

Scaling What Works: Accelerated Learning Holiday Camps As A Strategy For Strengthening Foundational Learning in Nigeria.

*A teacher guiding a group of learners at one of the holiday camps set up by PLANE in Kaduna State

This knowledge product is designed to inform policymakers, education planners, and development partners of scalable, cost-effective models to improve foundational learning.

It presents the Accelerated Learning Holiday Camps as a practical innovation that has strengthened foundational literacy and numeracy in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states. The model introduced by the UK-funded Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria programme (PLANE) uses school

holidays as short, focused learning cycles for learners who struggle during the term. In a context where roughly 70%¹ of children in Nigeria cannot read with meaning or solve simple mathematics problems, the camps provided level-based instruction, activity-rich lessons and strong community participation. Learners improved both skills and confidence within fifteen to twenty days. This note outlines the intervention architecture, implementation process, evidence of change and key considerations for governments and partners who may wish to adopt or adapt the model.

Context

Nigeria faces a serious foundational learning crisis. National and partner data show that about 70%² of children in the country cannot read with meaning or solve simple mathematics problems, and less than 60%³ of children in school reach basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy.

UNICEF reports that around 75%⁴ of children between seven and fourteen years cannot read a simple sentence or solve a basic math problem. In early grades, only a small share of pupils can recognise letters, read words or comprehend simple sentences, and a significant proportion reach the end of primary school without basic comprehension skills. These patterns mirror broader trends in Sub-Saharan Africa, where learning poverty is high, and many children

complete several years of schooling without acquiring foundational skills.

Within this context, PLANE introduced the Accelerated Learning Holiday Camps to provide learners with an opportunity for targeted learning of basic literacy and numeracy skills. The programme converted school holidays into a period of intentional learning recovery. The purpose was to offer a short-cycle intervention for incoming Primary Four learners who were performing below expected levels in literacy and numeracy, and to test a scalable model that state governments and partners could adopt within their foundational learning strategies while generating evidence and lessons for replication.



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Intervention Architecture



The intervention was designed as a structured, learner-centred model that starts at the learner's actual competency level and builds upward through short, intensive cycles. Learners partake in two hours of daily instruction, one hour for literacy and one for numeracy.

Learners were assessed at the beginning of the camp using simplified Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) tools in literacy and numeracy. These assessments identified children who could not read letters, syllables or simple words, and those who could not identify or work with one-digit or two-digit numbers. Based on these entry points, learners were grouped by level.

Instruction was organised in small groups and followed an activity-based sequence. Lessons relied on songs, games, body movement, object handling and guided practice to reinforce key skills. The intervention architecture gave teachers clear objectives and a bank of activities, but also allowed them to adjust pacing and emphasis based on real-time observations of learner progress.

The model was designed to be low-cost and compatible with public school systems. It used existing school facilities, relied on government and community teachers and required only simple teaching and learning materials.

Implementation Process



The Holiday Camps were implemented across Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states, with trained teachers and local volunteers leading delivery. Teachers facilitated instruction and assessment, while volunteers supported group management, preparation of materials and learner engagement. This current round followed an initial pilot conducted in December 2024, which helped refine the model before it was delivered again at scale in August 2025.

Holiday timetables were used to schedule daily sessions that focused on literacy and numeracy only. The absence of regular term pressures created a calmer environment where teachers could attend to fewer subjects and learners could focus on core skills. Communities played an active role. Parents, school-based management committees and local leaders helped mobilise learners, monitor attendance and encourage participation.

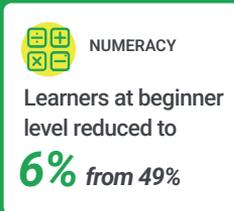


In Kaduna North, the Education Secretary reported that on the final day of the camp, pupils were asking for additional days, which signalled strong acceptance of the model. In Kano, a community leader noted that children attended because they knew they would gain knowledge they did not have before.

Implementation was monitored by school support officers and state-level teams, who visited the camps, observed lessons, verified assessments and documented experiences across the three states.

Successes and Evidence of Change

01. The camps produced rapid learning gains within **fifteen to twenty days**. In literacy, the share of learners at the beginner level reduced from **74% to 13%**⁷. In numeracy, the share at the beginner level reduced from **49% to 6%**⁸ over the same period. Many learners advanced by one or two instructional levels during the camp. These shifts are significant when compared against national patterns in which most learners take years to acquire basic reading and numeracy skills, if they do at all.



Although multiple factors influence learning outcomes, the contrast between the pre-camp and post-camp assessment suggests that the short, intensive cycles contributed meaningfully to the improvement observed⁹.



The numeric improvements were matched by changes in behaviour and confidence. A learner in Kano explained that before the camp, he could not read a sentence but now reads and writes with confidence. Another learner shared that she no longer feels afraid when asked to read aloud. Teachers reported that children who usually avoided reading or number tasks during the term began to participate actively, raise their hands and attempt new exercises.

02. This pattern is also reflected in PLANE's wider learning outcome assessments. Before the introduction of the holiday camps, state-level assessments showed that most learners remained at beginner bands in both literacy and numeracy with minimal upward movement.



However, after two rounds of Accelerated Learning Holiday Camps, the follow-up assessment recorded clear improvements, with more learners moving out of beginner levels and into word, paragraph and higher number recognition bands.

03. Parents and community members confirmed these observations. They reported that children were reading more at home, showing their work and discussing what they had learned. State officials observed that learners had clearly regained skills they previously lacked and expressed interest in sustaining and expanding the model.

Taken together, national statistics and camp-level data suggest that the intervention is addressing the same foundational gaps highlighted in national and international reports, but in a concentrated, practical and measurable way.

Key Drivers of Effectiveness

Several factors appear to explain why the model performed well in this context.



Instruction began at the learner's actual ability level rather than their formal grade. This alignment reduced frustration and allowed learners to experience early success, which is critical in settings where children have long histories of struggle in school.



Lessons were activity-based. Movement, songs, games and object handling helped learners process new information through repeated, varied practice. The relatively small number of learners in each group also supported active participation and effective classroom management. The short cycle format concentrated time and attention on a narrow set of foundational skills. This contrasts with the broader, more fragmented curriculum of regular school terms and is more suited to closing specific gaps revealed by national surveys.



Teachers had the flexibility to adapt activities and pacing based on live observations. They were not confined to rigid scripts but worked within a clear structure. This allowed them to respond to different starting points and learning speeds within their groups. Community engagement added a supportive layer around the classroom. Encouragement from parents, monitoring by school-based management committees and visible follow-up from state officials signalled to learners that their effort mattered.

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

The evidence and success of this pilot intervention in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states suggest that the Accelerated Learning Holiday Camp model is a viable option for state governments seeking to address foundational learning gaps in a low-cost and scalable way. It uses existing infrastructure, aligns with national concern about learning poverty and has demonstrated measurable gains within a short period.

For future cycles, states may consider extending camp duration to twenty days to deepen consolidation of skills and allow for mid-cycle regrouping. They may also strengthen mobilisation for children whose attendance is affected by household labour or seasonal activities and invest in simple but durable teaching and learning materials that can withstand repeated use.

Conclusion

Nigeria's foundational learning crisis is deep and well-documented, requiring practical and scalable solutions that can deliver results within existing system constraints. PLANE's Accelerated Learning Holiday Camps demonstrate concrete evidence-based examples of what is possible when school holidays are used deliberately to support learning recovery in environments where there is high learning loss.

This pilot model and related evidence demonstrate that short, structured and activity-based learning cycles can produce measurable improvements in literacy and numeracy

within a few weeks, while also rebuilding learner confidence and strengthening community engagement with schools.

As PLANE's role evolves, this learning brief is intended to serve as a practical reference and guide for state governments and partners seeking to adopt, adapt and institutionalise the model within their own foundational learning strategies, contributing to sustained progress for all children across Nigeria.

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Scan to Watch the Pilot Phase of the Accelerated Learning Holiday Camps on YouTube.

