



Transforming Tsangaya Education in Northern Nigeria: A Call to Action

ADVOCACY BRIEF



Introduction

Nigeria is currently facing one of the most severe educational crises globally. Millions of children are out of school, and many who are in school are unable to read or write by the appropriate age.

According to UNICEF's 2022 data, literacy rates among 7-14-year-olds in the northern regions are alarmingly low, with only 10% in the Northwest and 12% in the Northeast able to read.

In many northern communities, many parents prefer sending their children to Islamiyah and Tsangaya schools, where traditional Islamic education is emphasised. These schools play a vital role in preserving religious and cultural values and often provide instruction in Arabic literacy and Qur'anic studies. However, because they frequently operate outside the formal school system, most of the children in these settings do not acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills as defined by modern, Western-style education systems. As a result, while these children are not entirely out of learning environments, they may still lack the competencies needed for lifelong learning, socio-economic mobility, and broader participation in national development.

Learning Assessment Data from Baseline Report

In March 2025, the UK-funded Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE) programme, in collaboration with the Kaduna State Government, conducted a baseline assessment to evaluate the early grade reading and mathematical skills of learners in selected Tsangaya schools in five (5) intervention LGAs in Kaduna State. The results from a sample size of 25 schools and 250 learners reveal a worrying trend in both Hausa literacy and numeracy.

250
Pupils



25
Schools



HAUSA LITERACY

- More than half (**55.1%**) of learners cannot identify a single alphabet, while **21.6%** are pre-readers with limited syllable recognition
- Only **1.21%** have started to read simple words.
- **2.83%** are developing basic skills, **12.96%** can read more difficult texts, and just **6%** are able to read.

Overall, only **21.79%** of the learners have at least basic reading skills.



MATHEMATICS

- **24.3%** of learners remained at the Beginner level, demonstrating little numeracy skills
- **15.4%** of the learners were in the Emergent Numerate category, showing some understanding of numbers
- Only **3.6%** of learners are achieving foundational numeracy and 4.0% are classified as Progressing Numerate
- About **39.7%** of the learners could solve simple mathematics problems



Overall, nearly half **47.3%** of the learners show at least basic math skills. This may be because many of the assessed learners are aged 14–16 and gain math experience through everyday tasks like trading and chores.

OTHER CHALLENGES

- Only **8.1%** of learners reported to have access to Hausa reading books at school, and an even smaller proportion—just **5.3%** had access to mathematics textbooks.
- **17.8%** of learners reported reading at school every day, suggesting that structured reading activities are not consistently implemented



About **18%** of learners reported experiencing abuse at school, such as verbal insults, physical punishment, or bullying, from either teachers or peers

Many Tsangaya schools still operate without trained teachers, adequate learning materials, and proper oversight. The lack of formal qualifications for school proprietors has compounded these issues, undermining the quality of education provided. Another major challenge facing the Tsangaya system is its lack of integration into the formal education sector.

Key Recommendations

The findings above emphasise the urgent need for early literacy interventions aimed at enhancing letter-sound recognition, phonemic awareness, and word decoding in Tsangaya Schools. Hence, PLANE calls for the following immediate actions to improve learning outcomes in Tsangaya Schools.

01. Establishment of a State Board for Out-of-School and Almajiri Children to coordinate interventions for Out-of-School and Almajiri children.	05. Community Engagement in supporting literacy and numeracy development of learners in Tsangaya schools.
02. Targeted Early Literacy Interventions that emphasise letter-sound recognition, phonemic awareness, and decoding skills.	06. Ongoing Assessment and Monitoring to track the progress of learners in both literacy and numeracy.
03. Teacher Training and Support for volunteer teachers in Tsangaya schools on effective literacy and numeracy instruction strategies.	07. Strengthening Numeracy Programmes introducing more interactive and hands-on mathematical activities that help learners apply basic concepts.
04. Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) curriculum integrated into Tsangaya schools as a strategy to improve foundational learning.	08. Provision of Learning Materials including reading books, math tools, and visual aids that are culturally relevant and engaging

Conclusion

The baseline assessment in Tsangaya schools across Kaduna State reveals a concerning state of foundational learning. Despite efforts through the Integrated Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education (IQTE) strategy, most learners fall short of expected literacy and numeracy benchmarks. The schools' focus on Islamic knowledge has not translated into foundational academic skills. Key systemic challenges include limited learning materials, minimal reading practice, safeguarding risks, and inconsistent teaching support hinder progress.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including curriculum support, teacher training, adequate school resources, regular attendance monitoring, and community engagement. A coordinated response from government, communities, educators, and development partners is crucial. Without urgent action, the learning crisis will worsen, further marginalising vulnerable children. A data-driven, inclusive strategy is necessary to ensure every child acquires foundational skills, regardless of background or school type.



Consortium Partners:

