



Learning beyond Academics: The Transformative Social Impact of Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) on Students and Communities

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ABSTRACT

Remedial learning interventions implemented through Inspire, Educate and Empower Rwanda (IEE Rwanda), in partnership with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) and UNICEF, have demonstrated that FLAs can contribute not only to academic improvement but also to broader social transformation. This article examines the transformative social impact of FLAs on students, schools, families, and communities, with particular attention to remedial teaching and learning. The examined the evolution of foundational learning support and revealed that the integration of FLAs has contributed a lot to improved learning outcomes, reduced dropout risks, increased learner confidence, strengthened community engagement, and encouraged youth participation in the teaching profession at large. The paper further explored the role of remedial learning programs on lower primary kids. Within these two years support since 2024 learners have never stopped evolving in literacy and numeracy gaps especially in Mathematics and English. Evidence from project implementation suggests that FLAs contributed to improved classroom participation, individualized learner support, emotional wellbeing, and learner retention. The programme has created pathways for youth empowerment, professional growth through provision of up-to-date methodologies and technological research guides through Joint CPDs and Refresher Trainings. This paper adapted qualitative and analytical review approach, from 500 respondents in 155 schools, project reports, policy documents, and educational literature. Findings indicate that FLAs linked schools and communities by reinforcing and strengthening lower primary education within five districts operation. The paper concludes that institutionalizing FLAs or youth volunteers can contribute to national educational transformation and social development, as there is no greater legacy we can offer our children today than education. Through recommendations the study evoked a need for policy support, increased investment in remedial education, structured training frameworks, community ownership, and integration of the youth-high school leavers into Rwanda's education system.

Keywords: Foundational Learning Assistants, Remedial Education, Community Transformation

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Globally, education systems are increasingly moving beyond a narrow focus on academic attainment to emphasize the holistic development of learners, including their social, emotional, psychological, and moral growth, alongside preparation for active citizenship. Despite expanded access to schooling, many learners-particularly in lower primary education-continue to face persistent challenges in acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skills. In Rwanda, significant education reforms have been advanced through the Competency-Based Curriculum introduced in 2016. (Nsengimana, V. (2021). This curriculum was complemented by targeted interventions such as remedial learning programs initiated by MINEDUC in 2014. These interventions, implemented through various models including holiday, weekend, and in-school support, reflect an adaptive approach aimed at strengthening foundational competencies among struggling and vulnerable learners. More recently, since 2024, IEE Rwanda has introduced innovative initiatives designed to improve early learning outcomes while also encouraging youth engagement in the teaching profession, including the deployment of Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs). FLAs serve as structured educational



support personnel who provide individualized academic assistance in literacy and numeracy, while also promoting learner participation, mentorship, and psychosocial wellbeing. Beyond classroom support, their engagement often extends to strengthening school-community relations and encouraging parental involvement. This role suggests that FLAs not only enhance learners' academic performance but may also contribute to broader social change within communities by reinforcing inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the significant progress made in improving access to quality education in Rwanda, many learners continue to face difficulties in acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skills, especially in reading and mathematical operations. These learning challenges are associated with overcrowded classrooms, limited individualized support, parental involvement and inadequate remedial interventions, which negatively affect learners' academic progress and social development. Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) were introduced to address these gaps by improving learner engagement, strengthening basic competencies, and reducing learning inequalities among children. However, there is still limited evidence on how FLAs contribute to broader social transformation, community development, and youth empowerment beyond academic achievement, which creates the need for this study.

General Objective

The general objective of this paper is tied on examining the transformative social impact of Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) on students, schools, and communities in Rwanda.

Specific Objectives

We have identified the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the contribution of FLAs to learners' literacy, numeracy, and holistic development.
2. To examine the role of FLAs in promoting youth interest in the teaching profession and community transformation.
3. To identify challenges and opportunities associated with remedial learning and foundational learning interventions in Rwanda.

Research Hypotheses

HP1: Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) significantly improve learners' literacy, numeracy, and holistic development.

HP2: Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) significantly enhance youth interest in the teaching profession and contribute to community transformation.

HP3: There is a significant relationship between the implementation of remedial learning and foundational learning interventions and the challenges and opportunities experienced in Rwanda.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON REMEDIAL LEARNING

Introduction

Education has been recognized as a fundamental driver of individual development and societal progress. According to Theodore Schultz (1961), education is an investment in human capital that enhances productivity and improves individuals' capacity to contribute to economic development. Similarly, Gary Becker (1964) argues that education increases people's knowledge, skills, and competencies, thereby generating both individual and societal benefits. However, contemporary scholars contend that access to education alone is insufficient to guarantee meaningful social and economic transformation. The World Bank (2018) argues that



schooling without learning limits the development of human capital and reduces the potential benefits of education. Likewise, Amartya Sen (1999) maintains that education should expand individuals' capabilities and freedoms, enabling them to improve their lives and contribute to societal development rather than merely accumulating academic credentials. Turning to the words of Paulo Freire (1970), education should empower learners to become active agents of change capable of transforming their social realities. This perspective suggests that the value of education lies not only in acquiring knowledge but also in applying that knowledge to address social, economic, and community challenges. Consequently, scholars increasingly emphasize the importance of foundational learning, learning support mechanisms, and remedial interventions in ensuring that learners acquire meaningful competencies. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2022), foundational learning skills such as literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies form the basis for lifelong learning and participation in society. Therefore, this review examines the concepts of foundational learning, remedial education, and community transformation, highlighting how these elements contribute not only to educational achievement but also to the practical application of knowledge for an individual and community at large.

Quality education and the competence-based curriculum in Rwanda

Access to quality education refers to the ability of all learners to obtain inclusive, equitable, and effective learning opportunities supported by qualified teachers, safe learning environments, and relevant competencies that prepare individuals for life and work. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is a global priority aimed at fostering sustainable development and reducing social inequalities. In Rwanda, a significant progress has been made toward improving access to quality education. According to de Dieu H. J., Theogene H., Philothere N., and Ke Z. (2022), the country has recorded increased school enrolment rates, expanded basic education programs, and implemented government-led initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all children. These achievements reflect Rwanda's commitment not only to increasing access to education but also to enhancing the quality of learning outcomes.

To strengthen quality education, Rwanda introduced the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC), which shifts the focus from content acquisition to the development of competencies that learners can apply in real-life situations. According to the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB, 2015), the CBC is designed to equip learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for lifelong learning, employability, and active participation in society. The curriculum emphasizes learner-centered approaches that encourage critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. A central feature of the CBC is its emphasis on foundational learning, particularly in the early grades (Primary 1–3). Foundational literacy competencies include *listening, speaking, phonological awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading comprehension, handwriting, spelling, and written expression*. Similarly, foundational numeracy competencies include *number recognition, counting, number patterns, arithmetic operations, measurement, geometry, and solving real-life mathematical problems*. These competencies are considered essential building blocks for future academic success and lifelong learning.

According to UNESCO (2022), the emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy demonstrates the strong relationship between quality education and the Competence-Based Curriculum in Rwanda. The World Bank (2018) emphasizes that quality education is not measured solely by school attendance or completion rates but also by the extent to which learners acquire and apply foundational competencies. Therefore, according to the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB, 2015), the CBC serves as a key mechanism for improving educational quality by ensuring that learners develop practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving competencies that enable them to contribute effectively to their communities and national development. CBC in Rwanda evolves from theory to practice where we have curricular activities (**theory: eg. English grammar**), co-curricular activities (**practice:eg. Debate club**) and extra curricular activities (**life skills: eg.Team work**)



Foundational Learning and the Rationale for Focusing on Mathematics, English, and Kinyarwanda in Rwanda

Foundational learning refers to the acquisition of basic literacy, and numeracy skills that enable children to access, understand, and succeed in all other areas of learning. International evidence shows that foundational reading and numeracy skills acquired during the early years of schooling form the basis for future learning, educational attainment, and lifelong opportunities (UNICEF, 2022). Learners who fail to master these fundamental skills are more likely to struggle academically in later grades, experience low confidence, repeat grades, and eventually drop out of school (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2022).

Recognizing the central role of foundational skills, the Government of Rwanda prioritized three core subjects for remedial learning interventions:

- **Kinyarwanda**, as the primary language of communication in Rwanda (mother tongue) and literacy acquisition in the early grades;
- **English**, as the principal language of instruction in primary and secondary and tertiary education; and
- **Mathematics**, as the foundation for logical reasoning, problem-solving, science, technology, and financial literacy.

These subjects were selected because competency in literacy and numeracy directly influences learners' ability to access and succeed in all other curriculum areas. Rwanda's Foundational Learning Strategy identifies literacy and numeracy as critical competencies that must be strengthened to improve learning outcomes and ensure equitable access to quality education (MINEDUC, 2024).

The Situation before Structured Remedial Learning Interventions

Before the introduction of structured remedial learning programs, support for struggling learners in many Rwandan schools was largely informal and inconsistent. Teachers attempted to assist low-performing learners within regular classrooms that were often overcrowded and characterized by significant teaching workloads. In most cases, schools lacked specialized remedial programs, dedicated support personnel, and adequate instructional resources to provide individualized learning support.

This challenge was not unique to Rwanda. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, UNESCO and UNICEF have reported a learning crisis where many children progress through grades without acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2022). These foundational learning deficits negatively affect learner confidence, increase repetition and dropout rates, and limit long-term educational achievement (UNESCO, 2024).

Although Rwanda introduced a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) to promote learner-centered pedagogy and practical competencies, implementation challenges persisted. Research has identified factors such as high teacher workload, insufficient instructional materials, inadequate teacher preparation, and limited opportunities for individualized support as barriers to effective curriculum implementation (Niyigena & Mutarutinya, 2024). Consequently, many learners continued to experience difficulties in attaining foundational literacy and numeracy competencies.

Evidence of Grade Repetition before Remedial Learning Reforms

Prior to the expansion of remedial learning initiatives, grade repetition remained a significant challenge within Rwanda's education system. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, the national repetition rate was approximately 18% in 2007, declining to 10% in 2018, but remaining particularly high in the lower primary grades where foundational learning is developed (UNESCO, 2025). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, learning disruptions contributed to a sharp increase in repetition rates, with UNESCO reporting that repetition reached approximately 30% in 2021. The report further notes that only 38% of



learners completed primary education within the expected six-year cycle, highlighting persistent challenges in learner progression and mastery of foundational competencies (UNESCO, 2025).

Similarly, Rwanda's Ministry of Education reported that repetition rates in basic education decreased from 18.4% in 2015 to 13.4% in 2018, yet repetition remained a major concern affecting educational efficiency and learner progression (MINEDUC, 2019). High repetition rates are often associated with learners' inability to master foundational literacy and numeracy skills during the early grades (UNESCO, 2025).

Government Response: Structured Remedial Learning framework

To address foundational learning gaps and improve learner progression, the Government of Rwanda introduced a comprehensive remedial learning framework built around three complementary approaches:

Weekend Remedial Learning

Additional learning sessions conducted during weekends for learners who require extra academic support to master foundational competencies and prepare for exams (done by leaving candidates: P6, S3 and S6 students).

Holiday Remedial Learning

Targeted learning programs organized during school holidays to help learners recover missed competencies and strengthen their readiness for progression to the next grade (here learners are grouped into three categories: extended students marked from 8-10 marks, consolidated learners marked from 5-7.9 and remedial / struggling learners marked from 0-4.9 out of 10).

In-School Remedial Learning (Integrated Remedial Lessons)

Structured remedial support integrated into regular teaching and learning processes, allowing teachers to provide targeted instruction to learners who have not yet achieved expected competency levels. Together, these approaches aim to provide timely intervention before learning gaps become severe enough to result in grade repetition or dropout. They also align with Rwanda's commitment to ensuring that all learners attain foundational literacy and numeracy skills as outlined in the Foundational Learning Strategy (MINEDUC, 2024).

IEE Rwanda's Contribution to In-School Remedial Learning

The remedial learning cycle is built around three major stages: Needs Assessment, Remedial Planning, and Remedial Practices (REB, 2025). These stages provide a systematic approach to identifying learners who require additional support, planning appropriate interventions, and implementing effective teaching strategies to improve learning outcomes.

The first stage, **Needs Assessment**, begins after the completion of every teaching unit. Teachers administer an **end-of-unit assessment** to determine the extent to which learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes. After marking and analysing learners' work, teachers identify those who have mastered the competencies as well as those who continue to experience learning difficulties. The assessment results provide evidence that guides instructional decisions and ensures that remedial support is based on learners' actual needs rather than assumptions (REB, 2025).

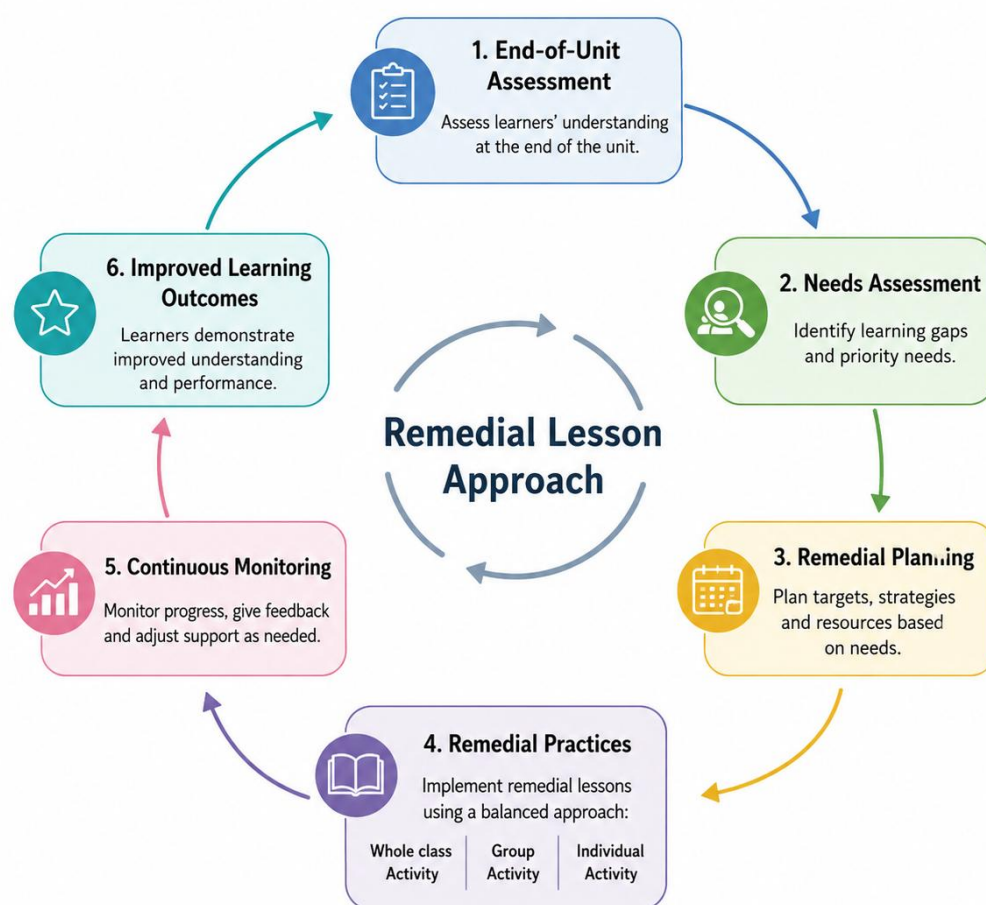
The second stage, Remedial Planning, involves designing targeted learning activities to address the identified learning gaps. Since the 2025–2026 academic year, teachers have been expected to organize remedial instruction through structured classroom routines that respond to learners' different levels of understanding. The planning process requires teachers to select appropriate learning objectives, teaching materials, instructional strategies, and assessment methods that help struggling learners achieve the expected competencies (REB, 2025).

The third stage, **Remedial Practices**, focuses on implementing the planned interventions through three classroom routines:

Whole-Class Activity: During whole-class activities, the teacher revisits concepts that were challenging for many learners. The teacher uses demonstrations, questioning techniques, guided discussions, modelling, and additional examples to reinforce key concepts. This approach ensures that all learners receive clarification before moving to more targeted support activities (Tomlinson, 2017:34). He stressed that a role of a teacher in a differentiated classroom is to “*understand students’ culture, background, interest and need*” so as to better assist them into different categories.

Group Activity: Learners are organized into small groups according to their learning needs or ability levels. The teacher facilitates collaborative learning through discussions, problem-solving exercises, peer learning, and cooperative exercises. Working in groups enables learners to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop confidence while addressing common understanding and solve challenges. Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Everlove, S. (2009).

Individual Activity: Learners who continue to experience specific learning difficulties receive individualized support from their teacher, co teacher or school leader when they are in a class. The teacher provides exercises, one-on-one guidance, corrective feedback, and continuous monitoring based on each learner's identified needs. Individual activities ensure that every learner progresses at an appropriate pace and receives personalized assistance until the required competencies are achieved through their own experience **Grau, V., & Whitebread, D. (2012)**. Teachers create an inclusive learning environment that supports all learners in achieving the expected competencies (REB, 2025)





IEE Rwanda and Foundational Learning Projects

Inspire, Educate and Empower (IEE) Rwanda has consistently focused on improving the quality of education through teacher professional development, mentorship, remedial learning, and youth engagement. Since 2024, the organization has implemented remedial teaching and learning initiatives aimed at strengthening literacy and numeracy skills among primary school learners. With support from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) through Learning and Inclusion for Transformation (LIFT) programme, the initiative expanded to include upper primary learners, while subsequent support from the Hemple Foundation with the concern partnership with UNICEF, enabled the program to refocus on lower primary learners. Since October 2025, IEE has been implementing the **Remedial Teaching and Learning for Children Improved Learning Outcomes and Holistic Development Project**, which seeks to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy among lower primary pupils in 155 schools. A key pillar of the project is school-based teacher mentorship through co-planning, co-teaching, lesson observation, and constructive feedback provided by IEE-Remedial Learning Advisors. Teachers also receive regular training on remedial learning approaches, learner assessment, grouping techniques, and parental engagement, recognizing that children's education depends on the active partnership of teachers, parents, and learners. The project is further strengthened by youth volunteers known as **Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs)**, who work closely with teachers and communities to identify struggling learners, deliver targeted remedial support, and monitor learner progress. By receiving little incentives (34\$ a month) known as “*Transport facilitation*” their first year recruited “**three**” FLAs per school, while in the 2025–2026 academic year the model transitioned to “**two**” FLAs per school, with a total of 310 FLAs engaged across project schools. With evidenced research conducted by the University of Rwanda in March 2025, the project's learner-centered approach, which integrates psychosocial support and inclusive participation, has resulted into improved classroom participation, reading fluency, confidence, attendance, school performance compared to non supported schools and stronger community involvement in supporting children's learning. Support school, but is not limited to:

- **Ngororero District:** The project was implemented in 30 schools [sector in brackets], across Ngororero District namely CS GASURA (Bwira), CS MUKINGI (Bwira), GS BWIRA (Bwira), CS RUKERI (Bwira), CS BUKONDE (Kabaya), CS MBANDARI (Kabaya), CS GISEBEYA (Kabaya), CS KARIHA (Kageyo), GS RUHUHA (Kageyo), GS KAVUMU A (Kavumu), CS MUTAKE (Kavumu), CS KASEKE (Matyazo), EP KUNTURO (Matyazo), CS GASHONYI (Matyazo), CS BUKUNZI (Muhanda), GS RUBOKO (Muhororo), GS KIBANDA (Ndaro), EP KAMINA (Ndaro), CS CYUMBA (Ngororero), EP BUTEZI (Ngororero), EP RUHUNGA P (Ngororero), CS TURAMIGINA (Ngororero), GS NYANGE A (Nyange), EP GIKO (Nyange), GS VUNGU (Nyange), CS BIBUNGO (Sovu), CS GIHONGA (Sovu), CS MWUMBA B (Sovu), CS NYAMPINGIRA (Sovu), and GS MAHEMBE (Sovu).

- **Gakenke District:** The project was implemented in 29 schools[sector in brackets], across Gakenke District, EP GAKORO (Cyabingo), EP KARAMA (Janja), EP MWASHA (Kamubuga), EP GAHINGA (Nemba), GS KAMINA (Busengo), EP RWINGOMA (Busengo), GS CYANIKA (Coko), GS MURAMBA (Cyabingo), EP MUTANDA (Cyabingo), EP BUHETA (Gakenke), EP GAKENKE PROTESTANT (Gakenke), EP MURANDI (Gashenyi), EP RUTENDERI (Gashenyi), EP MBATABATA (Kamubuga), GS JOMBA (Kivuruga), EP GASIHO (Minazi), GS MUGUNGA (Mugunga), EP MUNANIRA (Mugunga), EP BUSAKE (Muhondo), GS BUMBA (Muyongwe), EP NGANZO II (Muyongwe), EP CURUGUSI (Muzo), EP GAHONDO (Muzo), GS MUBUGA II (Muzo), EP INDATWA (Nemba), EP GIKINGO (Ruli), GS NYANGE (Rusasa), EP NTONDE (Rusasa), and GS KARUNGU (Rushashi).

- **Gisagara District:** The project was implemented in 23 schools [sector in brackets], across Gisagara District, namely EP CURUSI (Gikonko), GS GIKONKO CATHOLIQUE (Gikonko), EP KAGOMA (Gishubi), GS MUDUHA (Gishubi), EP HEMBA (Gishubi), EP NYARUHENGERI (Kansi), EP MBEHO (Kansi), EP AGAHABWA (Kigembe), EP RUSAGARA (Kigembe), EP MWENDO (Mamba), EP LINDA (Mugombwa), GS



NYABISONGA (Mugombwa), EP MUKIZA (Mukindo), EP RUNYINYA (Mukindo), GS CYAMUKUZA (Ndora), GS NDORA (Ndora), EP NKINDA (Ndora), EP KIGARAMA (Ndora), GS GISUNZU (Nyanza), EP RUSONGATI (Nyanza), EP REMERA (Nyanza), EP NYAMUGARI (Nyanza), EP SAVE A (Save).

- **Rusizi District:** The project was implemented in 37 schools [sector in brackets], across Rusizi District, namely EP MUBUGA (Gikundamvura), GS CYIBUMBA (Nkanka), GS KIBANGIRA (Bugarama), EP RUGETE (Butare), GS GASUMO (Butare), GS MURAMBA (Butare), GS NYABIGOMA (Bweyeye), EP MUNYINYA (Gashonga), GS MUNYOVE (Giheke), GS NTURA PROTESTANT (Giheke), EP RWEGA (Giheke), EP NYAGATARE (Gihundwe), GS MUHARI (Gihundwe), EP GIHAYA (Gihundwe), GS RWAHI (Gihundwe), EP KAGARA (Gihundwe), EP NYAMPANGA (Gitambi), EP NYANTABA (Gitambi), EP INDATWA (Gitambi), EP RUHIMBI (Kamembe), GS MUGANZA A (Muganza), EP MUTIMASI (Mururu), EP RUBONA (Nkungu), GS MATARE (Nkungu), GS CYIVUGIZA (Nkungu), GS GASEKE (Nyakabuye), GS NYAKABWENDE (Nyakabuye), EP MASHYUZA (Nyakabuye), GS KIYOVU TSS (Nyakabuye), GS CYATO (Nyakarenzo), GS NYAKARENZO (Nyakarenzo), EP MUGURI A (Nzahaha), GS RUHOKO (Nzahaha), GS NYAKAGOMA (Nzahaha), EP NTENYI (Rwimbogo), EP KARENGE (Rwimbogo), EP MURAMA (Rwimbogo).

- **Karongi District:** The project was implemented in 36 schools [sector in brackets], across Karongi District, namely EP GATOKI (Bwishyura), EP GATWARO (Bwishyura), GS KARONGI A (Bwishyura), GS ST RENE BIRAMBO (Gashari), GS NGOMA ADV (Gishyita), EP GISIZA (Gishyita), EP MUNANIRA (Gishyita), EP MUSEBEYA (Gishyita), EP MUVUNGU (Gitesi), GS GASHUBI (Gitesi), EP KANUNGA (Gitesi), EP KINYAMI (Gitesi), EP GITANGA (Murundi), EP KABEZA (Mubuga), EP CYAMATARE (Murambi), EP NYAKABUYE (Murambi), EP NYAMABUYE (Murundi), GS KABAYA (Murundi), GS BUKIRO (Murundi), EP GIHUNGA (Mutuntu), EP KANYAMURINDA (Rubengera), EP CYIRABO (Rugabano), GS NYABIKERI (Ruganda), EP KINYOVU (Ruganda), EP RUGOBAGoba (Ruganda), GS BISESERO (Rwankuba), EP GASATA (Rwankuba), GS MUSANGO (Rwankuba), EP KARONGI B (Rwankuba), GS RUKORE (Rwankuba), EP RUSHABARARA (Rwankuba), EP MUKUNGU ADEPR (Twumba), EP TEMA (Twumba), GS NYARUBUYE A (Twumba), GS MUNIGI (Twumba), and GS TWUMBA (Twumba).

Pict # 2: Scope of IEE supported schools in 5 districts academic year 2025-2026

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in the following theories:

Differentiated Instruction Theory (Tomlinson, 2017)

The study is guided by the Differentiated Instruction Theory, which emphasizes that learners have different levels of readiness, interests, learning needs, and abilities. According to Tomlinson (2017), effective teaching requires educators to adapt content, learning processes, and support strategies to respond to learners' diverse needs. (Tomlinson, 2017). In the context of Rwanda's foundational learning interventions, this theory explains the importance of remedial learning approaches where learners are grouped according to their learning levels not by grades '*Teaching at the Right Level*', such as extended learners, consolidated learners, and struggling/remedial learners. The theory supports the use of whole-class activities, group activities, and individualized support as mechanisms for addressing learning gaps with eight core principles turning to *assessment, grouping, teaching and re-teaching, learner engagement and use of targeted and differentiated instructions to continuously support evidence based instructional decisions and adaptation.*

Social Constructivist Theory of Learning (Vygotsky, 1978)

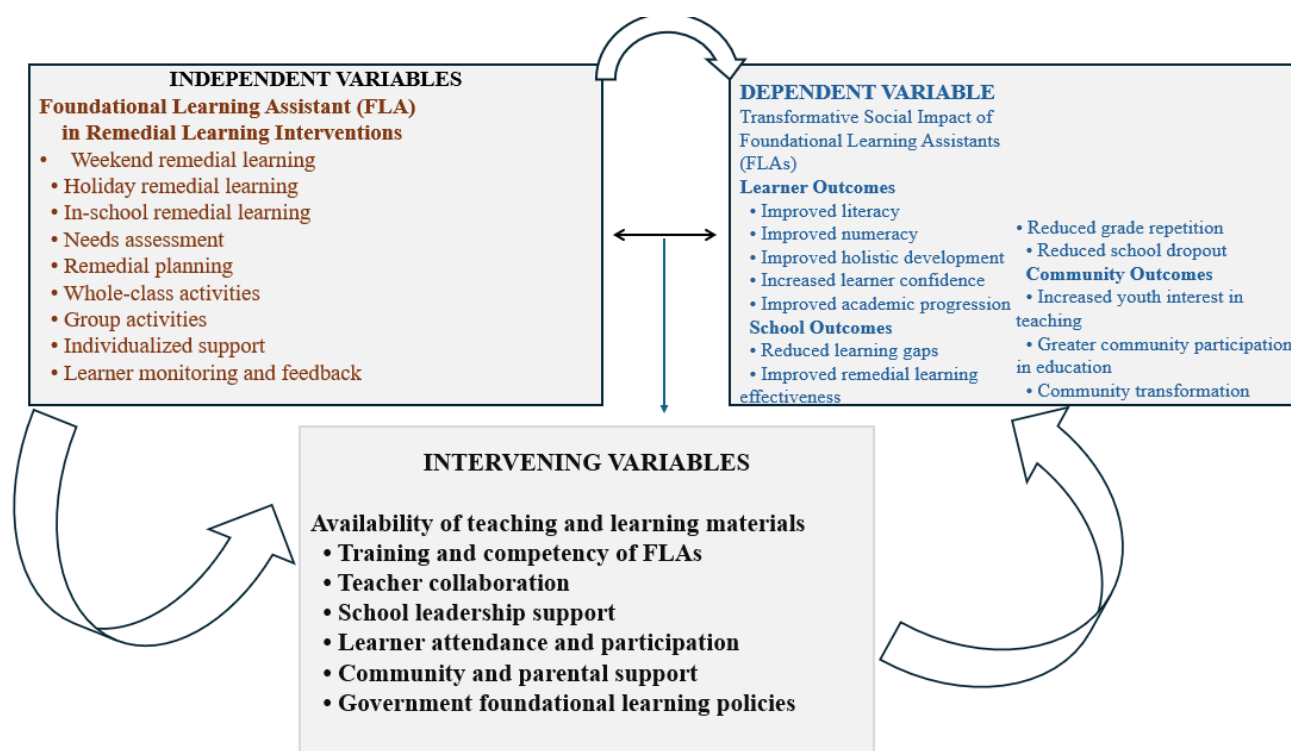
The study is also informed by Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which argues that learning occurs

through social interaction, collaboration, and guided support from more knowledgeable individuals. The concept of the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** explains that learners can achieve higher levels of understanding when supported by teachers, peers, or learning facilitators. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978).

Within Rwanda's remedial learning framework, FLAs act as learning supporters who provide scaffolding to learners through group discussions, peer learning, guided practice, and individualized assistance. Weekend remedial learning, holiday remedial learning, and in-school remedial lessons create opportunities for learners to receive additional support beyond regular classroom instruction.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

By linking our theories, key concepts and variables, to practical investigation, we confirm that the transformative social impact of Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) on learners, schools, and communities in Rwanda was due to FLA-supported remedial learning interventions. Their roles have contributed to improved learner outcomes, increased interest in the teaching profession among youth, and positive community transformation. However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on several implementation factors such as training, school leadership, teaching resources, and community support.



METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed analytical and empirical review design to examine the contribution of Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) as a youth volunteer-based input supporting the implementation of the remedial learning programme. Rather than relying on documentary evidence alone, the study brought together programme documents, quantitative data, and qualitative evidence from stakeholders to address the three research hypotheses (HP1–HP3). The documentary component provided contextual and historical evidence from programme reports, policy documents, assessment records, and related studies, while the empirical component drew on respondents, observations, and programme data. Quantitative evidence helped identify measurable patterns in learner participation, attendance, progression, learning outcomes, and the social and economic experiences of FLAs, while qualitative evidence helped explain the experiences, processes, and challenges behind these patterns. These two forms drove the study beyond describing what was implemented and the outcomes associated with their involvement.



STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in schools working with Foundational Learning Assistants (FLA) in the remedial learning Programme implemented in partnership with UNICEF and IEE Rwanda in five districts namely: Gakenke, Gisagara, Rusizi, Ngororero and Karongi to examine the impact of FLAs interventions and their transformative social impact on **learners, schools, and communities**.

Target, sample size and sampling techniques

As according to Kothari, C. R., & Garg, G. (2019), The sample random, purposive, and document-based sampling techniques consisted of 310 FLAs, 100 parents who attended school meetings during the study period (one parent per school), and 90 school leaders and teachers to make 500 respondents from 155 schools implementing the remedial learning programme during the 2025–2026 academic year as we assessed: (i) learner participation, foundational literacy and numeracy development, attendance, learning progression, and holistic development. (ii) school level support for remedial learning implementation, collaboration with teachers and school leadership, and the use of learning and assessment data. (iii) Community level engagement, awareness, and the broader social contribution of the programme.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were generated through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, while secondary evidence was obtained from policy and programme documents, literacy and numeracy assessment records, learner attendance trackers, FLA weekly reports and success stories, and publications from UNICEF Rwanda, IEE Rwanda, and University of Rwanda researchers. By using Google Forms exported in Microsoft Excel for cleaning, coding, and analysis, statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, were applied to summarize respondents' views regarding the implementation and social impact of the Foundational Learning Assistant programme. The findings were presented in tables and interpreted according to the study objectives and research questions.

Validity of Research Instruments

Content validity was established through consultation with research supervisors and experts in education and educational research, whose recommendations informed refinement of the instruments. The instruments were reviewed for alignment with the research objectives and hypotheses (HP1–HP3). Findings across questionnaires, interviews, observations, and programme document sources were compared to enhance consistency, validity, and credibility of the study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Tied on Cacciattolo, M. (2015) guides the participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, with respondents informed of the study purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and learner, school, and programme data were securely handled and used solely for research purposes. The study obtained appropriate institutional authorization and ensured that all learner-related information was collected, processed, and reported in accordance with applicable ethical and data-protection requirements.

Table 1: Research participant identification

FLAs	Parents	School leaders and teachers	Overall
310/310 to be 100%	100/155 to be 64%	90/155 to be 58%	74%

With Mohanasundaram, S. S. T., BV, P., & Harsha, H. (2024) we used the percentage = $(n/N) \times 100$, where **n** represents the number of respondents selected and **N** represents the total target population or reference



group. This formula was applied to determine the level of representation of FLAs, parents, and school leaders in the study sample. Consequently, all 310 FLAs were included, representing 100%, while 100 parents out of 155 schools represented 64%, and 90 school leaders out of 155 schools represented 58% of the targeted groups.

Table 2: Observed Progress Reported by Respondents (FLAs, Parents, and Teachers/School Leaders)

Indicator	Reported evidence of progress	Percentage (%)
Academic progression	Respondents reported improved learner performance, attainment of expected competencies, and readiness for progression to the next grade, including reduced repetition and increased attainment of the 50% pass threshold.	79%
Teacher participation and instructional practice	Respondents reported improved development and use of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) over the two-year implementation period, particularly through more effective use of locally available resources.	89%
Learner participation and engagement	Respondents reported increased learner participation, classroom engagement, and active involvement in learning activities, including mathematics counting games, English alphabet songs, literacy-related storytelling, sports, and clubs.	85%
Literacy development	Respondents reported improvement in reading skills, comprehension, and foundational literacy competencies, including reading aloud and phonological awareness.	82%
Numeracy development	Respondents reported improved calculation skills, problem-solving abilities, and understanding of basic mathematical concepts, including addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, equality, and comparison.	80%
Learner attendance and retention	Respondents reported improved attendance, reduced absenteeism, and greater continuity of participation among learners receiving remedial support, supported by attendance monitoring and targeted early-morning sessions.	76%
Learner confidence, motivation and discipline	Respondents reported increased learner confidence, willingness to participate, motivation, and positive behavioural practices, including improved attendance, discipline, hygiene, and adherence to school expectations.	84%
Remedial learning effectiveness	Respondents reported greater effectiveness of remedial interventions through targeted support, differentiated instruction, and individualized assistance, implemented through whole-class, group, and individual learning activities.	83%
Community and professional impact	Respondents reported increased parental involvement, stronger school–parent engagement, community support for education, and increased youth interest in foundational learning activities and	75%

	the teaching profession.	
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Source: Researcher's synthesis (2025-2026).

The table demonstrates substantial reported gains across key programme outcomes, with the highest improvements observed in teacher participation (89%), learner engagement (85%), and learner confidence and motivation (84%). Literacy (82%), numeracy (80%), and academic progression (79%) further indicate positive contributions to foundational learning and learner development. However, the findings remain primarily respondent-reported and should be triangulated with assessment, attendance, progression, and retention records to establish the magnitude of actual gains.

Table 3: Challenges faced during the programme implementation and their effect

Challenge	Extent of the Challenges' Effect on Remedial Learning	Reported Impact (%)
Limited teaching and learning resources	Inadequate learning materials, printed resources, and inclusive instructional tools constrain the effectiveness of remedial instruction, particularly for learners with disabilities.	78%
Large class sizes	Classes exceeding 50 learners make it difficult to provide individualized attention and adequately respond to diverse learning needs.	72%
Limited FLA and teacher capacity development	Insufficient training contributes to variations in the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of remedial learning practices.	65%
Learner absenteeism and irregular attendance	Irregular participation interrupts learning continuity and slows progress among learners requiring additional support, despite overall improvements in attendance.	69%
Socio-economic challenges affecting families	Household responsibilities and limited parental support reduce learners' attendance and participation in remedial activities and other opportunities for learning at school and at home.	63%
Time constraints within school schedules	Limited time for remedial sessions (after end unit) restricts opportunities to address individual learning gaps and monitor learner progress adequately.	61%
Limited integration of remedial learning into school planning	Inconsistent integration of remedial activities into regular school planning due to teacher workload can affect sustainability, coordination, and continuity of implementation.	58%
Limited monitoring and	Although teachers conduct assessments, limited diagnostic analysis constrains the identification of individual learning gaps and the provision of targeted	55%

assessment follow-up	support.	
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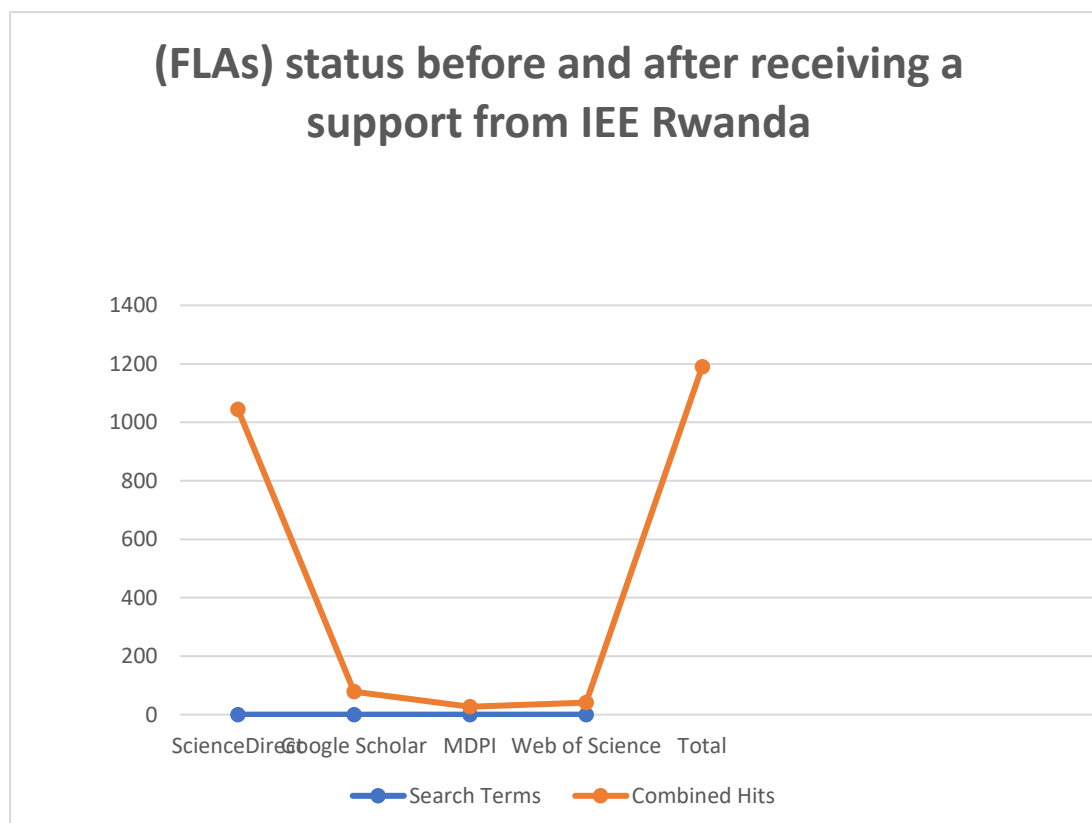
Source: Researcher's synthesis (FLAs 2025-2026).

The findings indicate that inadequate teaching and learning resources (78%) and large class sizes (72%) were the most prominent barriers to effective remedial learning. Learner absenteeism (69%) and limited attendance due to parental support for these learners further constrained continuity and consistency of implementation. Lower but still significant concerns related teachers' skills on diagnostic analysis, and regular follow-up to struggling learners.

Table 5: Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) status after receiving a support from IEE Rwanda

Indicator	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
FLAs who participated in the remedial learning programme	310	100
FLAs who joined university after participating in the programme	221	71.3
FLAs who continued supporting foundational learning activities	181	58.4
FLAs who reported that the programme helped them enrol or continue university education	101	32.6
FLAs who reported improved ability to support family needs	241	77.7
FLAs who reported improved personal financial stability or reduced daily financial stress	221	71.3
FLAs who saved money for personal growth or development	189	61
FLAs who started or improved small business/economic activities	239	77.1

Source: Researcher's synthesis (FLAs 2025-2026).





The findings indicate that approximately **68.6%**, of FLAs reported positive changes in their lives following the IEE intervention. Reported improvements included access to university education, financial stability, family support, savings, and small business development. This demonstrates that the programme contributed to both foundational learning support in schools and the broader socio-economic wellbeing of FLAs.

Key observed changes

- **University Enrolment:** It was observed that participation in the remedial learning programme encouraged several FLAs to enrol in university and pursue further education. The experience appeared to increase their confidence, career aspirations, and commitment to professional growth.
- **Continued Support for Foundational Learning:** The findings showed that many FLAs continued supporting foundational learning activities even after their formal engagement in the programme. This demonstrates sustained commitment to improving literacy and numeracy within their communities.
- **Access to Higher Education:** It was observed that the programme contributed to enabling some FLAs to enrol in or continue their university education. The financial support and work experience gained through the programme reduced barriers to further studies.
- **Family Support:** The study found that many FLAs reported an improved ability to contribute to their household needs after joining the programme. This positively influenced their families' well-being and increased their sense of responsibility.
- **Financial Stability:** It was observed that participation in the programme improved the financial stability of many FLAs by providing a reliable source of income. As a result, several participants reported reduced financial stress and greater confidence in meeting daily expenses.
- **Personal Savings and Development:** The findings indicated that some FLAs were able to save part of their earnings for personal development, including education and other future goals. This reflects the programme's contribution to building financial resilience.
- **Economic Activities:** It was observed that some FLAs invested their earnings in small business or other income-generating activities. Many of them engaged in agriculture, focusing on both crop production and livestock farming. They raised a variety of small domestic animals, including rabbits, chickens and turkeys as well as big domestic animals such as pigs, goats, sheep and cows. These farming activities provide food, generate income, and support the supply of meat, milk, eggs, and other animal products. Through agriculture, they contribute to food security and family development.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) have played a significant transformative role in strengthening foundational learning outcomes and promoting social development within Rwanda's education system. The findings demonstrated that FLAs contributed not only to improving learners' literacy, numeracy, participation, confidence, and academic progression but also to reducing learning gaps through targeted remedial support. Their collaboration with teachers, school leaders, parents, and communities has enhanced the effectiveness of foundational learning interventions and promoted inclusive education. Beyond their contribution to learners, the FLAs generated broader social impacts by empowering young people through employment opportunities, professional experience, financial support, and increased interest in pursuing education and teaching careers. The programme reflected a community transformation by encouraging parental engagement, strengthening education awareness, and creating pathways for youth development. The study therefore concludes that investing in Foundational Learning Assistants is not only an educational strategy but also a long-term social and human capital development approach. Sustaining and strengthening FLA initiatives can contribute significantly to addressing learning poverty, improving education quality, promoting equity, and supporting Rwanda's national development goals.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish regular talent shows and competitions:** Schools should organize activities such as reading campaigns, debates, and other competitions to identify learners' talents and interests.



- **Strengthen co-curricular participation:** Learners should be encouraged and supported to participate in sports, arts, clubs, and other co-curricular activities where their abilities can be nurtured.
- **Recognize and motivate talented learners:** Schools should regularly acknowledge and award outstanding learners to encourage continued participation, confidence, and talent development.
- **Institutionalize FLAs nationally:** Formally recognize FLAs or youth volunteers within the education system, with clear roles and responsibilities to sustain remedial learning.
- **Strengthen FLA capacity and career pathways:** Provide continuous professional development trainings, mentorship, and opportunities for further education and career progression.
- **Ensure sustainable programme investment:** Allocate adequate resources for FLAs, teaching materials in schools, ICT facilities in schools, transport facilities, and programme supervision to continuously track their performance.
- **Strengthen MEL “Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning” and data use:** Establish a system that tracks learner progress by **individual competency and learning level, rather than grade alone**, work with schools to track performance and give a feedback.

Source: Researcher’s synthesis based on findings from questionnaires, interviews, observations, and analysis of the impact of Foundational Learning Assistants (FLAs) within remedial learning programmes during the 2025–2026 academic year.

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