide policymakers with practical frameworks for scaling effective approaches, while the evidence of improved foundational literacy outcomes supports advocacy for sustained investment in multilingual education approaches.

Solution

Description of the Initiative

Mother tongue instruction initiatives build on a growing body of global and regional research that highlights the cognitive and academic benefits of early learning in a child's first language. Across Africa, multiple national and sub-national projects have been undertaken, including Kenya's PRIMR-MT, Uganda's SHRP, and Ethiopia's post-reform language policy. These initiatives introduced early grade reading programmes in local languages, developed and distributed language-specific instructional materials, and trained teachers to deliver content effectively in the mother tongue (Piper et al., 2016; Brunette et al., 2019). Each intervention was designed in response to the linguistic, cultural, and policy environments of the country. As programmes scaled, further research and policy dialogue supported refinements to improve effectiveness across diverse socio-economic and linguistic settings. Community engagement was also a key component, helping to raise awareness and build support for learning in a familiar language.

Most initiatives follow a structured, evidence-based approach, typically incorporating the following components:

- **Curriculum Development:** Designing and integrating mother tongue-based instructional materials for literacy, numeracy, and foundational learning.
- **Teacher Training and Capacity Building:** Equipping educators with training on bilingual pedagogy, classroom strategies, and culturally responsive teaching methods.
- **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Collaborating with parents, community leaders, and policymakers to build ownership and promote sustainability.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Scaling:** Conducting impact assessments to measure learning outcomes and inform programme adaptation and expansion (Global Partnership for Education, 2022).

Implementation of the Initiative

Implementation varied by country, but shared several core features rooted in evidence-based design and local adaptability. All initiatives began with context analysis—often including language mapping, baseline assessments, and consultations with education stakeholders. Instructional materials were developed in target mother tongues and aligned with national curricula. Teachers were trained in bilingual pedagogies and supported through structured coaching and professional development.

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In Kenya, the PRIMR-MT pilot was conducted as a randomized controlled trial in Lubukusu- and Kikamba-speaking areas, providing tailored materials and continuous teacher support (Piper et al., 2016). Uganda's SHRP collaborated with 12 language communities to develop local language materials and strengthen instructional delivery through extensive teacher training (Brunette et al., 2019). Ethiopia's policy enabled regions to select languages of instruction, with federal coordination supporting curriculum development and decentralised monitoring (Seid, 2016).

More recently, Mozambique's Vamos Ler! programme introduced a bilingual model in Emakhuwa and Elomwe across over 2,000 schools, training 6,000+ teachers and distributing millions of learning materials. The initiative led to a nearly tenfold increase in reading proficiency among Grade 3 learners (Creative Associates International, 2022). In Niger, a transitional bilingual programme expanded rapidly between 2017 and 2018, combining local language instruction with structured French introduction, supported by mentoring and community mobilisation (Global Partnership for Education, 2017). South Africa contributed to implementation through initiatives such as Vula Bula and the African Storybook Project, which produced openly licensed, culturally relevant readers in multiple African languages to improve literacy and expand access to mother tongue content (Haese, 2023; African Storybook, 2023).

Across all these settings, implementation followed a phased, context-sensitive model. Common elements included piloting in schools, iterative programme adjustments, rigorous evaluations, and multi-level stakeholder engagement—all aimed at improving foundational learning outcomes through linguistically inclusive education.

Challenges and Solutions

Teacher Language Proficiency

Challenge: Many teachers are not fluent in the mother tongue assigned for instruction, making it difficult to deliver lessons effectively. This issue has been observed across several countries, including Zambia and Lesotho, where teachers often default to English due to limited skills in local languages (Maseko & Masinire, 2023).

Solution: Targeted teacher training has been introduced to strengthen both language proficiency and pedagogical competence in mother tongue instruction. Countries like Lesotho have also revised pre-service and in-service training curricula to better support bilingual teaching approaches (Makalela, 2021).

Shortage of Local Language Materials

Challenge: Instructional materials—such as textbooks, readers, and teacher guides—are often unavailable or poorly developed in many local languages, limiting teaching effectiveness (EdQual, 2023).

Solution: Several initiatives have addressed this by creating open-access resources. The African Storybook project, for instance, has developed thousands of freely available storybooks in over 230 African languages, improving resource availability for both schools and families (African Storybook, 2023).

Community Resistance and Language Preferences

Challenge: Parents and community members may resist mother tongue instruction, favoring international languages (e.g., English or French) due to perceived economic advantages (Global Partnership for Education, 2022).

Solution: Community engagement and sensitization campaigns have helped shift perceptions. By involving parents and leaders in programme design and explaining the cognitive and academic benefits of early instruction in familiar languages, resistance has been reduced in countries such as Mozambique and Niger.

Policy-Practice Gap

Challenge: While many African countries have supportive language-in-education policies, these are often poorly implemented due to limited funding, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate coordination (Chaulagai et al., 2022).

Solution: Governments and implementing partners have responded by integrating mother tongue instruction into broader education sector plans, investing in capacity-building, and developing monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure fidelity and accountability in implementation (UNESCO, 2023).

Results

Outcomes

Mother tongue instruction initiatives across Africa have demonstrated measurable improvements in foundational literacy and educational outcomes:

- **Kenya:** The PRIMR-MT program achieved gains ranging from 0.3 to 0.6 standard deviations in oral reading fluency and comprehension in mother tongue languages, surpassing the outcomes of English-only instruction (Piper et al., 2018).
- **Uganda:** The School Health and Reading Program (SHRP) significantly enhanced literacy achievement in 9 out of 12 local languages. Notably, in the Ngakarimojong language, 71% of Primary 4 learners in program schools read 40 or more correct words per minute, compared to 30% in control schools (Brunette et al., 2019).
- **Ethiopia:** Following the 1994 education reform, gross primary enrollment rates more than doubled from 24% in 1994 to 57% in 2000 (Chaudhury et al., 2006). Additionally, the likelihood of children being in the appropriate grade for their age increased by 8.8 percentage points (Seid, 2016).
- **Mozambique:** The Vamos Ler! ('Let's Read!') program, initiated in 2017, implemented a bilingual education curriculum in over 2,000 schools. By 2021, 43.2% of Grade 3 students in participating regions achieved minimum reading proficiency, a substantial increase from 4.9% in 2016 (Creative Associates International, 2022).
- **Niger:** The Ministry of Education expanded a pilot program from 500 to 5,000 schools between 2017 and 2018, introducing local languages in early grades and gradually transitioning to French. This approach led to higher student performance in bilingual schools compared to traditional Francophone schools (Global Partnership for Education, 2017).
- **South Africa:** The Vula Bula initiative developed openly licensed reading resources in nine official African languages. These phonically levelled readers have been widely adopted in public schools to improve early literacy. The program was evaluated and shown to improve reading outcomes in isiXhosa for the children who received them compared to previous cohorts in the same schools who did not (Haese, 2023).

These outcomes were assessed using standardized tools like the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and national census data, ensuring robust and comparable data collection across different contexts and time periods.

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

Recent evidence, including several global reviews and meta-analyses, confirms that mother tongue instruction can significantly improve early literacy and equity, particularly when integrated with broader system reforms (Piper et al., 2018; Brunette et al., 2019; Creative Associates International, 2022). UNESCO's comprehensive 2016 global review found that children beginning education in their mother tongue consistently outperform those starting in a second language across reading, writing, and overall academic achievement (UNESCO, 2016). This finding is supported by Alidou et al.'s (2006) meta-analysis of African contexts, which demonstrated moderate to large positive effects on literacy acquisition, and the World Bank's systematic review of over 40 countries, which showed improved learning outcomes and reduced dropout rates, with particularly pronounced equity benefits for marginalized communities (World Bank, 2005). For successful replication, initiatives must begin with linguistic mapping to align instructional languages with community use (Chaulagai et al., 2022).

Complementing these global reviews, findings from the online survey revealed strong consensus on the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction. Respondents highlighted enhanced comprehension and cognitive development as key benefits, with particularly notable gains in countries implementing systematic approaches in linguistically homogeneous contexts. Burundi, for example, demonstrates a scalable model through the structured integration of vernacular languages across educational levels, linked to equity gains and improved foundational skills. At the same time, challenges were emphasized in multilingual settings, such as Cameroon and Uganda, where the sheer number of languages creates significant resource and teacher training demands. Stakeholders stressed that effectiveness is closely tied to government commitment, policy frameworks, and the availability of adequate teacher training and culturally relevant learning materials.

Effective implementation requires targeted teacher training in bilingual pedagogy, as seen in Mozambique and Uganda, and consistent development of high-quality materials, supported by open-access platforms like African Storybook and Vula Bula (Haese, 2023; African Storybook, 2023). Community engagement is also essential to shift preferences that favour international languages—Mozambique and Niger have shown how sensitization efforts can build public support (GPE, 2017; UNESCO, 2023).

Finally, strong policy alignment, sustained political will, and use of reliable assessment tools like EGRA are critical to scale and sustain impact. Countries that integrated mother tongue instruction into national strategies—such as Ethiopia and Kenya—achieved greater success and system-level change (Piper et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2023).

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The consistent positive results across diverse African contexts demonstrate several practical lessons learned:

- successful mother tongue instruction requires systematic linguistic mapping to align instructional languages with community use;
- effective implementation depends on targeted teacher training in bilingual pedagogy combined with ongoing coaching support;
- high-quality, culturally relevant materials are essential and can be supported through open-access platforms;
- community engagement and sensitization are critical to overcome initial resistance and build public support for local language instruction; and
- strong policy alignment with sustained political commitment enables greater system-level impact.

Countries that integrated mother tongue instruction into comprehensive national education strategies achieved more substantial and lasting improvements in foundational literacy outcomes.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Adopt MTI as a transitional bridge model: Position MTI not as an endpoint, but as a pathway that supports children—particularly refugees and out-of-school learners—to build foundational skills in a familiar language before gradually transitioning to the official/national language by Grade 3–4.
- Integrate MTI with complementary pedagogies: Combine MTI with other proven instructional approaches such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), structured pedagogy, and play-based learning to enhance engagement and accelerate literacy and numeracy gains.
- Ensure systematic language mapping and strategic selection: Conduct early and evidence-based linguistic mapping to identify the most widely spoken and pedagogically viable languages for instruction. Prioritize practicality by focusing on a manageable number of languages to avoid fragmentation.
- Strengthen teacher professional development in bilingual pedagogy: Institutionalize continuous pre-service and in-service training, along with classroom coaching, to equip teachers with the skills to implement multilingual teaching and manage transitions between languages effectively.
- Invest in culturally relevant, cost-effective materials: Scale up the development and distribution of high-quality learning resources in local languages. Leverage open-access platforms and affordable models, such as the Ladder to Learning approach, to keep per-learner costs low while ensuring contextual relevance.
- Mobilize communities and address concerns proactively: Develop communication and sensitization strategies that engage parents, caregivers, and community leaders to build understanding and support for MTI, addressing fears around delayed acquisition of international languages.
- Embed MTI within national education strategies: Move beyond fragmented pilots by integrating MTI into national education policies, with harmonized models, clear coordination structures, and strong political commitment to ensure long-term sustainability and scale.

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Targeting Instruction by Learning Level Rather than Age or Grade

A simple, low-cost approach that helps children catch up by teaching according to ability rather than age or grade.

Case Study Countries:
Botswana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia

These case study countries were selected based on evidence of successful implementation of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approaches at scale, with documented learning gains and strong government partnerships. The selection represents different stages of implementation and regional contexts, demonstrating the adaptability and effectiveness of ability-based grouping strategies across diverse African education systems

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

In many African countries, a large number of children reach the later stages of primary school without being able to read fluently or solve basic maths problems (World Bank, 2020). Indeed, data from the World Bank shows that nearly 9 out of 10 children in Africa are unable to read a simple sentence by the age of 10 (World Bank, 2022). Despite attending school regularly, learners often fall behind because instruction remains rigidly tied to grade-level curricula that do not reflect students' actual ability. Multiple large-scale assessments, such as Uwezo in East Africa (Uwezo, 2011; Uwezo, 2021) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in West Africa, confirm that foundational literacy and numeracy are not being mastered in the early grades (Gove & Wetterberg 2011).

To compound this issue, children who start to fall behind rarely catch up. Teaching practices often do not respond to the range of abilities in the classroom, and most teachers are not equipped with tools or strategies to differentiate instruction (Onyishi & Sefotho, 2020; Abora, 2015; de Jager, 2017). Additionally, teachers will often target their lessons at the higher achieving students, meaning that the students with the lowest levels of numeracy and literacy fall increasingly further behind (Syengo, 2022). The result is a growing gap between the curriculum and learning, particularly for children in the early primary grades.

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Initiative Goal

The goal of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is to ensure that all children develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills, regardless of the grade they are in. Rather than assuming all learners are at the same level, TaRL supports teachers to assess children's current abilities and provide targeted instruction that helps them catch up and progress (Banerjee et al., 2016).

Target Beneficiaries

The initiative primarily targets children in early and middle primary school who are not yet able to read fluently or perform basic arithmetic. Despite being present in school, these students are often not learning. This targeting approach addresses a fundamental challenge identified across African education systems: children who start to fall behind rarely catch up because teaching practices often do not respond to the range of abilities in the classroom, and most teachers are not equipped with tools or strategies to differentiate instruction. Teachers will often target their lessons at the higher achieving students, meaning that the students with the lowest levels of numeracy and literacy fall increasingly further behind (TaRL Africa, 2022). The TaRL methodology specifically addresses this through its core assessment and grouping process: conducting short oral assessments to gauge student ability, forming learning groups based on those results, using tailored activities to teach core skills, reassessing children regularly to track progress and regroup accordingly, and supporting teachers with ongoing mentoring and monitoring (Banerjee et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2023). This approach recognizes that learner attainment in Africa often falls short of grade level, requiring scaffolded and differentiated instruction that is responsive to varied ability levels rather than chronological age or grade placement (Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2021).

Teachers are a secondary beneficiary group, as they receive training and tools to assess and group students, as well as how to implement simple, effective learning activities. Ministries of Education benefit through access to a low-cost, scalable model that can be integrated into national programmes (Curtiss Wyss et al., 2023).

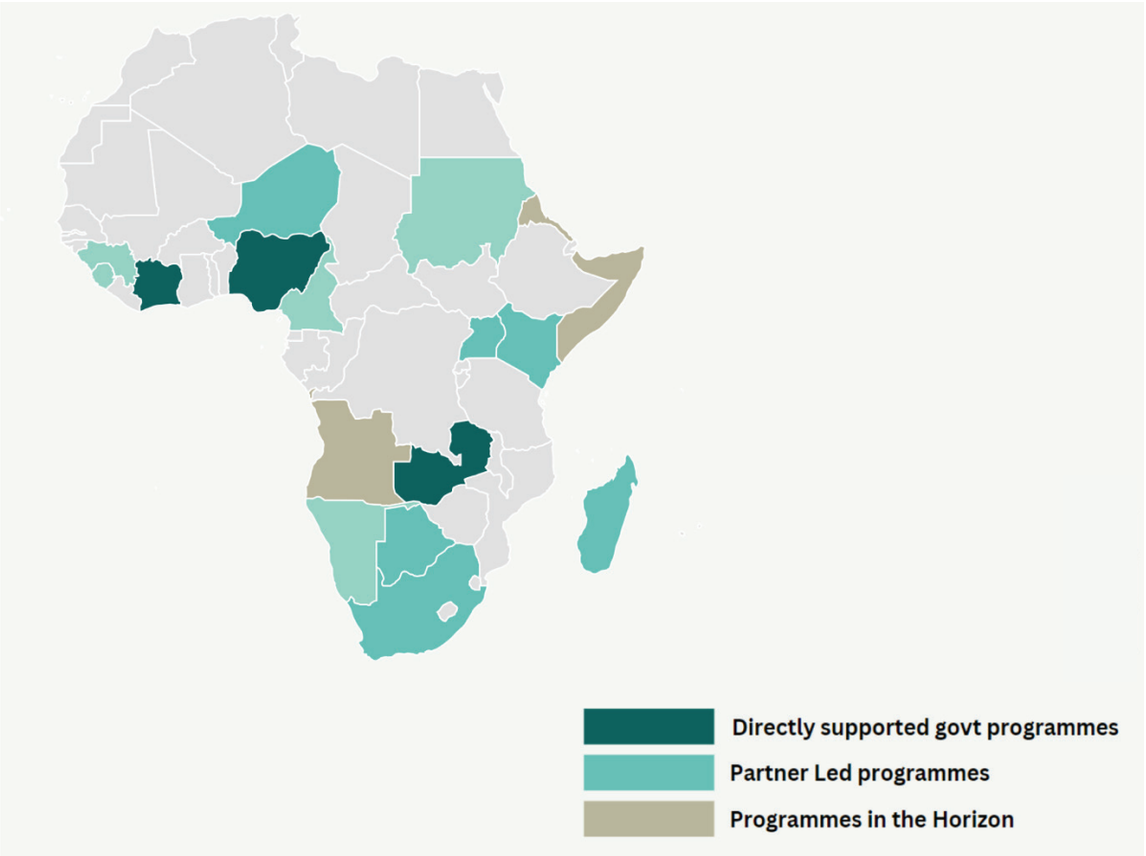
Solution

Description of the Initiative

Teaching at the Right Level was originally developed by Pratham, one of India's largest NGOs, in response to the widespread issue of children attending school but failing to master basic reading and arithmetic. The initiative gained international recognition following several successful evaluations and was later adapted for use in African countries through a partnership with J-PAL.

The figure below illustrates the extensive network of TaRL Africa's implementing partners across the continent, demonstrating the intervention's broad reach and collaborative approach to scaling foundational learning improvements.

Figure 1: Examples of TaRL Africa's Partners
Source: TaRL, 2023



TaRL is a learner-centred approach that is designed to improve foundational literacy and numeracy (Angrist et al., 2020). Rather than following the standard curriculum by grade, the method begins with an initial assessment to determine each child's learning level. Students are then grouped by ability and taught using targeted activities appropriate to their current level. These activities are intentionally simple, often delivered in local languages, and designed to require minimal materials. They focus on foundational reading and numeracy skills, such as letter recognition, word decoding, and basic arithmetic.

Instructional strategies are delivered through a repeating cycle. This includes (i) conducting short oral assessments to gauge student ability; (ii) forming learning groups based on those results; (iii) using tailored activities to teach core skills; (iv) reassessing children regularly to track progress and regroup; accordingly, and (v) supporting teachers with ongoing mentoring and monitoring. These five steps form the core methodology of TaRL, allowing teachers to teach students in accordance with their literacy and numeracy levels respectively, rather than their age (Banerjee et al., 2016). Unlike structured pedagogy, which often relies on detailed lesson plans and scripted materials, TaRL offers teachers more flexibility and encourages them to adapt instruction in response to learners' progress.

Implementation of the Initiative

To date, TaRL Africa has implemented this initiative in over 12 different African countries, including Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Madagascar, Namibia, Niger, Nigera, Uganda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Zambia, and aims to aims to improve learning outcomes for more than 5 million African children (TaRL, 2023a). Moreover, governments in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zambia are currently taking steps to institutionalise the approach. This has so far included over 1,000 schools in Côte d'Ivoire, more than 2,000 in Nigeria across 7 states, and over 5,000 in Zambia, which represents more than half of the country's primary schools (Ibid.).

The implementation of TaRL has varied across countries but is typically adapted to local context and requires strong government engagement.

In Zambia, the Catch-Up programme was introduced across 1,800 schools. Teachers delivered TaRL activities during the regular school day, with the first hour allocated for catch-up work. The Ministry of General Education led the rollout, supported by partners such as VVOB and Pratham, and reinforced the programme through school visits and monitoring tools (VVOB, 2018).

In Nigeria, TaRL was introduced in northern states, including Borno. Here, the approach showed rapid results: after six months, literacy rates among Grade 3 students improved from 14 percent to 45 percent (TaRL, 2023). Teachers used

Hausa as the language of instruction, and community-based facilitators played a central role in coaching and tracking progress. Côte d'Ivoire aligned the PEC programme with national curriculum goals. TaRL was implemented in over 1,200 schools through a focused 100-day learning cycle. Students were grouped into three levels based on learning assessments, and instruction was delivered in French and maths. Results from this short cycle revealed learning gains that exceeded those from the entire previous school year (TaRL, 2023).

In Botswana, TaRL was piloted in selected districts, using both Setswana and English. Teachers noted improved classroom engagement, particularly among learners who had previously been disengaged (Curtiss Wyss et al., 2023). The approach was integrated into the school timetable and supported by continuous professional development.

Namibia is developing catch-up programmes that mirror the TaRL principles and methodology, with diagnostic assessments and scripted learning support. Numeracy support will also be tracked via a FLN dashboard and regional coaching, reaching as many learners as possible and prioritising inclusion. A significant improvement was noted in the performance of learners who have gone through the programme.

While implementation varied by context, all four countries focused on (i) training teachers in the core TaRL methodology; (ii) integrating TaRL sessions into the school day; (iii) providing support through coaches and mentors; and (iv) collecting regular data on student learning outcomes. Adaptation to language, curriculum, and local teaching norms was essential in each case.
Challenges and Solutions
While TaRL has shown strong results across a range of contexts, implementation has not been without challenges. Several practical and systemic issues emerged, requiring context-specific solutions to ensure quality and consistency.

Teacher resistance to new methods

Challenge: One of the most common challenges was initial resistance from teachers (Global Partnership for Education, 2023), who were often unfamiliar with grouping students by ability rather than age or grade. Many teachers felt that changing classroom routines would be burdensome.

Solution: To address this, countries like Nigeria and Zambia used hands-on training and peer learning to help teachers experience the benefits of the approach directly.

Balancing remedial instruction with the official curriculum

Challenge: A second challenge concerned the balance between covering the official curriculum and the delivery of remedial content.

Solution: In response, ministries made adjustments to the timetable. Zambia, for example, dedicated an hour of each school day to TaRL (Lipovsek et al., 2023), ensuring that it became a regular and prioritised part of instruction. Conversely, Côte d'Ivoire aligned TaRL activities with national learning competencies (Dembele, 2023).

Maintaining quality and consistency at scale

Challenge: Another common hurdle was the maintenance of quality and consistency across schools. Where monitoring and coaching were limited, implementation standards declined.

Solution: In countries like Nigeria where support systems were maintained, student progress remained strong. Regular visits by coaches, mobile monitoring tools, and community engagement proved essential to reinforcing teaching quality and sustaining momentum (GPE KIX, 2025).

Results

Outcomes

Teaching at the Right Level has delivered significant improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy in each of the four countries. Independent assessments and internal programme evaluations showed measurable improvements in reading and mathematics proficiency (Curtiss Wyss et al., 2023; Curtiss Wyss et al., 2021; Empower Learning Africa, 2024; Lipovsek et al., 2023)

Table 3: Reported Improvements in Literacy and/or Numeracy Gains

Country	Improvements in Literacy and/or Numeracy Gains
Botswana	The percentage of grade 3 to 5 students who could not do any basic numeracy operations fell from 34 % to 8 % during a TaRL implementation duration of 3 to 6 weeks.
Côte d'Ivoire	The share of students in the beginner level of reading dropped from 23% to 14.8% in just 3 weeks.
Namibia	Students improved from 16% to 57% in basic addition skills in just one term.
Nigeria	50% improvement in students' ability to perform subtraction and division, and over an 80-percentage point improvement in reading Hausa or English sentences.
Zambia	The share of children reading with basic proficiency rose from 34% to 52%.

Sources: Curtiss Wyss et al., 2023; Curtiss Wyss et al., 2021; Empower Learning Africa, 2024; Lipovsek et al., 2023, TaRL, 2025.

These outcomes are especially notable given the relatively low cost of the intervention and the use of existing school infrastructure. TaRL has shown that with the right instructional approach and support, large-scale learning gains are possible, even in resource-constrained environments (GPE KIX, 2024).

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

TaRL is increasingly recognised as being a highly cost-effective and scalable approach to improving foundational literacy and numeracy. Evaluations conducted in Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zambia consistently show that when implemented effectively, the approach leads to significant and sustained improvements in literacy and numeracy.

Several enabling conditions were common across successful programmes. These include (i) strong political and institutional leadership; (ii) explicit integration of TaRL into daily school routines; (iii) clear instructional roles for teachers and school heads; and (iv) robust systems for coaching, data collection, and course correction.

These four case studies suggest that flexibility, local ownership, and ongoing teacher support are critical to successful implementation of the initiative. The approach does not require expensive technology or extensive resources. Rather, its effectiveness lies in its simplicity and the ease with which it can be implemented if teacher buy-in is successfully achieved either prior to or during the early phases of implementation. (Banerjee et al., 2016).

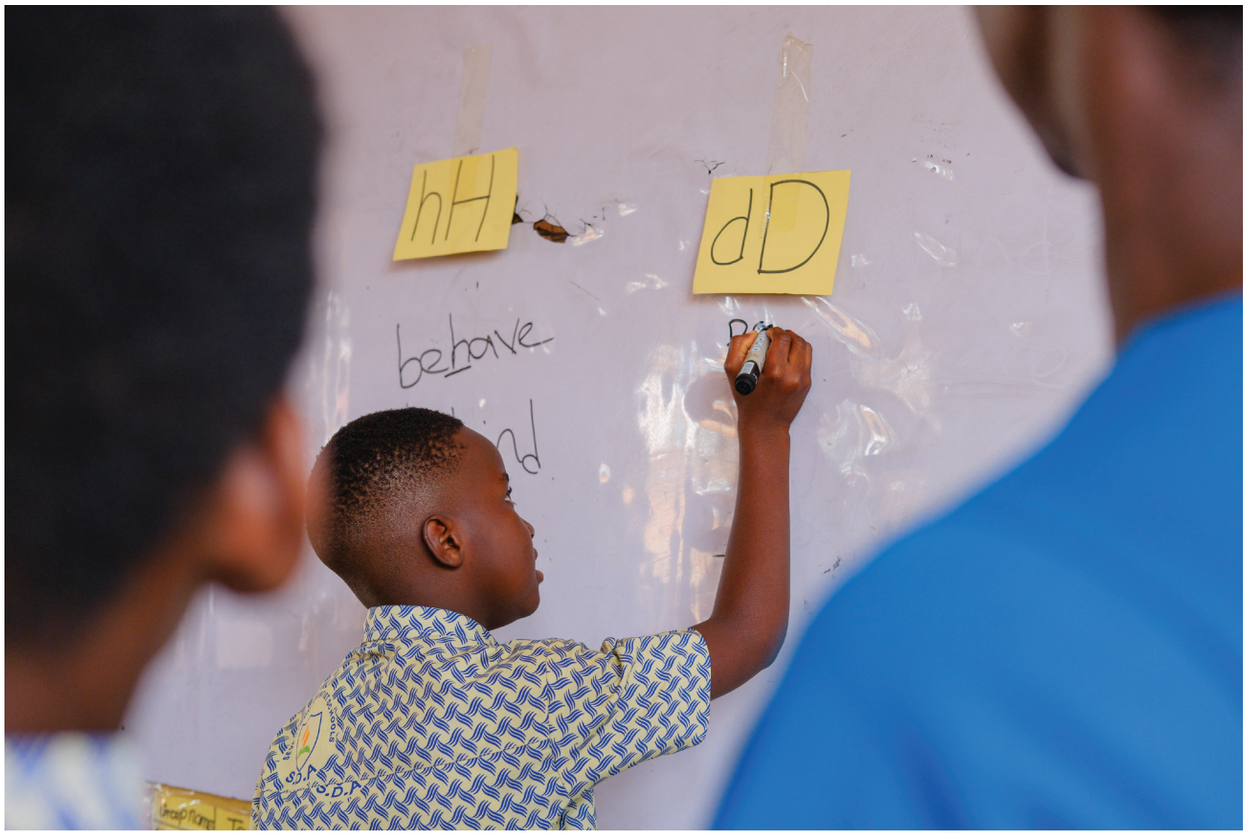
Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Drawing on field experience and validation workshop discussions, several lessons have emerged on how Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) strengthens foundational learning when adapted and scaled in African contexts.

- **Learning for All, not just Schooling for All:** TaRL demonstrates that focusing on children's actual learning levels—rather than their age or grade—can significantly accelerate foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes, especially for learners at risk of being left behind.
- **Simple, Targeted Assessments Drive Instruction:** Periodic, one-on-one assessments provide teachers with a practical tool to group students by learning level and track progress. This simplicity makes the approach scalable across diverse education systems.
- **Practical, Hands-On Teacher Training Works:** Intensive, practice-based training—typically 20–25 days—equips instructors with the skills to implement TaRL effectively, marking a departure from minimal, theory-heavy professional development models.
- **Flexible and Adaptable Pedagogy is Key:** By using simple, engaging activities that can be adjusted as children progress, TaRL offers a dynamic approach that ensures no child is left behind, in contrast to rigid whole-class instruction that often caters only to top-performing learners.
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Mentoring Sustain Impact:** Continuous review and support systems enable teachers to adapt instruction in real time, helping to maintain fidelity to the model and ensuring consistent results at scale.

Building on these lessons, the following recommendations can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Institutionalize learning-level targeting within national strategies to ensure that foundational skills are prioritized for all children, particularly in Grades 3–5.
- Adopt simple, regular assessment tools that enable teachers to group students effectively, track progress, and make timely instructional adjustments.
- Invest in sustained, practice-based teacher training that equips educators with the hands-on skills to apply TaRL methods, supported by structured mentoring and peer learning.
- Embed adaptable instructional practices into curricula, allowing teachers to adjust groupings and activities based on children's progress rather than rigid grade-level expectations.
- Strengthen monitoring and feedback systems at classroom, school, and district levels to ensure quality, consistency, and continuous improvement as TaRL scales.



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Structured Pedagogy

Improving instructional quality by supporting teachers with structured lesson plans, coaching, and sustained classroom support.

Case Study Countries:
The Gambia, Liberia, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda

These case study countries were selected to represent successful large-scale implementation of structured pedagogy programs with documented evidence of learning improvements. The selection prioritized government-led initiatives that demonstrate the effectiveness of systematic instructional support, teacher training, and structured materials in improving foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

In many LMICs, especially in Africa, teachers often lack the pedagogical skills required to design and deliver effective, student-centred lessons. This is frequently compounded by limited content knowledge, and teachers are left under-equipped to respond to learners' needs. As a result, poor instructional methods remain common in lower primary classrooms (Piper & Dubeck, 2018; Piper & Dubeck, 2024).

Several interrelated factors contribute to this challenge. One is the misalignment between curriculum expectations and students' actual learning levels (Muralidharan & Singh, 2019). Another is the widespread use of non-local languages, such as English, as the medium of instruction. This often takes place before children have fully developed proficiency in their home language (Piper et al., 2016). Pritchett (2013) captures the heart of the issue by noting that in many systems, 'curriculum content is taught rather than children.' Moreover, teaching methods continue to rely heavily on lecture-based, teacher-centred approaches that leave little room for student interaction or guided practice. A study conducted in Kenya (Commeyras & Inyega, 2007) highlighted how such strategies offer limited opportunities for learners to apply and develop foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, and therefore contribute to poor literacy and numeracy outcomes.

It is within this context that structured pedagogy has emerged as a response. Recognising the need to support teachers with clear instructional tools, several African governments have introduced reforms aimed at improving the pedagogical quality of teaching through structured lesson plans, teacher training, and sustained classroom support (Piper & Dubeck, 2018).

Initiative Goal

Structured pedagogy programmes aim to strengthen literacy and numeracy, including foundational learning, by supporting consistent, high-quality instruction, including in early childhood and early primary grades. This approach centers on giving teachers clear, daily guidance on lesson delivery through comprehensive teaching guides, while equipping students with appropriate learning materials and providing teachers with specialized training and continuous classroom support. Unlike traditional professional development that focuses on general teaching principles, structured pedagogy offers specific, actionable guidance on curriculum delivery, enabling teachers to implement evidence-based instructional techniques even in resource-constrained environments, particularly in early childhood and early primary grades.

In Kenya and The Gambia, this has been pursued through large-scale government-led interventions that combine curriculum-aligned learner materials, detailed teacher guides, in-service training, and school-based coaching (Piper & Dubeck, 2018; Eble et al., 2019). In Kenya, the Tusome programme sought to embed structured pedagogy across all public primary schools by equipping teachers with daily lesson plans and providing real-time feedback mechanisms through instructional coaching. In The Gambia, a similar structured pedagogy approach was adapted for use by para-teachers, extending quality instruction into under-resourced and remote areas where qualified teachers were not available. In both contexts, the ultimate aim was to enable all children, regardless of background or school location, to access effective and inclusive early learning.

In Nigeria, Edo State has implemented the Education Basic Education Sector Transformation (EdoBEST) program, a comprehensive state-led reform initiative aimed at improving teaching and learning practices across all primary schools. The program's primary goal is to ensure that every child learns foundational skills, moving beyond traditional input-focused approaches to prioritize actual learning outcomes. EdoBEST employs a structured pedagogy approach where every teacher receives standardized lesson plans delivered via tablets, enabling real-time tracking and monitoring of lesson delivery (Saavedra & De Simone, 2023)

In Uganda, Inspiring Teachers, has been implementing a structured pedagogy initiative designed to improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes through the provision of structured lesson plans for teachers. Working in partnership with non-government organizations, Inspiring Teachers has developed these lesson plans to provide grade 5 mathematics teachers with step-by-step guidance that combines both content knowledge and pedagogical strategies within a single, easy-to-follow format. The initiative aims to address the learning crisis in Uganda, where children complete an average of 6.8 years of schooling but only achieve 4.3 actual years of learning due to poor educational quality. By providing teachers with structured yet flexible lesson plans—as opposed to overly scripted guides—the program seeks to enhance teaching practices, increase student engagement, and ultimately improve learning outcomes, particularly in contexts where teachers may lack specialized subject training or adequate classroom resources (Fortet, 2025). Namibia's national roadmap anchors FLN delivery in structured pedagogy,

combining scripted phonics and numeracy instruction with formative assessments, instructional coaching, and fidelity dashboards. The model is linked to pre-service reform and CPD rollout, ensuring continuity across training and classroom practice.

Target Beneficiaries

Structured pedagogy programmes are designed with two core beneficiary groups in mind. Firstly, the immediate beneficiaries are teachers. They receive practical tools, in the form of scripted lesson plans, teaching guides, and professional development, that assists them in delivering effective classroom instruction. Where implemented effectively, these programmes enhance teacher confidence, reduce planning burden, and improve pedagogical understanding (Piper & Dubeck, 2018).

However, the ultimate beneficiaries are the students. Structured pedagogy aims to promote equity and inclusion across gender, disability, language, and socio-economic background (GEEAP, 2023). With this in mind, it is essential for any structured pedagogy programme to explicitly integrate inclusive practices.

'Structured pedagogy interventions are among the few education programmes that have consistently demonstrated large effects on foundational learning when implemented at scale.'

Graham & Kelly, 2018

Solution

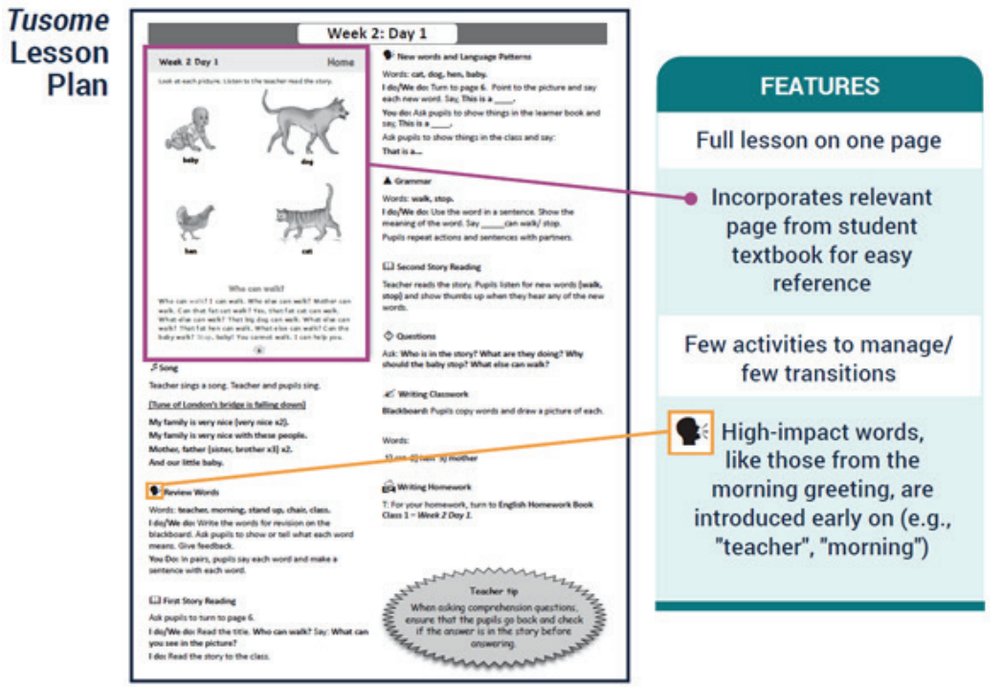
Description of the Initiative

Structured pedagogy refers to a deliberately developed, cohesive set of investments aimed at improving classroom instruction (Piper et al., 2021). Although the specific design may vary by setting, structured pedagogy programmes commonly comprise four key components: (i) student learning materials, often distributed at a 1:1 ratio to ensure universal access; (ii) detailed teacher guides that provide structured, daily lesson plans to guide instructional delivery; (iii) professional development for teachers, focused on equipping them with the specific competencies needed to implement these lessons effectively; and (iv) sustained support for teachers through ongoing mechanisms such as instructional coaching and teacher peer networks.

Programmes referred to within this section, such as Kenya's Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) and Tusome programmes, Gambia's para-teacher programme (Eble et al., 2019), in addition to a USAID-funded initiative in Liberia, contained these four key components.

Kenya's PRIMR programme focused on children in Bungoma and Machakos counties, where Lubukusu and Kikamba are commonly spoken, providing tailored materials and continuous teacher support. The Tusome programme combined structured lesson plans (Figure 2), teacher training, learner materials, and coaching, resulting in learning gains equivalent to one to two additional years of schooling in reading fluency and comprehension.

Figure 2: Example of a lesson plan page from the Tusome program in Kenya
Source: World Bank. 2023. Making Teacher Policy Work



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Gambia's para-teacher programme recruited community members, trained them in structured pedagogy methods, and deployed them to support early grade classrooms. The model was especially effective in addressing teacher shortages and increasing instructional time, producing statistically significant improvements in reading outcomes among Grade 1 learners despite resource constraints.

Liberia's Read Liberia programme provided Primary 1 to Primary 2 teachers with structured lesson guides, student workbooks, and regular mentoring visits. The programme reached 57,600 students and resulted in significant gains in oral reading fluency and comprehension.

It should also be noted that additional common features included; (i) national or sub-national rollouts targeting thousands of schools; (ii) scripted lesson plans aligned with revised curricula; (iii) cascaded training models supplemented by classroom-based coaching; and (iv) use of formative assessments to monitor student progress.

World Bank Teach Tool: Measuring Classroom Practice Quality

The World Bank's Teach Primary tool serves as a complementary instrument for measuring and improving the quality of classroom instruction within structured pedagogy programmes. Developed as a free classroom observation tool for primary classrooms (grades 1-6), Teach Primary assesses teaching practices across three primary areas: Classroom Culture (supportive learning environment and positive behavioural expectations), Instruction (lesson facilitation, checks for understanding, and feedback provision), and Socioemotional Skills (fostering autonomy, perseverance, and collaborative skills). The tool uses structured observations and captures both time spent on learning and the quality of teaching practices, with a cross-cutting focus on inclusion and teaching practices that are responsive to all students' needs (World Bank, 2022).

In the context of structured pedagogy programmes like those implemented in Kenya, The Gambia, and Nigeria, Teach Primary can serve multiple purposes: as a system diagnostic to assess current teaching quality, as a monitoring and evaluation tool for education policies targeting teacher practices, or as part of teacher professional development systems. The tool enables education systems to identify gaps between intended and actual instructional delivery, inform targeted coaching interventions, and track improvements in teaching quality over time. Since its launch in 2019, more than 500 enumerators in over 30 countries have been trained on the tool, demonstrating its practical applicability for structured pedagogy programmes seeking to ensure that improved materials and teacher training translate into enhanced classroom instruction and student learning.

Implementation of the Initiative

Implementation varied by country, depending on scale and system readiness. However, regardless of context, common implementation strategies include: (i) baseline assessments to identify student learning gaps; (ii) development and distribution of structured teaching and learning materials; (iii) intensive teacher training followed by ongoing coaching; and (iv) government leadership and integration into national education systems.

Notably, in The Gambia, the para-teacher programme recruited community members, trained them in structured pedagogy methods, and deployed them to support early grade classrooms. Accordingly, the model was especially effective in addressing teacher shortages and increasing instructional time.

A USAID programme in Liberia, called the *Read Liberia programme*, provided Primary 1 to Primary 2 teachers with structured lesson guides, student workbooks, and regular mentoring visits. The programme reached 57,600 students and resulted in significant gains in oral reading fluency and comprehension (Menendez et al., 2021).

Challenges and Solutions

Structured pedagogy programmes faced several implementation challenges. Firstly, there was often resistance from teachers, particularly in the early phases, due to the perceived rigidity of scripted lesson plans and unfamiliar pedagogical routines. In Kenya, some educators initially felt constrained by the materials as they felt that it limited their autonomy (Piper & Dubeck, 2018). There was also some initial resistance in The Gambia, where para-teachers required intensive support to adopt structured delivery. However, this was due to their lack of pedagogical training, meaning that they didn't feel they had the skills necessary to deliver the lessons, as opposed to frustrations with the pedagogical approach itself (Eble et al., 2019).

Logistical issues around the timely delivery of materials also affected the speed and quality of implementation. In both Kenya and The Gambia, delays in distributing teacher guides and learner books hindered programme rollout in the first year, and improved coordination between ministries and printing contractors was required in order to ensure the future success of these programmes (Graham & Kelly, 2018).

Another fundamental issue is that learner attainment in Africa often falls shorts of grade level (Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2020). In order to overcome this, structured pedagogy programmes must address this through scaffolded and differentiated instruction. Learner materials and lesson plans should be responsive to varied ability levels, and use strategies such as guided practice and formative assessment to support progress. Classrooms were also often overcrowded, containing students from multiple different grades. This made it difficult for teachers to follow scripted routines as designed.

Finally, efforts to conduct sustained monitoring were initially uneven. Where district-level oversight was weak, programme adherence suffered. The responses to this issue differed by context. Kenya used mobile data collection to strengthen accountability, whereas the programme in The Gambia required increased supervisory visits and teacher mentoring (Stern et al., 2021).

Results

Outcomes

Structured pedagogy programmes in Africa have demonstrated notable improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy when delivered at scale. In Kenya, the Tusome programme, which combined structured lesson plans, teacher training, learner materials, and coaching, resulted in learning gains equivalent to one to two additional years of schooling in reading fluency and comprehension (Piper & Dubeck, 2018; Stern & Piper, 2019). These impacts placed the programme's average effect size above the 90th percentile of all education programmes trialled in Africa (Evans & Mendez Acosta, 2020).

Likewise, in The Gambia, the para-teacher structured pedagogy intervention produced statistically significant improvements in reading outcomes among Grade 1 learners (Eble et al., 2019). Despite resource constraints, this low-cost model demonstrated that structured pedagogy can deliver learning gains even in remote or under-resourced contexts, particularly when instruction is supported by targeted training and supervision.

South Africa's Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) series provides compelling additional evidence for structured pedagogy's effectiveness. The Department of Basic Education conducted multiple randomized controlled trials from 2015-2025, testing what they term the "education triple cocktail" - scripted daily lesson plans, additional learning materials, and teacher professional development with coaching. The most successful intervention combined in-person coaching with the base programme, with children learning "an additional 40% of a normal year's worth of schooling by the end of Grade 2" in home language reading (Taylor et al., 2025, p.13). Critically, the research found that coaching was essential, as virtual coaching and department head-led coaching models proved less effective than external in-person coaching, demonstrating that "the on-site in-person coaching remains the only effective intervention" (Ibid., p.14).

More broadly, consolidated reviews (Graham & Kelly, 2018; Stern & Piper, 2019) show that structured pedagogy programmes in LMICs consistently outperform their counterparts in high-income countries, achieving average effect sizes of 0.44 SD. The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP, 2023) further endorsed these programmes as a 'Great Buy,' citing their strong learning impacts and cost-effectiveness (Angrist et al., 2021).

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

Structured pedagogy programmes are most impactful when they are led by governments and aligned to national priorities (Stern et al., 2021). Kenya's Tusome and The Gambia's para-teacher initiative both show that large-scale improvements in foundational learning, especially in literacy and numeracy, are possible when education ministries are involved in the development of materials, teacher training, and monitoring. Clear communication of expectations, most notably at district and school levels, is vital in ensuring effective programme implementation. Moreover, materials must always be adapted with the local context in mind. This should begin with local curriculum review and context-specific material development, that uses collaborative processes with national education stakeholders (Dubeck & Sitabkhan, 2020).

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Drawing on field experience and validation workshop discussions, several lessons have emerged on how structured pedagogy strengthens foundational learning when adapted and scaled in African contexts:

- System alignment underpins sustainability: Structured pedagogy initiatives are most effective when tightly integrated with national policies, curricula, and education strategies.
- Teacher and school leadership are pivotal enablers: Structured pedagogy depends on equipping teachers with scripted lessons, continuous professional development, and strong coaching support. Equally, school leaders play a central role in creating an enabling environment—without their buy-in and active support, implementation risks faltering.
- Evidence and iteration drive stronger design: Robust data collection, frequent assessments, and short-sprint adaptation cycles help refine materials and approaches.
- Policy-driven multilingual instruction expands equity: A clear framework for language use in education enables more inclusive foundational learning.
- Community engagement remains a weak link: Parental and community resistance—especially regarding mother tongue instruction—can undermine structured pedagogy reforms. This underlines the need for stronger communication strategies and community involvement in reform processes.
- Scaling requires adequate resources: Successful pilots demonstrate impact, but widespread rollout is constrained by shortages of teaching materials, limited funding, and overcrowded classrooms. Sustained domestic and donor financing, combined with leadership investment, is essential for long-term scale.

Building on these lessons, the following recommendations can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Institutionalize structured pedagogy in national systems by embedding lesson plans, teacher guides, and assessment tools within national curricula and policies to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Prioritize teacher professional development and coaching with continuous, practice-based training models that strengthen teacher confidence and consistency in delivering structured lessons.
- Invest in school leadership development to ensure leaders can champion structured pedagogy, mentor teachers, and maintain fidelity to implementation.
- Leverage data for adaptation and scale through routine assessments, program evaluations, and tools like language mapping to refine interventions and target resources effectively.
- Strengthen multilingual instruction frameworks by supporting policies that incorporate national languages into structured pedagogy programs, complemented by the development of high-quality teaching materials in these languages.
- Engage communities proactively with communication and sensitization strategies that build trust and counter resistance, especially regarding language of instruction reforms.
- Mobilize sustainable financing from domestic budgets and external partners to expand teaching materials, reduce classroom overcrowding, and secure long-term program viability.

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Early Grade Literacy and Numeracy Assessments

Standardised assessments help identify learning gaps in early grades, guiding instruction and supporting national systems to improve foundational literacy and numeracy.

Case Study Countries:
Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe

These case study countries were selected based on their experience implementing early grade assessments at scale, with evidence of using assessment data to inform policy and instructional decisions. The selection represents different approaches to integrating assessment systems within government structures and demonstrates the potential for assessment-driven improvements in foundational learning.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

Foundational literacy and numeracy are essential to achieving equitable, quality education. Yet across many African countries, there remains a lack of timely, reliable, and actionable data to assess children's learning levels in the early grades (World Bank, 2019). This presents a particular challenge for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1.1(a), which tracks the proportion of children in Grades 2 and 3 who reach minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics.

In response to growing concerns over learning poverty, diagnostic tools like the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA), and citizen-led initiatives such as ASER and Uwezo have been adopted in several countries across the continent. These tools have helped uncover substantial deficits in learning—yet their use remains inconsistent, often disconnected from national systems, and poorly aligned with global benchmarks (ASER Centre, 2023; USAID, 2016; Twaweza East Africa, 2019).

Namibia reflects this broader regional picture. While formal assessments are well-established at upper primary and secondary levels, regular data collection on early learning outcomes has been limited. EGRA was first piloted in Namibia in 2012 with support from the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), providing valuable insights into literacy development in local languages. The initiative was driven by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC), with technical support from international partners like the American Institutes for Research and funding from the European Commission. Key milestones in its promotion include pilot implementation. EGRA was first piloted in three regions of the 14 regions (Hardap, Kavango, and Oshikoto), and in three languages. It has

since expanded to twelve Namibian languages. However, these efforts have yet to be institutionalised across the country (NIED, 2012).

Zimbabwe has made significant strides in institutionalizing early grade assessment through the Zimbabwe Early Learning Assessment (ZELA). Starting in 2012, ZELA has evolved from externally supported pilots to a government-led annual assessment. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has "institutionalised the Zimbabwe Early Learning Assessment (ZELA) as a strategy to evaluate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values acquired by pupils at key points in their educational journey" (Republic of Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024, p. iii).

Other countries have faced similar issues. In Kenya, early Uwezo assessments revealed that only 20% of Grade 3 learners could read a Grade 2-level passage. In Rwanda, EGRA results were used to support foundational curriculum reforms, while in Uganda, early grade assessments identified significant gaps in reading comprehension, with only 16% of learners meeting national benchmarks in Luganda (Piper et al., 2018; MINEDUC, 2023; USAID, 2019). Without early grade data, policymakers struggle to design targeted interventions, allocate resources effectively, or monitor progress. This makes it difficult to improve instruction at the classroom level or report against key learning goals.

Initiative Goal

The aim of this initiative is to generate high-quality data on foundational learning in early primary, enabling education systems to respond more effectively to the needs of learners. It supports the use of early grade assessments, such as EGRA and EGMA, to identify skill gaps in literacy and numeracy, inform instructional decisions, and strengthen alignment with national and global goals. While Namibia provides the focal example, this model has relevance across a wide range of African countries that face similar challenges in monitoring and improving learning in the early years.

Target Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries are children in the early grades of primary school (Grades 1 to 3), whose learning levels are often unknown and unsupported. Teachers also benefit through improved access to data that can guide lesson planning, grouping, and remediation. Policymakers gain a clearer understanding of system performance, while Ministries of Education and district officials can use results to shape curriculum and teacher development. Development partners benefit from data that can inform investment priorities and programme design.

Solution

Description of the Initiative

Namibia's Foundational Approach

Namibia's early grade assessment initiative, though still emerging in scale and institutional depth, reflects a broader regional recognition that measuring what children know is essential to improving how they are taught. In 2012, Namibia began piloting the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), later expanding to include foundational numeracy through EGMA. These tools were designed to align with the national curriculum and were adapted into local languages such as Khoekhoegowab, Otjiherero, and Oshikwanyama, recognising the linguistic diversity of early primary classrooms (NIED, 2012). Administered in selected schools, the assessments provided a baseline understanding of students' reading fluency, comprehension, and basic mathematics skills.

Crucially, these diagnostic tools were not simply intended for data collection but for informing pedagogical decisions. Teachers and education officials received training on how to interpret results, using findings to adjust lesson content, identify struggling learners, and target instructional support. At the policy level, early findings contributed to discussions around curriculum reform and teacher training needs, though this process remains ongoing. There has also been growing interest in aligning these early assessments with upper primary exams and national monitoring systems, such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS), to create continuity across the learning cycle.

Zimbabwe's Comprehensive Assessment Model

Zimbabwe has developed one of the most comprehensive early grade assessment systems in the region through ZELA. The assessment is administered annually to Grade 2 pupils as they transition from the Infant School Module (ISM), which "encompasses four years from ECD A to Grade 2" (Republic of Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024, p. iii). The objective is "to measure and evaluate teaching and learning outcomes as pupils move into Junior School (Grades 3 - 7)" with particular focus on "assessing the foundational literacy and numeracy competencies of pupils" (Ibid., p. iv).

ZELA represents a significant evolution in assessment methodology. In 2023, "the Technical Working Group (TWG) introduced a digitised scanner sheet data capturing model, similar to the ZIMSEC Grade 7 scanner system customising it to suit the needs of ZELA" (Ibid., p. 6). This technological advancement allows for more efficient data collection and analysis, supporting the government's goal of aligning "Zimbabwe's assessment systems with global assessment methods" (Ibid., p. 6).

The assessment covers multiple languages reflecting Zimbabwe's linguistic diversity. ZELA evaluates proficiency in "Mathematics, English, and Indigenous

Languages (including Shona, Ndebele, Tonga, Nambya, Venda, Sesotho, Xichangana, and Kalanga)" (Ibid., p. vii). In 2024, the assessment involved 15,440 Grade 2 pupils from 700 primary schools across the country's 10 provinces (Ibid., p. 13).

Regional Learning from Other Countries

Namibia's and Zimbabwe's experiences echoes similar trajectories in other countries. In Kenya, EGRA data fed directly into the design of the Tusome literacy programme, which combined regular assessments with teacher coaching and standardised materials. In Rwanda, early assessments shaped national literacy policy and helped establish benchmarks for early grade learning. Uganda has followed a similar path, integrating results into curriculum planning and teacher development (Piper et al., 2018; MINEDUC, 2023; USAID, 2019). These examples demonstrate how early assessment can move beyond measurement to become a tool for instructional improvement and system-wide accountability.

Implementation of the Initiative

In Namibia, implementation has followed a phased model: tool development, piloting in selected schools, data analysis, and use of findings to inform instructional and strategic planning. EGRA and EGMA instruments were adapted by NIED in collaboration with development partners. Following initial data collection, results were presented to regional and national officials, prompting discussions around teacher support, language policy, and early grade curriculum reform (NIED, 2012).\

Zimbabwe has developed an implementation framework for ZELA that balances national coordination with local capacity building. The assessment uses both random and purposive sampling: In 2024, "603 schools were randomly selected while 97 were purposively selected, drawn from schools that scored zero percent pass rate at Grade 7 for the past 2 consecutive years" (Republic of Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024, p. 13). This approach ensures national representativeness while specifically targeting schools that may need additional support. The implementation involves multiple stakeholders across the education system. This enables analysis of factors affecting student performance beyond test scores alone. A key innovation in Zimbabwe's approach is the integration of assessment with broader educational planning. ZELA data is used to track "the achievement of key foundational milestones for Grade 2 pupils as they transition into Grade 3" while also evaluating "the impact of government and education partners' investments in education through the provision of grants for teaching and learning programs" (Ibid., p. vii).

Implementation models from across the continent offer useful lessons. Rwanda and Uganda have embedded assessment literacy within teacher training, enabling classroom-level data use. Kenya has aligned assessment findings with coaching programmes. Across these settings, success hinges on aligning tools with national priorities and building sustainable local capacity.

Challenges and Solutions

Despite clear potential, Namibia's assessment efforts, and those of similar initiatives across the region, have faced several implementation challenges that have limited their impact. The first issue concerns sustainability. Early grade assessments in Namibia were initially supported by external partners, and although the pilots yielded important data, they were not fully institutionalised within national systems. This meant that subsequent rounds of assessment were often irregular, depending on donor funding cycles rather than routine government operations. Without integration into EMIS or alignment with national planning, the data risked becoming static rather than actionable. Other countries, such as Kenya and Rwanda, have been more successful in embedding assessments within government-led monitoring systems, ensuring that findings feed directly into instructional planning and national decision-making. Zimbabwe has made significant progress in this area, transitioning from external support to government leadership. As noted in the ZELA report, "Since 2022, after the Ministry personnel had received some training, the Ministry has now taken a more prominent role in the ZELA administration" (Republic of Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024, p. 8).

A second challenge relates to the use of data at the classroom level. While assessments generated valuable insights, translating these findings into improved teaching has not always followed. Teachers were often trained to administer the tools but lacked sustained coaching or materials to adjust their practice in response. As a result, the potential for these assessments to guide differentiated instruction or inform remedial learning was not fully realised. In contrast, programmes like Tusome in Kenya and Catch Up in Zambia demonstrate how pairing assessment data with structured pedagogical support, such as coaching, grouping strategies, and scripted lesson plans, can lead to measurable gains in learning outcomes (Piper et al., 2018; VVOB, 2021).

Finally, there has been a tendency across the region to prioritise literacy over numeracy, with limited investment in tools like EGMA. This imbalance means that foundational gaps in early mathematics often go undetected and unaddressed. Zimbabwe's ZELA addresses this by providing equal focus on both domains. The 2024 results showed different trends for each subject: while mathematics scores improved, English scores declined, highlighting the need for subject-specific interventions. Moving forward, it will be essential for countries to develop a more balanced approach, recognising that numeracy, like literacy, is a core building block for future learning and should be monitored with equal rigour.

Results

Outcomes

In Namibia, EGRA and EGMA pilots revealed significant gaps in early literacy and numeracy. Fewer than 10% of Grade 2 learners were reading at grade level in local languages, with average oral reading fluency below 20 correct words per minute and comprehension rates under 30% (NIED, 2012). These findings informed curriculum review processes and teacher training but have not yet translated into national-scale reforms, in part due to limited system integration.

Zimbabwe's ZELA provides detailed insights into student performance and factors affecting learning outcomes. In 2024, ZELA revealed that 74.94% of pupils performed at or above grade level in English and 72.45% in Mathematics (Republic of Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2024, p. 22). However, the assessment also identified concerning trends, including an increase in pupils performing below grade level in English from 21.87% in 2023 to 25.1% in 2024 (Ibid.). The assessment demonstrated the importance of multilingual education, with "proficiency level in all Indigenous languages surpassed the proficiency levels of both Mathematics and English language" (Ibid., p. xii). This finding supports educational approaches that build on children's mother tongue abilities as a foundation for learning additional languages. ZELA also revealed significant demographic factors affecting performance. The assessment found that "girls consistently outperformed boys in both Mathematics and English from 2019 to 2024" and that "the performance gap between boys and girls has been continuously widening over the years since 2019, with 2024 having the largest gap" (Ibid., p. 32). Additionally, "urban respondents outperform rural respondents in both English and Mathematics" with notable disparities in access to educational resources (Ibid., p. 46).

In Rwanda, EGRA results contributed to foundational curriculum changes and structured teacher coaching. Between 2020 and 2023, early grade literacy benchmarks improved by 13 percentage points, with smaller gains in numeracy (MINEDUC, 2023). Uganda's EGRA in Luganda found only 16% of Grade 3 learners met national comprehension benchmarks, prompting ministry-led improvements to instructional content and assessment frameworks (USAID, 2019).

In Kenya, Uwezo data revealed that only 20% of Grade 3 pupils could read a Grade 2-level passage. Following the integration of EGRA insights into the Tusome programme, students recorded literacy gains of 15–25 correct words per minute, with learning improvements ranging from 0.6 to 1.0 standard deviations across subjects and regions (Piper et al., 2018).

These results underscore the value of early grade assessments when used to inform instruction and policy. While data alone is not sufficient, it can drive significant improvements when embedded within broader system reforms and supported by government leadership.

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

Early grade assessments represent one of the most cost-effective ways to identify learning gaps, monitor progress, and improve instructional quality in the early years of primary school. However, their impact depends on whether data is used for decision-making and whether systems are in place to support continuous improvement.

Namibia and other African countries can build on existing assessment pilots by embedding them into national EMIS systems, ensuring alignment with global indicators like SDG 4.1.1(a), and balancing focus across literacy and numeracy. Moreover, classroom-based assessment tools, combined with structured observation and coaching, can complement national data systems, creating a full picture of learning and instructional needs. When fully institutionalised, early assessments help shift education systems from input-focused to learning-focused, creating a clearer pathway for children to acquire the foundational skills they need to thrive.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Drawing on field experience and validation workshop discussions, several lessons have emerged on how early grade assessments strengthen foundational learning when adapted and scaled in African contexts:

- **Assessment is a catalyst for systemic improvement**: Far from being a mere measurement exercise, assessment is central to reducing learning poverty. It raises awareness, informs program and policy choices, and tracks progress toward "learning for all."
- **No single tool can meet all needs:** A wide range of assessment instruments exist (EGRA/EGMA, ASER, MICS, national assessments, PASEC, PIRLS). Each has strengths and limitations—some are diagnostic, others comparative or curriculum-aligned. Countries must therefore recognize that no universal "perfect" tool exists.
- **Equity and accountability must be at the core:** Assessment data is crucial for identifying disadvantaged groups—such as girls, rural populations, and marginalized communities—ensuring interventions target those most in need. This positions equity as both a driver and a measure of progress.
- **Strategic decision-making is required:** The choice of assessment tool must balance cost, diagnostic value, curriculum alignment, and reporting obligations (e.g., SDG 4.1.1). In many cases, a combination of tools offers the most complete picture of learning outcomes.
- **Global frameworks provide guidance but should not dominate choices:** While tools like AMPLE and PAL are being developed to align with international reporting frameworks such as the Global Proficiency Framework, their utility must be judged on whether they generate actionable, sustainable insights for national education systems—not only on their reporting function.
- **Sustainability is critical for long-term success:** Short-term, donor-funded assessments risk being one-off exercises. For impact, assessments must be institutionalized, capacity-building must be embedded, and financing must be integrated into national budgets.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Embed assessment systems in national education strategies to ensure sustainability, ownership, and consistent use of data for improving classroom practice and policy design.
- Adopt a mixed-tool approach that leverages the strengths of different instruments (e.g., EGRA for diagnostics, ASER for community engagement, PASEC/PIRLS for comparability) to provide a holistic picture of learning outcomes.
- Prioritize equity in assessment design and reporting, ensuring disaggregated data is systematically collected and used to target interventions toward the most disadvantaged learners.
- Align with global frameworks pragmatically, using tools like AMPLE and PAL where relevant, but ensuring the choice of assessment remains grounded in local policy needs and system capacity.
- Strengthen national capacity for implementation, including training for teachers, administrators, and policymakers to collect, interpret, and use assessment data effectively.
- Integrate financing into domestic budgets to reduce dependency on donor-funded pilots and ensure assessments become a permanent, iterative feature of education systems.
- Ensure data informs classroom practice, linking assessment results directly to teacher training, pedagogical strategies, and targeted interventions so that findings translate into measurable learning improvements.

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Innovative Approaches to Teacher Recruitment and Training

Innovative teacher recruitment methods to improve foundational learning in underserved communities.

Case Study Countries:
Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda

These case study countries were selected to represent the diversity of Teach For All network implementations across Africa, demonstrating different approaches to recruiting and training teachers for underserved communities. The selection prioritized countries with documented evidence of impact on student learning outcomes and strong integration with national education systems

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

Across many African countries, the persistent challenge of learning poverty continues to undermine efforts to ensure that all children acquire foundational skills by the end of primary school. According to UNESCO (2022), in some contexts more than 80% of children are unable to read and understand a simple sentence by the age of 10. While there are numerous interrelated reasons for this, such as overcrowded classrooms, underdeveloped assessment systems, and language of instruction challenges, the quality and deployment of teachers remains one of the most significant contributing factors (Bold et al., 2019; RTI International, 2021; GEEAP, 2023).

Teacher recruitment, training, and deployment frequently fail to match the needs of education systems, especially in rural or low-income communities. These areas also often suffer both from acute teacher shortages and high youth unemployment (Teach For Nigeria, 2023). This disconnect exacerbates existing inequalities and hampers efforts to ensure that all children, particularly those in the early years of primary education, acquire foundational literacy and numeracy.

Initiative Goal

The goal of the initiative is to reduce learning poverty by improving the quality of instruction in classrooms, often in underserved communities. This is achieved through the recruitment of teachers with high potential, training them in foundational teaching skills, and supporting them to deliver effective instruction. The initiative covers a broad age range, and includes a focus on primary learners, who

are most at risk of being left behind if they do not acquire basic reading and mathematics skills (GEEAP, 2023).

Target Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries are students in underserved public schools, particularly in rural and low-income communities where teacher shortages and low learning outcomes are most acute. In Nigeria, more than 1,500 fellows have been placed in public schools across Lagos, Ogun, and Kaduna states, directly serving students in these underserved areas (Teach For Nigeria, 2023). Secondary beneficiaries include young professionals, recent graduates, and in-service teachers who are recruited as fellows, as well as local education systems that benefit from enhanced instructional quality and leadership capacity. In Uganda, fellows are specifically trained in phonics-based literacy, formative assessment, and inclusive teaching strategies, while also working to establish professional development groups within schools (Teach For Uganda, 2023).

'I've worked with many fellows from Teach for Nigeria, and each of them was unique and passionate about improving the quality of education.'

Mrs. Temitope Adeniyi, Head of School, EAC Primary School, Ita Oshin, Abeokuta North, Ogun State (Teach for Nigeria, 2023)

Solution

Description of the Initiative

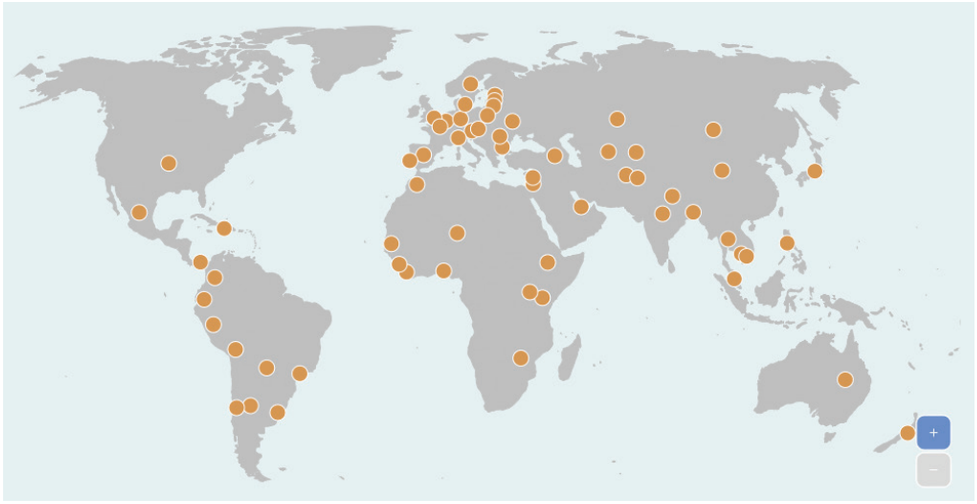
Teach For All is a global network founded in 2007, building on the success of Teach For America (established 1989) and Teach First UK (launched 2002). The network operates as an 'incubator of national entrepreneurs,' comprising independent, locally-led and funded partner organizations that share a common vision, mission, and set of unifying principles. Each partner organization recruits and trains talented university graduates and young professionals to teach for two years in high-need schools, with the ultimate goal of developing a pipeline of future education leaders who will work to transform education systems both inside and outside the classroom. The network's theory of change rests on addressing a fundamental problem shared globally: that teaching is often considered a low-prestige profession that fails to attract sufficient outstanding talent.

Teach For All has been adopted in numerous countries throughout Africa. This includes Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zimbabwe (Teach for All, 2025).

Although structured as an independent NGO network, Teach For All and its affiliates frequently collaborate with Ministries of Education to align their work with national education priorities. This engagement is central to the network's unifying principles, which emphasize public-sector partnerships to secure teacher placements, policy support, and accountability for results (Teach For All, 2024). For example, in Liberia, Teach For All's local partner has engaged with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to align its fellowship model with national goals around youth and teacher

development, including exploring the use of youth centres and vocational training opportunities (FrontPage Africa, 2024). Such collaborations highlight how Teach For All's locally led organizations, though independent, work closely with governments to embed innovative recruitment and training approaches within existing systems, ensuring sustainability and scale.

Figure 3:Teach For All Network Partners
Source: Teach for All, 2025



While the broader model supports education across all levels, in these countries it has also been used to directly support younger learners, particularly those in early primary grades, to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills. This case study concentrates on Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, and Niger, where implementation has been well-documented and where there has been a clear emphasis on improving outcomes for early primary learners.

The core features of the initiative are consistent across contexts. Most notably, fellows undergo rigorous training before being placed in public schools for two years. During this time, they receive mentorship, continuous professional development, and are encouraged to lead change at the classroom, school, and community levels (Teach For Uganda, 2023; Lead For Ghana, 2023). After the fellowship, many alumni continue to work in education, government, and civil society, extending the programme's impact beyond the classroom (Teach For Nigeria, 2023).

A key feature of the initiative is the integration of leadership development with teaching practice. Fellows are not only trained in pedagogy and curriculum but also in community engagement, adaptive problem-solving, and policy awareness. The emphasis on mindset, mission, and long-term systems change sets it apart from traditional teacher recruitment pathways (Lead For Ghana, 2023; Teach For Uganda, 2023).

Implementation of the Initiative

Implementation has varied across countries depending on local education systems, policy contexts, and local needs. Despite these differences, the core design features of the initiative have remained broadly consistent. Fellows are recruited through a competitive selection process, undergo intensive pre-service training, and receive ongoing in-service support. Delivery is then typically embedded within national systems and aligned with government priorities for teacher development.

In Nigeria, more than 1,500 fellows have been placed in public schools across Lagos, Ogun, and Kaduna states. They receive regular coaching and participate in professional learning communities aimed at improving instructional practice and tracking student progress (Teach For Nigeria, 2023). The initiative has also been implemented at scale in Ghana, where it operates in partnership with the Ghana Education Service and is integrated with broader education reforms. Fellows are deployed to underserved districts and supported to use real-time data and school-level diagnostics to guide their teaching.

Uganda's implementation has centred on phonics-based literacy, formative assessment, and low-cost classroom tools. Fellows receive training in multilingual pedagogy and inclusive teaching strategies, and are encouraged to work closely with parents and school leaders through learning circles and community engagement activities (Teach For Uganda, 2023). Similarly, in Rwanda, fellows are trained to deliver structured lesson plans and assess learning progress regularly. Many have also contributed to the creation of school-based professional development groups, reinforcing peer support and classroom improvement strategies (Teach For Rwanda, 2022).

In Niger, the programme is at an early stage, with implementation having started from February 2025. Fellows have started to undertake placements in the Zinder region. The model is being adapted to suit the country's unique challenges, including teacher shortages, low enrolment, and fragile school infrastructure (Teach For Niger, 2025).

Challenges and Solutions

The initiative has faced several challenges across participating countries. A common issue has been resistance from existing staff, particularly where fellows are seen as external or temporary. To address this, programme staff have worked to build strong relationships with school leaders, involve district officials in fellow induction, and demonstrate alignment with national priorities.

Each context has also presented unique implementation challenges. In Nigeria, the programme navigated high levels of unemployment and widespread teacher shortages, while also working to shift negative societal perceptions of teaching as a career path. Robust recruitment campaigns and alumni storytelling have helped reposition the fellowship as a desirable and impactful profession (Teach For Nigeria, 2023). Conversely, a key challenge in Ghana was ensuring consistent support for fellows in remote areas. This has been addressed through decentralised mentoring

structures and data dashboards that allow programme staff to track school-level progress (Lead For Ghana, 2023).

A separate challenge faced in Uganda was that the scale of classroom overcrowding and the diversity of learning needs made differentiated instruction difficult. The programme has responded by piloting technology-assisted learning in larger classrooms, using tablets, projectors, and speakers to support multimodal engagement (Teach For Uganda, 2023). Despite these challenges, programme teams have been able to adapt responsively to country-specific contexts.

Results

Outcomes

The initiative has delivered encouraging results across a range of African contexts. In Nigeria, internal assessments have shown that the proportion of students in Primary 2 (Nigeria) meeting grade-level reading benchmarks increased from 18% to 42% after one year of fellow-led instruction. Numeracy improvements were similarly notable, with basic arithmetic proficiency doubling over the same period (Teach For Nigeria, 2023). Similarly, in Ghana, pass rates in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) have improved substantially in schools supported by Lead For Ghana fellows. While the BECE assesses students at the end of junior high school, these gains are attributed in part to stronger foundations built in earlier grades (Lead For Ghana, 2023).

In Uganda, programme evaluations have documented improvements in classroom engagement, especially in early grades. Teachers report greater learner participation, improved attendance, and increased confidence in both literacy and numeracy. Pilot studies have also found positive effects from the use of play-based and multimodal instruction (Teach For Uganda, 2023). Likewise, Rwanda has reported increased teacher retention and improved instructional quality in schools supported by fellows. District officials have noted greater use of formative assessment and better lesson planning, particularly in Primary 1 to Primary 3 (Uganda) classrooms (Teach For Rwanda, 2022).

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

Although implemented in a range of diverse contexts, the model has been adapted effectively to support early primary learners. Partnership with Ministries of Education has often been a key enabler, particularly where the model has been integrated into teacher development and deployment frameworks. In Ghana and Uganda, the use of real-time data and localised coaching structures has enhanced responsiveness and helped to sustain programme quality (Lead For Ghana, 2023; Teach For Uganda, 2023).

Long-term sustainability is also reinforced by well-developed alumni networks. In Rwanda and Nigeria, alumni have taken on leadership roles in government, teacher training institutions, and NGOs, helping to embed foundational learning priorities into national discourse (Teach For Rwanda, 2022; Teach For Nigeria, 2023). Across

contexts, ongoing support structures, such as peer networks and alumni pathways, have proven essential for translating classroom-level change into broader systemic impact. While the model does not resolve structural issues such as curriculum misalignment or chronic underfunding, it offers a complementary pathway for building teacher capacity and driving foundational literacy and numeracy improvements in the early grades.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Evidence from Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda highlights the potential of innovative teacher recruitment and training models to accelerate progress on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN). The experiences of Teach For All's partners in these countries demonstrate several important lessons:

- **Strategic Partnerships Enable Scale and Integration:** The initiative's alignment with Ministries of Education has been critical to ensuring sustainability, legitimacy, and national-level impact. In Ghana and Rwanda, for example, integration into teacher deployment frameworks allowed fellows to reach the communities most in need.
- **Ongoing Coaching and Data Use Improve Quality:** Real-time data and continuous mentoring strengthened teaching practice and responsiveness to learner needs, particularly in Ghana and Uganda. This highlights the importance of embedding monitoring and support systems alongside recruitment.
- **Alumni Networks Sustain Impact Beyond the Classroom:** In countries such as Nigeria and Rwanda, fellows have gone on to leadership positions in government, training institutions, and civil society. These alumni play a pivotal role in embedding foundational learning priorities into policy and practice, extending the initiative's influence beyond its initial scope.
- **Contextual Adaptation is Key:** While the fellowship model is consistent across contexts, its success depends on tailoring to local realities. In Uganda, training emphasized phonics-based literacy and inclusive pedagogy, while in Nigeria recruitment campaigns addressed both teacher shortages and societal perceptions of teaching.
- **Innovative Models Complement but Do Not Replace Systemic Reform:** While the initiative has achieved notable gains in learning outcomes, it cannot by itself resolve deeper structural issues such as chronic underfunding, curriculum misalignment, or systemic inequities. Instead, it should be viewed as a complementary mechanism that strengthens teacher capacity and stimulates system-wide innovation.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Ministries of Education should formally embed fellowship-based recruitment and training approaches into their teacher deployment and professional development frameworks, ensuring that they reach underserved communities at scale.
- Pre-service and in-service training should emphasize foundational teaching skills—such as phonics-based literacy instruction, formative assessment, and differentiated pedagogy—so that teachers are well equipped to address diverse learner needs in the early grades.
- Teacher quality is best sustained through regular coaching, peer learning circles, and data-driven decision-making. National systems should adopt these practices to complement formal training and enhance instructional quality over time.
- Governments and partners should engage programme alumni in policy dialogue, teacher training institutions, and leadership roles to maximize their long-term contributions to educational reform.
- Public–Private Partnerships across NGOs, governments, and communities are crucial for legitimacy and sustainability. Countries should strengthen collaboration mechanisms that allow innovative teacher recruitment models to align with and reinforce national education priorities.
- Donor support can help pilot such models, but long-term funding must come from domestic budgets. Governments should progressively integrate the costs of recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development into national education financing frameworks.

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Synthetic Phonics

Structured phonics instruction that improves reading fluency and literacy outcomes for children in public primary schools.

Case Study Countries:
Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa

These case study countries were selected based on evidence of successful implementation of systematic phonics instruction at scale, with documented improvements in early reading outcomes. The selection represents different linguistic contexts and implementation approaches, demonstrating the adaptability of phonics-based instruction across diverse African languages and education systems.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

Despite improvements in access to education across many African countries, foundational literacy remains a significant challenge. According to the World Bank (2022), over 70% of children in LMIC countries are unable to read a simple text by the age of 10. This crisis is particularly evident in early primary grades, where traditional methods of instruction, which are often focused on rote memorisation and whole-word recognition, fail to equip children with sufficient awareness of phonemics for independent reading (GEEAP, 2023).

In countries like Nigeria and Ghana, national Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results have shown that a large proportion of learners in Grade 2 are unable to identify letters or blend sounds to form words (RTI International, 2021). Furthermore, teachers often lack both the training and resources to deliver phonics-based instruction, and many classrooms function without structured lesson plans or learner-centred pedagogies. These challenges are compounded by large class sizes, linguistic diversity, and limited professional development opportunities for teachers (Piper et al., 2018).

Initiative Goal

The initiative's goal is to improve reading fluency and literacy outcomes for children in public primary schools by introducing synthetic phonics through the Jolly Phonics programme. It is supported by teacher training, structured materials, and ongoing monitoring.

Target Beneficiaries

The initiative primarily targets children in early primary grades (P1–P3), particularly in rural and underserved communities where literacy rates are lowest. Secondary beneficiaries include classroom teachers and headteachers, who receive structured training and coaching to deliver phonics instruction effectively.

'In just a few weeks, I saw a change. My pupils who couldn't read a word were sounding out letters and blending them confidently.'

Grade 2 Teacher, Northern Nigeria (Jolly Futures, 2023)

Solution

Description of the Initiative

Jolly Phonics is a synthetic phonics programme designed to teach children the 42 letter sounds in English, and how to blend them to read and write words. Developed in the UK and adapted for global use, it uses a multi-sensory approach that includes actions, songs, and stories to reinforce learning (Lloyd & Wernham, 2015). The programme has been implemented across Africa through Jolly Futures, the not-for-profit division of Jolly Learning.

Synthetic phonics differs from other reading approaches by explicitly teaching the relationship between sounds and letters, and equipping learners to decode unfamiliar words. Instruction is systematic and cumulative, building up from individual sounds to whole words and sentences (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). Jolly Futures provides free teaching materials, training for government school teachers, and continuous coaching, often in partnership with national Ministries of Education.

Implementation of the Initiative

Since 2016, Jolly Futures has implemented national and sub-national programmes in over 20 African countries. For example, in Nigeria, state-level initiatives in Kaduna and Kano have trained over 10,000 teachers and reached more than 1 million pupils (Jolly Futures, 2023). Furthermore, in Ghana, the programme was integrated into the national curriculum for early primary grades, with nationwide teacher training delivered through the Ghana Education Service (GES, 2019).

In general terms, implementation typically follows a phased model: (i) engagement with Ministries of Education to align with national literacy policies; (ii) selection and training of master trainers who cascade training to classroom teachers; (iii) provision of structured teaching materials, including pupil books, teacher guides, and flashcards; and (iv) ongoing support and monitoring, including coaching visits and school-level assessments.

In Kenya and Ethiopia, the programme was piloted in partnership with local NGOs and scaled through public-private partnerships. In Ethiopia, for example, the Ministry of Education integrated synthetic phonics into English language instruction across several regions, supported by Jolly Futures and regional education bureaus (RTI, 2020).

In South Africa, the programme has been introduced in select provinces with strong interest from both public and private sectors to explore broader implementation (Jolly Futures, 2023). In Cameroon, efforts have been made to adapt phonics instruction to multilingual contexts through teacher-led innovation (Jolly Futures, 2023). In Egypt, early pilot projects have shown potential for embedding synthetic phonics within national language instruction, especially in English-medium schools (Jolly Futures, 2023).

In Namibia, the rollout of the Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar programme has been a multi-phase national initiative, stemming from successful pilots in 2017 in Oshana region. The overarching aim of the project is to embed essential foundational English literacy skills in the Junior Primary Phase, facilitating future academic achievement. The programme's rollout has progressed systematically:

1. Jolly Phonics (2022): Initially rolled out to Grade 1 teachers across all government schools, benefiting approximately 1,023 schools, and 2,665 teachers
2. Jolly Grammar 1 (2024): This phase targeted 2,742 Grade 2 teachers, aiming to ensure continuity from Jolly Phonics and introduce Jolly Grammar concepts. Additionally, 651 Heads of Departments (HoDs) were trained to monitor and mentor teachers using the Jolly Monitor App.
3. Jolly Grammar 2 (2025): The most recent phase focused on 2,678 Grade 3 teachers and 225 HoDs, ensuring a smooth progression and strengthening sustainability through continued HoD capacity building.

Challenges and Solutions

Several challenges have emerged in the implementation of synthetic phonics at scale. One key issue is the mismatch between English instruction and the home language of many learners. To address this, Jolly Phonics has previously been adapted to include instruction in local languages before transitioning to English (Lind, 2010).

Another challenge relates to teacher confidence and understanding of phonics. Many teachers are unfamiliar with this method and require sustained support to master the techniques. To address this, Jolly Futures uses a cascade model of training, supplemented by peer coaching, demonstration lessons, and mobile-based refresher content.

Monitoring quality across a large number of schools is another persistent issue. In response, partner ministries and NGOs have used mobile data collection tools and regular supervision visits to ensure fidelity to the methodology (GES, 2019).

Results

Outcomes

Evaluations of the Jolly Phonics programme across multiple African countries have shown strong gains in foundational literacy. In Nigeria, a 2021 assessment found that children who were taught using the Jolly Phonics Method demonstrated identification, formation, reading and writing skills far ahead of their contemporaries who were taught using other methods (Aliyu, 2021).

Country	Literacy Gains
Nigeria	Formation, reading and writing skills far ahead of their contemporaries who were taught using methods other than Jolly phonics (Aliyu, 2021)
Ghana	National rollout aligned with improved reading fluency in P1–P3 (GES, 2020)
Kenya	Marked increase in decoding skills among Grade 1 students (RTI, 2020)
South Africa	Improved letter recognition and blending in early grades in pilot schools (Jolly Futures, 2023)
Ethiopia	Significant improvement observed by teachers in decoding accuracy and fluency in select regional pilots (RTI, 2020)
Cameroon	Early evaluations showed increase in phonemic awareness in multilingual classrooms (Lind, 2010)
Egypt	Pilot results indicated stronger English reading outcomes in Grade 2 (Jolly Futures, 2023)

These improvements are especially notable given that the programme operates in large class sizes and with limited classroom resources. After the initiative is implemented, teachers report higher learner engagement, improved classroom discipline, and greater confidence in delivering reading instruction (Jolly Futures, 2023).

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

Synthetic phonics has proven to be a scalable, cost-effective, and impactful approach to developing foundational literacy in African contexts. A 2021 review by the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP) recommended synthetic phonics as one of the most effective interventions for improving early-grade reading (GEEAP, 2021).

The success of the Jolly Phonics model in Africa highlights several enabling conditions; (i) strong collaboration with national Ministries of Education; (ii) alignment with existing curricula and language policies; (iii) low-cost, easy-to-use teaching materials; and (iv) robust systems for training and follow-up support.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Drawing on field experience and validation workshop discussions, several lessons have emerged on how synthetic phonics strengthen foundational learning when adapted and scaled in African contexts:

- **Systematic phonics instruction is highly effective:** Evidence from multiple African contexts demonstrates that systematic and explicit phonics approaches, such as Jolly Phonics, significantly improve decoding, word recognition, and overall literacy outcomes.
- **Multi-sensory approaches enhance learning**: Programs that combine actions, stories, and structured sequences for teaching sounds engage learners more effectively and support memory retention, as seen in the implementation of Jolly Phonics across several countries.
- **Scalability and cost-effectiveness are achievable:** Jolly Phonics has been successfully scaled nationally in numerous contexts, showing that high-quality phonics instruction can be delivered widely without prohibitive costs, provided there is structured planning and government support.
- **Government engagement is key to sustainability:** Strong partnerships with Ministries of Education are essential for program adoption, alignment with national curricula, and sustained implementation over time.
- **Adaptability to local languages increases relevance:** The Jolly Phonics methodology can be adapted beyond English. This flexibility makes it suitable for multilingual contexts and supports inclusive education.
- **Early intervention maximizes impact:** Foundational learning should ideally begin at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level to provide a solid base for later literacy development, particularly in contexts where children may not attend preschool.
- **Community and family engagement supports sustainability:** Programs with strong parent and community involvement—through platforms such as Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or local sensitization initiatives—are more likely to be accepted, maintained, and scaled successfully.
- **Consolidation reduces fragmentation:** Multiple overlapping literacy interventions can be counterproductive. Consolidating best practices from various programs into a single, evidence-driven structured pedagogy ensures coherence, national ownership, and more efficient use of resources.
- **Funding gaps are a key constraint:** Many pilot programs face challenges in scaling due to limited government budgets and insufficient long-term funding mechanisms for foundational learning initiatives.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Ministries of Education should integrate structured phonics programs, like Jolly Phonics, into national curricula to improve early reading outcomes.
- Programs should extend to Early Childhood Development (ECD) and kindergarten levels to maximize literacy readiness before primary school.
- Engage Ministries of Education from the outset to embed phonics programs into national systems, curricula, and teacher development frameworks.
- Use platforms such as PTAs and local sensitization campaigns to build support, encourage participation, and foster ownership of literacy initiatives.
- Where multiple early literacy programs exist, merge them into a unified, nationally owned approach that combines the most effective practices.
- Equip teachers with skills to deliver structured, multi-sensory phonics instruction, including methods adaptable to local languages and diverse learner needs.
- Governments should allocate dedicated budgets and explore innovative financing strategies to ensure foundational literacy programs are scaled and sustained nationally.

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PART 2-
Enabling Environment Interventions to improve learning outcomes

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School Health and Nutrition Initiatives

Strengthening access and outcomes for foundational learning through school-based feeding programmes, addressing hunger, malnutrition, and social exclusion, and simple deworming programmes, improving health, attendance, and learning by treating infections that hinder education in low-resource settings.

Case Study Countries: Across Africa (Multi-Country)

The multi-country approach was selected to demonstrate the continental scale and diversity of school health and nutrition initiatives programs across Africa, representing different implementation models, funding mechanisms, and integration with national systems. The selection prioritized countries with documented evidence of impact on both nutrition and learning outcomes, strong government ownership, and potential for sustainable expansion. Additionally, case study countries were selected based on documented evidence of large-scale school-based deworming programs with measurable health and educational outcomes over the past five years. The selection prioritized countries with strong government leadership in program implementation demonstrated cost-effectiveness, and potential for regional replication across different contexts in Africa.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a paradox: while primary school enrolment rates are high, foundational learning levels are alarmingly low. The root of this problem often lies outside the classroom — in hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. Millions of children arrive at school hungry, making it challenging focus, stay awake, or retain information (Zenebe et al., 2018).

In Ethiopia, surveys show that more than 30% of school-aged children are undernourished. Across West Africa, 42% of early-grade students attend school without eating breakfast, correlating with significantly lower literacy outcomes (World Bank, 2018). Girls, in particular, are disproportionately affected. Cultural norms and household economics often keep girls out of school, especially when families must choose who eats or attends class.

Prior to 2020, school feeding efforts were scaling up quickly, reaching 65 million children in Africa by 2019 (WFP, 2020). The pandemic disrupted this progress —

school closures meant millions lost their only reliable meal. This crisis underscored both the necessity of school meals and the fragility of systems lacking home-based alternatives (Bundy et al., 2022).

The African Union responded with renewed political momentum, launching the 'Africa Day of School Feeding' and co-founding the School Meals Coalition in 2021. Countries like Nigeria, Rwanda, and Kenya are committed to scale and resilience, seeing school feeding as a lever for learning recovery and equitable development (AU Information Directorate, 2024).

One of the most prevalent yet overlooked health issues in Africa is soil-transmitted helminth (STH) infections, commonly referred to as intestinal worms. These infections are caused by parasitic worms such as hookworm, roundworm, and whipworm, affecting more than 200 million children across Africa, particularly in areas with inadequate sanitation and hygiene (Lo et al., 2018; WHO, 2023).

Children with worm infections suffer from anaemia, malnutrition, and fatigue, all of which directly impact their ability to attend school and concentrate in class. Worm infections can also hinder physical growth and cognitive development, leading to stunting and delayed school entry. This represents a significant obstacle to achieving universal FLN outcomes. If foundational skills are not acquired during early childhood and the first years of primary school, future learning becomes exponentially more difficult. Therefore, addressing parasitic infections among African children is not just a health imperative, it is an educational one.

Initiative Goal

The overarching goal of school feeding initiatives is to enhance learning, including foundational learning, by addressing hunger, malnutrition, and social exclusion (World Food Programme, 2025; World Bank, 2012). School feeding is seen as a bridge between education, health, and agriculture. It tackles immediate hunger, supports cognitive development, and promotes regular school attendance, especially for vulnerable groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and those from low-income households (Bundy et al., 2022). Specific goals include:

- **Increase Attendance and Enrolment:** By offering a free meal, schools reduce the cost barrier for families and attract out-of-school children. Meals encourage consistent attendance and decrease dropout rates, particularly during food-insecure periods (Wall et al., 2022).
- **Enhance Learning and Focus:** Hunger hampers attention and memory. A well-fed child is more likely to participate, concentrate, and perform better in reading and numeracy (Wang et al., 2021).
- **Promote Health and Growth:** Meals supply vital nutrients (carbohydrates, protein, vitamins), supporting healthy physical and cognitive development. Pairing feeding with deworming further boosts health outcomes (Zenebe et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2022).

- **Advance Gender Equity:** In many regions, school meals disproportionately benefit girls by incentivizing families to enrol and keep them in school. Take-home rations for girls have closed gender gaps in places like Ghana and Burkina Faso (Kazianga et al., 2014).
- **Support Social Protection:** Feeding programs often purchase from local farmers, employ community cooks, and integrate with social protection and agriculture initiatives, making them multifaceted poverty-reduction tools (Giyose et al., 2022).

Additionally, many programs aim to stimulate local economies. By linking schools with smallholder farmers, local fisheries, and food producers, governments support income generation and rural development, making school feeding a catalyst for broader socioeconomic growth (Ahern et al., 2021).

The overarching aim of school-based deworming initiatives in Africa is to eliminate worm infections as a barrier to educational achievement. Children with worm infections suffer from anaemia, malnutrition, and fatigue, all of which directly impact their ability to attend school and concentrate in class. These infections can also hinder physical growth and cognitive development, leading to stunting and delayed school entry, which represents a significant obstacle to achieving universal FLN outcomes. Research has shown that among primary-aged children, worm infections contribute to absenteeism, lethargy, and reduced concentration in the classroom, with deworming shown to reduce these health burdens and increase the number of days children are present and attentive in school (Miguel & Kremer, 2004). The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended that in areas with a worm prevalence greater than 20%, all school-aged children should receive deworming treatment once or twice per year (WHO, 2023). The initiative seeks to operationalize these guidelines across the African continent, targeting pre-primary and primary-age children (1–12 years old).

By providing low-cost, safe, and effective treatment to millions of children, the initiative aims to improve health, increase school attendance, enhance cognitive capacity, and ultimately foster stronger FLN outcomes. While the primary goal is health-focused—namely, reducing worm burden among children—the educational secondary benefits are well-documented and highly significant, supporting foundational learning by improving health and cognitive ability (UNICEF, 2020; Lo et al., 2018). The seminal work by Kremer and Miguel (2004) showed that school-based deworming programs in Kenya significantly reduced absenteeism and increased school participation by 25%, with substantial positive spillover effects extending to untreated schools in the vicinity. Subsequent research has built upon these foundational findings, with Baird et al. (2016) providing additional evidence of positive long-term impacts from the same Kenyan intervention. The evidence base spans multiple contexts, with Ahuja et al. (2015) documenting similar patterns in India, reinforcing the consistency of positive associations between deworming and educational outcomes across diverse settings. The evidence suggests that deworming's impact on learning operates through multiple pathways: directly

improving cognitive function by reducing the metabolic burden of parasitic infections, increasing school attendance by reducing illness-related absences, and enhancing children's ability to concentrate and engage with learning materials when they are in school. The initiative is rooted in the belief that no child should be prevented from learning to read, write, or perform basic mathematics because of a preventable and treatable infection.

Target Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries are young learners in pre-primary and primary grades, with targeted support for:

- **Children in Food-Insecure Areas:** School feeding prioritizes communities facing high poverty, seasonal food shortages, and chronic malnutrition. These include rural areas, urban slums, and conflict-affected regions.
- **Girls and Other Vulnerable Children:** Gender-sensitive programs offer take-home rations or extra incentives for girls to improve attendance. Orphans, children with disabilities, and those from female-headed households benefit most from the reduced household food burden (Giyose et al., 2022).
- **Preschool and ECD Learners:** Countries like Rwanda and Kenya have extended meals to children in early childhood development centres, recognizing the importance of nutrition before Grade 1.
- **Families and Local Communities:** Parents benefit from reduced food costs, while local farmers and food vendors gain new markets. Women are often employed as cooks, boosting household incomes and reinforcing gender empowerment (AU, 2021).

In Nigeria, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) reaches over 9 million children in Grades 1–3 across 56,000 public schools. In Malawi, Mary's Meals supports over 1 million children with daily porridge in nearly 30% of schools, with mothers volunteering to cook (Mary's Meals, 2023).

The primary beneficiaries of school-based deworming programs are children aged 1–12 years living in worm-endemic regions across Africa, with Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, and South Sudan particularly affected (WHO, 2025). This includes both pre-primary children (typically aged 1–5) and those in primary education (6–12). These children are particularly vulnerable to soil-transmitted helminth infections due to poor sanitation, lack of hygiene facilities, and limited access to clean water. Preschoolers often carry high worm burdens which can affect their physical and cognitive development at a critical stage. For this group, deworming helps gain better growth and school readiness (Lo et al., 2018).

Deworming also helps non-enrolled children, via community delivery. They are targeted through complementary community-based deworming efforts, especially in remote or conflict-affected areas. Evidence shows long-term improvements in income and education outcomes (Baird et al., 2016).. Secondary beneficiaries include teachers, families, and broader communities, as the treatment has spillover effects, reducing overall transmission. By improving health equity and enabling vulnerable populations to participate in learning, deworming programs also contribute to reducing disparities in educational access and outcomes.

Solution

Description of the Initiative

Most programs provide a daily cooked lunch or nutritious snack. Meals typically include staple foods (e.g., maize porridge, rice and beans) fortified with vitamins or complemented with vegetables and protein. Some countries offer breakfast or fortified biscuits to support early morning learning.

Programs often source food from nearby farmers and cooperatives. Ghana's school feeding scheme buys rice, yams, and beans locally. Nigeria contracts local caterers and farmers to deliver sweet potatoes, fruit, and poultry (AU, 2021).

At the school level, committees comprising teachers, parents, and community leaders oversee logistics. Food is either prepared on-site or delivered from centralized kitchens. Kenya's Food for Education program uses a central kitchen to prepare meals for 12,000+ students daily, with Tap2Eat wristbands enabling mobile payment tracking and cost-sharing by families (Rockefeller Foundation, 2022).

Many programs integrate health checks, deworming, and nutrition education. In Senegal, combining school meals with deworming led to higher learning outcomes. School gardens teach students agricultural skills while supplementing meals with fresh produce. Such initiatives deepen the developmental impact of school feeding (Wall et al., 2022).

School-based deworming programs typically involve the annual or biannual distribution of anthelmintic tablets—usually albendazole or mebendazole—administered to children through their schools. The treatment is delivered without prior diagnostic screening, based on WHO guidelines for mass drug administration in high-prevalence areas. Implementation begins with mapping exercises to identify worm hotspots and prioritize regions for intervention. Ministries of Health and Education collaborate to develop operational plans, mobilize resources, and train school staff. Teachers and health workers are trained, and communication campaigns build parental trust (Evidence Action, 2018; Welch et al., 2017; WHO, 2023).
Sensitization campaigns using local media and parent-teacher meetings are conducted to inform families about the benefits and safety of deworming.

In many countries, deworming is paired with other interventions such as vitamin A supplementation, hygiene education, or water and sanitation improvements to enhance its impact. Some countries have adopted annual national deworming days/weeks to institutionalize the program within the school calendar and ensure broad participation. The initiative is not limited to the school setting - community outreach via health posts, mobile clinics, and early childhood development centres ensures younger children and those not in school are also reached.

Implementation of the Initiative

High-level political commitment is key. By 2022, 89% of African nations had school feeding policies. Presidents in Senegal and Benin personally championed expansion, investing millions in national scale-ups (AU Information Directorate, 2024).

Programs are increasingly domestically financed, with governments covering about 80% of costs. External partners (e.g., WFP, World Bank) offer startup support or crisis assistance. In Rwanda, community contributions supplement government resources. Ethiopia reduced costs through bulk grain purchases and volunteer labour (Bundy et al., 2022).

Ministries of education, agriculture, and health collaborate on procurement, safety standards, and community delivery. Ghana's decentralized model empowers local caterers. Some areas use motorcycles to deliver food to remote schools (Dateline Health Africa, 2024).

Teachers, storekeepers, and cooks receive training in hygiene, food handling, and record-keeping. In Nigeria, NHGSFP deployed independent monitors for transparency. Schools establish feeding committees with parents, who often volunteer time (AU, 2021).

Digital tools now track food delivery, attendance, and spending. Kenya's Tap2Eat platform is one such example. These systems reduce fraud, increase efficiency, and generate real-time program data (Rockefeller Foundation, 2022).

During school closures, Botswana distributed food baskets to families. Kenya and South Africa provided take-home rations or mobile cash transfers. This flexibility is now being embedded into emergency preparedness plans (Bundy et al., 2022).

Implementation of deworming programs in Africa relies on strong cross-sectoral collaboration, particularly between ministries of health and education. A central coordination committee often oversees planning, while regional and district-level teams handle local logistics and training. Drug procurement is usually supported by pharmaceutical donations or international organizations such as WHO and UNICEF (Miguel & Kremer, 2004; WHO, 2023). Tablets are distributed to district health offices and then to schools. Teachers receive training on safe administration, documentation, and managing side effects. Community health workers may also assist in outreach efforts, especially in rural areas.

Monitoring mechanisms are critical to measure treatment coverage, assess infection prevalence over time, and identify areas needing intensified efforts. Digital reporting tools and sentinel site surveys help track progress and improve accountability. Engagement with local leaders and parent associations helps build trust and increase uptake. Despite logistical challenges such as transport difficulties, teacher shortages, or misinformation, countries have achieved high coverage rates, often exceeding 75% of target children (WHO, 2023). Some countries, like Kenya and Rwanda, have successfully mainstreamed deworming into their national school health policies, showing how systematic institutionalization can support sustainability.

Challenges and Solutions

Several challenges have affected the rollout of school feeding programs across Africa:

- **Funding Instability:** Rising food prices and inconsistent disbursements threaten program continuity. Solutions include national trust funds (Senegal, Ethiopia), cost-effective local sourcing, and support from WFP in emergencies.
- **Corruption Risks:** 'Ghost' students, inflated supplier contracts, and poor oversight undermine credibility. Nigeria's response included third-party audits, community committees, and digital attendance verification (Dateline Health Africa, 2024).
- **Logistics Barriers:** Inadequate infrastructure, long distances, or natural disasters disrupt food delivery. Investment in kitchens, storage, and local transport has improved access.
- **Low Community Engagement:** Initial resistance is mitigated by involving locals in menu planning, cooking, and oversight. Kenya and Malawi rely on mothers' groups for cooking and community mobilization.
- **Nutritional Gaps:** Some meals lack diversity. Countries now follow national dietary guidelines, incorporate fortified foods, and monitor children's weight and anaemia rates.
- **School Closures:** Take-home rations and cash transfers ensure continuity during crises. These approaches helped maintain child health during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Challenges have also affected the rollout of deworming programs across Africa:

- **Out-of-School Children and Parental Resistance:** One common issue is reaching out-of-school children and overcoming parental resistance (Welch et al., 2017). To address this, countries have used community-based platforms, including child health days and mobile clinics, to extend coverage.
- **Parental Hesitancy:** Another challenge is parental hesitancy due to fears about side effects or distrust in externally provided medication. Targeted communication strategies, involvement of local leaders, and transparent information sharing have helped overcome this.
- **Logistics Barriers:** Logistical barriers—such as distributing drugs to remote areas or ensuring water availability for pill consumption—have been met through careful planning and alignment with other school health services.
- **Impact Concerns:** Concerns around the impact of deworming on academic outcomes have been addressed by presenting evidence of improvements in attendance and long-term economic benefits.
- **COVID-19:** COVID-19 presented unique difficulties, leading to the suspension of school-based campaigns in many countries. Programs adapted by delivering treatments through homes, health centres, or during other national campaigns (WHO, 2021). Cost and coverage have been optimized through teacher-led models (Miguel & Kremer, 2004). These adaptations have strengthened the resilience of deworming efforts.

Results

Outcomes

School meals have consistently led to higher attendance. In Uganda, enrollment rose 9% within two years of program introduction. In Ethiopia, fed students had significantly lower absenteeism (Wall et al., 2022). Ghana's take-home rations doubled girls' attendance in the northern region (Kazianga et al., 2014). Controlled trials in Ethiopia reported reduced stunting and improved BMI after one year. In Mali and Burkina Faso, anemia decreased when iron-rich foods were added. Teachers note fewer health complaints and higher classroom engagement (Zenebe et al., 2018).

School meals correlate with improved math and reading scores. In Senegal, test scores rose 6.3 points. South Africa's breakfast pilot boosted numeracy by up to 25% among younger students (Wang et al., 2021). In Kenya and Senegal, math and literacy scores improved, especially among early-grade learners who benefited from meals plus deworming (Wall et al., 2022).

School feeding has also narrowed the gender gap. In Malawi, girls' attendance surpassed boys' after program expansion. Vulnerable groups like orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS also benefit from the safety net (Mary's Meals, 2023).

Additionally, school feeding programs have a wider community impact. Every 100,000 children fed generates ~750 jobs. Parents save money, volunteer at schools, and feel more invested. Feeding also creates routine and psychological stability during crises, particularly in drought or conflict-affected regions (Bundy et al., 2022).

School-based deworming has also shown clear positive outcomes in terms of child health and education. In Kenya, infection rates of intestinal worms dropped by over 50% among treated children, while school absenteeism was reduced by 25% (Miguel & Kremer, 2004). In Eswatini, national coverage of 85% contributed to progress toward eliminating worm infections as a public health problem (WHO Africa, 2018). Deworming also reduces stunting and anaemia in young children—key indicators of improved nutrition and developmental potential (Lo et al., 2018). Educational outcomes include improved classroom attendance, greater attentiveness, and in some cases, increased exam pass rates.

A longitudinal study in Kenya found that children who were dewormed during primary school earned 13% more in adulthood and worked longer hours (Baird et al., 2016). Intergenerational benefits have also been documented, as healthier children grow into healthier parents who are better able to support their own children's education and well-being (Walker et al., 2023). By reducing barriers to learning, deworming enables other FLN interventions—such as improved teaching methods or curriculum reform—to have greater impact.

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

School feeding programs have proven to be scalable, replicable, and sustainable across numerous countries:

- Programs expanded from pilots to nationwide coverage. Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Egypt each feed over 1 million children. Costs are manageable—$40 per child per year in Kenya—and the results justify the investment (Economist, 2022).
- Standardized frameworks like the AU's Home-Grown Feeding Guidelines and WFP toolkits allow rapid adaptation across regions. Countries borrow models from one another — Ghana's caterer model influenced Nigeria's, while Kenya's centralized kitchens are now being explored in Uganda (AU, 2021).
- National budgeting, community ownership, and supply chain resilience are key to longevity. Climate adaptation (e.g., food reserves, crop insurance) ensures programs survive seasonal shocks.

Deworming initiatives across Africa have also proven to be a highly effective, scalable strategy for improving foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by addressing a key barrier—poor child health (UNICEF, 2020; World Bank et al., 2022; Lo et al., 2018). Success has been strongest where deworming is embedded within national education and health systems, supported by political commitment, cross-sectoral coordination, and consistent funding—either domestic or through international partnerships (WHO, 2023; Evidence Action, 2018).
Programs that integrate deworming with child-focused services such as nutrition, hygiene, and early learning amplify both health and educational outcomes.

Community engagement has also been essential for building trust, ensuring uptake, and responding to misinformation (UNICEF, 2020). Effective monitoring and evaluation systems allow implementers to track outcomes, adapt to changing needs, and demonstrate value-for-money (WHO, 2023). Sustainability hinges on building local capacity and transitioning gradually to domestic financing, while maintaining flexibility to respond to disruptions like pandemics.

Ultimately, the African experience highlights that simple, evidence-based health interventions delivered through schools can significantly enhance school attendance, engagement, and long-term human capital. Deworming aligns closely with the UNICEF Build to Last framework and should remain a core component of any strategy to strengthen FLN outcomes across the continent (UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2023; Evidence Action, 2018; World Bank et al., 2022; Lo et al., 2018).

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The following lessons have emerged from the implementation of school health and nutrition initiatives across Africa, highlighting the critical factors that drive improved attendance, health, and foundational learning outcomes:

- **Addressing hunger is foundational for learning:** School feeding programs consistently demonstrate that children learn better when their basic nutritional needs are met. Hunger, malnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies significantly impede attention, memory, and engagement in early grades.
- **Deworming enhances educational outcomes:** Soil-transmitted helminth infections hinder attendance, concentration, and cognitive development. Mass deworming programs reduce absenteeism, improve classroom attentiveness, and amplify the effectiveness of other educational interventions.
- **Integrated, multi-sectoral approaches maximize impact:** Programs that combine school feeding, deworming, hygiene education, and local food procurement achieve both health and educational outcomes while supporting local economies.
- **Government ownership and political commitment are critical:** Programs scale and sustain more effectively when embedded within national education and health systems, backed by clear policies, funding commitments, and high-level champions.
- **Community engagement is essential for uptake and trust:** Involving parents, local leaders, and community volunteers in planning, cooking, monitoring, and communication ensures local relevance, builds trust, and mitigates resistance or misinformation.
- **Standardized frameworks facilitate replication and scalability:** Models such as the AU Home-Grown School Feeding Guidelines and WFP toolkits allow countries to adapt successful interventions from other contexts while maintaining quality.
- **Monitoring and evaluation drive continuous improvement:** Real-time tracking of food delivery, attendance, nutritional status, and infection prevalence allows programs to adapt quickly, ensure accountability, and demonstrate value for investment.
- **Sustainability requires diversified financing and resilience planning:** Programs thrive when they combine domestic funding, community contributions, and targeted donor support. Strategies like local sourcing, digital monitoring, and contingency plans help maintain operations during crises such as pandemics or natural disasters.
- **Targeted interventions reduce inequities:** School feeding and deworming programs disproportionately benefit vulnerable groups, including girls, children with disabilities, orphans, and children in food-insecure regions, helping close gender and socioeconomic gaps in foundational learning outcomes.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- School-based feeding and deworming should be integrated as foundational components of education strategies, particularly in early primary grades.
- Ministries of Education and Health should coordinate to institutionalize school feeding and deworming programs, ensuring alignment with curricula, health policies, and national priorities.
- Involve parents, caregivers, local leaders, and school committees from program inception to strengthen relevance, trust, and participation.
- Link education, health, agriculture, and social protection initiatives to amplify outcomes for children, families, and local economies.
- Utilize digital tools, sentinel site surveys, and real-time reporting to track program coverage, nutritional impact, attendance, and learning outcomes, and to inform iterative improvements.
- Engage presidents, ministers, and parliamentary bodies to sustain scale, ensure domestic financing, and institutionalize interventions beyond pilot phases.
- Develop flexible implementation models that can withstand crises, such as school closures, natural disasters, or economic shocks, while maintaining program quality and continuity.
- Target the most vulnerable children, including girls, children with disabilities, and those in marginalized communities, to maximize the impact on foundational literacy and numeracy and reduce systemic disparities.

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Family Engagement

Providing parents with regular, accessible updates can strengthen links between home and school, ensuring children are better supported.

Case Study Countries:
Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia

These case study countries were selected based on the criteria outlined in the methodology, including evidence of strong performance in parent engagement initiatives over the past five years, implementation at scale beyond pilot programs, demonstrated government engagement and ownership, and potential for cost-effective and sustainable expansion. The selection also considered the need for geographic representation across different regions of the African Union, as noted in the methodology's commitment to reviewing interventions operating across all regions of the continent

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

Despite near-universal access to primary education in many countries in Africa, the region continues to experience a profound learning crisis, with more than 80% of ten-year-olds unable to read and comprehend a simple sentence (UNESCO, 2022). This gap between schooling and actual learning, often referred to as 'learning poverty', has triggered global concern. At the heart of this challenge lies a systemic issue: limited parental engagement in early education. Many parents and caregivers are not equipped, due to either literacy, awareness, or social constraints, to meaningfully support their children's learning at home. In Mozambique, a study by Planet Aid (2021) found that two-thirds of parents had never received updates about their child's learning from the school. In rural and underserved communities, parents often lack even basic information such as attendance records, report cards, or school calendars. Without consistent school-to-home communication, families cannot intervene early when children are falling behind.

Compounding this problem are cultural and gender-based barriers. In northern Ghana, IPA Ghana (2021) found that post-pandemic, households prioritized boys' return to school due to beliefs about girls' lesser future returns from education. Similarly, in multilingual and low-literacy contexts, communication from schools is often misaligned with the local language or understanding of parents. Schools typically send information in official languages of instruction (such as English, French, or Portuguese), while parents may be more comfortable in local languages. Additionally, written communications may be inaccessible to parents with limited literacy skills, creating barriers to meaningful engagement even when parents are motivated to support their children's learning. This lack of relevant, timely, and accessible information has undermined families' ability to support foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) during the most critical years of a child's development.

Similar conditions exist in Zambia and Botswana, where recent assessments revealed that 46–88% of Grade 2 children could not read a single word in their mother tongue (Brookings, 2023). Addressing parental knowledge gaps has become a key strategy across several countries. In Tanzania and Uganda, parental engagement initiatives have been piloted with SMS nudges, teacher-parent meetings, and learning camps, further reinforcing this approach.

Recognizing that many parents themselves face literacy challenges that limit their ability to support their children's learning, some countries have integrated adult literacy components into family engagement strategies. These initiatives acknowledge that effective parent-school communication and home-based learning support often require addressing the basic literacy needs of caregivers alongside children's educational development. Examples of such initiatives include FILL's (Family and Intergenerational Literacy and Learning), implemented by the Federal Ministry of Education in Ethiopia (MOJA, 2021), Family Literacy Project implemented in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa (Desmond, 2006), or the Family Basic Education (FABE) programme implemented by LABE in Uganda (UNESCO UIL, n.d.). Additionally, in Uganda and Tanzania, Right to Play have implemented the 'Play to Grow' Parental Education Programme, which aims to equip parents with the relevant skills needed to support their children's social-emotional and educational developmental needs (Right to Play, n.d.)

Initiative Goal

The initiative aims to address the disconnect between schools and homes by providing parents with regular, actionable, and linguistically accessible updates about their children's education. Its objectives are multifaceted. First, to alert parents about their child's attendance, especially in regions with high absenteeism. Second, to promote home-based learning by nudging families to read with children or review simple math tasks. Third, to correct misinformation or passive attitudes about education, particularly around gender. Fourth, to empower parents with practical suggestions, like asking a child to read for 10 minutes nightly, even if the parent is not literate. By enabling schools to push out consistent messages via SMS, radio, report cards, or home visits, the initiative has demonstrated measurable improvements in parental engagement behaviours and student learning outcomes across multiple African contexts (Ame & Menendez, 2022; Angrist et al., 2022; Banerjee et al., 2023; Planet Aid, 2021; IPA Ghana, 2021).

Crucially, this goal is not merely informational. It is behavioural. Research shows that simple 'nudges', like an SMS saying 'Your child was absent today', can have disproportionate effects on behaviour. In Côte d'Ivoire, similar prompts led to significantly improved school engagement among low-performing children (Banerjee et al., 2023). The initiative, therefore, seeks to build a sustainable culture of parental participation in education across Africa (UNESCO, 2022; Planet Aid, 2021; IPA Ghana, 2021).

Target Beneficiaries

This initiative primarily targets households with children in early primary school (pre-primary through Grade 4), especially those living in remote or economically marginalized areas. These are the students who often experience the sharpest drop in learning outcomes due to a lack of home support. In particular, girls and their caregivers are prioritized, as girls face additional risks of dropout, early marriage, and undervaluing of education in patriarchal settings. Programs like those in Ghana and Mozambique used gender-sensitive messaging to shift parents' perceptions of girls' educational potential (IPA Ghana, 2021).

Additionally, low-literacy families benefit from inclusive design, such as voice messages or illustrated report cards, ensuring that even caregivers who cannot read can understand and act on the content. Teachers and school leaders also benefit indirectly: when parents are better informed, teacher-parent communication improves, absenteeism drops, and classroom learning becomes more consistent. In the longer term, Ministries of Education and local governments stand to benefit as well. These interventions are being incorporated into national education sector plans in countries like Botswana and Mozambique, enhancing their reach and sustainability (Youth Impact & Brookings, 2023).

Solution

Description of the Initiative

The initiative comprises multiple delivery formats tailored to different linguistic, cultural, and technological contexts across Africa. In Zambia, the Makhalidwe Athu program delivered serialized SMS stories to parents that encouraged them to read with their children at home. These stories were culturally resonant, delivered in local languages, and specifically designed to prompt family engagement around literacy (Ame & Menendez, 2022). Parents received texts 2–3 times a week, suggesting simple activities like, 'Ask your child to tell you a story about the market.' Despite many parents being unable to read, children themselves or older siblings often acted as intermediaries.

Botswana's ConnectEd program took a two-pronged approach. Parents received math problem prompts via SMS, and then were called by trained tutors who spent 20 minutes per week guiding students and reinforcing concepts. The combination of low-tech SMS and live interaction was found to significantly enhance numeracy outcomes (Angrist et al., 2022). In Côte d'Ivoire, the Eduq+ program used both SMS and voice messages to share performance data and attendance records with parents. Messages like 'Your daughter was absent 2 days this week' helped trigger immediate action at home (Banerjee et al., 2023).

Where digital access is limited, alternatives such as printed report cards, community radio broadcasts, and town-hall meetings were used. Mozambique's Apoiar a Ler campaign combined radio programs with community volunteer visits, reinforcing literacy routines and school values (Planet Aid, 2021). All messaging approaches are designed to be low-cost, scalable, linguistically inclusive, and behaviourally

effective.

Finally, in Namibia, RightStart is a nationally recognised communication and social behaviour change programme for Early Childhood Development (ECD), launched in 2019 and now embedded across government systems. Evolving from a public awareness campaign into a dynamic, multi-sectoral platform, RightStart serves as a vehicle for ECD communication, advocacy, and behaviour change—anchored in the five pillars of the Nurturing Care Framework. It reaches a broad spectrum of stakeholders, from national policymakers to community caregivers, ensuring the dissemination of accurate, inclusive, and practical information that supports the optimal development of all children. By embedding strong, evidence-based messaging within ECD programming, RightStart fosters consistent public engagement and reinforces national efforts to create nurturing, enabling environments for every child. The programme aligns with Namibia's Vision 2030 and the National Development Plan (NDP6), recognising that early investment in children is essential for breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and advancing long-term educational, economic, and human capital development outcomes.

Implementation of the Initiative

The success of these initiatives hinges on localized planning, strong partnerships, and community trust. Implementation typically begins with Ministries of Education or district education offices identifying schools or regions with low learning outcomes and limited parent-school contact. Programs are then co-designed with local NGOs, school administrators, and sometimes telecom providers, particularly where SMS or call services are deployed (Youth Impact & Brookings, 2023).

Figure 4: Implementation Process

An initial step involves collecting caregivers' phone numbers and preferred languages. In some areas, a household may share one phone or rely on a neighbour's phone for messaging. Programs account for this by using flexible, inclusive outreach strategies. Message content is tested in pilot phases for clarity, tone, and relevance. For example, ConnectEd's pilot in Botswana revealed that parents preferred evening calls over mid-day calls due to availability and privacy (Angrist et al., 2022).

Schools receive orientation on data collection, monitoring tools, and how to interpret responses from parents. Many models now incorporate two-way communication, allowing parents to ask questions, report issues, or request support. Some initiatives provide support helplines. Where digital literacy is low, community agents or early childhood educators serve as intermediaries, explaining messages or helping parents act on them. Implementation has proven most successful where educators and parents are seen as partners with shared goals.

Challenges and Solutions

Despite strong results, these programs face several challenges. Chief among them is parental illiteracy. In Mozambique and Ghana, many mothers were unable to read SMS content (Planet Aid, 2021; IPA Ghana, 2021). To address this, initiatives pivoted to voice messaging and radio, which proved more accessible and fostered collective listening. In Zambia, older siblings or neighbours often read texts aloud to parents.

Another challenge is shared or no phone access in households. Programs mitigated this by involving community volunteers who relayed messages in person. Botswana's approach included weekly tutoring calls that didn't require phone ownership per se—parents could borrow phones to participate. Message fatigue is a third challenge. Overuse of generic reminders leads to disengagement. Most programs now limit messages to 2–3 per week, personalize the content, and balance instruction with encouragement.

Gender barriers also surfaced. In Ghana, some mothers lacked access to household phones. Projects adapted by holding mother-only sessions and using printed flyers distributed by female leaders. Across all countries, continuous community feedback loops and message refinement have proven vital to maintaining engagement and trust.

Results

Outcomes

The most compelling aspect of these interventions is their measurable impact on both behaviour and learning outcomes. In Zambia, the Makhalidwe Athu program led to a +0.25 standard deviation improvement in early literacy scores, with caregiv-

ers reporting increased home reading and story-telling (Ame & Menendez, 2022). Botswana's ConnectEd initiative produced a +0.12 SD improvement in math scores and a 31% reduction in innumeracy among young learners (Angrist et al., 2022).

In Côte d'Ivoire, Eduq+ helped low-performing children catch up by actively involving parents with tailored progress updates (Banerjee et al., 2023). Mozambique's Apoiar a Ler project saw a 15% rise in girls' attendance and a 1.3x increase in family reading sessions (Planet Aid, 2021). In Ghana, simple SMS reminders significantly increased girls' return-to-school rates post-COVID by 11 percentage points (IPA Ghana, 2021).

Qualitative feedback has also been overwhelmingly positive. Parents reported greater confidence in supporting schoolwork, a better understanding of the curriculum, and stronger relationships with teachers. Even in non-literate homes, children relayed the messages to parents, creating new opportunities for dialogue and educational reinforcement. Importantly, these changes were most pronounced among the poorest households, underscoring the equity potential of parent-engagement messaging in FLN settings.

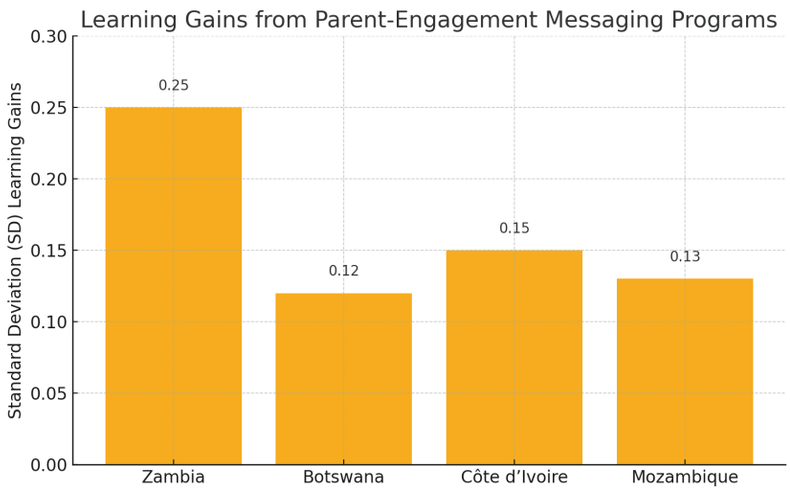
Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

These interventions demonstrate that meaningful parental engagement can be achieved at scale, using affordable and adaptable technologies. Programs like ConnectEd (implemented in Botswana since 2020) and Eduq+ (implemented in Côte d'Ivoire since 2018) were expanded across multiple countries with only modest contextual adaptation, showing the robustness of the model (Youth Impact & Brookings, 2023). The cost per child ranges from $10 to $15, far lower than most remedial education programs, and delivers significant learning returns. Critical lessons include:

- Interactivity boosts impact: SMS alone is weaker than SMS paired with calls, radio, or in-person support.
- Cultural relevance drives engagement: Messages must reflect local languages, social norms, and family structures.
- Feedback loops are essential: Iterating based on parent responses improves content and delivery.

Long-term success depends on integrating these efforts into government systems like EMIS or national education strategies. Botswana's Ministry of Basic Education, for example, has committed to sustaining ConnectEd as part of its learning recovery plan. Embedding parent communication tools within school calendars, teacher training, and digital systems will ensure these practices are not ad hoc but institutionalized. Overall, the African experience shows that with the right tools, every parent, regardless of literacy level, can be a partner in learning. In doing so, they unlock their child's potential during the critical early years of education.

Figure: Learning Gains from Parent-Engagement Messaging Programs
Sources: Ame & Menendez (2022); Angrist et al. (2022); Banerjee et al. (2023); Planet Aid (2021)



Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Effective family engagement is a critical lever for improving foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes across Africa. Drawing on experiences from Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, several lessons and actionable recommendations have emerged:

- **Behavioural Nudges Drive Results:** Simple, timely messages—such as SMS alerts about attendance or performance—can meaningfully change parental behaviour, especially when combined with supportive tools like phone calls, radio, or in-person visits.
- **Interactivity Enhances Impact:** Two-way communication platforms that allow parents to ask questions, seek guidance, or confirm actions are more effective than one-way information delivery alone. Programs that paired SMS with live tutoring or community engagement saw stronger learning outcomes.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Relevance is Essential:** Messages must be delivered in local languages and reflect household contexts, cultural norms, and gender dynamics. Failure to adapt content risks exclusion of non-literate or marginalized caregivers.
- **Addressing Literacy Gaps Among Caregivers:** Parent-focused adult literacy or guidance programs enhance the effectiveness of engagement initiatives. Non-literate caregivers benefit from voice messages, radio broadcasts, or community intermediaries who relay content in accessible ways.
- **Gender-Sensitive Design Promotes Equity:** Targeted interventions that consider barriers facing girls—such as access to phones or cultural biases—can **increase girls' attendance and participation in early primary grades.**
- **Feedback Loops Strengthen Programs:** Iterative adjustments based on parental responses, engagement patterns, and community feedback increase relevance, maintain trust, and sustain participation.
- **Integration with National Systems Ensures Sustainability:** Embedding parental engagement initiatives into government structures, such as EMIS, teacher training, and school calendars, facilitates scale-up and long-term institutionalization.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Governments and partners should expand SMS, voice, and radio-based engagement programs while pairing them with supportive interactions such as tutoring calls or home visits.
- Tailor messages to local languages, customs, and family structures. Integrate gender considerations to address differential barriers and encourage equitable participation.
- Combine parent engagement programs with adult literacy initiatives where necessary to ensure all caregivers can access and act on educational messages.
- Design platforms that allow parents to ask questions, provide feedback, and report challenges. Active dialogue strengthens trust and engagement.
- Utilize older siblings, volunteers, and local educators to bridge gaps in access to technology and literacy, ensuring messages reach all households.
- Institutionalize family engagement initiatives within school systems, including integration into EMIS, curriculum, teacher training, and school calendars to secure sustainability and scale.
- Establish systems to track parental engagement, assess learning outcomes, and refine approaches based on evidence, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness to local needs.

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School Improvement, Leadership Support & Community Engagement

Raising learning outcomes in low-performing schools by strengthening teaching practices, enhancing school leadership, increasing community engagement, and improving accountability for results.

Countries:
The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone

These case study countries were selected based on evidence of systematic approaches to school improvement that combine instructional leadership development, community engagement, and accountability mechanisms. The selection prioritized government-led initiatives with documented improvements in foundational learning outcomes and models that demonstrate scalability across different contexts.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

Across many African countries, significant progress in expanding access to primary education has not translated into corresponding improvements in foundational learning outcomes. Learning assessments consistently reveal that large proportions of children reach the end of primary school without mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills. According to the World Bank, over 86% of 10-year-olds in the region cannot read and understand a simple text (World Bank et al., 2022). This disconnect between schooling and learning reflects deeper systemic challenges within education systems that cannot be addressed through single-point interventions alone.

The need for comprehensive school improvement approaches is evidenced by the range of challenges documented across different country contexts. In Ghana, for example, systemic challenges include weak instructional leadership, underutilized School Management Committees (SMCs), and inconsistent teacher quality (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2022). The prevalence of school improvement initiatives across the continent that specifically target instructional leadership, community engagement, and accountability mechanisms suggests these challenges are widespread, though their specific manifestations vary by context.
Learning outcomes data reveals the scale of the challenge across multiple countries. In Ghana, Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) in 2015 revealed that over 50% of Primary 2 students could not read a single word, and nearly three-quarters

struggled with basic arithmetic (World Bank, 2020). In Nigeria's EdoBEST initiative, baseline assessments revealed significant learning gaps that prompted statewide reform (World Bank, 2022). In Senegal, the Lecture Pour Tous programme found that only 0.3% of Grade 2 children could read at grade level in 2017 (USAID, 2021). These examples highlight the urgent need for comprehensive approaches that address multiple dimensions of school performance simultaneously.

Recognition of these interconnected challenges has led to the development of holistic school improvement initiatives that target multiple elements of the education system concurrently, rather than focusing on isolated inputs or interventions.

Initiative Goal

The Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP) was launched in 2020 to address these deficiencies. The initiative aimed to improve the quality of education in the lowest-performing basic schools by strengthening teaching practices, enhancing school leadership, increasing community engagement, and improving accountability for results (World Bank, 2022). The key objective was to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by targeting under-resourced schools.

Cross-African Comparison: Sierra Leone's Education Innovation Challenge adopted similar outcome-based goals, focusing on measurable gains in foundational literacy and numeracy. In Nigeria, NEI Plus targeted reading proficiency in Hausa and English among Grade 1-3 students, aiming for systemic capacity-building to sustain literacy gains beyond the life of the project (USAID, 2020).

GALOP targeted approximately 10,000 low-performing basic schools, reaching around 2.9 million students across all regions of Ghana. Special attention was given to vulnerable populations, including rural learners, girls, and children with disabilities. Approximately 96,000 teachers and thousands of headteachers benefited from professional development and coaching. School Management Committees (SMCs) and district-level education officers were also included in the capacity-building efforts (GPE, 2022).

Target Beneficiaries

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Complementary Models: In Nigeria, the NEI Plus project supported a comprehensive 'whole child, whole teacher, whole school, and whole system approach' that strengthened Local Government Education Authorities' capacity to train and manage teachers, improve school governance, and mobilize community support for learning. The initiative built programmatic ownership across government levels while focusing specifically on early grade reading instruction, reaching nearly 1.4 million children in foundational grades through strengthened education systems and community engagement (Creative Associates International, 2025).

In Senegal, Lecture Pour Tous strengthened school-community partnerships through School Management Committees (SMCs) that coordinated community mobilizers, implemented multi-channel communication campaigns, and established home-school communication tools for joint tracking of student reading progress. The program built SMC capacity to integrate reading activities into action plans and sustain parent engagement activities, while training community mobilizers to conduct parent dialogues, home visits, and reading clubs that connected in-school and home learning activities (USAID, 2024). The programme directly reached over 600,000 students and trained more than 14,000 teachers, demonstrating a large-scale impact through inclusive targeting (USAID, 2021).

Solution

Description of the Initiative

GALOP is a government-led, results-based initiative implemented in Ghana and supported by the World Bank, GPE, FCDO, and other partners. Its design integrates four core components:

1. **Teacher Training & Support:** Teachers received in-service training on differentiated learning techniques, phonics-based literacy instruction, and learner-centered mathematics strategies.
2. **Instructional Leadership:** Headteachers were trained to support instructional quality and conduct in-school coaching.
3. **Community Engagement:** SMCs were revitalized and trained to monitor student learning and support school improvement plans (SPIPs).
4. **Accountability Systems:** A national learning assessment (NST) and dashboard tools were introduced to track learning outcomes and resource distribution.

These interventions were designed to create a feedback loop between schools, communities, and the education system to strengthen accountability and improve FLN outcomes (MoE, 2023).

Implementation of the Initiative

GALOP implementation began in 2020 with a phased rollout across the 10,000 schools across Ghana. Master trainers were prepared at the national level and cascaded training to district coaches known as School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs), who provided ongoing in-school coaching. Teachers were supported in implementing differentiated learning through practical lesson demonstrations and observation cycles (World Bank, 2022).

Headteachers underwent leadership development to enhance instructional supervision. SMCs received orientation to support School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIPs), and small grants were issued to each school to fund these plans. Community engagement was further promoted through parent-teacher meetings, local radio programs, and the dissemination of school-level report cards. Despite COVID-19 disruptions, GALOP maintained momentum through remedial learning initiatives, including home-based learning kits and virtual training for teachers (GPE, 2022).

Comparative Insight: In Sierra Leone, the Education Innovation Challenge implemented randomized school support strategies and learning camps to ensure flexibility and real-time response to underperformance. The use of performance-based funding mechanisms ensured timely delivery of remedial support based on midline assessments (EOF, 2023).

Challenges and Solutions

COVID-19 Impact: The pandemic caused prolonged school closures. GALOP responded with remedial learning programs, including radio/TV lessons and take-home materials. Upon reopening, an accelerated learning strategy helped mitigate learning loss (MoE, 2022).

Capacity Gaps: Many teachers lacked prior training in differentiated learning. Intensive coaching and professional learning communities were established to support practice.

Inconsistent SMC Engagement: Some committees were inactive or lacked clarity on their roles. GALOP introduced localized training sessions in local languages and collaborated with NGOs to build SMC capacity. Community scorecards helped ensure visibility and engagement.

Data Utilization: Although national data systems were introduced, dashboard tools were initially underused at district levels. Training and integration with the existing EMIS helped address this.

Teacher Allocation: Disparities in teacher deployment were addressed through performance-based conditions, leading to improved teacher-pupil ratios in target schools (World Bank, 2023).

Shared Experiences: In Nigeria's EdoBEST, resistance from teachers to using tablets and scripted lessons was addressed through transparent union negotiations and demonstration of learning gains. In Senegal, initial community resistance to using local languages was overcome by integrating local media campaigns and leveraging traditional leadership support (USAID, 2021).

Outcomes

Results

Improved FLN Proficiency: The 2022 National Standardized Test (NST) indicated that 38% of Primary 2 learners achieved literacy 'mastery,' while 62% achieved numeracy mastery—a substantial improvement from pre-GALOP benchmarks (MoE, 2023).

Equity Gains: Rural schools, previously underperforming, outpaced urban schools in some indicators, narrowing regional disparities. Gender parity improved slightly, with girls achieving 47% representation among direct beneficiaries (GPE, 2022).

Teacher and Leadership Development: Over 70,000 teachers and 10,000 head-teachers have been trained. Observation data show improved use of phonics, grouping techniques, and formative assessment. Headteachers are now more confident in supervising instruction and guiding school planning (World Bank, 2023).

Enhanced Community Participation: All 10,000 target schools now have functioning SMCs. Community members have contributed to infrastructure improvements, learning support sessions, and school safety initiatives. Parent attendance at school meetings increased significantly in several regions (MoE, 2023).

Increased Accountability: The NST and school dashboard tools enabled targeted interventions. District-level officials now use real-time data to allocate resources and support underperforming schools.

Benchmarking Outcomes: In Sierra Leone, the SLEIC program delivered a 0.175 standard deviation gain in English and 0.292 in math over two years, exceeding African norms (EOF, 2023). In Senegal, Lecture Pour Tous saw reading proficiency among Grade 2 students rise from 0.3% to 29% before COVID-19 disruptions (USAID, 2021).

Figure: Comparison of FLN Improvements in Selected African Initiatives

Initiative	Country	Literacy Gain (% / SD)	Numeracy Gain (% / SD)
GALOP	Ghana	38% literacy mastery	62% numeracy mastery
Lecture Pour Tous	Senegal	0.3% - 29% (Grade 2)	N/A
SLEIC	Sierra Leone	+1.175 SD (English)	+0.292 SD Math
EdoBEST	Nigeria	2+ years equivalent gain	N/A

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

Midterm evaluations (2022–2023) indicate that GALOP is on track to achieve its development objectives. The project has demonstrated that structured support—including coaching, leadership development, and community participation—can lead to meaningful FLN improvements at scale (World Bank, 2023). Key lessons include:

- Linking funding to performance conditions creates incentives for equitable teacher deployment and student learning.
- SMC engagement, when structured and resourced, is effective for monitoring and motivating school-level improvements.
- Data systems require parallel investments in local capacity to interpret and use information.
- For replication and sustainability:
- Integration of GALOP components into Ghana's national education plan is ongoing.
- The MoE is mainstreaming the SPIP framework and in-service training models into routine education sector activities.
- The success of GALOP offers a scalable model for improving FLN in resource-constrained settings by leveraging existing governance structures like SMCs.

Pan-African Learning: Across several African contexts, success in improving FLN has hinged on community ownership and structured school leadership. Whether through SBMCs in Nigeria or CGEs in Senegal, local involvement ensures the persistence and relevance of reforms. Programs that provide teachers with clear instructional tools, backed by data systems and community monitoring, consistently outperform those relying solely on inputs. The use of results-based financing, as demonstrated in Sierra Leone, offers an emerging model for achieving efficiency and accountability.

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Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Strengthening school performance requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that addresses teaching quality, leadership, community engagement, and accountability. Experiences from Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and other African contexts provide critical insights for scaling and sustaining such initiatives:

- **Integrated Approaches Improve FLN Outcomes:** Programs that combine teacher training, instructional leadership, community engagement, and accountability systems consistently produce stronger literacy and numeracy gains than isolated interventions.
- **Instructional Leadership is Crucial:** Headteachers and school leaders play a key role in translating policy into practice. Targeted leadership development and coaching significantly enhance classroom supervision, lesson quality, and implementation of school improvement plans.
- **Teacher Support and Coaching Drive Change:** In-service training combined with in-class coaching, observation, and formative assessment support enables teachers to adopt learner-centered approaches and differentiated instruction, leading to measurable improvements in foundational learning.
- **Community Engagement Strengthens Accountability:** Revitalized School Management Committees (SMCs), community mobilizers, and parent engagement mechanisms improve monitoring, resource allocation, and school-level motivation, ensuring reforms are relevant and sustained.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making Enhances Effectiveness:** Real-time learning dashboards, standardized tests, and EMIS integration help identify underperforming schools, target interventions, and track progress. However, dashboards are most effective when local officials are trained to interpret and act on the data.
- **Flexible Adaptation Mitigates Disruptions:** During COVID-19, remedial programs, home-based learning kits, and virtual teacher training allowed continuity of learning and minimized losses, demonstrating the importance of adaptable implementation mechanisms.
- **Equity Requires Intentional Targeting:** Rural learners, girls, and children with disabilities benefit most when initiatives deliberately prioritize under-resourced schools and address gender and inclusion barriers.
- **Performance-Based Incentives Encourage Teacher and School Accountability:** Linking resources or support to measurable outcomes fosters equitable teacher deployment, active engagement, and higher-quality instruction.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Governments should integrate teacher development, leadership coaching, community engagement, and accountability mechanisms into national strategies to achieve scalable FLN gains.
- Training headteachers and school leaders in instructional supervision and coaching should be central to reform, with ongoing mentoring and peer networks to reinforce skills.
- In-service training should be coupled with classroom-based coaching, demonstration lessons, and formative assessment tools to support consistent adoption of effective instructional practices.
- Provide resources, training, and clear roles for community structures to monitor school performance, support student learning, and foster local ownership.
- Invest in training district and school-level officials to interpret dashboards and assessments, ensuring data informs actionable decisions and resource allocation.
- Embed contingency mechanisms such as remedial learning programs, home-based kits, and remote teacher support to mitigate disruptions like pandemics or local crises.
- Design interventions that specifically support rural learners, girls, and children with disabilities, and monitor progress against inclusion indicators.
- Results-based financing or performance-linked incentives can improve teacher deployment, instructional quality, and school-level accountability, while promoting systemic efficiency.
- Embed successful models, such as SPIP frameworks, teacher coaching cycles, and community engagement mechanisms, into national education plans to ensure sustainability beyond project timelines.
- Encourage cross-country learning on school improvement strategies, leveraging successful approaches from Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria to inform replication in similar low-resource contexts.

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Teacher Accountability Mechanisms

Enhancing classroom instruction through the use of data-driven performance incentives that strengthen teacher accountability.

Case Study Countries: Kenya, Tanzania

These case study countries were selected to represent different approaches to strengthening teacher accountability through data-driven performance systems. The selection prioritized large-scale, government-led initiatives with documented evidence of impact on instructional quality and learning outcomes, offering contrasting models for accountability implementation.

Setting

Context | Problem Statement

In many parts of Africa, the challenge of improving foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) has historically been exacerbated by limited teacher accountability for what happens in classrooms. While efforts have been made to expand access and provide teaching materials, less consistent attention has historically been paid to whether instructional practices align with curriculum expectations, or whether teachers receive timely, constructive feedback. Observations are rare, data is underused, and professional support is often either absent or inconsistently delivered (Bold et al., 2017; RTI International, 2022).

This lack of accountability has contributed to variable instructional quality, even within the same systems, contributing to the fact that many children unable to read or perform basic arithmetic by the time they complete the early grades. This case study presents two national approaches – one implemented in Kenya and one in Tanzania – that intended to overcome this problem.

Initiative Goal

At a broad level, the goal of the initiative was to strengthen teaching and learning in primary schools through enhanced accountability mechanisms. It ensured that teachers were supported, observed, and held responsible for what learners actually achieve. This included both systems of direct monitoring and feedback, and structures that create incentives for performance improvement.

Target Beneficiaries

Both approaches were aimed at improving outcomes for children in public primary schools, many of whom lacked access to consistent, high-quality teaching. While Kenya's Tusome specifically targeted early grade learners, the BRN-E initiative in Tanzania worked across the full basic education cycle. In both settings, teachers were also key beneficiaries. They received support, oversight, and greater clarity on expectations. Ministry officials, school leaders, and district officers benefitted indirectly through the availability of real-time data and performance metrics that informed management decisions (RTI International, 2022; Mbiti et al., 2019).

'In just a few weeks, I saw a change. My pupils who couldn't read a word were sounding out letters and blending them confidently.'

Grade 2 Teacher, Northern Nigeria (Jolly Futures, 2023)

Solution

Description of the Initiative

The initiative can be understood broadly as an effort to introduce more robust accountability mechanisms into primary education systems. It includes creating clearer expectations for teachers, monitoring instructional quality, using performance data to guide support, and aligning incentives to encourage learning improvements.

In practice, these mechanisms were implemented differently in Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya, the Tusome programme-introduced in 2015 by the Ministry of Education-focused on improving early grade reading through structured pedagogy and digital accountability tools. Teachers in Standards 1 and 2 received scripted lesson plans in English and Kiswahili and were regularly visited by curriculum support officers (CSOs), who recorded observations using tablets (Piper et al., 2018; Lucas et al., 2014). This data was sent to a national dashboard and reviewed at county and national levels, ensuring timely feedback and system-wide visibility (RTI International, 2022; Crouch & De Stefano, 2017).

Tanzania's BRN-E, launched in 2013, introduced national performance rankings for schools based on Standard 7 examination results. Thus, the teacher accountability mechanisms were not directly linked to FLN for primary learners, although they did have a significant impact in this area due to the wider increase in accountability they brought about. These rankings were made public and were accompanied by financial incentives for top performers. The reform was part of a broader results-based governance strategy and was supported by the President's Delivery Bureau. Teachers and school leaders operated under increased scrutiny, with performance expectations defined in headteacher contracts and communicated widely (Mbiti et al., 2019).

Implementation of the Initiative

Both approaches were implemented at scale and integrated directly into government systems, reflecting a commitment to nationwide reform rather than isolated pilots. Tusome was scaled nationally in Kenya. It covered over 23,000 public primary schools and reached more than 7 million learners (RTI International, 2022). CSOs were responsible for observing teachers at least twice per term. Data was gathered using observation tools embedded in tablets and included indicators such as time on task, use of instructional materials, and lesson completion. Where observations identified challenges, feedback was provided directly to teachers, and district-level interventions could be triggered (Piper et al., 2018).

Likewise, Tanzania's BRN-E also operated at national scale. It reached over 16,000 schools and more than 8 million pupils (Mbiti et al., 2019). Performance data from Standard 7 exams were used to publicly rank schools, and bonus payments were awarded to top performers. While BRN-E did not include classroom observation or coaching, the public reporting system created performance pressure that, in some contexts, encouraged schools to reorganise teaching and focus more intensively on exam preparation (Twaweza, 2015; Hwa & Pritchett, 2021).

Challenges and Solutions

While both initiatives were implemented at scale, their delivery encountered a number of practical and policy challenges that shaped how accountability mechanisms translated into classroom practice. Tusome's most pressing challenges centred on maintaining the consistency and quality of coaching, particularly in rural counties. Curriculum Support Officers were often responsible for large clusters of schools, and the frequency of classroom visits fell short of planned targets in some regions. In addition, CSOs varied in their interpretation of observation protocols, resulting in inconsistent feedback for teachers. Additionally, connectivity issues occasionally delayed data uploads to the central dashboard, limiting real-time oversight. These issues were mitigated through refresher training, the roll-out of offline data capture tools, and more structured performance reviews at the county level (RTI International, 2022).

BRN-E, by contrast, drew criticism for narrowing the scope of improvement efforts. While the use of public rankings helped elevate learning outcomes on the national agenda, it also created incentives that were not always aligned with the development of foundational skills. In some cases, schools reportedly discouraged lower-performing pupils from sitting exams in order to safeguard their position in the rankings (Mbiti et al., 2019). Without direct instructional guidance or classroom-level support, many teachers felt constrained due to a pressure to focus heavily on exam preparation, often at the expense of other areas they felt were more pressing (Hwa & Pritchett, 2021).

Results

Outcomes

Both initiatives produced measurable results, though the scale and nature of their impact varied in line with the design and focus of each programme. Tusome's impact on foundational literacy was significant. For example, by the end of Standard 2, students in Tusome schools were reading an average of 25 more correct words per minute in Kiswahili and 18 more in English than their counterparts in comparison groups. Their gains ranged from 0.6 to 1.0 standard deviations, depending on region and subject, and were consistent across different demographic groups (Piper et al., 2018; Crouch & DeStefano, 2017). The programme also led to improvements in teacher attendance and time on task, which suggests that the teacher accountability measures also led to positive behavioural change.

In Tanzania, BRN-E led to smaller, though still meaningful, improvements. Public rankings increased average test scores by 0.14 standard deviations, while the combination of rankings and financial grants led to gains of 0.21 standard deviations (Mbiti et al., 2019). The intervention was most effective in improving previously low-performing schools, suggesting that teacher accountability pressure helped to increase effort in contexts where there had been lower expectations. However, because BRN-E did not systematically measure FLN outcomes in the early grades, there are limitations in drawing conclusions specifically in relation to FLN.

Findings from Evaluations of the Initiative

The two cases offer distinct models of how teacher accountability initiatives can be designed and delivered. Tusome's strength lay in its coherence. Teachers were given the tools to teach, a clear structure to follow, and consistent feedback to guide improvement. Its accountability mechanisms, such as real-time monitoring, in-class coaching, and performance dashboards, reinforced one another and enabled government to identify and address implementation gaps with speed and precision.

Conversely, BRN-E demonstrated the benefits of performance pressure at scale. Its reforms placed learning on the national agenda and created system-wide incentives to improve. However, without embedded pedagogical support, its impact was less direct on foundational literacy and numeracy and more focused on test outcomes. The initiative's value lies in showing how political will, data transparency, and targeted incentives were able to attention toward results, as well as in in highlighting the limits of accountability when not paired with instructional guidance. This is something that future initiatives should absolutely bear in mind prior to attempted implementation.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Strengthening teacher accountability through data-driven mechanisms has proven to be a critical lever for improving instructional quality and learning outcomes. Experiences from Kenya and Tanzania offer valuable insights into the design, implementation, and impact of such initiatives:

- **Coherent Accountability Systems Drive Stronger Outcomes:** Initiatives that combine clear expectations, structured guidance, and consistent feedback—like Kenya's Tusome programme—produce larger and more sustained gains in foundational literacy and numeracy. Alignment between instructional support, observation, and performance monitoring reinforces teacher behaviour change.
- **Direct Support and Monitoring Are Key:** Classroom observations, coaching, and structured feedback enable teachers to adopt improved instructional practices. Tusome's use of Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) and real-time dashboards demonstrated that consistent monitoring at scale is feasible and effective.
- **Performance Incentives Must Align with Instructional Goals:** While Tanzania's BRN-E showed that public rankings and financial incentives can motivate teacher and school effort, misalignment with early grade learning priorities can produce unintended consequences, such as overemphasis on exam preparation or exclusion of low-performing students.
- **Scalability Requires Integration into Government Systems:** Both initiatives highlight that nationwide reform is achievable when embedded in government structures. Tusome leveraged the Ministry of Education's supervisory framework, while BRN-E drew on the President's Delivery Bureau, illustrating the importance of institutional ownership.
- **Contextual and Operational Challenges Matter:** Rural and resource-constrained areas face challenges such as limited supervision capacity, inconsistent adherence to observation protocols, and connectivity issues for data reporting. Proactive measures—offline tools, refresher trainings, and structured county-level oversight—can mitigate these obstacles.
- **Data Transparency Encourages System-Wide Accountability:** Public reporting of school performance elevates learning on the national agenda and can motivate improvement. However, transparency alone is insufficient without complementary pedagogical support and teacher capacity building.
- **Teacher Behaviour Changes with Combined Supports:** Accountability mechanisms work best when they pair monitoring and performance feedback with instructional guidance, as shown by improved teacher attendance, time on task, and adoption of structured lesson plans in Tusome schools.

Building on these lessons, the following **recommendations** can guide African Union member states and partners in taking this approach to scale:

- Effective teacher accountability should integrate classroom coaching, structured lesson guides, and performance monitoring to reinforce instructional quality rather than focusing solely on outputs like exam results.
- Financial or public recognition rewards should correspond with meaningful learning improvements, particularly foundational literacy and numeracy, to avoid perverse incentives.
- Use digital tools, observation protocols, and dashboards to track teacher performance at scale. Ensure local officials are trained to interpret data and act on findings promptly.
- Provide additional support for rural or under-resourced schools, including offline data collection options, cluster-based supervision, and targeted refresher training for observers and teachers.
- Embed accountability mechanisms within existing government structures to ensure sustainability, policy alignment, and long-term adoption beyond individual projects.
- Encourage iterative feedback loops where data informs teacher coaching, supervision practices, and policy adjustments, creating a system that continuously adapts and improves instructional quality.
- Mechanisms should prioritize support for underperforming schools and vulnerable learners, ensuring that performance pressure does not exacerbate exclusion or inequity.
- Public transparency and rankings are valuable for system-wide motivation, but they must be paired with coaching and resources to avoid negative consequences for students and teachers.

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SECTION 3: Operationalisation

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The exemplars documented in this report demonstrate that significant improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy are achievable across diverse African contexts. However, translating these proven approaches into sustainable, system-wide change requires systematic operationalisation that moves beyond isolated pilots to embedded, scaled interventions.

Essential Steps for Implementation

Political Commitment and Leadership

Success begins with high-level political commitment that positions foundational learning as a national priority. This includes presidential or ministerial champions who can drive policy alignment, resource allocation, and sustained implementation even through political transitions. Countries like Kenya (Tusome), Ghana (GALOP), and Nigeria (EdoBEST) demonstrate how political leadership enables system-wide transformation.

Policy Integration and Embedding

Foundational learning interventions must be embedded within existing policy frameworks rather than operating as parallel initiatives. This includes integration into Education Sector Plans (ESPs), Global Partnership for Education compacts, Medium-Term Results and Performance frameworks (MYRPs), and national development strategies. The Nouakchott Declaration's call for accelerated action on education in Africa provides a continental framework for this integration.

Financing and Resource Mobilization

Sustainable implementation requires predictable, adequate financing through multiple channels. Several exemplars from the documented interventions demonstrate successful financing approaches:

- **Domestic resource mobilization:** Countries like Kenya (Tusome) and Ghana (GALOP) have successfully integrated foundational learning interventions into national education budgets, with Kenya achieving national scale across over 23,000 schools and Ghana targeting 10,000 schools through government-led financing.
- **International partnerships:** Nigeria's NHGSFP reaches over 9 million children through a combination of government funding covering approximately 80% of costs, with external partners providing startup and crisis support. Ethiopia and Rwanda have similarly leveraged community contributions to supplement government resources.
- **Performance-based and results-based financing:** Ghana's GALOP demonstrates how linking funding to performance conditions creates incentives for equitable teacher deployment and improved learning outcomes, while Sierra Leone's Education Innovation Challenge uses performance-based funding mechanisms to ensure timely delivery of remedial support.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Programs like Teach For All network initiatives across multiple countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda) show how partnership models can mobilize resources while maintaining government ownership and integration into national systems.

Systematic Implementation Pathway

Effective operationalisation follows a structured progression:

- Piloting: Initial implementation in selected districts or schools to test feasibility, adapt to local contexts, and build evidence. This phase focuses on proof of concept and refinement of delivery mechanisms.
- Operationalising: Expanding beyond pilots to significant scale while maintaining quality and fidelity. This involves developing systems for training, materials distribution, monitoring, and feedback loops.
- Scale-Up: Full national or system-wide implementation with embedded sustainability mechanisms. This requires integration into routine government operations, pre-service and in-service teacher training, and institutional frameworks

Evidence Generation and Learning

Robust evidence generation is essential throughout implementation phases:

- Data collection systems: Establishing routine data collection mechanisms that align with national EMIS and international indicators (such as SDG 4.1.1a)
- Monitoring and evaluation: Regular assessment of implementation fidelity, learning outcomes, and cost-effectiveness to inform continuous improvement
- Research partnerships: Collaboration with academic institutions and research organisations to generate rigorous evidence on effectiveness and adaptation

South-South and Triangular Collaboration

The African experience demonstrates the power of peer learning and knowledge exchange. Countries implementing foundational learning interventions should actively engage in:

- Continental learning networks: Participating in African Union education initiatives and peer learning platforms.
- Bilateral exchanges: Learning from countries with similar contexts and challenges.
- Triangular partnerships: Collaborating with development partners to facilitate knowledge transfer and technical assistance.
- Regional communities of practice: Engaging with regional economic communities and education consortiums to share experiences and coordinate approaches.

Critical Success Factors

Experience across the continent highlights several factors that distinguish successful implementation:

- **System integration:** Interventions that work within existing structures rather than creating parallel systems achieve greater sustainability and scale. For example, Kenya's Tusome programme was integrated directly into the national education system and reached over 23,000 public primary schools, while Ghana's GALOP worked through existing School Management Committees to reach 10,000 schools.

- **Local adaptation:** While core principles remain consistent, successful interventions adapt to local languages, cultures, and institutional contexts. Mother tongue instruction initiatives demonstrate this clearly, with Kenya's PRIMR-MT adapting to Lubukusu and Kikamba languages, while Mozambique's Vamos Ler! programme worked in Emakhuwa and Elomwe across over 2,000 schools.
- **Continuous improvement:** Implementation that includes feedback loops, regular course correction, and iterative refinement based on evidence and experience. Teaching at the Right Level exemplifies this through its core methodology of conducting short oral assessments, forming learning groups, using tailored activities, reassessing children regularly, and supporting teachers with ongoing mentoring and monitoring.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Active involvement of teachers, parents, communities, and local leaders throughout the implementation process. Family engagement initiatives demonstrate this through programs like Zambia's Makhalidwe Athu program that delivered SMS stories to parents, leading to +0.25 standard deviation literacy improvements, and Botswana's ConnectEd program that combined SMS with tutoring calls, resulting in +0.12 standard deviation math gains.
- **Sustainability planning:** Early attention to transition from external support to domestic ownership and financing. The Teach For All network demonstrates this through alumni networks, with former fellows in countries like Rwanda and Nigeria taking leadership roles in government, teacher training institutions, and NGOs, helping to embed foundational learning priorities into national discourse.

The pathway from evidence to impact requires deliberate, systematic operationalisation that addresses political, financial, technical, and institutional dimensions simultaneously. The exemplars in this report provide not just evidence of what works, but roadmaps for how transformation can be achieved at scale across the continent.

The End Learning Poverty for All in Africa (ELPAf) Campaign

Launched in September 2024 as a flagship initiative marking the AU Year of Education, the ELPAf Campaign is led by the African Union Commission's Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (AUC-ESTI) Department with UNICEF support. The campaign addresses the learning crisis affecting 9 out of 10 children in Sub-Saharan Africa who cannot read proficiently by age 10, aiming to ensure every African child achieves quality foundational literacy and numeracy skills by 2035. The first phase will launch in 25 countries over 24 months, including early adopters like Malawi and Zambia, selected based on political commitment to foundational learning, urgency of need, and willingness to partner on systemic reforms. This continental framework provides countries with a structured pathway for operationalising the evidence-based interventions documented in this report.

END LEARNING POVERTY READ • WRITE • COUNT

Annex A:

Online Survey Data Analysis and Results

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

The following presents findings from a stakeholder survey conducted as part of a wider continental mapping exercise to identify exemplars of good practice in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) throughout Africa. The survey was developed collaboratively between the UNICEF Office to the African Union Commission and UNECA, and the Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) Team within the African Union Commission, with technical support from specialist consultants experienced in digital questionnaire design and administration.

The survey formed a core component of a broader mixed-methods research design combining systematic literature review techniques with stakeholder consultation and expert analysis to ensure comprehensive coverage and rigorous evaluation of FLN initiatives across the African continent. This methodological approach was specifically designed to capture both the breadth of interventions being implemented and the depth of evidence regarding their effectiveness and scalability potential.

1.2 Survey Purpose and Objectives

The questionnaire was designed to capture insights into scalable, evidence-based approaches for strengthening Foundational Literacy and Numeracy across African contexts, with particular attention to identifying promising practices that could inform the continental resource mapping exercise. Copies of the questionnaires are appended to this report as Annex A. Survey administration was monitored to promote broad participation from AU Member States and development partners, with results analysed to complement the systematic literature review and inform the final selection of exemplars documented in the broader mapping initiative.

The survey sought to gather insights from key stakeholders, including representatives of Member States as well as implementing partners, donors, and other actors within the education sector throughout the continent and internationally. This dual stakeholder approach was essential for capturing both policy-level perspectives from government representatives and implementation-level insights from organisations directly engaged in FLN programming across diverse African contexts.

2. Stakeholder Engagement & State Representation

The survey was developed collaboratively between the UNICEF Office to the African Union Commission and UNECA, and the Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) Team within the African Union Commission, with technical support from specialist consultants experienced in digital questionnaire design and administration. This collaborative approach ensured comprehensive coverage of key stakeholder perspectives whilst maintaining alignment with continental educational priorities.

The mapping exercise successfully engaged stakeholders across 21 African countries, representing diverse regional, linguistic, and developmental contexts. Countries represented in the analysis included Algeria, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This geographic spread ensured representation across regions of the African Union, capturing varied implementation contexts and approaches to FLN interventions.

Table 4 - Achieved Sample

Member States Survey		Implementing Partners Survey	
Country	**# of Responses**	**Country**	**# of Responses**
Algeria	2	Burundi	1
Botswana	2	Cameroon	1
Côte d'Ivoire	2	Senegal	1
Liberia	1	Somalia	1
Malawi	1	Tanzania	1
Namibia	3	Tunisia	1
Nigeria	1	Uganda	1
Tanzania	1	Zambia	3
The Gambia	1	Zimbabwe	2
Tunisia	1	**TOTAL**	**12**
Zimbabwe	1		
TOTAL	**16**		
GRAND TOTAL		**28**	

3.1 Learning Poverty Data Landscape

Findings suggest a range of understanding amongst stakeholders of data sources which provide insight into Learning Poverty across Africa. Responses suggest a reliance on established international assessments, and a preference for standardised data enabling regional comparisons. The Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC), ASER/UWEZO, and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) were noted in responses, alongside contributions from international organisations including the World Bank and UNESCO, underscoring these institutions' role in shaping national education data landscapes.

Member countries reported a range of approaches to data collection and utilisation. For example, responses from Zambia note approaches involving national assessment integration, drawing on World Bank study results alongside varied assessment initiatives including EGRA, EGMA, modified ASERs (as part of wider 'TaRL' programming), augmenting data from national examination results. Reports of the application of such assessments over recent years provides insight into potential models for wider application, with national assessment surveys and active monitoring of dropout and enrolment data signifying movement beyond pilot stages to national-level implementation.

Likewise, Burundi's response indicates the use of assessments from the World Bank, complementing evaluation data gathered by international non-governmental organisations, suggesting a potential approach to data-driven educational improvement in contexts in which data sources have historically been limited. References to interventions supported by multi-agency partnerships suggest broader implementation scope, with engagement of multiple stakeholders indicating potential pathways for scaling effective practices. More broadly, response content on Uganda's National Assessment for Progress in Education provides a model rooted in government-led data gathering, providing a structured approach rather than fragmented measurements which is more widespread in 'pilot' contexts.

3.2 Member State Data Collection Practices

Amongst Member States surveyed, 87% of respondents reported gathering data relating to learning outcomes in relation to basic literacy, numeracy, and computer literacy at age 10, with mechanisms measuring children and young people in grades 2/3 achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics aligned with SDG4 Indicator 4.1.1a; it should be noted that it remains unclear (on the basis of survey response data garnered) the extent to which Member States are consistently collecting data against the relevant SDG indicators, or whether there is consistency with regard to terms, definitions, and calculation approached adopted. Notwithstanding the above, this high percentage suggests widespread recognition of assessment importance, and increasingly systematic approaches to monitoring foundational learning outcomes, irrespective of how far countries have progressed toward widespread and effective implementation of such mechanisms.

Responses relating to the Zambia context shared insights on the integration of assessment and feedback systems through systematic ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) data collection as a component of Teaching at the Right Level

implementation. The country has developed innovative digital dashboards which collect assessment data in addition to providing real-time feedback to teachers on learners' attainment and progress levels. These digital tools provide a potentially scalable approach to connecting assessment outcomes with real-time shifts and adaptations to instructional support, enabling teachers to provide responsive instruction catering to individual student needs. This reported approach could serve as a potential model of how assessment systems can move beyond data collection to become active components of instructional improvement processes.
Responses on Côte d'Ivoire note approaches to assessment implementation which focus on annual national assessments at multiple educational phases, including CE1, 5th, and 3rd grades, overseen by the Direction de l'Evaluation. The systematic utilisation of EGRA and EGMA assessments, combined with government agency involvement to promote data quality and policy utilisation, provides insight into what could potentially serve as a replicable model for quality data and evidence-generation led by national governments.

Responses on the Zimbabwe context note implementation of internal assessments specifically targeting attainment levels in Grade 2 for Mathematics and English, with termly reports on literacy and numeracy outcomes. Findings from these assessments reportedly undergo software-based analysis, to inform subsequent educational interventions, indicating a potentially dynamic and scalable approach to data utilisation. The national-level data collection and analysis, conducted with government oversight, provides useful insight into government-led, evidence-based educational approaches.

Responses on Nigeria report the use of various standardised assessments, including EGRA and PASEC, with funding by international donors. The reported involvement of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) highlights a potentially replicable model of government ownership, and integration of data into resource allocation and policy formation processes. Reports of systematic analysis for gender, region, and wealth disparities, combined with data utilisation for programme design and policy adjustments, likewise suggests a model for systematic improvement efforts across the education system, which could inform initiatives elsewhere.

It should be noted that not all responses provide full details of reporting against specific SDG indicators. As such, whether learning outcome indicators are currently being effectively tracked and analysed using the described tools and approaches remained unclear from the available evidence. Nonetheless, the tools, approaches, and evidence sources described have the potential to address relevant learning outcome indicators, and many of the initiatives have established foundations that could, in future, enable measurement and calculation against SDG reporting requirements for learning outcomes.

3.3 Planned Assessment Expansion

All Member States surveyed (100%) report plans to introduce further assessment mechanisms to provide additional insights into literacy, numeracy, and computer literacy at age 10, indicating strong commitment to enhanced data collection and analysis. This universal commitment suggests recognition of current limitations and desire to strengthen evidence bases for policy and programme development.

Response inputs on Namibia's Standardised Achievement Test (SAT) covering Grades 5 and 7 provides insight into a further model of assessment development, with national benchmarks for reading and mathematics proficiency. Reports of annual administration at national level suggest a model of continuous assessment, with alignment to international standards suggesting potential for expansion to cover lower grades with appropriate resource allocation. Reported government engagement in continuous data collection and analysis suggests a systematic approach to educational monitoring, which could inform the development of similar initiatives elsewhere.

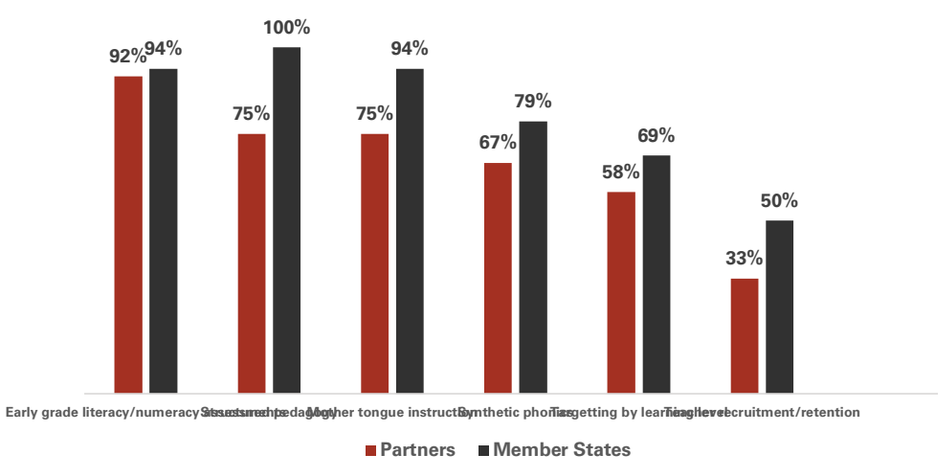
Findings from responses on Nigeria's shared insight into a proposed National Learning Assessment System alignment with the Global Proficiency Framework suggesting a future systematic approach to addressing current gaps in assessment coverage. Such an approach covering Grades 2/3 and potentially out-of-school children, suggests future movement beyond pilot projects toward inclusive national assessment strategies. Implementation alongside digital learning analytics platforms offers potentially high scalability with community involvement, whilst emphasis on adequate funding and stakeholder buy-in highlights the importance of government and community engagement.

4. Intervention Implementation Landscape

4.1 Implementation Patterns Across Stakeholder Groups

Analysis of intervention implementation suggests widespread reporting of adoption of key FLN approaches across both partner organisations and Member States.

Figure 5 - Reported Implementation Rates by Intervention Type and Stakeholder Group (%)



Early grade literacy and numeracy assessments were the highest reported implementation models across both stakeholder categories (92% partners, 94% Member States), suggesting broad consensus on assessment presence and widespread stakeholder awareness of systematic evaluation approaches for foundational learning outcomes within their countries.

Responses suggest widespread awareness of structured pedagogy approaches amongst Member States (100%) with high reported partner awareness (75%), likewise indicating broad recognition of systematic instructional approaches within national contexts. The gap suggests a more comprehensive awareness on the part of Member States due to engagement with national curriculum frameworks, teacher training programmes, and policy initiatives which are rooted in structured pedagogy models, whilst certain partners may have more limited visibility into government-led structured pedagogy initiatives or may be less aware of broader systemic approaches as structured pedagogy interventions.

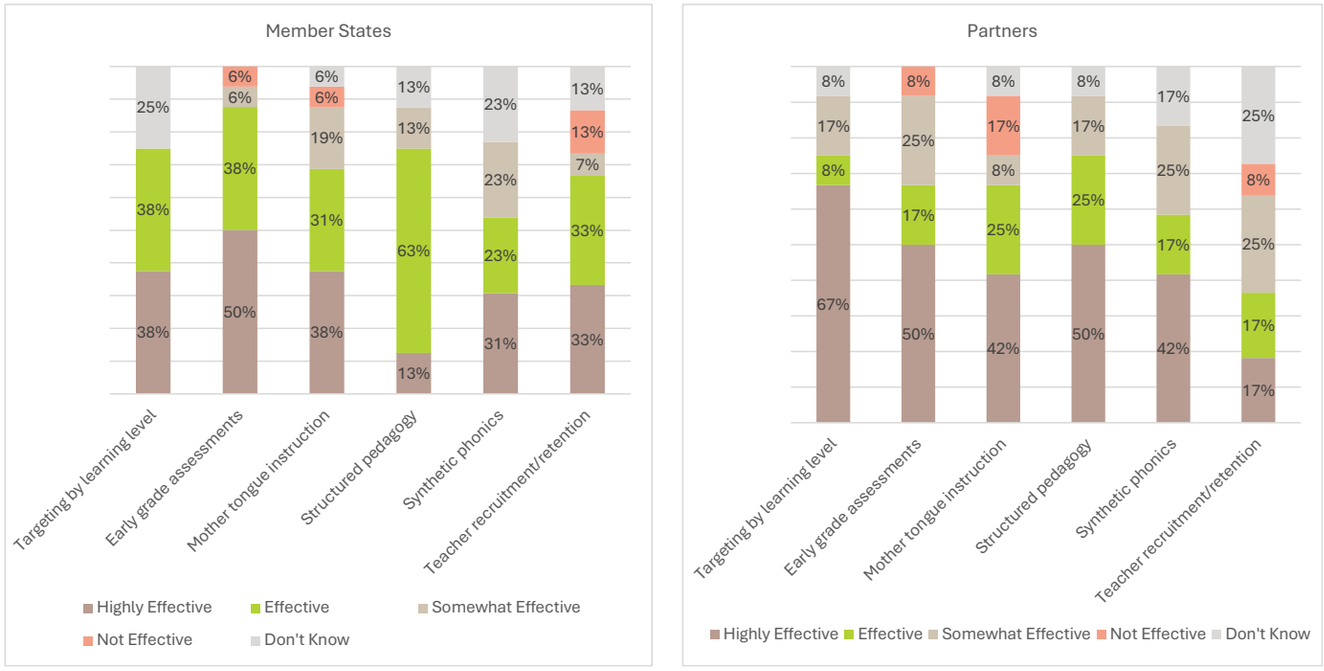
Mother tongue instruction also noted high reported implementation across both groups (75% partners, 94% Member States), with the higher Member State awareness suggesting government officials' knowledge of language policy frameworks and multilingual education initiatives is strong. The disparity may indicate that certain partners (other than those focusing on literacy initiatives), often operating in specific geographic areas or through particular schools, have less comprehensive visibility into national mother tongue instruction policies or their implementation across different regions and educational contexts.

Targeting instruction by learning level shows comparable awareness rates (58% partners, 69% Member States) across both stakeholder categories, suggesting that such approaches require specific implementation visibility that both government officials and partners encounter similarly. The convergence may reflect that this approach typically involves distinct training programmes or pilot initiatives that become visible to both stakeholder groups when present, or that implementation challenges create similar awareness patterns across different organisational perspective, i.e., they are likely delivered jointly by government and partners.

Responses on innovative approaches to teacher recruitment and retention suggest a large awareness gap, with 33% of partners reporting implementation of such approaches compared to 50% amongst Member States, though responses did not provide insight into the reasons behind this disparity; it is perhaps due to the narrow focus of such work to specific partners (i.e. 'Teach for All').4.2 Effectiveness Perceptions

Reported Stakeholder perceptions of intervention effectiveness suggest strong confidence in several key approaches, with combined analysis across partners and Member States providing insight into perceived intervention impact potential. The following crosstab presents effectiveness ratings across key interventions by stakeholder group:

Figure 6 - Effectiveness Perceptions by Stakeholder Group (%)



This suggests distinct patterns in effectiveness perceptions that may reflect stakeholders' different observational positions within national education systems. Targeting instruction by learning level shows a pronounced difference, with 38% of Member States rating it highly effective compared to 67% of partners , though member state responses show strong combined positive ratings (76% highly effective or effective). This divergence may reflect Member States' awareness of broader implementation challenges at system scale, including resource constraints and teacher capacity limitations that may moderate perceived effectiveness, versus partners' direct experience with specific differentiated instruction programmes.
Responses on early grade literacy and numeracy assessments suggest more aligned perceptions, with 50% of Member States and partners rating them as highly effective. The combined positive ratings exceed 65% for both groups, suggesting broad consensus on assessment value.

Reponses on structured pedagogy provide a range of complementary perspectives, with Member States showing more conservative assessment (13% highly effective, 63% effective) compared to 50% of partners rating it highly effective. This pattern may reflect Member States' awareness of the complexities involved in implementing structured approaches at national scale, including teacher training requirements, material development needs, and adaptation challenges across diverse contexts, versus partners' experience with specific structured pedagogy programmes that demonstrate clear outcomes.

Responses on mother tongue instruction shows 38% of Member States rating it highly effective compared to 42% of partners, with both groups showing strong combined positive ratings. The difference may reflect Member States' awareness of implementation challenges in multilingual contexts, resource constraints for material development in multiple languages, and varying community acceptance across different regions, versus partners' experience with successful local-level mother tongue programmes.

Findings on synthetic phonics suggest a range of perspective on the part of Member States, with a similar distribution across highly effective (31%), effective (23%), somewhat effective (23%), and "don't know" (23%) categories. This contrasts with stronger partner confidence (42% highly effective), suggesting that partners may have more direct experience with specific phonics programmes, and associated evidence bases, whilst Member States may have limited visibility into phonics implementation outcomes or conflicting evidence from different contexts within their countries.

Responses on teacher recruitment and retention innovations suggest inverted perspectives, in contradistinction to those on other interventions, with Member States reporting higher confidence (33% each for highly effective and effective) compared to partners (17% each for highly effective and effective). This likely reflects Member States' direct involvement in policy development and awareness of teacher management initiatives, whilst partners have limited visibility into recruitment system outcomes or may observe challenges at the operational level that temper their assessment of these innovations' effectiveness.

Asked whether they are aware of any unsuccessful or ineffective interventions seeking to address FLN, the majority of respondents reported no knowledge of such programs. Two partner responses from Zambia provided insights into specific interventions perceived to be ineffective predominantly due to inadequate support and implementation strategies. Noteworthy points included critical views on large-scale teacher training and technological solutions without practical support, as well as the limited focus on other aspects of literacy aside from teaching children how to read of the USAID Let's Read program in Zambia.

5. Exemplar Case Studies

5.1 Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL): Multi-Country Implementation

Responses on Teaching at the Right Level interventions suggest positive performance across multiple African contexts, with implementation reported, in responses, in Zambia, Uganda, Senegal, and Burundi.

In Zambia, feedback on TaRL methodology integration suggests strong evidence of effectiveness through external assessments and systematic evaluation processes. Responses suggest the approach has been embedded effectively into pre-service education systems, indicating a potentially systematic government approach extending beyond pilot studies to nationwide educator preparation efforts. This integration into teacher training programmes highlights the importance of government ownership, and potential for scale-up through state-led implementation, with cost-effective methodology utilising community and volunteer inputs providing what could be strong scalability potential.

Responses on Uganda's implementation through UCatchUP/TaRL pilot, supported by UNICEF and implemented by VVOB, provides insight into potentially scalable models with reported government endorsement through the Ministry of Education and Sports. The adaptation for system-scale implementation indicates scope for 'mature' expansion beyond pilot settings, with direct Ministry involvement in intervention adaptation and scaling demonstrating what appears to be strong government engagement and ownership.

The methodology's reported focus on addressing learning gaps and supporting remediation suggests scope for cost-effective and sustainable application in broader regions. Reported partnerships in countries such as Senegal suggest wider examples of governmental buy-in, though specific details on active Ministry involvement vary across implementation contexts. Feedback on evidence from randomised controlled trials and qualitative assessments across multiple countries suggest effectiveness, with ongoing scaling and government support strengthening the overall evidence base.

6. Cross-Cutting Themes and Implementation Insights

6.1 Mother Tongue Instruction: Benefits & Implementation Challenges

Findings suggest consensus across stakeholder groups regarding mother tongue instruction effectiveness, with particular recognition of enhanced comprehension and cognitive development benefits. Countries implementing systematic mother tongue approaches demonstrate improved foundational skills development, with research supporting effectiveness particularly in homogeneous linguistic contexts where systematic implementation becomes more feasible.

Burundi offers what could potentially serve as scalable approach to mother tongue instruction implementation through systematic integration across educational framework with focus on vernacular languages in linguistically homogeneous setting. Educational policies emphasising local language instruction support equity promotion, with studies indicating improved foundational skills amongst children

receiving instruction in familiar languages. The systematic implementation across multiple educational levels demonstrates potentially strong scalability within supportive linguistic and policy contexts.

Implementation challenges emerge particularly in multilingual contexts where language diversity creates resource and training complexities. Countries such as Cameroon, with over 200 languages, face significant barriers in developing appropriate materials and training teachers across linguistic diversity. Uganda's context with 50+ languages presents similar challenges requiring systematic approach to teacher proficiency development and resource allocation across multiple language communities.

Responses suggest the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction appears closely linked to policy support, resource availability, and contextual appropriateness, with countries demonstrating systematic government commitment showing potentially stronger implementation outcomes. Research evidence supports effectiveness claims, though implementation success depends heavily on adequate teacher training, appropriate material development, local linguistic and literacy conditions, and systematic policy framework supporting multilingual education approaches within broader educational systems.

6.2 Structured Pedagogy: Implementation Quality and Adaptability

Responses on Structured pedagogy suggest widespread implementation across contexts with strong stakeholder confidence in effectiveness, particularly when adequate support and training systems accompany implementation. Countries implementing systematic structured approaches report improved instructional quality and learning outcomes, with organised, sequenced approaches facilitating enhanced teacher confidence and classroom interaction quality.

Nigeria's implementation offers what could potentially serve as a case of structured pedagogy effectiveness in providing teachers with lesson plans, training, and materials, reportedly leading to significant improvements in student learning outcomes particularly in low-resource contexts. The systematic approach addresses specific challenges faced in resource-limited settings whilst providing consistent framework for instructional quality improvement. Ministry of Education involvement proves essential for driving effectiveness and sustainability and ensuring systematic implementation across educational contexts.

Botswana's "Breakthrough to Setswana" programme in lower primary demonstrates what appears to be a structured approach yielding effective results in literacy and numeracy development. The programme's implementation across primary education beyond isolated school settings indicates systematic government

support and framework for scalability across broader regional contexts. National education framework integration demonstrates direct governmental support and alignment with broader educational improvement strategies.
Reported implementation challenges include potential limitations on teacher adaptability and need for substantial professional development investment to ensure effective utilisation. The balance between providing structured support and maintaining flexibility for individual learner needs requires careful consideration in programme design and implementation. Systematic teacher training and ongoing support prove essential for successful structured pedagogy implementation across diverse educational contexts.

7. Evidence Quality and Implementation Challenges

7.1 Evidence Base Limitations and Gaps

Despite widespread implementation of various FLN interventions across African contexts, significant limitations exist in available evidence supporting effectiveness claims and scalability assessments. Many interventions demonstrate strong theoretical foundations and stakeholder confidence whilst lacking robust quantitative evidence from systematic evaluations or longitudinal studies demonstrating sustained impact over extended periods.
Responses frequently cite intervention effectiveness based on qualitative observations or limited pilot implementations without comprehensive evaluation frameworks assessing impact across diverse contexts or extended timeframes.
The absence of standardised evaluation frameworks across interventions in varied national contexts limits the ability to compare effectiveness across contexts or assess relative impact of different approaches.

7.2 Government Engagement and Sustainability Considerations

Whilst responses suggest that many interventions demonstrate some level of government involvement, the depth and nature of government engagement varies significantly across contexts (or remains somewhat unclear), affecting sustainability potential and scaling prospects. Encouraging exemplars such as Nigeria's PLANE programme and Namibia's comprehensive approach demonstrate substantial Ministry leadership and ownership, whilst other interventions show more limited government integration despite effectiveness claims.

Government capacity for sustained funding and technical support varies considerably across contexts, with many interventions remaining dependent on external donor and agency support for continued operation. The transition from donor-supported pilot implementations to nationally-owned systematic programmes represents significant challenge requiring enhanced attention to sustainability planning and government capacity development throughout intervention design and implementation processes.

Policy integration mechanisms prove essential for sustained intervention success, yet many promising approaches lack systematic integration within national education policy frameworks. Countries demonstrating stronger government engagement typically show more comprehensive policy alignment and institutional support structures, suggesting importance of policy integration for successful scaling and sustainability.

Technical capacity for systematic monitoring and evaluation within government systems remains limited across many contexts, constraining ability to assess intervention effectiveness and guide improvement processes systematically. Enhanced capacity building for government evaluation and monitoring systems appears essential for sustainable intervention implementation and systematic improvement across national educational contexts.

7.3 Regional and Contextual Variation

Responses suggest that implementation success varies significantly across different regional and national contexts, with factors including linguistic diversity, resource availability, institutional capacity, and educational infrastructure affecting intervention outcomes and scaling potential. Countries with more homogeneous linguistic contexts, such as Burundi, demonstrate more systematic implementation of mother tongue instruction, whilst multilingual contexts face greater implementation complexity.

Resource availability significantly affects intervention implementation quality and sustainability, with countries having stronger educational infrastructure and funding demonstrating more systematic implementation and evaluation capacity. This variation suggests need for contextually adapted approaches and differentiated support strategies based on national circumstances and capacity levels.

Institutional capacity for systematic implementation and evaluation varies considerably across contexts, affecting ability to demonstrate intervention effectiveness and support scaling decisions. Countries with stronger educational management systems and evaluation capacity show more robust evidence generation and systematic improvement processes, whilst others require enhanced capacity building for effective intervention implementation.

Cultural and social factors affect intervention acceptance and implementation success, particularly for approaches involving community engagement or language of instruction changes. Successful implementations typically demonstrate sensitivity to local contexts and systematic approaches to community engagement and stakeholder consultation throughout intervention design and implementation processes.

Annex B:

Questionnaire on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Initiatives in African Union Member Countries

About This Research

This research is being commissioned by the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) of the African Union Commission (AUC) with the technical support from UNICEF. This study aims to gather expert insights on learning poverty, foundational literacy and numeracy interventions, and effective educational practices across Africa.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to:

- Identify best practices and data sources for understanding learning poverty in Africa
- Document effective interventions for strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes
- Gather expert perspectives on various educational approaches and their effectiveness
- Inform evidence-based policy recommendations for improving educational outcomes across the continent

Findings will be used to finalize the drafting of a continental report titled: "Mapping of Exemplars of Good Practices in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy in AU Member States

What Your Participation Involves

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey that should take approximately 20-30 minutes. The survey includes questions about:

- Your professional background and expertise
- Data sources and assessment tools related to learning poverty
- Educational interventions you are aware of or have experience with
- Your professional assessment of various pedagogical approaches
- Optional supporting documentation

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may:

- Choose not to participate without any consequences
- Skip any questions you prefer not to answer
- Withdraw from the survey at any time before submission
- Contact us if you have concerns about your participation

Confidentiality and Data Protection

Your privacy and confidentiality are important to us:

- You may choose to have your responses attributed to you by name or remain anonymous
- All data will be stored securely and accessed only by authorized research team members
- Your responses will be used solely for research purposes and policy development
- Data will be handled in accordance with AUC's and UNICEF's data protection policies and applicable privacy laws
- No individual responses will be shared with third parties without your explicit consent

Use of Information

The information collected will be used to:

- Develop evidence-based recommendations for improving educational outcomes
- Inform UNICEF and partner organizations' programming decisions
- Contribute to academic research and policy discussions (in aggregated, non-identifying form unless you specifically consent to attribution)
- Support advocacy efforts for improved educational policies and practices

Risks and Benefits

Risks: There are no anticipated risks to participating in this survey beyond those encountered in everyday professional activities

Benefits: Your participation will contribute to improving educational outcomes for children across Africa and may help inform more effective educational policies and interventions

Contact Information

If you have questions about this research study, please contact:

- African Union Commission: Mrs. Sophia Ndemutila Ashipala ashipalas@africanunion.org
- UNICEF AU Office: Mr. Jephthe Mve Mvondo jmmvondo@unicef.org
- Research lead consultant: Matthew Robert Goldie Scot mgoldie@unicef.org
- Survey designer technical consultant: Alexandra Tigan a.tigan@thusogroup.com

Consent to Participate

By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that:

- You have read and understood the information provided above
- You understand that your participation is voluntary
- You understand how your data will be used and protected
- You consent to participate in this research study

This research is being conducted by UNICEF's Africa Union Office (AUO) as part of its commitment to improving educational outcomes for children across Africa. Thank you for considering participation in this important research.

For Member Countries

Do you consent to participate in this survey?

☐ Yes
☐ No

In what country do you work, or what country do you represent?
☐ [list of countries]

If other country, please specify:

Please confirm whether you are willing for this response to be attributed to you, or whether you wish for your responses to remain anonymous:

☐ Attributable
☐ Anonymous

(if Attributable) What is your name?

(if Attributable) What is your role?

(if Attributable) What is your gender?
☐ Male
☐ Female

i) Does your country gather any data relating to learning outcomes in relation to the ability to read basic texts, undertake simple mathematical tasks, or demonstrate basic computer literacy, at the age of 10 and/or measure the proportion of children and young people in grades 2/3 who achieve a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics (i.e. SDG4 Indicator 4.1.1a)?

If so, what mechanisms do you apply to gather such data, with what frequency is it collected, how is quality assured, and how is the data analysed and used in practice?

ii) Do you plan to introduce any further assessment mechanisms, or other tools, to provide further insights into literacy, numeracy, and/or computer literacy at the age of 10 (in grades 2/3)?

If so, what would these entail? (Please provide precise details)

iii) Are you aware of any interventions in your country which proactively seek to strengthen learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy? (Please provide details, including the name of the intervention, if applicable, and details of any implementation partners)

If so, do you consider these interventions to be effective? (Please provide precise details, including any relevant evidence base informing this judgement)

iv) Are you aware of any interventions elsewhere in Africa, or internationally, which proactively seek to strengthen learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy? (Please provide details, including the name of the intervention, if applicable, and details of any implementation partners)

If so, do you consider these interventions to be effective? (Please provide precise details, including any relevant evidence base informing this judgement)

v) Are you aware of any interventions seeking to strengthen learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, which have not worked as well as intended, have been unsuccessful, or which have had unintended negative impact? (Please provide details, including the name of the intervention, if applicable, and details of any implementation partners)

If so, please provide precise details, including any relevant evidence base informing this judgement?

vi) To your knowledge, are any of the following being implemented in your country to strengthen outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Provision of information to parents / family engagement	☐	☐	☐
Mother tongue instruction	☐	☐	☐
Targeting instruction by learning level, rather than by age or grade	☐	☐	☐
Structured pedagogy	☐	☐	☐
Early grade literacy and/or numeracy assessments	☐	☐	☐
Innovative approaches to teacher recruitment and/or retention	☐	☐	☐
Synthetic phonics	☐	☐	☐

Are there any further initiatives being implemented in your country to strengthen outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, which are not listed above?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If 'Yes', please provide details:

vii) On a scale comprising 'Harmful - Not Effective – Somewhat Effective – Effective – Highly Effective,' please rank the following interventions:

Provision of information to parents / family engagement

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Mother tongue instruction

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Targeting instruction by learning level, rather than by age or grade

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Structured pedagogy

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Early grade literacy and/or numeracy assessments

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Innovative approaches to teacher recruitment and/or retention

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Synthetic phonics

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

If you wish to upload any supporting documents, please click here.

viii) Any final comments? For Partners
Do you consent to participate in this survey?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

In what country do you work, or what country do you represent?

- ☐ [list of countries]

If other country, please specify:

Please confirm whether you are willing for this response to be attributed to you, or whether you wish for your responses to remain anonymous:

- ☐ Attributable
- ☐ Anonymous

(if Attributable) What is your name?

(if Attributable) What is your role?

(if Attributable) What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

i) What do you consider to be the best source of data on Learning Poverty in Africa? (Please provide precise details)

ii) Are there any assessment mechanisms, or other tools, would provide further insight into Learning Poverty in Africa, which you consider could be deployed at scale?

If so, what would these entail? (Please provide precise details)

iii) Are you aware of any interventions in the country in which you work, which proactively seek to address Learning Poverty and/or which seek to strengthen learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy? (Please provide details, including the name of the intervention, if applicable, and details of any implementation partners)*

If so, do you consider these interventions to be effective? (Please provide precise details, including any relevant evidence base informing this judgement)

*Note: This can include interventions which your organisation is directly involved in implementing - if this is the case, please ensure this is reflected in your response.

iv) Are you aware of any interventions elsewhere in Africa, or internationally, which proactively seek to address Learning Poverty and/or which seek to strengthen learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy? (Please provide details, including the name of the intervention, if applicable, and details of any implementation partners)*

If so, do you consider these interventions to be effective? (Please provide precise details, including any relevant evidence base informing this judgement)

*Note: This can include interventions which your organisation is directly involved in implementing - if this is the case, please ensure this is reflected in your response.

v) Are you aware of any interventions seeking to address Learning Poverty and/or which seek to strengthen learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, which you consider have been ineffective? (Please provide details, including the name of the intervention, if applicable, and details of any implementation partners)*

If so, please provide precise details, including any relevant evidence base informing this judgement?

*Note: This can include interventions which your organisation is directly involved in implementing - if this is the case, please ensure this is reflected in your response.

vi) To your knowledge, are any of the following being implemented in the country (or countries) in which you work to strengthen outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Provision of information to parents / family engagement	☐	☐	☐
Mother tongue instruction	☐	☐	☐
Targeting instruction by learning level, rather than by age or grade	☐	☐	☐
Structured pedagogy	☐	☐	☐
Early grade literacy and/or numeracy assessments	☐	☐	☐
Innovative approaches to teacher recruitment and/or retention	☐	☐	☐
Synthetic phonics	☐	☐	☐

Are there any further initiatives being implemented in the country in which you work, to strengthen outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, which are not listed above?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If 'Yes', please provide details:

vii) On a scale comprising 'Harmful - Not Effective – Somewhat Effective – Effective – Highly Effective,' please rank the following interventions.

Provision of information to parents / family engagement

☐ Harmful
☐ Not Effective
☐ Somewhat Effective
☐ Effective
☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Mother tongue instruction

☐ Harmful
☐ Not Effective
☐ Somewhat Effective
☐ Effective
☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Targeting instruction by learning level, rather than by age or grade

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Structured pedagogy

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Early grade literacy and/or numeracy assessments

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Innovative approaches to teacher recruitment and/or retention

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

Synthetic phonics

- ☐ Harmful
- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Effective
- ☐ Highly Effective

Please give detailed reasons for your judgement:

viii) Any final comments?

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