

PLANE's Teaching and Learning Approach in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

Scaling What Works: A Strategy for Strengthening Foundational Learning in Nigeria

This knowledge product is designed to inform policymakers, education planners, and development partners of scalable, cost-effective models to improve foundational learning. It highlights the PLANE programme's implementation strategy, outcomes, and lessons to support replication and institutionalisation.

The Context

Foundational skills of reading, writing and mathematics set children on the path to success and life-long learning. Yet, despite the recommendation by the United Nations that every child should have these skills by the age of 10, almost 90 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa are lagging behind. In Nigeria, about 70% of children have difficulty reading or understanding simple text (UNICEF, 2022).

With millions of children out-of-school in Nigeria, many of those currently in school are also not learning as they should. About half of those who attend primary schools, which is constitutionally compulsory and free, do not achieve basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy. In the northern part of the country, the percentage drops even further, with only 10% of 7–14-year-olds in the North-west and 12% in the Northeast able to read.

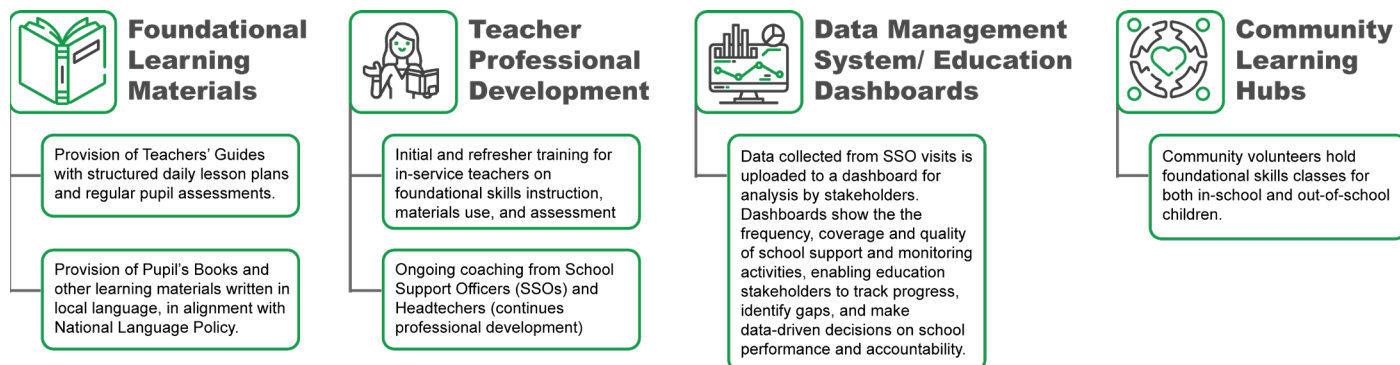
The learning crisis in Nigeria is fueled by many factors, including overcrowded classrooms, lack of competent teachers, shortage of learning materials in schools, and poor infrastructure.

In this paper, we explore how the FCDO-funded Partnership for Learning for All in Nigerian (PLANE) programme is transforming foundational skills education in target states through the adoption of evidence-based instruction and learning materials, ongoing monitoring, and community support.



PLANE's Foundational Learning Strategy

The PLANE programme in Nigeria, funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), works with federal and state governments to improve learning outcomes in basic education. The programme is strengthening teaching and learning through a foundational learning strategy that has four major components.



PLANE's approach enables better learning outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly for marginalised groups of children. In northern Nigeria, specifically in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states, the programme has reached over 1.2 million learners across over 2,500 schools and trained approximately 12,000 teachers. Each component of the strategy is further explained below.



Foundational Learning Materials



In collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and partners from Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states, PLANE developed the following foundational literacy and mathematics materials:



Hausa Literacy

Primary 1-6 Pupils Books
Primary 1-6 Teacher's Guides
Primary 1 & 2 Story Read Aloud
Anthologies



Mathematics

Primary 1-6 Pupils Books
Primary 1-6 Teacher's Guides



English

P1-P3 Teacher Guides and Pupil
Resources (available September
2025)



Posters

Hausa literacy & Mathematics
themed songs

PLANE materials build on the successful **Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA)** project, previously funded by the UK Government through UNICEF, and it is aligned with the Nigerian National Primary Curriculum and global best practices. The Teacher's Guides are structured and lightly scripted while Pupil's Book are divided into classwork and homework sections related directly to the content introduced by the teacher. PLANE's pupil's books are textbooks, designed to be reusable by different set of learners, thus enhancing cost-effectiveness and sustainability.. Materials are also compliant with Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) guidelines and feature positive depictions of children with disabilities.

Teacher Professional Development

With close coordination with State Ministries of Education, State Universal Basic Education Boards and related parastatals, PLANE organises in-service teacher training and coaching focusing on:

- Foundational Learning Skills (Literacy and Mathematics)
- Classroom Management & Routines
- Teaching Aids Creation (low cost instructional material development)
- Professional Learning Communities
- Inclusive Teaching
- Teacher Code of Conduct

Training Structure

PLANE's in-service training uses a cascade model where national master trainers train state-based master trainers, who in turn train school support officers, head teachers and teachers. The training methodology involves a hands-on, minds-on approach for core skills and concepts, using the following these steps:

- Definition and/or explanation of a core skill or concept
- Discussion and/or brainstorming on how to teach the skill(s).
- Practical application of the skill(s):
 - The facilitator demonstrates how the skill is taught using the FL materials.
 - The participants practice teach (simulate) the skills using the FL materials.
 - Feedback sessions by both peer and facilitators.
- Practicum with learners

Teacher Mentoring & Coaching

PLANE trains School Support Officers (SSOs) to strengthen school leadership and accountability. SSOs regularly visit schools to observe lessons and provide one-on-one coaching for teachers, thereby helping them build their skills in real-time. SSOs flag key issues to head teachers and collect digital lesson observation data, which is shared with local government authorities for analysis and additional follow-up (see next section).



Data Management System/ Education Dashboards



Data is collected by SSOs during school support visits through an application known as open data kit (ODK). Data is uploaded to an education dashboard where it is visualised in real-time. State and local government officials use dashboards to track the progress of school visits, understand school performance and respond to arising needs.

PLANE has trained SSOs, EMIS (Education Management Information System) officers,

community volunteers, and others to collect data using ODK forms. PLANE has also used ODK to develop over 35 digital tools to gather data across the project.

Community Learning Hubs

Community Learning Hubs offer simple literacy and math lessons weekly and serve as a forum for improving basic education at the community level. They are volunteer-run hubs where children both in-school and out-of-school can learn in safe community-provided spaces. Hub Facilitators receive short training and a simple book of lessons from the PLANE programme. The hubs also involve community members in educational leadership roles, creating a low-cost and sustainable model for supplemental education. These volunteers are often supported by community reading champions identified within the communities.



Successes

1. With language being a very important part of every culture, the use of local language as the language of instruction in early primary years in all PLANE materials led to notable improvement in learning outcomes across all states.
2. Gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) are at the crux of the PLANE programme and are mainstreamed into all teaching and learning interventions. This has improved classroom experiences, with teachers being more deliberate about empowering the girl-child and inclusion of learners with special needs.
3. Investing in digital economy has proven to enhance the quality of data management and hence improve the turn-around time for decision making. This was evident in the interest the state has shown in the use of the education dashboard for school monitoring, lessons observation, and decision making.
4. PLANE has established and maintained high-level engagement with both state and non-state partners from the onset, fostering shared understanding, aligning goals, and ensuring stakeholders take ownership. These efforts have led to Kaduna State fully managing the distribution of teaching and learning materials from the state level to schools, as well as Jigawa State scaling up foundational learning activities across more Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). In 2025, Kano state scaled up PLANE's monitoring and dashboard system to the entire state.

Lessons Learnt

1. Systemic conditions need to change to improve learning outcomes: particularly smaller class sizes, sufficient number of trained teachers, more learning materials for learners, and a better system for tracking school opening and attendance.
2. Long-term success, particularly in the use of data management systems, requires high-level commitment and integration into government policies to ensure continuity despite political or organisational changes.
3. Proactive efforts in monitoring schools and fostering stronger community engagement significantly improve school support structures and enhance their effectiveness.



Challenges

1. The sustainability of the education dashboard relies on securing financial resources for server subscriptions, software licenses (ODK, Power BI), and ongoing training. Costs are reasonably low (about \$400 a month) yet finding a budget to cover even a small additional expense is difficult in such financially constrained settings.
2. Many stakeholders require additional training to effectively use digital tools and frequent transfers of EMIS officers create skill gaps, reducing system efficiency.
3. PLANE's data shows that all target LGAs have a very high teacher-pupil ratio, twice and in some cases, almost four times higher than UNESCO's recommended ratio of 35 learners to one learner.
4. Absenteeism remains a major concern in schools, and this is compounded by lack of clarity on school opening and closing days.



What works - Actions to Sustain Impact and Drive Scale-Up

1. Ensure **at least one teacher per grade** and no more than **45 learners per teacher** to prevent overcrowding and enable level-appropriate instruction.
2. Minimise **frequent teacher transfers**. Trained teachers should remain in post to apply skills consistently and maintain continuity in learning.
3. Provide **regular coaching and mentoring** through School Support Officers (SSOs). Governments should allocate **transportation stipends** to enable SSOs to reach remote schools.
4. Guarantee that **every child has basic learning materials**—an exercise book and a pencil. Governments should include these in **annual education budgets**, with SBMCs supporting where feasible.
5. **Institutionalise the use of data dashboards** by integrating them into state education systems and budgets. This will sustain real-time decision-making and school monitoring beyond project timelines.
6. **Invest in digital literacy** for EMIS officers and local education staff to strengthen data use and reduce the impact of staff turnover.
7. **Governments, Development partners and CSOs should align with proven models like PLANE's** to amplify scale, support government uptake, and sustain inclusive learning outcomes.



