

POLICY BRIEF

FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING SERIES, NO. 1

Closing Kenya's Foundational Learning Gap

Evidence from the 2025 Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) Conference on Scaling Proven Literacy Gains to Numeracy

Prepared for the Ministry of Education · Source: 6th Biennial EE4A Conference, University of Embu, 26–28 August 2025 · Mizizi Elimu Afrika



71,440+

teachers trained through the literacy cascade model (Tusome/KPLP-aligned)

3M+

learners reached by that same national literacy programme

5.4%

of learners exceeded expectations in basic numeracy, 2024 KPSEA results

1 in 3

Grade 6 learners cannot read a Grade 3-level passage, FLANA 2023

WHY THIS BRIEF

Kenya has already shown, at national scale, that literacy outcomes can be moved. A cascade-model teacher-training programme built on the Tusome and Kenya Primary Literacy Program (KPLP) frameworks has trained more than 71,440 teachers, sensitized 22,000 head teachers, and reached over 3 million learners. Numeracy has received no equivalent national investment, and the gap shows: the 2024 KPSEA results found just 5.4% of learners exceeding expectations in basic mathematics. This brief distils the Foundational Learning evidence from the 2025 Education Evidence for Action (EE4A) Biennial Conference into a single, resourced ask for the Ministry of Education: extend the model already working in literacy to numeracy, built for equity and evidence from the start.

THE EVIDENCE BASE

This brief draws primarily on the Foundational Learning sessions of the 6th Biennial EE4A Conference (University of Embu, 26–28 August 2025) and its consolidated conference report: a dedicated pre-conference session, evidence-sharing presentations from researchers, government and practitioners, and a Day 2 action-planning round-table. Two findings below are corroborated by an independent rapid review of Kenya's foundational learning assessment landscape (Muthomi & Ranji Karanja, 2026), cited only to confirm patterns the conference itself identified



As we continue with the roll-out of Competency Based Education, we will still require evidence to inform critical decisions for policy and even financial intervention. The challenges our education system faces can only be addressed effectively through research and evidence that propose and test viable solutions

Hon. Julius Migos Ogamba, Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kenya

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

The Gap Is Real, and Long-Standing

A government assessment and a long-running household survey tell the same story. NASMLA (National Assessment System for Monitoring Learner Achievement), run by KNEC, found 58.8% of Grade 3 learners below minimum reading proficiency in English and 51.3% in Kiswahili in 2020. Usawa Agenda's household survey, renamed from Uwezo to FLANA in 2023, found 57% of Grade 2 learners needing urgent reading support in 2021, and by 2023 still found roughly one in three Grade 6 learners unable to read a Grade 3-level passage with comprehension. The gap holds before and after COVID, and in both English and Kiswahili.

NASMLA 2020; Usawa Agenda / FLANA, 2021 and 2023

Numeracy Is Worse, and Unprogrammed

The 2024 KPSEA results found only 5.4% of learners exceeding expectations in basic mathematics, with fewer than half meeting expectations in multiplication (49%), division (49%) or fractions (33%). Unlike literacy, numeracy has no equivalent, nationally scaled teacher-training programme behind it, and an independent review of the wider assessment landscape confirms this is not a one-off: numeracy performance has changed little in about fifteen years.

2024 KPSEA; Muthomi & Ranji Karanja (2026)

Literacy's Cascade Model Is Proof It Can Work

A cascade-model programme built on the Tusome and KLP frameworks, teacher guides, sustained coaching, peer-learning communities and digital dashboards, trained over 71,440 teachers and 22,000 head teachers, reaching more than 3 million learners nationally. It demonstrates that resourced, well-designed teacher training moves outcomes at national scale.

EE4A 2025 conference report, cascade-model results

Learners with Disabilities Remain an Afterthought

Assistive technology, screen readers, braille devices, hearing aids and adapted manipulatives, enables learners with visual, hearing and physical disabilities to access literacy and numeracy, not just attend school. Yet fewer than 10 civil society organisations (CSOs) nationwide specialise in hearing or visual impairment support, and Kenya's Ministry of Education estimates that 11.4% of children aged 3–21, around 2.49 million children, live with a disability, most of whom sit outside any assessment that reports outcomes by disability status

EE4A 2025 conference report, Action 4; Muthomi & Ranji Karanja (2026)

A CALL TO ACTION

One investment closes the widest gap: extend the model already proven in literacy to numeracy, fully resourced and built for equity from the start.

THE ASK · MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Fully resource and scale a numeracy-focused equivalent of the Tusome/KPLP cascade model. Use the same ingredients that reached 71,440+ teachers and 3 million+ learners in literacy, teacher guides, sustained coaching, peer-learning communities and formative-assessment dashboards, and build them for numeracy from the ground up.

THIS ASK DEPENDS ON FOUR CONDITIONS

- Build in assistive technology and disability-accessible design from day one, rather than retrofitting it later.
- Pair the rollout with teacher data-use tools so Grade 3 and Grade 6 diagnostic results directly guide classroom remediation, not just system-level reporting.
- Make the programme's impact independently trackable from the outset: open a defined share of Ministry of Education Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessment data to researchers, starting with a sample comparable to the 10% used for Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) census data, so the new numeracy investment's effectiveness, not just its rollout, can be verified.
- Build community-level demand and sustainability into the rollout: scale proven, low-cost parental-engagement models such as the Regional Education Learning Initiative's Parental Empowerment and Engagement (RELI-PEE) model, a cluster-randomized evaluation in Embu County showing a 26% gain in parent-teacher communication and up to 40.6% gains in parental participation in learning activities versus a comparison group, into the rural and marginalized communities where the numeracy programme will be rolled out, while commissioning research that links parental engagement directly to learning outcomes, not relational gains alone.

SOURCES

EE4A 6th Biennial Conference Report and Conference Brief (University of Embu, 26–28 August 2025), Foundational Learning sessions. National assessments cited therein: NASMLA (2020, KNEC/MoE) and Usawa Agenda's household survey (Uwezo 2021, renamed FLANA from 2023), alongside the 2024 KPSEA numeracy results. Two findings corroborated by Muthomi, K. & Ranji Karanja, J. (2026). Foundational Learning Assessments in Kenya: A Rapid Review. Mizizi Elimu Afrika.

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