Practice Guide

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Room to Read

Adapting a structured pedagogy model for Foundational Literacy remediation in Tanzanian non-formal contexts

Impact at Scale Labs: Foundational Literacy & Numeracy

2026

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Through the Impact at Scale Labs - Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), Global Schools Forum supports seven grantee organisations across India and Sub-Saharan Africa for testing, iterating, and generating evidence towards scaling their FLN programmes in low-middle income contexts. Read more about the Labs, our grantees and their innovations here

Overview

This Practice Brief is co-developed by Room to Read and Global Schools Forum, as part of the Impact at Scale Labs for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy. The practices, insights and recommendations shared here are grounded in the implementation realities and reflect the lived experiences of organisations working to improve foundational learning outcomes.

These approaches were designed and delivered in specific contexts. Applying them elsewhere will mean adapting to different programme, systemic and delivery realities. We share them as a guiding point for that adaptation. We encourage you to explore these practices and consider how they might inform your own work.

Let's continue the conversation:
If you are exploring how to adapt any of these practices, whether within your organisation, your fund or a wider education system, we would love to learn more about your programmes, the challenges you are navigating and the opportunities for impact you see ahead.

To discuss adaptation or implementation, or to connect directly with the organisations that implemented and refined these practices, please reach out to

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Introduction

Tanzania has made significant progress in expanding access to primary education, achieving near-universal enrolment. Yet, access has not consistently translated into learning gains: many children complete early grades without acquiring foundational literacy skills, limiting their ability to engage with the curriculum and progress academically.

Tanzania's 2023 National 3Rs Assessment found that

25.6% of Standard Two pupils could not demonstrate basic reading comprehension, while 13.1% could not read a single word of a 50-word passage.

These challenges are particularly acute in non-formal education settings, such as Complementary Basic Education (COBET) centres and children's homes, which serve learners who are over-age, have missed schooling, or lack consistent academic support. Learners in these environments often enter with substantial literacy gaps, experience irregular attendance and have limited access to structured instruction and age-appropriate learning materials. Consequently, students who fall behind rarely catch up.

About the programme

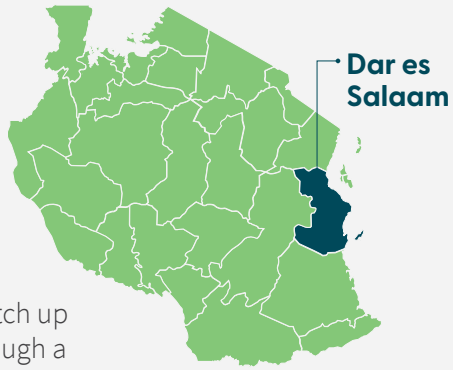
Year of Implementation
2025-26

Duration
6 months

Implemented by
Room to Read-Tanzania

Goal

To support out-of-school children in non-formal settings to catch up and thrive by meeting them at their current learning level, through a structured, small-group literacy remediation programme



Reach

2 Districts (Temeke and Ubungo)

5 Centres (2 Children homes and 3 COBET Centres)

337 Students reached

10 Teachers supported

6 Officials supported

To address these gaps, Room to Read Tanzania piloted a structured remedial literacy programme in Municipal Councils of Dar es Salaam, spanning five centres, including two children's homes and three COBET centres. **This programme adapts Room to Read's evidence-based structured pedagogy, grounded in the Science of Reading, systematic skill progression, and the Simple View of Reading, to function effectively within constrained, non-formal environments.** The approach emphasises explicit instruction in phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing, combined with structured coaching, assessment-driven differentiation, Teaching at the Right Level methodology, and accessible learning materials. All learner books and storybooks are approved and certified by the Tanzania Institute of Education, ensuring alignment with national curriculum standards.

About the Practice Guide

This practice guide focuses on how Room to Read's programme adaptation was designed, delivered and iteratively refined through evidence-informed strategies, stakeholder engagement and contextual fitment to make the model more scalable and replicable in non-formal learning environments.

By documenting these processes, the guide provides actionable insights for practitioners, funders and policymakers interested in strengthening foundational literacy where traditional school systems are limited or absent.

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Context and Problem statement

Room to Read has worked in public schools in Tanzania since 2012 and has since established a strong presence in the country as a trusted partner to The Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), The Ministry of Education, The Science and Technology (MoEST), The Prime Minister's Office Regional Administration and The Local Government (PMO-RALG).

Importantly, Room to Read Tanzania was engaged by the National Curriculum Review to support efforts to improve Grade 1 and 2 Teaching and Learning Materials,

which have now been rolled out nationwide, and co-developed Tanzania's guidelines for Writing and Evaluating Storybooks with TIE.

To date, Room to Read has worked in Morogoro, Dar es Salaam, Pwani, Tanga and Zanzibar.
In Tanzania, foundational literacy gaps persist across both formal and non-formal settings. These constraints are amplified in COBET centres and children's homes, where instructional time is less

structured and system support is limited. COBET centres and children's homes provide an established and scalable access point for reaching out-of-school learners in Tanzania. With approximately 2,000 centres serving primary and lower-secondary age learners, the COBET programme offers structured alternative pathways back into education for a portion of the 3.2 million children aged 7-17 who are currently out of school nationally (UNICEF). Across contexts, several constraints consistently limit learning:

- Limited teacher capacity in foundational literacy instruction and remediation
- Insufficient access to level-appropriate teaching and learning materials
- Weak or inconsistent use of assessment to inform instruction
- Irregular learner attendance, particularly in non-formal settings

Room to Read's structured literacy model has demonstrated strong results in formal government systems globally, including significant gains in oral reading fluency and comprehension. However, its effectiveness in non-formal environments had not yet been tested. This led to a central **problem statement: How can an impactful structured pedagogy model, designed for formal school systems, be adapted to deliver effective and cost-efficient remediation in non-formal learning environments?**

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Room to Read's Literacy Model

Before adapting the model to non-formal contexts, it is important to understand the core components of Room to Read's literacy approach as implemented in formal systems.
The model is grounded in the Science of Reading and evidence on structured pedagogy. It is designed to strengthen foundational literacy through explicit, implicit, responsive, and systematic instruction as well as continuous improvement of teaching practice.

Globally, Grade 2 children in Room to Read supported schools read on average more than twice as many correct words per minute

and correctly answered twice as many comprehension questions compared to their peers in comparison schools.

Pillars of the programme include

Curriculum and Content Quality: Contextualised literacy materials including: structured **Teaching and Learning Materials** built on a productive sequence of letters tied to decodable text and writing development; **supplementary teaching and learning materials** that support effective instruction and children's literature in print and multimedia forms that is developmentally appropriate, diverse and inclusive to develop **habit of reading.**

Educator Training and Coaching: On effective literacy **instruction, library management** and habit of reading development, and inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching practices. **Families and community members** are also supported on how to reinforce learning at home and in non-formal environments.

Delivery Structures: Safe, accessible learning spaces and the time and technology children need to develop literacy skills, including: dedicated time for literacy instruction, **child-friendly, accessible libraries** stocked with diverse children's books; appropriate technologies that increase quality or scale of programming; and strengthened supply and demand for children's literature and learning materials.

Research and Insights: Including measurement tools, data and evidence to drive programmatic improvement and innovation, including classroom-level assessments, **Early Grade Learning Skills Assessments, and innovative measures of reading fluency, comprehension, habit of reading and dignity** that support educators, policymakers and communities in delivering targeted literacy support.

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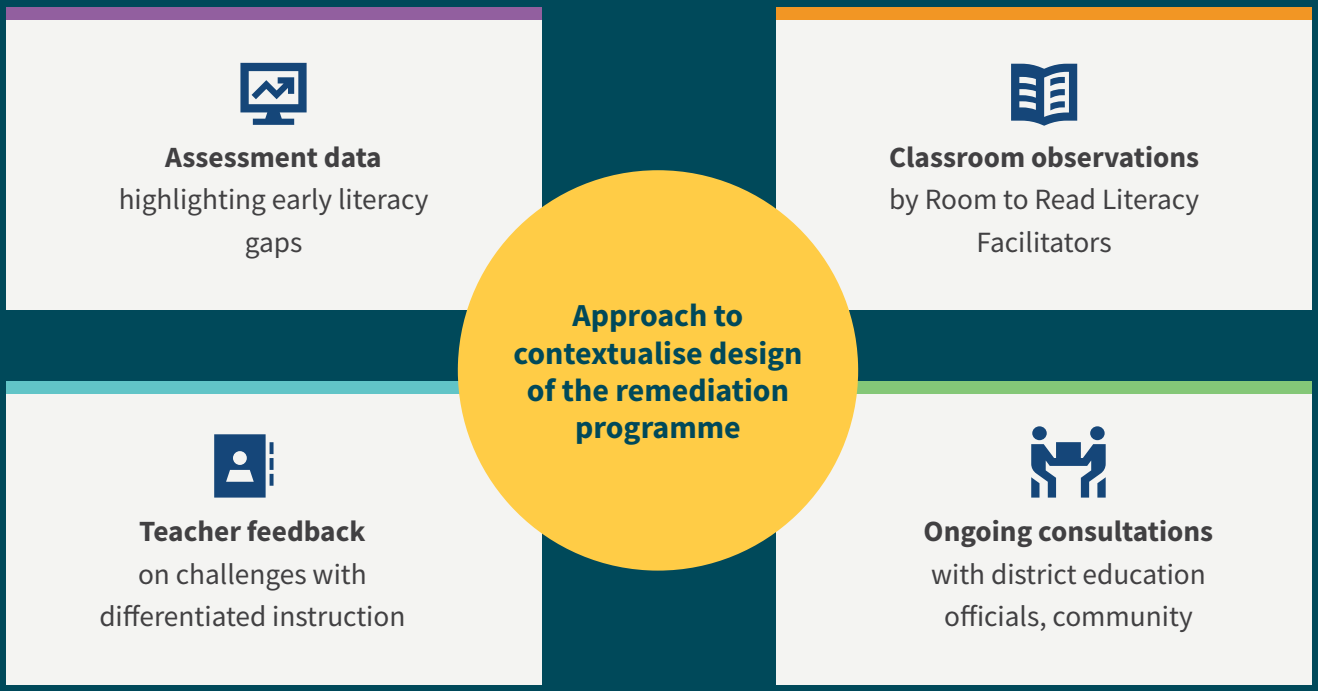
Adaptation to Non-Formal Contexts

4.1 Design and Delivery considerations

The intervention was **piloted in five non-formal centres** to test whether the structured literacy approach could be adapted to such learning environments, considering the following inputs:



This led to a central design decision: instruction would need to be differentiated, structured, and feasible within highly variable and resource-constrained environments.

Insights from the field

- The COBET centres and children's home were selected through dialogues with district and community stakeholders, with a specific focus on learners progressing through grades without mastering foundational reading skills.
- A mapping exercise was conducted through interviews and site visits in seven centres. Stakeholder consultations showed strong demand for remedial literacy support, but also highlighted differences in space, teacher availability, and operational readiness, which informed selection of the five pilot sites.
- Baseline and formative assessments revealed significant variation in literacy levels across centres. 53% of COBET learners and 39% of children's home learners could not name a single letter, while only 11% and 6% respectively met the oral reading fluency benchmark.
- Teachers also reported difficulty managing wide differences in ability within the same classroom.

4.2 Core Instructional Model Design

The resulting remediation model applies **a Teaching at the Right level (TaRL)-style, structured small-group instructional approach** to accelerate foundational literacy among learners with varied reading abilities.

Learning

Learners are grouped into **three proficiency levels** based on baseline assessments: those with reading difficulties, emerging readers, and nearly fluent readers. This allows instruction to be aligned to actual learning levels rather than age or grade. Teachers rotate across groups, enabling targeted support for struggling learners while maintaining progression for more advanced learners.

Teaching

Teaching is delivered through short, focused sessions targeting core literacy components, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and basic writing. **A six-month scope and sequence** ensures systematic coverage of Kiswahili graphemes. Instruction is delivered through decodable texts, guided reading, and interactive metalinguistic activities that reinforce skill development and application.

Coaching

Coaching emerged as central to the programme's success. The model **combined regular monthly visits, formative feedback, and learner data** to improve instruction, with peer learning, mentorship, and self-learning modules reinforcing reflective practice.

- Structured teacher guides, learner materials and ongoing coaching support consistent delivery were core components of the remedial programme.
- All programme materials, such as learner books and storybooks are aligned with Tanzania's national curriculum standards and certified by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE).
- This model creates a more responsive and inclusive learning environment, allowing instruction to adapt to learner needs while maintaining a clear instructional progression.

Challenges and Adaptations

The model was adapted to address specific constraints present in non-formal environments. Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) was followed to enable continuous adaptation based on local challenges, improving relevance, effectiveness and stakeholder ownership.[1]

Contextual Reality	Design Response
Limited infrastructure	• **Flexible delivery model** that operates in existing community spaces rather than formal classrooms. • **Portable teaching materials** for consistent, high-quality instruction in low-resource environments without fixed infrastructure.
Inadequate teaching and learning materials	• **1:1 learner books** provided alongside structured teacher guides to ensure children's access to learning materials. • **Age-appropriate, levelled, and decodable texts, supplemented by storybooks,** to increase opportunities for guided and independent reading and improve engagement. • **Integrated interactive, metalinguistic learning methods** and level-appropriate storybooks to strengthen phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and comprehension.
Teacher capacity gaps	• **Structured training for teachers** 5-day training and 3-day refresher training in foundational literacy and remediation strategies, reinforced through ongoing coaching and a strong community of learning that empowers teachers, sustains quality and drives lasting impact. • Literacy Facilitators (Room to Read staff) provided **continuous, in-class support to help teachers** apply techniques effectively, towards sustained professional development.
Irregular learner attendance	• **Flexible, modular lesson plans** designed to accommodate inconsistent attendance and allow learners to re-enter without significant learning loss. • **Community engagement** through volunteer teachers and local structures to promote participation and accountability.

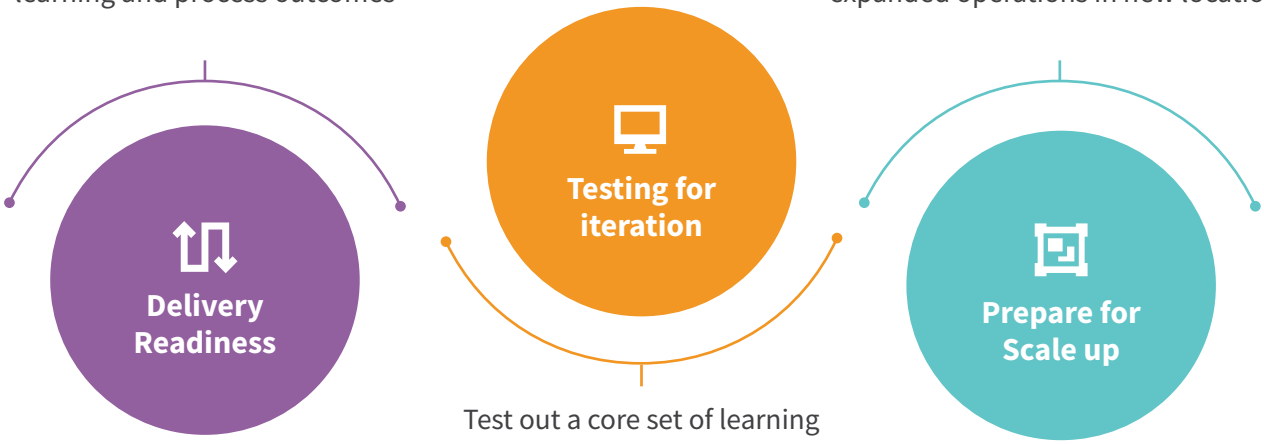
[1] The PDIA redundant uses a problem-driven approach to identify root causes and test small, practical solutions through continuous learning and adaptation. It emphasises iterative implementation, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based adjustments to improve outcomes over time.

4.3 Implementation Approach: Phased Delivery

The intervention was implemented in three phases to allow for design, testing, and refinement.

Establish delivery protocols and robust MEL framework for tracking learning and process outcomes

Review available evidence, system capacity and willingness to plan for expanded operations in new locations



Test out a core set of learning questions or assumptions in the field to refine implementation

Phase 1: Delivery Readiness

This initial phase focused on delivery readiness, encompassing material development and certification, educator training, MEL framework design, and baseline assessment. Co-designed with the Global Schools Forum's Impact at Scale Labs, through structured workshops and technical residencies, the MEL framework adapted the Theory of Change, research design, indicators, and measurement tools from the formal school

model to reflect the realities of non-formal contexts, balancing methodological rigor with operational feasibility. Baseline EGLS assessments established learner proficiency levels, revealing that many children were performing well below expected benchmarks, and informing the differentiated, small-group instructional model used throughout implementation.

Phase 2: Testing for iteration

Approach to testing for design and delivery refinements

Before instruction began, all learners completed the EGLS assessment to establish baseline proficiency. Results showed that many children were performing well below expected levels, some were unable to identify basic sounds, while others could decode text slowly but lacked fluency and comprehension.

Instead of grouping learners by age or grade, children were organised according to reading proficiency. Those performing below the fluency benchmark (fewer than 40 correct words per minute) were placed in small, level-based groups of six to ten learners.

Learners participated in structured literacy sessions five days per week, for approximately one hour daily. In centres without libraries, skill instruction and reading practice were integrated into a single session, and reading corners were established to increase access to books. Progress was monitored using the same EGLS tool at baseline and endline, supplemented by periodic tracking checkpoints. Ongoing classroom observations and facilitator interviews assessed instructional fidelity and educator practices, ensuring that learner progress and teaching quality informed continuous programme refinement.

Phase 2 was centred around three core learning questions:

1. Would the remedial programme improve literacy outcomes for students in children's homes over the pilot period?
2. How would the implementation fidelity of the remedial programme influence student outcomes?
3. How would teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and practices (KPP) regarding structured pedagogy and Individualised support influence the implementation and effectiveness of the remedial programme for sustainability?

These learning questions shaped how the programme was implemented and how evidence was collected. At the heart of the model was one central belief: that structured pedagogy delivered through small groups organised by reading level could strengthen oral reading fluency and comprehension.

But the team also understood something equally important. Even the strongest instructional model can fail if it is not delivered well. Structured lessons require discipline. Small groups require intentional pacing. Assessment data must be interpreted correctly.

Insights from the field

- What was most surprising during implementation was the degree of variation in facilitator preparedness and centre readiness.
- While the Training of the Trainers (TOTs) was completed successfully, facilitators required differing levels of practical support to confidently deliver structured lessons, particularly metalinguistic games and differentiated learner support.
- In some centres, rising learner numbers also stretched available space, materials, and teacher attention.
- In response, Room to Read intensified targeted coaching, Communities of Practice, and ongoing Literacy Facilitator follow-up to strengthen implementation fidelity and maintain programme quality.

Phase 3: Prepare for Scale up

Following testing and iteration, the programme now moves toward scale preparation. The scale pathways focus on:

- **Evidence-informed replication:** Leveraging structured content, coaching systems, monitoring tools, and the evidence product from children's homes to guide implementation in new geographies; Dodoma and Zanzibar regions (2027 –2028), targeting approximately 10 – 15 new COBET per region per year. The current content will be used as it is for initial replication. Endline survey results in 2026 will inform any necessary refinements to ensure the content remains evidence informed and contextually relevant.
- **Partnership expansion:** Aligning with COBET and other complementary education systems across both formal and non-formal education systems to ensure wider adoption, systemic integration, and sustainable impact. Partnership will include district education offices, community learning centres, and local NGOs supporting children, fostering partnership collaboration for scale up.
- **Capacity strengthening:** Building teacher and facilitator skills to sustain quality delivery across new sites.
- **Operational optimization:** Provides technical assistance and monitoring tools within the COBET structure under government oversight, while Local Government Authorities (LGAs) manage resources, deploy educators, and integrate remedial activities into district education plans, ensuring quality instruction at scale.

As the model scales, the core remedial literacy approach will stay the same: competency-based learner grouping, structured literacy lessons, ongoing assessment, and sustained coaching will remain central to maintaining learning gains and implementation fidelity. What will change is that monitoring will shift to a real-time dashboard, and implementation will increasingly be embedded within government and partner systems to improve long-term sustainability across a larger number of centres.

Tools and resources required for an effective remediation package:

- Teachers' Guide and learner books to provide structured, sequenced literacy instruction
- Teacher Training package and facilitation kit
- Community engagement approach informed by PDIA, enabling problem-driven collaboration
- Child friendly readers
- Monitoring and coaching manual and tools to support implementation fidelity and continuous improvement
- Learner's assessments package including Students tracking and end of chapter rapid tests which are embedded in Teacher's guide

Illustrative snapshot of Learner Stimuli from Student tracking tool
Zoezi la 1: Kusoma maneno ya Kubuni

Soma maneno haya kwa usahihi.
Mfano: **pase**

kuketha	**eke**	**feseo**	**ozega**
sekulefu	**dome**	**pumea**	**uledake**
taba	**amele**	**kebu**	**heye**
vabe	**veso**	**tutamwe**	**retei**
lemu	**inde**	**apelo**	**weokama**

Assessment: randomly select 5 learners and administer a short assessment of letters, syllables, words or sentences

Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
Correct/ Attempted	Correct/ Attempted	Correct/ Attempted	Correct/ Attempted	Correct/ Attempted

How teachers' priority areas progress over the course of the programme - Excerpts from the classroom observation form

Priority Area 1:

Using the instructional routine

Indicator	Yes	No	Partially	Comments
1a. The teacher is using the teacher's guide. She holds it or refers to it during the lesson.				
1b. The teacher uses the I do, We do, You do method and Turn and talk method				
1c. Children had an opportunity to read independently during the lesson.				

Priority Area 2:

Mastering basic skills

Indicator	Yes	No	Partially	Comments
2a. The teacher implements all of the lesson activities by teaching the lesson start to finish, within the time allocated.				
2b. The teacher pronounces the sounds correctly				

Priority Area 3:

Mastering advanced skills

Indicator	Yes	No	Partially	Comments
3a. The teacher asks probing questions to help learners answer comprehension questions, including Why and How questions.				
3b. The teacher explicitly teaches vocabulary words and gives learners a chance to use the words independently in a sentence.				

05

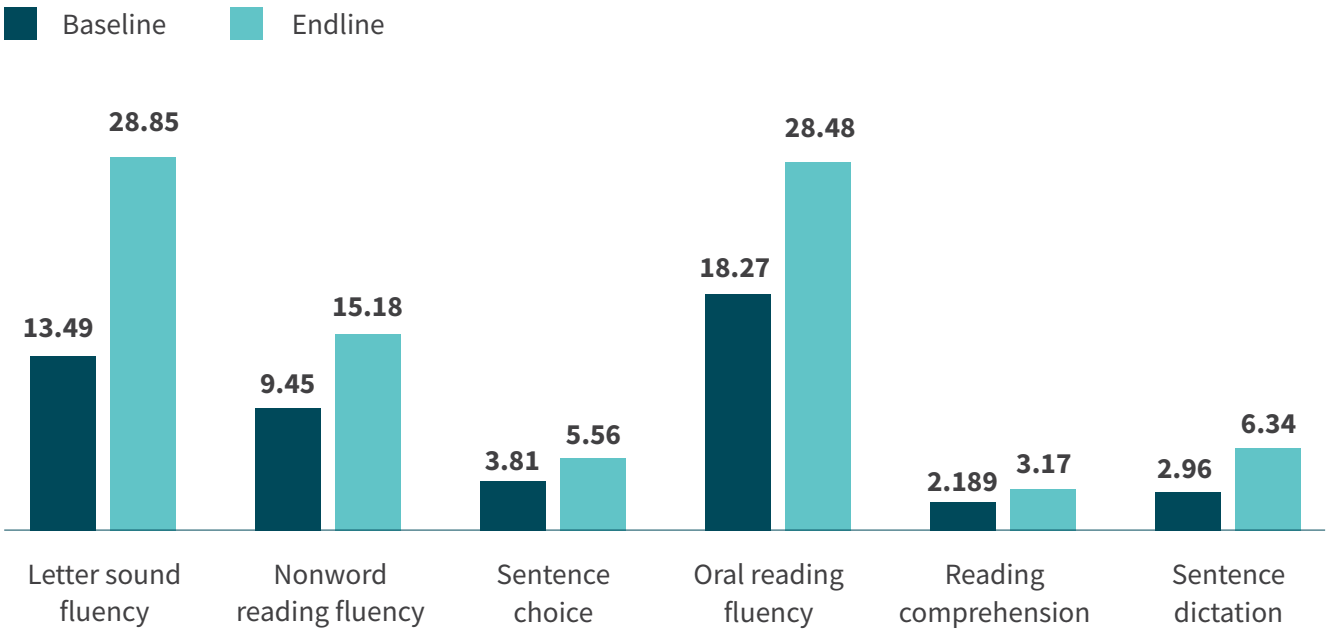
Impact and Results so far

The remediation programme improved literacy for learners who are out of formal schooling systems,

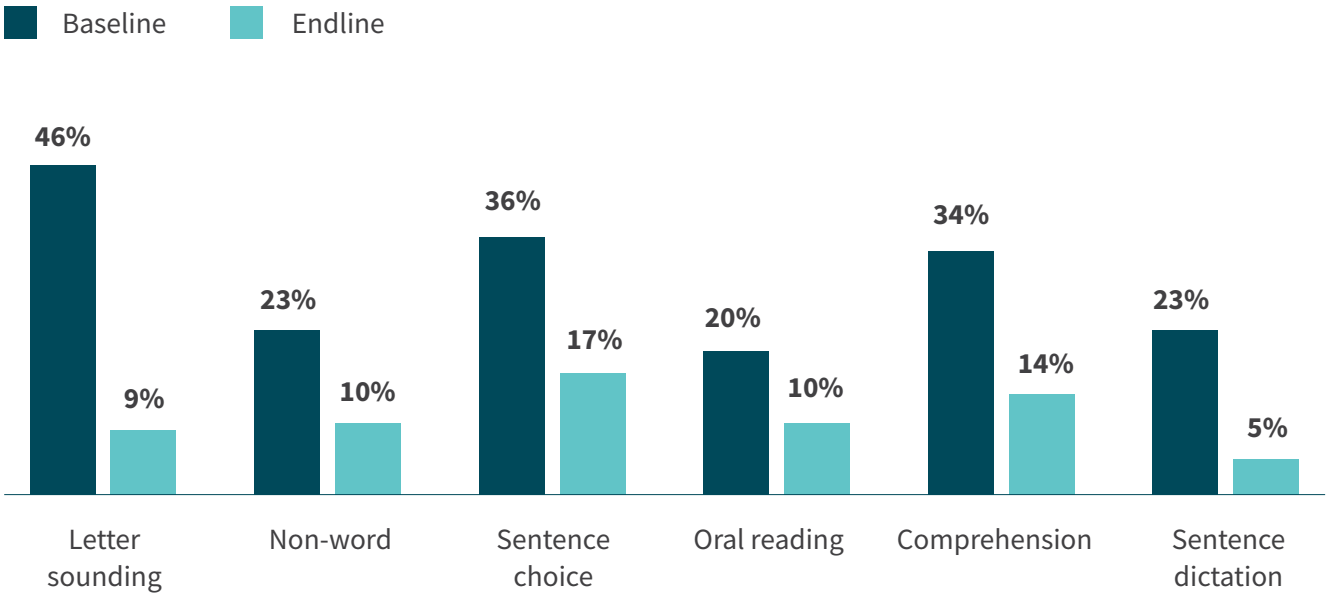
with notable gains in letter recognition, decoding, fluency, comprehension, and writing. Non-readers declined sharply, and more students reached reading benchmarks.

- The pilot demonstrated statistically significant improvements across all literacy subtasks ($p < 0.001$).
- Mean Oral Reading Fluency **increased from 18.27 to 28.48 correct words per minute** (+10.21 CWPM), while the proportion of non-readers declined substantially, with letter-sounding zero-scores reducing from 46% to 9% (−37 percentage points).
- The percentage of students meeting the 45+ CWPM fluency benchmark increased from 8% to 21%.
- Implementation fidelity was strong, with 100% adherence to the twice-monthly **coaching model** from August to November, and 70% of teachers reaching advanced pedagogical mastery

Mean EGLS Performance in Non-Formal Education Centres: Baseline-Endline (2025)



% Zero Scores in Non-Formal Education Centres: Baseline -Endline Literacy Results (2025)



Strengthened by increased access to books and adult support, these improvements were driven by consistent coaching, mentoring, and adoption of high-impact routines like read-alouds and dictation, demonstrating that practical, focused support enhances both teaching quality and student literacy outcomes.

Insights from the field

Teachers were seen shifting to small-group, level-based instruction, consistently applying routines like read-alouds, guided reading, and Think-Pair-Share, using assessment data to guide teaching, and providing real-time feedback, which enhanced engagement, instructional quality, and literacy gains.

Voices from the Field

Stakeholder and community engagement strengthened the implementation of the remedial programme at Majimatitu COBET Remedial Center in Municipal Councils. The center was equipped with a container library comprising five mini shelves organised according to Room to Read's color-coded reading levels, along with specially designed book checkout bags. This initiative benefited more than 170 learners, improving reading and writing skills, fostering a reading culture, and promoting programme ownership and sustainability.

Martha improved her reading fluency, comprehension and handwriting and is showing more confidence than before,"- shared Esther, Martha's teacher at Gonzaga Primary School where Martha attends regular classes. She is also a remedial learners at New House of Blue

My niece Loveness has made huge progress at Huruma Remediation Centre with targeted support from her teacher, unlike at the regular school," - said Maarifa, Loveness's uncle.

Using Room to Read's remediation techniques, Think-Pair-Share skills in decodable stories has made teaching more effective, engaging learners, enhancing literacy skills and creating a classroom of active participation bridging foundational gaps even to Grade 4 learners who are in the formal setting," - noted Elizabeth, a teacher at Majimatitu COBET centre.

06

Key Learnings and Recommendations

Effective foundational literacy improvement in constrained environments depends not only on strong programme design, but on the quality and adaptability of implementation.

The most consistent gains were observed where structured pedagogy was paired with targeted support, ongoing coaching, and context-responsive adjustments that allowed the model to flex to local realities while maintaining core instructional integrity.

Learnings

01 **Grouping learners by reading proficiency rather than age or grade** enabled targeted instruction for those furthest behind particularly non-readers and early decoders. This approach contributed to a 37% point reduction in non-readers (46% to 9%) and a

gain in oral reading fluency, suggesting that aligning instruction to actual learning levels was critical for rapid skill acquisition.

02 PDIA strengthened implementation through **continuous adaptation, enabling teams to respond quickly to context-specific challenges** like irregular attendance and limited materials, resulting in more resilient, locally owned approaches. It also enhanced engagement and support in non-formal centres. At Huruma parental involvement improved, boosting student attendance and community participation despite post-election tensions. At Majimatitu, PDIA guided teacher capacity building, training additional staff to support peers and to maintain instructional quality, ensuring consistent delivery and improved learning outcomes.

03 Use of **simple assessment data enabled responsive teaching.** Teachers regrouped learners and adjusted instruction based on ongoing results, supporting progression across levels, reflected in the increase in learners reaching fluency benchmarks (45+ CWPM) from 8% to 21%. Access to decodable texts and interactive strategies further improved engagement, practice, and learner confidence.

04 Structured pedagogy improved teaching consistency and quality. **Sequenced teacher guides and routines** (phonics, dictation, guided reading) reduced variability in instruction, contributing to 70% of teachers reaching advanced pedagogical mastery. These gains were **reinforced by strong coaching implementation,** with 100% adherence to the coaching model supporting real-time feedback and practice improvement.

05 Enriched literacy environments reinforced learning gains, as **increased access to books and structured reading opportunities** at the children's home and in COBET centres extended practice beyond the classroom, strengthened engagement, and supported more durable retention of foundational literacy skills

06 **Community engagement was uneven across contexts.** While some parents actively supported take-home reading, others did not engage. Adaptations included simplifying materials, tailoring communication, and leveraging trusted local leaders. The key insight is that engagement strategies must be context-specific rather than standardised.

07 **Scheduling constraints disrupted consistent delivery.** Exams, competing teacher responsibilities, and rigid timetables occasionally reduced instructional time. Programmes adapted by introducing shorter sessions, regrouping learners, and working with school leadership to adjust schedules. An explicit timetabling agreement with centre leadership, negotiated before the programme starts, would be key .

Key considerations for Practitioners attempting similar programmes

01 Maintain high-intensity Coaching as a non-negotiable component

In non-formal settings where teachers have no formal qualification pathway, coaching is the professional development mechanism. Budget for it, structure it, and ensure it is happening regularly to sustain instructional quality.

02 Prioritise mastery of high-impact Instructional Routines

Choose 3-4 high-impact instructional routines (like daily reading, dictation, guided fluency, and comprehension checks) that teachers can grasp quickly and apply consistently. Depth of mastery in a few routines is likely to outperform shallow familiarity, especially when training time is limited and turnover is high.

03 Cost leverage planning is key

The estimated cost per child is $ 10. Ongoing engagement with LGAs will leverage in kind support, embed the programme within COBET structure under government oversight, deploy educators, and integrate remedial activities into district education plans.

04 Strengthen continuity during disruptions, enable home literacy engagement

Design as per non-formal contexts needs: identify/recruit community volunteers, provide self-study materials or take-home reading packs as continuity mechanisms during disruptions (school holidays or closures). Encourage structured read-alouds or storytelling to reinforce classroom learning.

05 Monitor progress with simple, actionable data

Use simple, actionable tools to conduct classroom observations and periodic learner assessments to gauge progress and identify struggling students, practices that are not working early on. Ensure teachers are clear on their progression pathways across the competency levels (F/B/A) to see growth in themselves alongside the learners.

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