

Republic of Rwanda

Ministry of Education



FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING STRATEGY

2024/25 – 2028/29

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CoP	Communities of Practice
DEO	District Education Officer
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECLPE	Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education
CAMIS	Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System
FLS	Foundational Learning Strategy
GPF	global proficiency framework
HCI	Human Capital Index
KPL	Kigali Public Library
LARS	Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools
LEGRA	Local Early Grade Reading Assessment
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
NCDA	National Child Development Agency
NESA	National Examination and School Inspection Agency
NST1	National Strategy for Transformation
NIR	Net intake rate
SEO	Sector Education Officer
SGAEC	School General Assembly Executive Committee
SSL	School Subject Leader
TTC	teacher training college
TLM	teaching and learning materials
QAMIS	Quality Assurance Management Information System

1. Executive Summary

Education is what will forge the Rwanda of tomorrow. Enrolment in primary education is nearly universal, but solely 37.52 percent of P3 learners assessed met the benchmarks in English foundational literacy, compared to 10 percent in LARS 2021. In Mathematics, 55.60 percent of the P3 learners assessed met the national proficiency benchmarks, which is a decrease of 5.36 per cent compared to 2021. There was an improvement in Kinyarwanda reading comprehension from the previous assessment with 82.70 percent of the P3 learners who were assessed in 2023 meeting the national proficiency benchmarks. Despite the overall improvement in English and Kinyarwanda performance in 2023 LARS, more needs to be done to ensure enough young Rwandans have a solid foundation on which to acquire the competencies and attitudes for good jobs and careers in tomorrow's knowledge-based economy. A sharp reduction in this learning poverty is crucial for the success of Rwanda Vision 2050, the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), which envisions the country as a top-tier economy in Africa by 2030 and a globally competitive upper middle income one by 2050.

The Ministry of Education's Foundational Learning Strategy (FLS, 2024/25 to 2028/29) focuses on a unique window of opportunity in the schooling of young children. Covering pre-primary to lower primary levels, its goal is to equip all children with basic literacy and numeracy, and to instil in them a love for learning from an early age when their brains are changing and developing rapidly. Success in this endeavour opens the gateway for children to continue learning in subsequent grades, and even in adulthood.

The FLS's five-year plan envisions explicit learning goals by 2028/29 for P3 students: reading fluency and comprehension averaging 83% in Kinyarwanda and 55.6% in English; and numeracy proficiency averaging 70%. These targets are achievable when compared to the learning levels of P3 students evaluated in 2023 through the Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS)

assessments: reading fluency and comprehension averaging 82% in Kinyarwanda and only 38% in English, and numeracy proficiency averaging 55.6%. The Foundational Learning strategy envisages maintaining and building upon the gains made between 2021 and 2023, while also addressing the challenges that have led to a reduced performance in Numeracy. It prioritizes actions toward these goals in the context of major national policies and initiatives.

Two national policies of direct relevance contextualise the FLS: language of instruction and teacher salaries. The Government made the decision in 2019 to replace Kinyarwanda with English as the language of instruction in schools, beginning in Primary 1. Implementing the policy poses immense challenges, requiring simultaneous effort to boost teachers' fluency to teach in English while also improving their teaching effectiveness in the classroom. In August 2022, a second pertinent policy came into effect that boosted salaries by 88% for primary school teachers, 40% for those in secondary schools, and by other amounts for other educators. In addition, benefits to teachers through the savings scheme and other vehicles were improved. These sizable raises and other benefits for teachers removed a long-standing source of teacher demotivation and signalled the government's commitment to improve teachers' livelihoods and the prestige of their profession. This financial commitment aligns Rwanda with internationally recommended levels of public spending on education.

Other recent initiatives likewise delineate initial conditions for the FLS, the most noteworthy of these being classroom construction and teacher recruitment. Between 2019 and 2021, the government built more than 22,500 new school classrooms and 31,000 corresponding toilets, which lowered the average primary student-classroom ratio from 71 to 49 and helped relieve severe overcrowding, especially in P1 where underage enrolment had been prevalent due to the lack of adequate pre-primary options, and almost a quarter of the children repeated the grade. The data from the 2022/23 Education Statistical Yearbook indicate an increase of 3,551 classrooms at primary level between 2021/22 and 2022/23, rising from 46,010 to 49,561

classrooms. For pre-primary the total number of classrooms increased by 2,368 between 2021/22 and 2022/23 from 8,358 to 10,726. Despite the rise in the number of classrooms, the national average pupil per classroom ratio has remained constant for the past three years. This signifies that enrolment continues to surpass the available classroom capacity. As of the 2022/23 academic year, only 33% of primary schools met the standard of 46:1.

The number of teaching staff at pre-primary increased by 1,929 from 7,351 in 2021/22 to 9,280 in 2022/23. For the primary level, data indicates an increase of teaching staff by 4,493 from 63,046 in 2021/22 to 67,539 in 2022/23.

The FLS draws on evidence and experience on what works to improve foundational learning and highlights five priorities in its theory of change to address challenges specific to Rwanda.

Three of the five priorities focus on the core processes of teaching and learning in the classroom: instructional quality, the curriculum, and teaching and learning resources. Of the remaining two, one relates to families and local communities in their role in sustaining children's interest in their lessons and encouraging learning outside the classroom; and the other relates to arrangements for greater accountability from all parties. For each priority, the Strategy identifies key actions to reduce barriers that impede foundational learning, assigns institutional responsibility for implementation; and highlights vital areas of support from Rwanda's development partners. It encourages cross-unit collaboration where essential for its success.

Scope and Budget of the Foundational Learning Strategy

The Foundational Learning Strategy and its five-year Implementation Plan have been developed to complement and work side by side the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) and other priority strategies and programmes of the education sector. It was designed as a set of strategic priorities and activities, which will help delivery on the objective of reducing learning poverty,

and relies on a coordinated approach, which creates synergies between existing budgets and programmes, for effective delivery of results. The Foundational Learning Strategy has focused on key interventions, which will complement and add value to other on-going initiatives of the Ministry of Education to enhance the quality of education and learning outcomes in pre-primary and lower-primary grades. The Foundational Learning strategy sets an explicit focus on enhancing learning outcomes for children already attending education, i.e. enrolled in pre-primary and lower primary. There are numerous other strategies and initiatives focusing on continuing to enhance access, providing additional infrastructure, providing a nutritious diet at school as well as retaining learners in school, which will complement and serve as key-enablers of this strategy.

The Foundational Learning Strategy and its costed implementation plan has a working budget of 78,929,886,818 Rwf over five years, inclusive of the costs of monitoring and evaluating the results of the strategy. Given the limited size of the planned budget, it is imperative that the Strategy focuses on those strategic interventions which are evidence-informed to contribute to improvements in learning outcomes. To maximise results, it is important that the strategy engages and creates synergies with other programmes and budgets of the education sector. Some of the most prominent programmes and budgets include the School Feeding Programme; Inclusive and Special Needs Education initiatives; Ed-Tech strategies; Early Childhood Education expansion plans and ongoing school infrastructure investments.

The Ministry of Education has established a Delivery Unit (DU) to oversee the implementation of the FLS. The DU has a particular role to play in ensuring that the FLS leverages these synergies and builds on on-going programmes. The core programmes of the Ministry are prerequisites for the success of the Foundational Learning strategy, which has been designed to add value and focus on the priority of addressing learning poverty.

There are also a number of data management and monitoring and assessment systems within the sector that will be leveraged to track, monitor, report on and assess the impact of the Foundational Learning Strategy. Chief among these are the School Data Management System (SDMS), the Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System, the Teacher Management Information System, the Quality Assurance Management Information System and the Learning Achievement in Rwanda Schools Assessment conducted every two years.

FLS priority 1: Improving instructional quality through teacher development and support

In Rwanda as elsewhere, teachers hold the key to better learning outcomes. They orchestrate teaching and learning in their classroom, and the best among them deliver the curriculum with knowledge and skill; engage their students in active, joyful learning; and differentiate instruction to encourage every child to persevere in learning. To rise to these standards, Rwandan teachers need sufficient fluency in English; they also need good subject matter knowledge, continuing professional development and support, and access to tools and material resources. Data for 2018 indicates that only 38% of teachers in P1-P3 had sufficient fluency to teach in English; and classroom observations in 2022 confirmed that English has yet to take hold as the language of instruction. Communities of Practice (CoP)—among teachers and among school leaders—are nascent, and their potential for boosting teacher effectiveness remains untapped.

Key actions under FLS priority 1 relate to: (a) in-service and pre-service training for teachers; and (b) capacity development for school managers and school leaders as enablers of the work of teachers. Responding to specific barriers in the Rwandan context, the interventions comprise capacity building through in-service and pre-service training programs that prioritize the following: (a) an accelerated, yearlong training program for new and uncertified teachers to obtain both initial orientation and formal certification as teachers; (b) capacity development—

for school managers, instructional leaders, and teachers—with a focus on English proficiency, subject matter mastery, and the fostering of CoP as dynamic venues for professional support and learning among educators; and (c) provision of literacy and numeracy resources and support to develop and implement foundational learning programs at teacher training colleges (TTCs).

FLS priority 2: Implement an evidence-aligned foundational skills curriculum

Rwanda's competency-based curriculum for lower primary education sets ambitious learning goals. Its content and instructional pacing are oriented toward top learners. However, other learners, especially those from poorer families or those with learning impediments, struggle to keep up. Under these circumstances, a one-size-fits-all curriculum puts all but the top performers at risk of falling behind, and many may never catch up. The inadequacy of instructional time for literacy complicates the issue further. More than four-fifths of P1-P3 classrooms still operate on double shift, limiting the instructional time technically available to each class of learners. Actual instructional time is often much shorter because of teacher absenteeism, tardiness, or diversion to non-teaching activities. The country's bilingual ambitions add to the challenge of aligning the curriculum to the diversity of learner needs.

Key actions under FLS priority 2 relate to: (a) instructional time for literacy; (b) facilitation of the transition to English as the language of instruction; and (c) remedial programming for at-risk learners. First, to carve out more time for literacy instruction and practice, the Strategy proposes a systemwide approach to capitalizing on the foundational literacy curriculum. The Strategy proposes to sensitize all educators—including teachers, school managers and school leaders, and system-level actors—to literacy-focused teaching approaches; and to train them for its implementation (e.g., staffing management, instructional timetable, and calendar). Second, to facilitate the use of English as the language of instruction, the Strategy will recalibrate the curriculum as follows: (a) emphasize oral English in the P1 English curriculum, to lay the

groundwork for introducing written English in P2 and P3; (b) align the mathematics curriculum with learners' actual level of English comprehension; (c) equip mathematics teachers with techniques and resources to transition to teaching mathematics in English (e.g., trans-languaging, concept mapping from Kinyarwanda to English, etc.); and (c) Adapt the content of and integrate literacy and numeracy into non-literacy and numeracy subjects. Third, to leave no child behind, the Strategy will offer a remedial program targeting learners with the greatest learning needs. The key actions described above drive the Ministry's differentiated, learner-centered approach to teaching and learning.

FLS priority 3: Providing effective teaching and learning materials (TLM) in sufficient volume to all teachers and learners

Rwanda's new language of instruction policy makes it critical to provide well-designed TLM that consider the transitional challenges faced by non-English-speaking teachers as well as by young children who are starting to learn to read and write (in any language). The most important TLM for literacy instruction in lower primary education are textbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary resources for reading and numeracy practice. At the pre-primary level, resources must promote more holistic, play-based teaching and learning processes. The quality and availability of these resources are inadequate: the 2021 Report of the Auditor General of State Finances documented student-to-textbook ratios that vary from 1:7 to 1:233; while the 2021 LARS report found TLM in English to be in especially short supply. The Education Statistical Yearbook 2022/2023 reports an increase in the pupil-textbook ratio for the pre-primary level, across all subjects from 14:1 to 20:1 between 2021/22 and 2022/23. This increase may be explained by the recent high rate of increased enrolment in pre-primary. The Ministry intends to strengthen the TLM supply chain, from content design to product specification, to procurement and timely delivery to classrooms. The aim is to continue lowering the relevant ratios, eventually ensuring critical TLM are provided for Kinyarwanda, English and mathematics, including one

teacher guide per teacher per subject and a set of supplementary resources in every classroom for reading practice.

Key actions under FLS priority 3 relate to: (a) TLM for foundational literacy, including textbooks and bilingual teacher guides; and (b) TLM for P1 English, and for P2-P3 mathematics. Classes in pre-primary and lower primary education in Rwanda are typically very large and are often staffed by the least experienced teachers, many of them recent graduates who may still be working toward formal certification. In such circumstances, textbooks matter enormously, ensuring accurate transmission of the intended curriculum and eliminating the need for learners to copy from the blackboard to free up valuable instructional time for active learner-teacher interactions. Teacher guides are a teacher’s basic professional tool, helping to link classroom pedagogical practices to the country’s curriculum framework and standards. In the current phase of transitioning to English as the language of instruction, bilingual teacher guides are particularly relevant. Books and other materials—in various formats and genres, with levelled texts suitable for beginner readers—enable daily routines of guided and independent reading practice, building habits of reading for enjoyment and discovery.

FLS priority 4: Mobilizing parental and community support for foundational learning

Parents and communities support children to learn in many ways. Besides paying for their children’s school-related expenses, parents’ active interest in a child’s schooling (e.g., ensuring regular attendance, homework completion, etc.) enriches parent-child interactions and provides powerful encouragement for learning. Through the School General Assembly Executive Committee (SGAEC), parents can also engage with teachers and school managers and leaders on matters affecting their children’s schooling (e.g., infrastructure, availability of textbooks and other TLM, accessibility for children with disabilities, etc.). For children below school age, parents can enhance readiness for school through parenting practices with proven benefits for young

children’s brain development and socialization. Enrolling in early childhood development (ECD) programs can reinforce both benefits.

Key actions under FLS priority 4 relate to: (a) community libraries and reading clubs overseen by the Kigali Public Library (KPL); (b) school libraries; and (c) Early Childhood Development (ECD) caregiver training. More than three-quarters of Rwanda’s adult population is literate.ⁱ Given this asset, it is both desirable and feasible to encourage parents to play a more active and effective role in supporting young children’s learning of foundational skills. To this end, the FLS prioritizes three actions. First, it will increase the availability of reading materials and resources through community libraries and reading clubs through a systematic plan led by the KPL. Second, it will increase the number of school libraries that allow learners to borrow books for use at home and improve libraries’ access to KPL resources and technical support. Third, the Ministry will collaborate with the National Child Development Agency (NCDA) to develop, pilot, and expand ECD caregiver training. The Ministry will continue to strengthen the functioning of SGAECs and refine programming to attract parental participation.

FLS priority 5: Strengthening systemic quality assurance and performance management

Rwanda has made significant progress in organizing its arrangements for monitoring student learning outcomes. In 2020, the government established the National Examination and School Inspection Agency (NESA) to consolidate governance of standards-based school inspections, student learning assessments through the LARS system, and administration of national examinations. As a repository of data on learning outcomes, and a source of emerging technical expertise on learning assessments, NESA adds a critical piece to the country’s Education Management Information System. A key priority now is to strengthen NESA’s role in providing key actors in education with tools and data to improve the quality of teaching and learning and

enhance performance management and accountability through routine reporting of assessment results for use by schools, sectors, districts, and the Ministry.

Key actions under FLS priority 5 relate to: (a) classroom-based formative assessment protocols; (b) assessment data in the Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS); and (c) school inspection protocols via the Quality Assurance Management Information System (QAMIS). These actions aim to deploy NESA's data assets and technical expertise for the benefit of actors at the heart of the effort to improve foundational learning. First, NESA will develop and implement a set of formative assessment protocols and train teachers to use them for improving classroom teaching practices. Second, NESA will refine CAMIS to make it more user-friendly, and prioritize training for school managers and school leaders on using this tool to monitor and analyze assessment data and inform decision-making at their school. Third, NESA will develop a set of school inspection protocols and related data collection templates for the QAMIS system, and train District Education Officers (DEOs) and Sector Education Offices (SEOs) on using these resources for system monitoring. More broadly, NESA will continue to deepen its technical expertise to provide system-level managers with timely data and insight on nationwide trends, disparities, and other patterns in foundational learning.

2. Background

The Government of Rwanda is prioritizing efforts to build back a more resilient and better performing education system, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated school closures. Recent World Bank data confirms that learning poverty was already very high even before the pandemic hit; in 2019, the average global learning poverty rate in low- and middle-income countries was 57%, meaning nearly 6 out of 10 children were unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 86% of children were already experiencing learning poverty in 2019ⁱⁱ.

High rates of learning poverty are an early signal that education systems are failing to ensure that children develop critical foundational skills and thus are far from reaching, and in many cases potentially will not reach the SDG 4 target of universal quality education for all by 2030. Lost foundational learning will also affect dropout and repetition rates and eventually lead to children not completing basic education. Those who complete despite a lack of or a limited foundation in basic skills will attain lower skill levels, which in turn reduces productivity.ⁱⁱⁱ

Research using systematic measures of adult skills shows that even among those with the same level of schooling, those with better literacy and numeracy skills earn substantially more.^{iv} The economic and social cost of illiteracy on the local economy is significant, resulting in losses in earnings and productivity. Failure to develop critical foundational skills makes it significantly harder for children to acquire the technical and higher-order skills needed to thrive in increasingly demanding labor markets, and for countries to develop the human capital needed for sustained, inclusive economic growth. Investment in the first few years of a child's education yields greater

system efficiency, as measured by reductions in repetition and dropout rates, and consistent increases in learning gains.

From this evidence base, the development of foundational skills has become an imminent priority for the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). To accelerate literacy and numeracy, several noteworthy initiatives have kicked off to develop strategic plans. In November 2021, the Stepping Back to Accelerate Forward high-level policy workshop, co-organized by MINEDUC and the World Bank's Accelerator Program, brought together key stakeholders working on foundational learning for a focused dialogue on early learning in Rwanda. The workshop has since been adopted as a bi-annual event that takes stock of past and current initiatives to identify how progress in early learning can be accelerated. To support the timely operationalization of workshop resolutions, a high-level Steering Committee on foundational learning was formed in April 2022. The Steering Committee is chaired by the Minister of State in charge of primary and secondary education, and functions as a mechanism for institutionalizing coordination for foundational learning interventions.

While the broader government plans continue to outline the strategic priorities for the sector, the learning loss associated with the pandemic has precipitated the need for a new strategy to outline MINEDUC's priorities and plans for strengthening children's foundational education. In alignment with the Education Sector Strategic Plan's (2018/2019 -2023/24) goal of strengthening the quality of education, the FLS lays out an action plan to improve early literacy and numeracy and serves as an investment case to help stakeholders coordinate interventions, policies, and financing for a greater impact at scale. The strategy has a laser-sharp focus on identifying and investing in the enabling conditions necessary for students to master the foundational learning skills, particularly reading, writing and mathematics, critical for future achievement. The proposed interventions build on the successes of the past, account for lessons learned, and align key stakeholders around priority areas that can bring about the greatest impact.

3. Strategic Context

One of Rwanda’s most significant achievements in education is universalizing access to primary school education, with a net enrolment rate of 94.3% in 2022/23 school year.^v However, while there has been substantial progress in enrolment, less than half of the students who enrol in P1 transition to secondary levels.^{vi} Transition to secondary at the right age is particularly low with only 5% net intake rate (NIR) at S1 (for age 13), reflective of high repetition and dropout rates at primary level. High repetition rates in the early grades increase the opportunity cost of completing primary and secondary education. A 2017 USAID study found that 14% of Rwandan learners in P1–P4 were repeaters.^{vii} According to latest statistics the share of repeaters in P1 stood at 36%, so over a third of first-grade students were repeating. This—along with other factors, such as limited early childhood education (ECE) coverage and late school starters—results in a large “bulge” of students in P1, lowering the likelihood of primary school completion. Investing in improved quality of learning during early grades and lowering repetition rates could help reduce costs and allow greater investments in other critical parts of the education system. One estimate suggests that eliminating the bulge in P1 would “save about 5% of the primary education budget,” which would allow for more investments in other parts of the system.^{viii}

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened what was already a significant learning crisis across the world. Rwanda is no exception to this trend. Even before the pandemic, Rwanda was grappling with the issue of poor learning levels demonstrated in data such as for the Human Capital Index (HCI), which indicated that after factoring in what children learn, the expected years of schooling in Rwanda is only 3.9 years. Projections for post-COVID-19 school closures^{ix} point to concerning associated productivity losses. In 20 years, roughly 46% of Rwanda’s workforce (people aged 20 to 65 years) will be composed of individuals who were either in school or under the age of 5 during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus signalling the significance of what happens today. Necessary

investments to secure learning and school progression can prevent generations of low economic outcomes in years to come.

Even with sustained efforts to support remote learning efforts during the pandemic, the country's national learning assessment (that took place in February 2021) suggested that substantial learning losses were incurred.^x The 2021 LARS assessment found that student performance in English for P3 literacy was low, with only 10.08% of the students meeting grade proficiency benchmarks in English, the current language of instruction in lower primary. Numeracy levels were much more positive (60.94% of the participants achieved the grade level benchmarks) when assessed in Kinyarwanda, however grade proficiency dropped to just 16% when assessing numeracy skills in English. Several Kinyarwanda reading sub-skills were measured, with an average of 67% of P3 students meeting grade proficiency benchmarks in Kinyarwanda oral reading fluency and comprehension. However, the 2023 LARS assessment results show improvements for Kinyarwanda and English in particular. In 2023, just over 46 percent of P3 learners assessed met the national proficiency benchmarks in English reading comprehension and 55.60 percent of the P3 learners assessed, met the national proficiency benchmarks in Mathematics (down from 60.94% in 2021). 37.52 percent of the P3 learners who were assessed, met the national proficiency benchmarks in English foundational Literacy skills, up from 10.08% in 2021. There was an improvement in Kinyarwanda reading comprehension from the previous assessment with 82.70 percent of the P3 learners who were assessed meeting the national proficiency benchmarks in Kinyarwanda reading comprehension.

The LARS assessments also pointed to disparities in learning outcomes between boys and girls. Girls demonstrated consistently lower rates of learning achievement in most subjects, a trend taking roots in P3 with the gap widening with each grade level. By Secondary 3, girls perform 19 percentage points lower than their male counterparts; a similar trend was mirrored in recent national examination data. LARS data also pointed to a strong correlation between household

wealth and learning outcomes. As a compounding factor, the intersectional vulnerability for girls from low-income households has placed them at a significantly greater disadvantage.

3.1 Progress toward creating an enabling environment for foundational learning

It is important to acknowledge the areas of noteworthy progress, as well. Rwanda's spending on education has steadily increased over the last number of years. The country allocated over 16% of total government spending in 2023/24 (increased from 11% in 2016/17) on education. Education spending as a share of GDP also increased from 3% in 2016/17 to close to 5% in 2020/21. The total government allocation to education spending has increased from 4,658,442,303 Rwf in 2022/2023 to 5,030,058,091,823 Rwf in 2023/2024.^{xi}

Notable progress has been made to expand infrastructure to lower the student-qualified teacher ratio. The Rwandan education sector recorded a substantial increase in the number of classrooms for primary education from 34,468 in 2019 to 49,561 classrooms in 2022: hence the decrease in the average number of students using one classroom from 73 to 57. However, only 33,2% of schools with Primary level are meeting the standards (46:1 PCR)^{xii}. In addition, qualified teachers were recruited and the number of qualified teaching staff for primary increased from 43,348 in 2019 to 67,505 in 2022.^{xiii}

Early Childhood Education

The strategy acknowledges the utmost importance and key enabling role played by Early Childhood Education in paving the way for foundational learning to take place. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) is coordinating closely with the National Child Development Agency (NCDA) when it comes to early childhood education. This coordination is of critical importance especially for the area of early childhood education, which is delivered through several platforms,

the largest being school-based pre-primary or nursery education (for children aged 3-5 years old), overseen by the Ministry of Education. The strategy and efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education include strategies to ensure a smooth transition from pre-primary to primary grades.

Over the past years, tremendous efforts have been put in place to increase enrolment figures at pre-primary education level. Pre-primary Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) increased from 33.2% in 2022 to 53.1% in 2023, while the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) increased from 24.2% in 2022 to 39% in 2023^{xiv}. This is a significant increase in only one year, but still below the ESSP target. Low levels of enrolment and exposure to early childhood education opportunities translate into large numbers of children starting primary school late and with inadequate school readiness, which contributes to relatively high rates of repetition and subsequent drop out from primary school. Of the new children admitted to primary one in 2023, only 35.3% attended pre-primary education.

Progress has been made to strengthen the enabling environment for a high-quality ECD sub-sector. For example, in 2015, the Rwanda [Basic] Education Board (REB) revised the national curriculum to a competence-based curriculum (CBC), which included a 3-year pre-primary curriculum. In 2016, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) developed the minimum standards and norms for ECD to ensure that all ECD service providers, offer quality, accessible and equitable ECD services for young children in different settings.

In 2019, MIGEPROF developed the National Parenting Curriculum (NPC), which is a comprehensive, evidence-based parenting curriculum, used as a guide to support Rwandan parents in providing holistic care to their children.

In recent years, expanding access to quality pre-primary education has become a priority within the education sector in Rwanda. The fifth priority of the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) reads as follows: Increased access to education programmes, especially at Nursery (pre-primary), Primary, secondary, TVET and Higher education levels in Rwanda. Activities outlined in the ESSP to support Early Childhood Education include:

- Increase in number of pre-primary centres
- Increase in number of pre-primary schools that have qualified and salaried staff
- Provide community and parental education programmes for early learning

According to the 2022/23 Education Statistics Yearbooks, 4,051 schools have a pre-primary component, enrolling a total of 540,998 learners at pre-primary level, up from 355,325 in 2021/2022. This significant increase in enrolment (a 34.2% increase) is due to investments, which have been made in pre-primary classroom infrastructure as part of the recent large-scale school construction programmes, the expansion of the school feeding programme to pre-primary as well as the move by the Government to progressively place pre-primary school teachers on the public payroll. According to the 2022/23 Education Statistics Yearbooks, there were a total of 9,280 teaching and administrative staff at pre-primary level, up from 7,351 in 2021/22. The yearbook also reports that pre-primary schools appear to be understocked with games and materials for play, highlighting the need for play-based materials to ensure effective learning for pre-primary learners.

The government has made recent investments in the management, welfare, and deployment of teachers to attract and retain better teachers. Following the Cabinet meeting of July 29, 2022, a Communique signed by the Minister of Education announced a new salary increment scheme and the expansion of access to public loan support for teachers. Significantly, primary school teacher salaries have seen increases of up to 88%, with varying increments depending on education qualifications. Salaries for Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers, and support staff

working in public and government-aided schools were also revised upwards. The Communique indicated that the salary raises would come into effect in August 2022.^{xv}

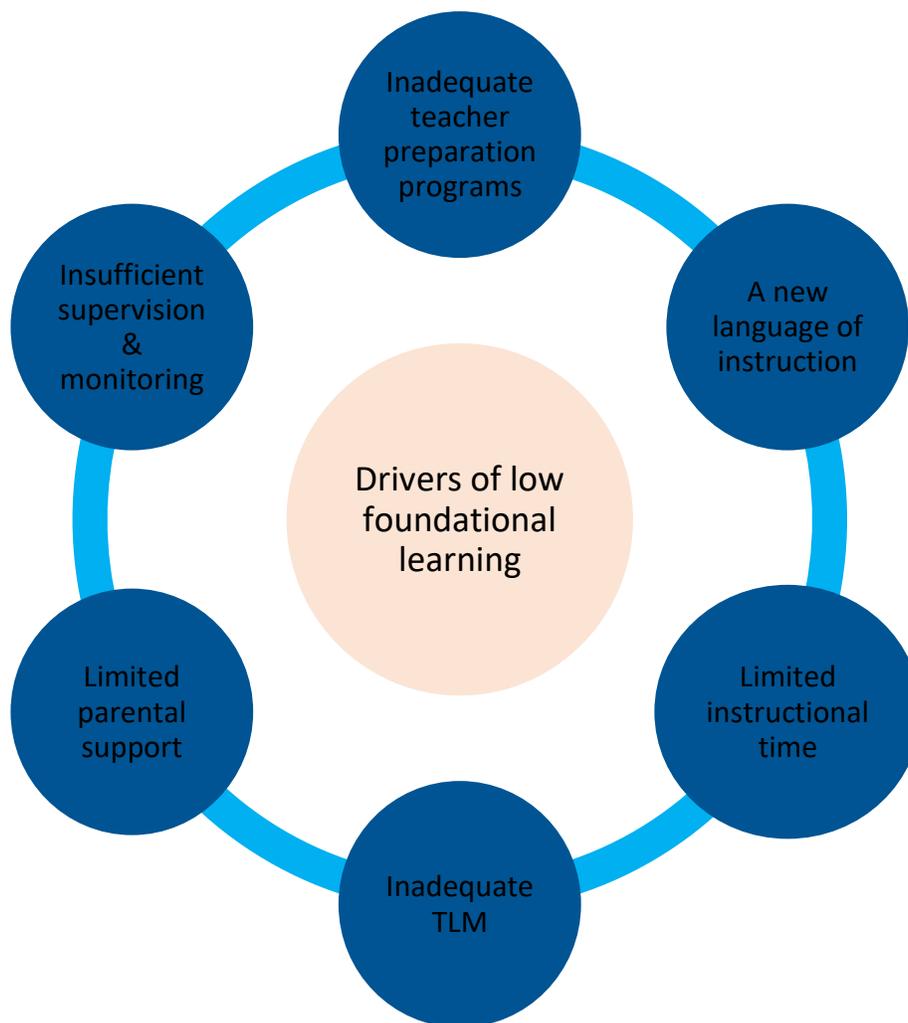
In 2020, NESA was established with the mandate of ensuring quality of basic education, and to regulate comprehensive assessments of students and national examinations. NESA oversees the monitoring of the implementation of norms and standards through school inspections and oversees administration of comprehensive assessments in basic education and TVET (NESA, 2022). The agency is in the process of developing an updated school inspection framework to shift inspection focus from enforcement of rules to provision of constructive support to schools to improve teaching and learning.

Strides have been made in strengthening system-level learning assessments. In 2011, Rwanda introduced the LARS assessment to measure learning against the national curriculum with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy. The LARS assessment allows for a systematic and regular measurement of learning outcomes, and the opportunity to use evidence to inform policy and planning. The LARS 2021 study positioned Rwanda as one of the first countries to conduct a post-COVID national learning assessment, and this was followed by a LARS 2023 study. Additionally, MINEDUC has made efforts to strengthen comprehensive assessment practices. In January 2019, MINEDUC established Ministerial Guidelines on Comprehensive Assessment which officially promoted multiple types of effective assessment practices.^{xvi} The guidelines further endorsed a Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS). The CAMIS system, while still under refinement, aims to facilitate real-time assessment data to feed into decision-making at the classroom, school, decentralized and national levels.

3.2 Drivers of low foundational learning

The 2022 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Rwanda Spotlight showed that the people, systems, and resources most closely linked to foundational learning in Rwanda require a more intense and refined focus to improve educational quality and foundational learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2022).

Since 2019, there has been a 56% increase in the primary education qualified teaching workforce with a large proportion of the current teachers at the primary and secondary level being new recruits.^{xvii} As cited in the LARS reports, schools must strengthen the implementation of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers through CoP organized at the school levels. Teachers must receive training on various pedagogical topics as well as specific subject content to adequately address the learning challenges being faced.



Graphic 1: Drivers of low foundational learning

The change in the language of instruction policy has brought forward significant challenges in teaching and learning. Gaps exist in the current levels of teacher preparedness to teach English and in English. Only 4% of existing teachers have intermediate to advanced skills in English. A 2018 World Bank report found that only 38% of teachers in P1-P3 met the required standard to teach subjects in English.^{xviii} With a teaching force lacking the requisite language skills to teach or monitor student performance, English language proficiency of students also remains unsurprisingly low. LARS data collected in 2023 found only 38% of P3 students met proficiency

benchmarks for English. The 2021 LARS data also highlights the effects of teaching mathematics in an unfamiliar language: student performance in mathematics assessments dropped by 45 percentage points when the language of assessment changed from Kinyarwanda to English. The 2022 UNESCO Spotlight Report found that most classrooms observed did not comply with the policy to use English as the medium of instruction; both teachers and students were observed using Kinyarwanda primarily and most textbooks observed were also in Kinyarwanda.^{xix}

There is limited instructional time in the lower primary years. In 2022, MINEDUC estimated that an average of 86% of classrooms in P1-P3 are still in double shifting. At maximum, students in double shifting only receive a possible 20 hours of instruction per week. Further, during the time spent in the classroom, meaningful learning time or ‘time on task’ is reduced by teacher absenteeism and tardiness as well as inefficient instructional practices. A study conducted with teachers in Rwanda found that only 52.2% of allocated Kinyarwanda reading time is allocated to learning. 28.5% is lost due to absenteeism and tardiness and 19.3% utilized for activities other than learning (USAID/Rwanda 2020).

Implementation of the competence-based curriculum (CBC) is limited by prevailing inefficient, teacher-centered instructional methods. The 2015 introduction of the CBC necessitated a shift from a ‘knowledge-based’ approach to education to a ‘competence-based’ approach, which focuses on deeper thinking and on teaching discrete skills. The shift was also meant to promote a learner-centered approach so that learners actively participate in their learning process. However, the gap between the competence-based curriculum and its implementation is widely recognized as a challenge in professional development for teachers (UNESCO GEM Spotlight, 2022). Concerningly, teacher attitudes toward the new CBC and its student-centred approach have also been found to be problematic. A 2019 study found that teachers overwhelmingly had negative attitudes toward learner-centred pedagogy.^{xx}

The quality, availability, and use of textbooks and other TLM are inadequate. The current textbook policy establishes a one textbook per child requirement. However, the 2021 Report of Auditor General of State Finances report noted that: "...schools did not possess sufficient books to enable adequate learning and teaching: the textbook: pupil ratio varied between 1:7 to 1:223."^{xxi} The LARS 2021 report noted a distinct lack of English TLM in classrooms and the LARS 2023 report noted that the insufficiency of English textbooks and qualified teachers of English was listed by learners and teachers as a barrier to effective teaching and learning of English. Investment in levelled reading materials in both English and Kinyarwanda will be essential to support literacy and learning in children's mother tongue as well as the new language of instruction.

Many children arrive at school without foundational skills (or abilities) to learn. According to the World Bank, low access to and poor-quality ECE contribute to the global learning crisis. As countries seek to build back better from the pandemic, even as they face tight resource constraints, investments in quality ECE are an integral part of national plans to recover and accelerate learning.^{xxii} Enrollment in pre-primary is linked to reduced repetition rates and improved learning outcomes in P1 and P2, suggesting that continuing to focus on increasing the number of children enrolled in pre-primary education is likely to have a positive impact on learning.^{xxiii} Quality ECE remains scarce, particularly in rural areas, and caregivers need more support to build caregiving skills and financial capacity.

Parental support for learning is low. Community participation in children's schooling is low in Rwanda.^{xxiv} Aside from paying school-related expenses, parents do not see it as their job to be involved in their child's education. This belief led to high turnover and low engagement in General Assembly Executive Committees (SGAEC) (formally known as Parent Teacher Associations, or PTAs). Importantly, children have very little access to quality, age-appropriate learning materials outside of school and limited opportunities to practice reading.^{xxv}

Insufficient supervision and monitoring of teaching and learning. While District Education Officers (DEOs) and Sector Education Officers (SEOs) are tasked to supervise and monitor schools, evidence suggests that they may not be properly trained to provide pedagogical oversight.^{xxvi} Further, they are regularly charged with additional political and administrative tasks. MINEDUC reports show that the frequency of school management and pedagogical involvement of DEOs and SEOs was much lower than expected.^{xxvii} In addition, districts are evaluated based on measurable outputs (per performance contracts) which tend to focus on measurable indicators around infrastructure, recruitment, training of teachers and the overall functioning of the schools,^{xxviii} rather than pedagogical practice in the classroom.

3.3 Learning targets for P3 English, Kinyarwanda, and mathematics

The Draft Education Sector Strategic Plan (2024-2028) has established indicative targets* for learning outcomes in Kinyarwanda, English and Maths, using the LARS 2023 data as a baseline. Ambitious yet achievable indicative targets have been set for the year 2028/29, as laid out in the below table.

No	Indicator	Baseline (LARS 2023)	Target (2028/29)
1	% learners at or above basic proficiency in Kinyarwanda in P3	67	83
2	% learners at or above basic proficiency in English in P3	37.5	55.6
3	% learners at or above basic proficiency in Maths in P3	56.0	70

*These are indicative targets and may be updated or revised during the ESSP finalisation process.

4 The Foundational Learning Strategy priorities and interventions

MINEDUC’s FLS focuses on a unique window of opportunity in the schooling of young children. Covering pre-primary to lower primary levels, its goal is to equip all children with basic literacy and numeracy, and to instil in them a love for learning from an early age when their brains are changing and developing rapidly. The FLS lays out how, over the course of a five-year period, foundational learning will be accelerated in Rwanda.

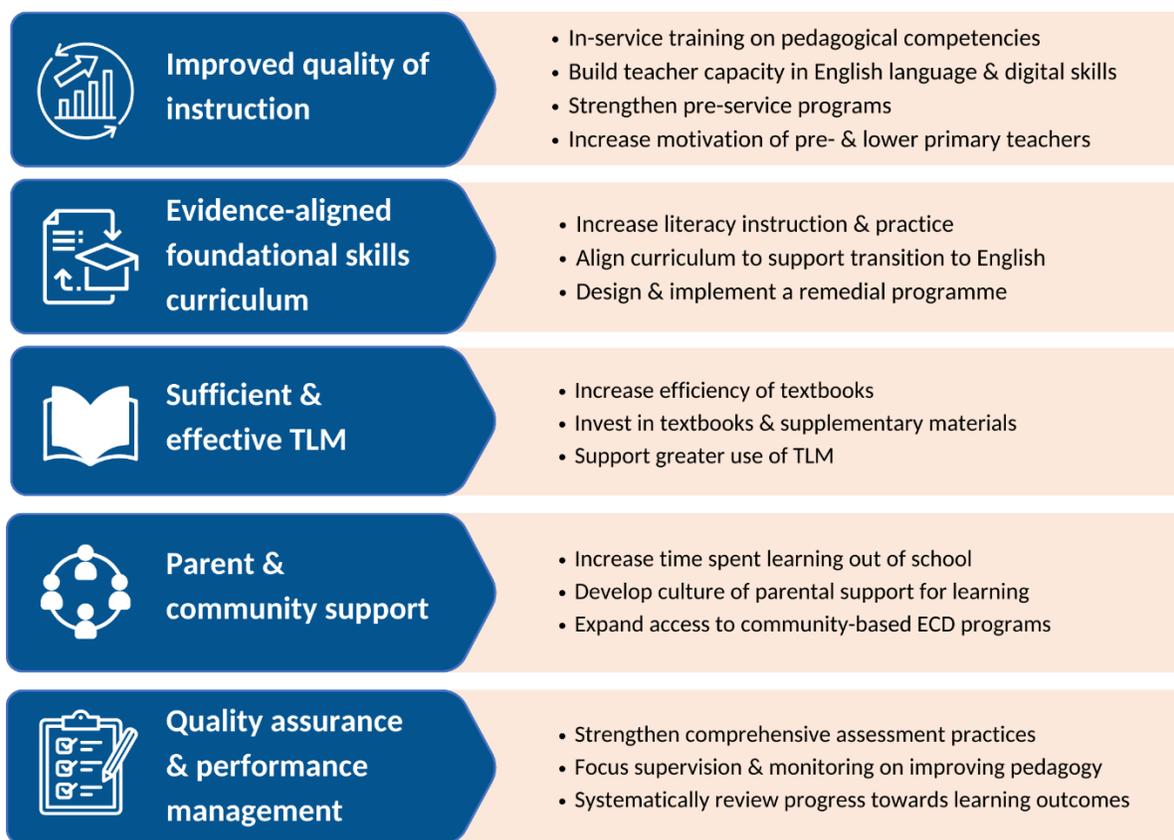
Timeline	
	5-year strategy (2024-2029)
Overall objective	
	Provide an evidence-backed, prioritized and costed plan to rapidly accelerate improvements in foundational learning in Rwanda
Specific objectives	
	Greater alignment across the government and key partners towards an evidence-backed, prioritized, and costed approach to achieve the government’s targets for foundational learning
	Guide MINEDUC and Rwanda Education Board (REB) decisions on allocation of resources and technical assistance towards a select number of prioritized evidence-backed interventions with the largest impact on foundational learning outcomes
	Mobilize resources through domestic resource allocation and international aid budgets
	Set outcome-based learning targets and a monitoring plan to measure progress towards accelerated learning

Graphic 3: FLS objectives

There are several evidence-driven approaches to improving learning that have informed the crafting of the Strategy. Global evidence reviews conducted by UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, USAID and FCDO were central to the selection of strategic priorities. Context-specific recommendations from recent research conducted in Rwanda have further informed the formulation of intervention areas.

The FLS draws from this wealth of evidence to outline five key priority areas to invest and align efforts in. Three of the five priorities focus on the core processes of teaching and learning in the classroom: instructional quality, the curriculum, and teaching and learning resources. Of the remaining two, one relates to families and local communities in their role in sustaining children's interest in their lessons and encouraging learning outside the classroom; and the other relates to arrangements for greater accountability from all parties. For each priority, the Strategy identifies key actions to reduce barriers that impede foundational learning, assigns institutional responsibility for implementation, and highlights vital areas of support from Rwanda's development partners. It encourages cross-unit collaboration where essential for its success.

Within each of the five priority objectives, there are strategic interventions identified which will contribute to the advancement of each goal. The 16 strategic interventions, in total, represent the requisite ingredients to accelerate learning in the foundational years. Each strategic intervention is then followed by a list of measurable and targeted activities to ensure they contribute to the overall improvement of foundational learning. Additional information on the details and timelines of the planned activities is included in the implementation plan.



Graphic 4: Overview of strategic priorities and interventions

Priority 1: Improving instructional quality at pre- and lower primary level through teacher development and support

Effective teachers have been shown to have significant impacts on the long-term well-being of students, their academic achievement, and for how long they will study, as well as their predicted income once they enter the labour market.^{xxix} Several years of outstanding teaching may in fact offset learning deficits of disadvantaged students. To rise to these standards of instructional excellence, Rwanda needs a robust teacher workforce that is both competent and motivated to improve foundational learning outcomes.

Key interventions under this priority area relate to in-service training for teachers, as well as capacity development for school leaders as enablers of the work of teachers. Literacy- and numeracy-specific content and training will form a major part of the overall professional development of teachers. The interventions comprise capacity building through in-service training programs, including an accelerated training program for new and uncertified teachers to obtain formal certification as teachers. In-service training will provide skills directly related to teaching reading and mathematics along with more general skills for teachers. CPD—for school leaders and teachers—will foster CoP as dynamic venues for professional support and peer learning. The upskilling of School Subject Leaders (SSLs) and other school based resources such as school-based mentors, to serve as a middle tier of instructional leaders in English, Kinyarwanda and mathematics will be instrumental in sustaining CoP and other school-based CPD.

Concerted efforts will improve the quality of pre-service training offered at TTCs. An assessment of the newly revised TTC curriculum (2019) will be carried out to examine the alignment with the content-based curriculum (CBC) and its efficacy in preparing future teachers to teach and assess foundational skills. This will inform an update to the Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education (ECLPE) option in TTCs to ensure a stronger focus on foundational skills and school readiness, including through the provision of literacy and numeracy resources.

Another key strategy objective will be to strengthen schools' capacity to effectively implement the English as the language of instruction policy. This requires a comprehensive plan for teacher training such that the risks of learning losses during instructional language transition are minimized. This also includes training on pedagogy to equip teachers to teach other subjects such as mathematics in English ensuring that children can grasp numeracy concepts well even when taught in a language they are still learning to speak.

Specific to the pre-primary level, the strategy includes an explicit emphasis on building teachers' capacity to support holistic child development, a foundation necessary for subsequent literacy and numeracy skill development. By fostering pre-primary students' natural inclination to learn and by developing their holistic skills through play-based learning, children are better equipped to learn and master literacy and numeracy skills in lower primary.

Other key areas of focus for teacher training include training on the use of teaching and learning materials, which is the focus of priority 3 of this strategy and training on teaching within the remedial education programme, which is outlined in priority 2 of this strategy. For all teacher training initiatives, pre-assessment of teachers' needs will be conducted to inform the exact focus and intensity of the training required.

As the system increases investment in teachers, it will be critical to ensure they remain both motivated and accountable. The final intervention in this priority area proposes improvements to the current teacher performance management processes to steer schools' efforts towards a focus on improving learning outcomes. Measures to motivate teachers can also include providing certificates of appreciation and awards to teachers or schools for enhanced performance.

Inclusive teaching and learning for children with disabilities and special needs remains a priority for the Ministry of Education, and the Foundational Learning Strategy will be implemented in synergy with other ongoing initiatives outlined in the Special Needs Education Policy, such as training teachers on inclusive pedagogies and in using inclusive teaching and learning materials.

Strategic interventions

1. Improve the quality and frequency of targeted in-service capacity building for teachers in literacy and numeracy pedagogical competencies	
	1.1 Provide school-level guidance to prioritize learning in the foundational years, including the placement of skilled teachers in pre- and lower primary levels and minimizing movement of trained teachers
	1.2 Create, pilot, assess, refine, and roll out a foundational skills orientation program for newly recruited uncertified teachers with practical training and coaching on literacy and numeracy instruction
	1.3 Institutionalize CPD forums, with the involvement of school leaders, including teacher Communities of Practice, and support for implementation
	1.4 Prioritize the upskilling of pre- and lower primary SSLs and SBMs in English, Kinyarwanda and mathematics to serve as instructional leaders
2. Build teacher capacity in English language proficiency and other key areas related to the FL Strategy	
	2.1 Refine and roll out a multi-year comprehensive plan to support teachers to improve their English proficiency, and ability to teach all subjects in English, including implementation and monitoring plans.
	2.2 Develop and implement an English language coaching scheme to support teachers to apply training in the classroom and improve their communicative English skills.
	2.3 Develop and implement teacher training in the effective use of teaching and learning materials and in remedial education, including the involvement of school leaders

3. Strengthen pre-service programs through a focus on targeted pedagogical and professional competencies

3.1 Carry out an assessment of the implementation and impact of the newly revised TTC curriculum (2019) to examine alignment with the CBC and focus on preparation to teach foundational skills. Adjust where needed.

3.2 Review the Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education (ECLPE) option in TTCs and identify strategies and develop an action plan to strengthen its focus on foundational skills and school readiness, including within the practicum as well as to strengthen the English language proficiency of TTC tutors.

3.3 Increase the regularity of investment in curricular play-based learning and foundational skills resources and reference materials for TTCs, especially the ECLPE option.

4. Implement interventions to increase motivation of pre- and lower primary teachers

4.1 Develop quality teaching elements performance metrics which include learning objectives into a standard imihigo template for pre- and lower primary teachers, headteachers and sector education inspectors

4.2 Implement a campaign to renew schools' use of imihigo to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes

Graphic 5: Priority 1 strategic interventions

Priority 2: Implement an evidence-aligned foundational skills curriculum

An effective evidence-aligned curriculum focuses instructional time on the skills, abilities, and knowledge that research has proven to be essential for literacy and numeracy development. Research shows that students need at least 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction each day to become fluent readers.^{xxx} Increases in the amount of instruction devoted to reading results in greater levels of average achievement and more children accomplishing productive levels of learning.

With most P1-P3 classrooms still operating in double shifts, students can only receive a maximum possible of 20 hours of instruction per week. Actual learning time is often much shorter because of teacher or student absenteeism and tardiness, as well as inefficient classroom management practices. With such limitations on instructional time, a recalibration of the curriculum distribution is necessary to ensure students have sufficient practice to develop literacy skills in both Kinyarwanda and English. A revised lower primary timetable will prioritize literacy instruction by establishing double literacy periods per day. In P1 and P2, literacy blocks are dedicated to mastery of Kinyarwanda literacy, with a shift to dedicated daily English literacy blocks in P3.

Another mechanism for increasing literacy instruction and practice is through the development of an integrated studies approach. This strategy encourages non-literacy and numeracy subjects, including SET, SRS and creative arts, to integrate learning outcomes into cohesive, thematic weekly teaching units. Teachers will be oriented on how to effectively deliver practical, life-based integrated studies lessons that hit on key curricular content of the non-core subjects. To operationalize this at the system level, all educators—including teachers, school leaders, and

inspectors—will be sensitized to literacy-focused teaching approaches and trained on their implementation (e.g., staffing management, instructional timetable, and calendar).

Increased time for literacy instruction and reading in school is complemented by opportunities for children to engage with community libraries and learning at home when not in school, an area which is covered by priority 4 of this strategy.

Another element critical to improving learning outcomes is a systemic reform of the curriculum and the overall orientation of the system to better meet the needs of the students not yet grade proficient in the medium of instruction. Oral language provides the foundation for literacy and allows students to learn to read with comprehension. To facilitate transition to English, the P1 English curriculum will emphasize listening and speaking skills to lay the groundwork for literacy skills transfer from Kinyarwanda to English in P2 and P3. The mathematics curriculum will be adjusted to align with the sequenced introduction of English language curriculum, while mathematics teachers are equipped with techniques and resources to transition to teaching mathematics in English. Content difficulty and instructional pacing will be aimed at the appropriate level to ensure numeracy learning is not hindered by students' lack of fluency in English.

Finally, to accelerate learning recovery for all children, the system will offer a remedial program targeting learners with the greatest learning needs. REB will design a remedial education programme, based on an assessment of needs and roll out remedial interventions for foundational subjects (English, mathematics, and Kinyarwanda) at the lower primary level. The program will offer additional support and instructional time for those students most at risk of not reaching learning targets. In parallel, teachers will be supported to embed inclusive remediation practices, such as differentiated, learner-centered approaches, into their normal teaching practices.

Strategic interventions

5. Increase the amount of literacy instruction and practice available to children	
	5.1 (A) Revise and develop timetable for P1-P3 (single and double shifts) that increases the amount of literacy instruction and practice available to children. (B) Revise the pre-primary teacher guide to reflect learning through play activities, including free play and corner play activities.
	5.2 Develop a costed plan for managing and eliminating double shifting in lower primary years with short term management strategies and intermediate targets towards securing the necessary infrastructure and human resources
	5.3 Adapt the content of and integrate literacy and numeracy into SRS and SET to be more user friendly and improve learning outcomes.
6. Align the curricular content to support the transition to English as a medium of instruction	
	6.1 Conduct a study to inform the design of a Kinyarwanda-English literacy curriculum, including decoding thresholds, requisite number of vocabularies to be taught in each curricular year.
	6.2 Adjust / reorganise P1-P3 curricular content to transition students more efficiently to English as a Medium of Instruction. (a) Adapting the P1 English curriculum to emphasize oral and spoken English language competencies (b) Recalibrating the P2 and P3 English curriculum to systematically introduce literacy subskills and encourage direct, explicit, structured early grade reading pedagogy (c) Adapting the mathematics curriculum to reflect students' English language levels
	6.3 Issue guidance (A/V materials and training) to schools on the delivery of curricular content in English, including provision for language supportive technique to assist students to map concepts from Kinyarwanda to English especially in Mathematics

7. Design and implement a remedial program to provide targeted support to students with the greatest learning needs

7.1 Design an effective learning recovery program, implementation timeline, and monitoring framework
7.2 Monitor the initial implementation of the remedial learning program and measure changes in learning levels
7.3 Scale up remedial learning nationwide, based on learning points from the monitoring, including distribution of necessary instructional guidance and materials

Graphic 6: Priority 2 strategic interventions

Priority 3: Providing effective TLM in sufficient volume to all teachers and learners

Effective instruction requires high-quality, contextualized TLM. Textbooks and other TLM are especially relevant to improving learning outcomes in contexts with large class sizes, unqualified and inexperienced teachers, or shortage of instructional time. With insufficient access to textbooks, valuable instructional time can be wasted as students copy content from the blackboard, significantly reducing time for engaged learning. Every child should have a textbook or learning materials, including ample supplementary materials for reading practice. Similarly, every teacher should have teacher guides aligned with the textbook and curriculum.

Reading practice requires books at students’ reading levels in a variety of formats and genres. Ideally, this includes levelled texts, decodable readers, and general interest children’s books. A core set of literacy materials for each classroom creates a framework for ensuring students engage in daily guided and independent reading practice. Equally, numeracy TLM support

student-centred learning, provide students with concrete experiences, and strengthen numerical concepts. At the pre-primary level, there is a need to increase the availability and use of appropriate TLM that promote play based ECE and develop children’s holistic skills, including locally made teaching and learning materials.

Textbook provision can be made more affordable by analysing TLM costs associated with different curriculum choices. It is more effective to have fewer books covering the essential parts of the curriculum—and prioritize all students having access to these books—than to have many discrete subjects, leading to a larger number of books required but not made available. Strategic decisions will be made to identify what will be covered in textbooks and what can be covered in teacher guides or in supplementary reading books. Literacy kits will provide classroom sets of reading materials (decodable, levelled, and read aloud books) to all English and Kinyarwanda classrooms. In parallel, interventions will be implemented to strengthen the TLM supply chain, from content design and product specification to procurement and timely delivery to classrooms. Improved procurement and management of textbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary learning materials will reduce costs and increase book availability to the necessary ratios to enable learning. Long term forecasting of teaching and learning materials across all grades will also support funding and planning processes.

Further, for textbooks to be effective they must also be in a language that is widely understood by students. The level of difficulty of the text needs to be compatible with the language ability and learning needs of the target students, as determined by assessment data. Similarly, English and mathematics textbooks will be evaluated and adapted to employ language supportive strategies to promote greater use and impact of books. Similarly, teacher guides must use language that teachers will comprehend to be considered worthwhile investments. In the current phase of transitioning to English as the medium of instruction, teacher guides which are more accessible and easy to follow will be made available to teachers.

Strategic interventions

8. Increase efficiency of textbooks by ensuring the materials (1) support instruction and lesson delivery; (2) are sufficiently durable; and (3) are delivered on time.

8.1 Conduct a technical review of P1-P3 textbooks to inform adaptations to TLM that are aligned with strategies 5 and 6.

8.2 Update and refine the protocol to test, evaluate and refine all content and pedagogy prior to printing and distribution

8.3 Review, update and implement protocol to test, evaluate and improve durability standards for TLMs

8.4 Update and refine standards and criteria for durability of TLM.

8.5 Conduct a comprehensive book supply chain analysis to identify areas for increased efficiency- including governance, management, and staffing issues as well as all other aspects of the supply chain - and implement priority action plans

9. Invest in textbooks and supplementary literacy and numeracy materials

9.1 Identify a set of cost-effective foundational skills TLM package for each subject/grade, including English and Kinyarwanda literacy kits and numeracy TLM for P1-P3 and play-based materials for pre-primary classrooms.

9.2 Earmark a proportion of capitation grants for literacy kits and numeracy TLM for P1-P3 and play-based materials for pre-primary classrooms. Establish and train school leaders on the system for using the grant.

9.3 Maximize development partner and other stakeholder support to textbook and supplementary TLM provision and replacement including a mapping of partner support.

9.4 Stimulate the local publishing and creative industry to produce quality non-textbook reading materials and play-based learning resources, including response to market needs (e.g. 8.2 and 8.3 standards set by REB).

10. Support greater use of TLM

10.1 Incorporate metrics on usage of TLM, including non-textbook resources and play-based materials, into teacher, school leader and inspector tools and performance management mechanisms.
10.2 Invest in inclusive versions of core TLM, including braille and large print versions, and accessible digital materials.
10.3 Develop and provide teacher guides to support implementation of the Kinyarwanda, English and Math curriculum. Include glossaries of key words and terms for Math and English to scaffold comprehension.

Graphic 7: Priority 3 strategic interventions

Priority 4: Mobilize parent and community support for learning

In Rwanda, like most countries, children spend much more time out-of-school than in school. It is therefore hugely important to develop children’s learning competencies and attitudes during the hours spent outside classroom contexts. There is a comprehensive body of research demonstrating significant benefits for children whose parents or caregivers support their academic development at home. The quality of parent-child interactions from the earliest years greatly influences children’s learning outcomes. Parents and caregivers are key decision-makers and stakeholders in their children’s education. Their beliefs about the purpose of foundational learning and how children should learn can affect the uptake and design of such programs.^{xxxix}

Parental and community support is particularly critical in double-shifting contexts where there is limited instructional time for students to practice the skills being taught during lessons. In addition, with large class sizes children with disabilities may not be able to receive individualized attention comparable to a home setting.

Ensuring that parents recognize the important role they play in the future development of their child's appetite and ability to learn is essential to harnessing the benefits of out-of-school time. Even parents and caregivers with low literacy skills can effectively support their children's learning. However, there is a need to build parents and communities' capacities to understand and promote age-appropriate learning activities they can support. These interventions have been found to be effective at both changing parents' behaviours and improving child outcomes in low- and middle-income countries.^{.xxxii}

Several interventions target the development of a culture of parental support for learning. An evidence-informed behaviour change communication campaign will be designed to empower parents to improve the quality of their parenting practices and interactions with children at home, and to increase parent involvement with children's formal learning. In parallel, REB will continue to strengthen the functioning of SGAECs and enhance school-based approaches to attract participation from less engaged caregivers.

Key investments will be made to improve parenting practices and home learning environments. First, coordinated efforts will increase the availability of reading materials in community libraries through a systematic plan led by the KPL. Community-organized learning activities, such as reading clubs, will provide additional time and support for children to practice the literacy skills being taught within the classroom. Second, it will enhance school libraries' functions to lend children books for use at home through improved access to KPL resources and technical support. Where technology is available, libraries will disseminate engaging educational entertainment content to supplement foundational learning. Access to a range of print and digital learning materials effectively fosters reading and learning habits which are vastly advantageous to instil at a young age.

Equally, community-based ECD programs are cost-effective avenues to supporting children to develop holistically, and ultimately make the timely transition to school-based instruction. For this approach to succeed, there is a need to support parents and caregivers’ understanding of and support for play-based, holistic development of pre-primary aged children. Both community and home stakeholders require sensitization on how and why children learn so that they can reinforce this behaviour in their daily interactions. It is crucial to offer clear, consistent demonstrations of how foundational play-based activities support later literacy and numeracy learning. To achieve this, MINEDUC will collaborate with local leaders and with the NCDA to develop, pilot, and expand ECD caregiver training. Specific interventions in this area will be identified during the Strategy’s first year of implementation, including the potential to identify and use local public and private sector resources to improve the quality of ECD services. MINEDUC and NCDA will work together to expand parenting programmes to families of children accessing ECD services to improve the home environment and initiate home activities to contribute to foundational learning.

Strategic interventions

11. Increase time spent practicing learning out of school	
11.1	Develop a resourced plan to strengthen the KPL’s mandate to oversee the expansion of community reading structures, including libraries, reading clubs and literacy outreach activities.
11.2	Provide material support to schools to implement the school library guidelines to provide greater opportunities for students to access books in and out of school
11.3	Disseminate engaging educational entertainment content to supplement foundational learning
12. Develop a culture of parental support for learning	

	12.1 Identify a responsible department/unit within REB to lead initiatives on parental engagement for learning
	12.2 Support school leaders and SGAEC to strengthen structured parent engagement mechanisms, including teacher parent meetings, communication of learning achievements to parents, home learning strategies, etc.
	12.3 Develop and implement a behaviour change communication campaign to sensitize parents on supporting foundational learning
13. Extend access to community based ECD programs	
	13.1 Establish a mechanism to increase coordination with NCDA on ECE and ECD and expand coverage to provide all children with at least one year of pre-primary/ECD
	13.2 Collaborate with NCDA to invest in ECD caregiver training and pilot transition to pre-primary teaching roles.
	13.3 Collaborate with NCDA to expand parenting programmes for children accessing ECD services to support foundational learning at home.

Graphic 8: Priority 4 strategic interventions

Priority 5: Strengthening systemic quality assurance and performance management

The sector’s ability to collect strong data on student learning and use it to affect practice and align stakeholders towards a common goal will be of critical importance. Routine monitoring and reporting of student progression and learning, including national assessments and benchmarking

to international standards, provide the metrics for system-wide tracking and appraisal. Continued investment in the LARS approach to national learning assessment is essential to allow for comparability of data and measuring progress in learning outcomes. Further, policy linking will allow these national learning assessments to be linked to the GPF through global benchmarks.

Comprehensive assessment is key to inform teaching, learning, and data-driven decision-making efforts.^{xxxiii} Further, the accessibility and accuracy of this assessment data is essential. NESAs will develop comprehensive assessment guidelines and train teachers to use simple, yet effective assessment practices, such as the Local Early Grade Reading Assessment (LEGRA) tool, to monitor student learning. With technical support, NESAs will be able to strengthen the role in providing key education actors with tools and data to improve the quality of teaching and learning and enhance performance management. This is an important step towards increasing accountability of routine reporting of assessment results for use by schools, sectors, districts, and MINEDUC.

To address the dearth of sustainable education technology solutions for real-time monitoring of learning outcomes, NESAs will invest in the finalization and roll out of the Comprehensive Assessment Monitoring Information System (CAMIS). Through key partner collaboration, NESAs will continue to refine CAMIS and prioritize training and support for school leaders on using this tool to monitor and analyze assessment data and inform decision-making at their school. Once CAMIS is fully operational, school, sector and district officials will be able to track and detect patterns of low learning outcomes and intervene accordingly, including informing which learners will benefit from remedial education programmes.

Translating the enabling conditions laid out in priority areas 1-4 into better student learning outcomes requires a robust system for performance management. Regular school visits are an essential support and accountability strategy, as inspectors collect information on the quality of

the school and evaluate learning progress. They also inform the structuring of incentives toward better performance by teachers and their managers at the school, sector, and district levels. District inspectors, DEOs, and SEOs require capacity and directive to effectively monitor and assess foundational skills instruction and play-based ECE. To this end, NESAs will develop a set of school inspection protocols and related data collection templates for the QAMIS system, and train DEOs and SEOs on using these resources for system monitoring. More broadly, NESAs will continue to deepen its technical expertise to provide system-level managers with timely data and insight on nationwide trends, disparities, and other patterns in foundational learning.

Strategic interventions

14. Strengthen comprehensive assessment practices by creating localized tools and guidance, building the capacity of education officers, head teachers and teachers to use data to improve instruction, and encouraging demand for learning data among parents	
14.1	Establish and implement nationwide comparable comprehensive assessment protocol to improve and standardize literacy and numeracy data collection and use
14.2	Strengthen NESAs' capacity to oversee learning assessments, benchmarking, and metrics analysis
14.3	Invest in the upskilling of a distributed school leadership team, including Head Teachers, Directors of Study, Responsables, SSL/SBMs, with an emphasis on comprehensive assessment and accountability for learning outcomes
14.4	Refine the usability of CAMIS and roll out training for school leaders and teachers on system use and tools to identify struggling learners
14.5	Establish systems to make learning achievement data open and accessible to system actors, school staff, parents, and partners

15. Focus supervision and monitoring systems on supporting teachers to improve pedagogical practices	
15.1	Update the inspection framework to include key metrics on monitoring school and classroom support for foundational skills, use of teaching and learning materials, play-based pre-primary teaching practices and monitoring learning outcome data
15.2	Develop a QAMIS that includes digitization of school inspection tools and data reporting mechanisms for real time data collection, monitoring and sharing
15.3	Train district inspectors on effective inspection of key elements of quality foundational skills instruction
16. Systematically track and review progress towards improving foundational learning outcomes	
16.1	Undergo a policy-linking process to allow national learning assessments to be linked to the GPF through global benchmarks
16.2	Continue refinement of the LARS tools and assessment practices to ensure sustained and comparable monitoring of foundational learning outcomes through regular bi-yearly assessments, including in 2023 and 2025.

Graphic 9: Priority 5 strategic interventions

5 Implementation and monitoring of the Foundational Learning Strategy

Implementing the Foundational Learning Strategy across the five priority pillars will require a focused and coordinated approach, with a tracking system put in place to monitor progress for each pillar and their respective strategic interventions and activities.

The Foundational Learning Strategy is accompanied by a costed implementation plan, which was developed in close consultations with education development partners and other education stakeholders.

For each of the five priorities of the Strategy, the costed implementation plan has elaborated SMART indicators with targets, which will be used to measure progress and success for each activity. For each activity, the implementation plan has identified the budget required.

The implementation plan identifies the responsible agency, and in some cases Department, leading on implementing each activity, as well as the education development partners who will be offering support, which defines the accountability mechanism for achieving results. The delivery chain for the Foundational Learning Strategy encompasses all levels of education implementation from the Ministry of Education and its agencies, to District and local level authorities, down to the school and community level, with each stakeholder included in the implementation plan.

The high-level delivery chain for the Foundational Learning Strategy is mapped out below:

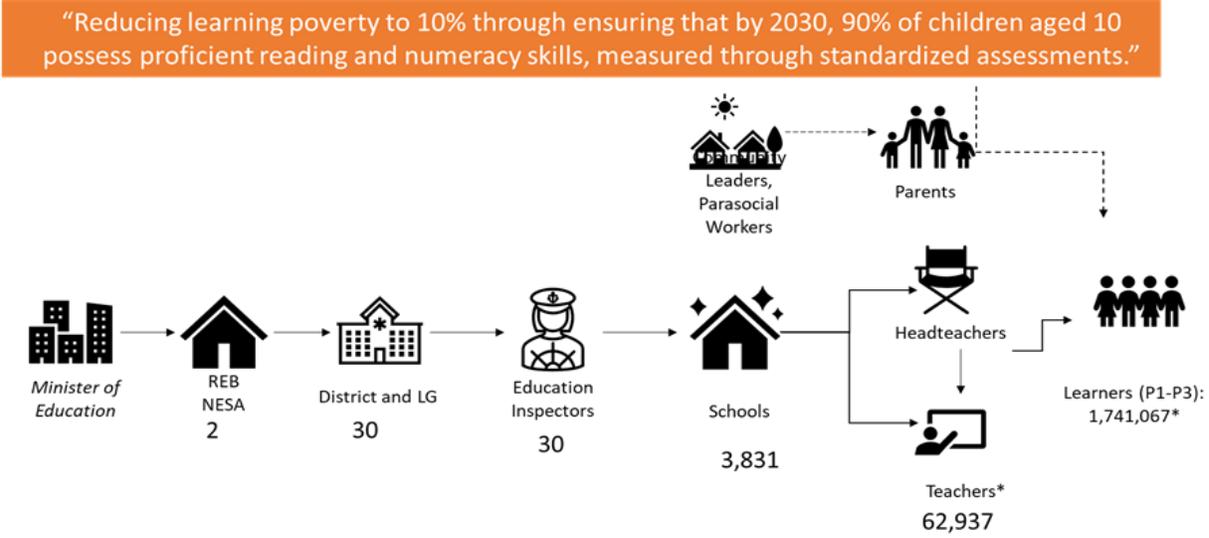


Figure 1: Sample of FLN Delivery Chain^[xxxiv]

Foundational Learning Delivery Unit.

To support delivery of the Foundational Learning Strategy and enhance the delivery culture within the Ministry, the Ministry of Education has set up a targeted delivery unit.

Delivery units are teams that concentrate on developing, implementing and monitoring transformational projects. Typically deployed by governments, they can operate at the state, local or national level to help ministries and government units monitor high priority policies and ensure the performance of these policies are on track. ^{xxxv}

The newly-constituted Delivery Unit will not only help the Ministry to stay on track of delivery on Foundational learning but also instil a culture of “getting things done” that can be transferred to other areas of priority for the Ministry. The Delivery Unit will directly report to the office of the Hon. Minister of Education and have assigned focal persons both within the Ministry and the affiliated agencies (NESA, REB) to work with.

The responsibilities of the Delivery Unit are as follows:

- Working closely with the Ministry of Education, REB, NESA and other education authorities, ensure implementation of the National Foundational Learning Strategy and fast-track any pending actions;
- Monitor and assess progress in implementing the foundational learning strategy and achieving the desired results;
- Identify challenges in implementing the strategy and propose solutions and actions to overcome those challenges;
- Mobilise resources and identify partnerships for better delivery;
- Ensure strategic communication (internal and external) about the achieved results;
- Document the process and results of the foundational learning strategy implementation
- Serve as a vehicle to bring on board talents and qualified individuals, who would be difficult to attract through existing recruitment structures

Delivery Unit Priorities and Structure

The delivery unit will consist of education, data and delivery experts, who will be recruited outside of the Ministry's structure. These experts will be directly attached to counterparts within the Ministry but also in the implementing agency to ensure they are equipped to drive delivery of the identified priority actions. Through the direct reporting chain to the Minister's office, the DU staff will have the necessary authority to set boundaries and stay focus on their identified target. It is envisaged that the delivery unit will be an eight-person team, though that will depend on the ability of the Ministry to mobilise resources and partners to support the costs of these posts.

The delivery team is responding to the need for the education sector to enhance its delivery capacity. Its objective is to identify, consolidate and fast-track the implementation of the sector's key priority in order to ensure that all citizens of Rwanda are provided with equal opportunities to high quality education.

Accountability, reporting and action

The creation of the delivery unit builds on the delivery and accountability structures and processes that have already been put in place by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education has achieved significant strides in institutionalizing the delivery structures to ensure Foundational Learning is addressed in a comprehensive and targeted way.

The structures that have been set up include: The National Steering Committee for Foundational Learning; a bi-annual symposium between Government of Rwandan stakeholders and the main development partners; as well as regional events bringing together different counterparts from Education Ministries to share experiences and jointly problem solve.

These forums and initiatives serve as accountability mechanisms to ensure delivery of agreed upon tasks and targets on reducing learning poverty, as well as a platform to share and discuss progress reports and plans.

The above-mentioned delivery unit will engage all stakeholders through these fora, to report on progress across all five priority areas of the Foundational Learning Strategy, based on the indicators and targets set out in the Implementation Plan, as well as identifying where additional effort is required to achieve the intended results.

6 Conclusion

Rwanda's FLS is integral to the country's broader plan for human capital development, one that spans the entire learning cycle—from early childhood to primary and secondary education, to tertiary education and skills development. As such, it benefits from the guidance, support, and commitment of the whole government. Coming close on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FLS is a key part of Rwanda's plan for recovery and rebuilding from the setbacks of this global debacle. Equally, the FLS benefits from the substantive input of the country's development partners who fund and implement a range of initiatives aligned to this strategy.

Through the strategic investments and planning included in the FLS, the Government of Rwanda lays the groundwork for rapid improvements in literacy and numeracy. The proposed interventions build on the successes of the past, account for lessons learned, and align key stakeholders around priority areas that can bring about the greatest impact. It is with this level of effort and intention that the FLS presents a roadmap for improved learning for all Rwandan children.

Annexes

Annex 1: Implementation plan

Annex 2: Costing and Financing

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^{xxxiv} This is a simplified version of how the Foundational Learning formal delivery chain starting from Primary 1 looks like. Figures for teachers refer to all teachers in Primary Level. The role of ECDs and primary school readiness is not catered for in this simplified graph.

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