



Literacy month: Call for effective effort to promote reading culture at a foundation level

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Nurturing future job creators in Rwanda's secondary schools



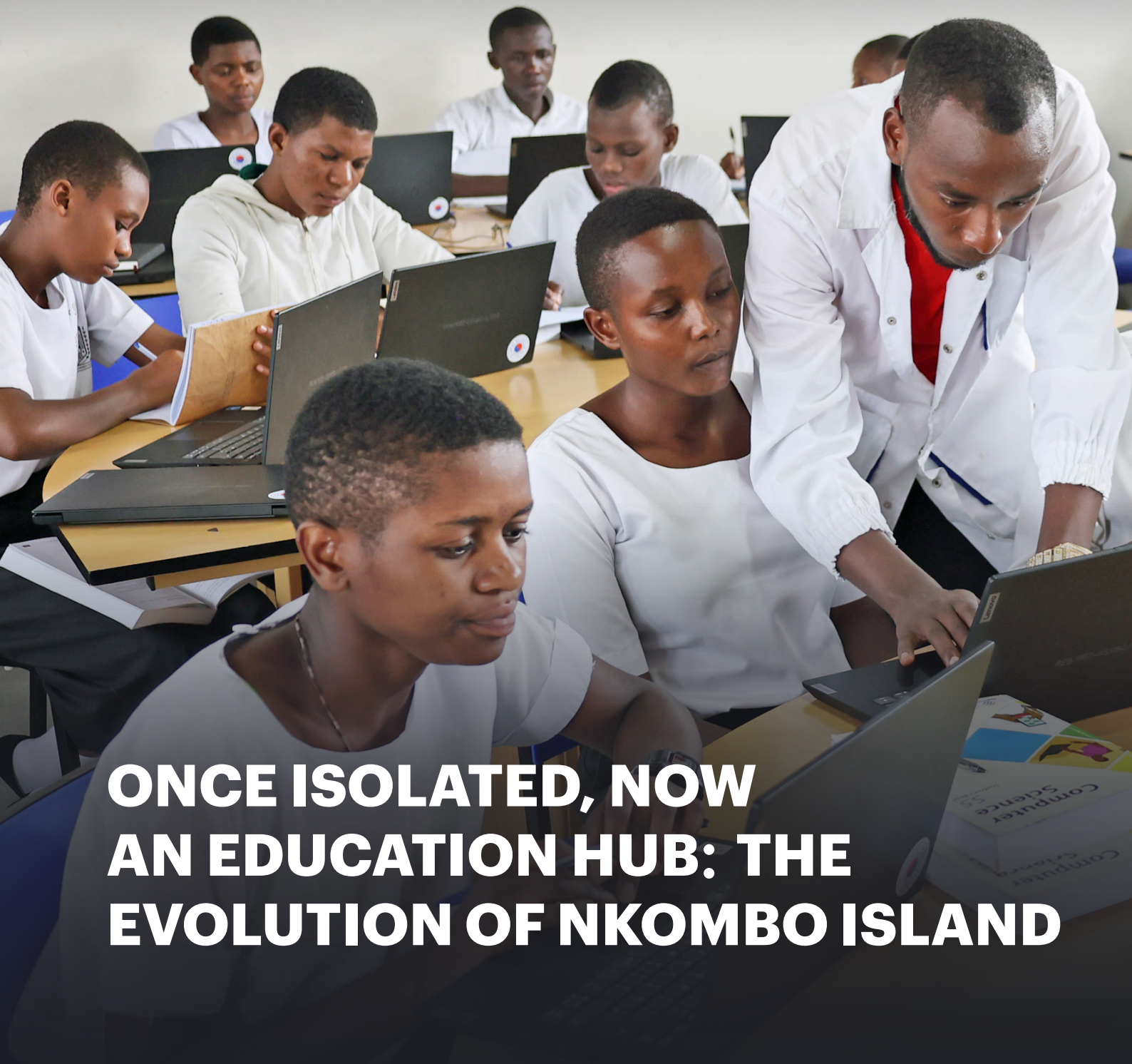
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Newsletter



ONCE ISOLATED, NOW AN EDUCATION HUB: THE EVOLUTION OF NKOMBO ISLAND



REB | **RWANDA BASIC
EDUCATION BOARD**

FOREWORD

Lxx Dear esteemed reader,

As we continue to build a prosperous and resilient Rwanda, it is imperative that we invest in the education of our youth. A cornerstone of this investment lies in the teaching and learning of our rich and complex history.

History is not merely a collection of facts and dates; it is the story of our people, our triumphs, our tragedies, and our collective journey.

It is, therefore, incumbent upon our history teachers to possess a deep and nuanced understanding of our past, which was marred by decades of sectarian and divisive politics that led to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in which over a million innocent lives were lost.

Through initiatives like targeted Itorero for history teachers, they will be able to have the full grasp of our intricate history which will then give them the confidence to impart the same knowledge to their respective learners.

By equipping themselves with a thorough knowledge of Rwandan history, teachers can inspire their students to think critically, analyze information, and develop a sense of national identity. They can foster empathy, tolerance, and a commitment to building a peaceful and prosperous future.

Let us challenge ourselves to delve into the rich tapestry of our history. By doing so, we can ignite the spark of curiosity in our students and empower them to become responsible citizens who contribute positively to our nation's development.

This is one of the topics tackled in our sixth edition of the Rwanda Basic Education Newsletter, which also delves into other milestones within the country's basic education ecosystem.

Other topics include a sneak-peak into the Foundational Learning Strategy, the expectations and the role of everyone to attain the intended results.

These and more can be found in this edition, which has been published through a partnership of REB and Unicef.

*Dr. Nelson Mbarushimana,
Director General, Rwanda Basic Education Board.*

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VISION

The vision of REB is to promote the quality of education in basic, specialised and adult schools



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WHY SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL SKILLS ARE CRITICAL FOR RWANDAN LEARNERS



Libby Karangwa-Miles, Executive Director of the Wellspring Foundation for Education.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is recognized as a fundamental component to high-quality education, and its significance to helping Rwanda on its journey towards economic and social transformation cannot be overemphasized.

SEL not only improves learning outcomes, but also increases positive social behaviors such as kindness, sharing, and empathy. It improves student attitudes toward school while reducing depression and stress among students.

More specifically, SEL skills have been shown to help students better cope with emotional stress, solve problems, and avoid peer pressure to engage in harmful activities. It provides a foundation for safe and positive learning, and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life.

But what is social emotional learning? SEL is defined as the process of helping young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. There are five categories of SEL competencies:

Self-Management: Skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate our own emotions and behaviors as we strive to achieve personal and educational goals.

Social Awareness: This involves the ability to understand, empathize, and feel compassion for people from different backgrounds or cultures, understanding social norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports.

Self-awareness: The ability to manage our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in a range of situations and to achieve our goals and aspirations.

Relationship skills: Relationship skills help students establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, both at school and at home. This is about communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, managing conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed.

Responsible decision making: This involves learning how to make constructive choices about our personal behavior and our social

interactions across diverse settings. It requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety concerns, behavioral norms for risky behaviors, the health and well-being of self and others, and to evaluate the consequences of our actions.

In addition to supporting academic achievement across a whole range of school subjects, developing SEL competencies is itself a key goal in Rwandan education institutions.

Over the last three years, Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), in partnership with the Wellspring Foundation for Education (Wellspring) and its technical partner, World Bank, have piloted and implemented the Youth First Rwanda Program – a wellbeing and resilience program integrated into the school day.

This evidence-based program is designed to improve both student and teacher wellbeing and resilience, interpersonal relationships in and out of school environments and empower students to impact their communities.

Youth First Rwanda is implemented in 55 schools across seven districts including Gasabo, Kayonza, Bugesera, Huye, Rulindo, Musanze and Rubavu District, where Senior one students took part in a weekly interactive sessions facilitated by trained teachers who are mentored and coached by Wellspring's team of trainers.

The program empowered selected teachers, known as SEL facilitators, to lead weekly student sessions in their schools, using a pedagogical approach that is student-led and inquiry-based.

The sessions covered a range of topics including building trust and listening skills, identifying and using our character strengths, understanding and managing emotions, goal setting and planning, forgiveness and appreciation.

Including also identifying and opposing violence, problem solving skills, assertive communication and conflict resolution, changes in adolescence and taking care of our bodies, creating and maintaining positive relationships, gender and rights, and substance use and abuse.

Since 2021, the program has supported more than 20,000 Senior One students and 240 teachers across Rwanda. Students who participated in the Youth First Rwanda program showed significantly more positive change in areas of resilience and coping skills, engagement in school work, peer and teacher relationships,

and a sense of belonging at school.

Changes in these areas resulted in a positive impact on the promotion rate as evidenced by five percent difference in promotion rate between Senior One students in control and experimental schools.

For instance, an 18-year-old male student, returned to senior one after a very long absence as he had been continuously lured away from school to sell marijuana.

Once back, he had low self-esteem as he was older than his classmates. However, he joined the Youth First program where he was empowered through discussions and regained hope for a better future. For the first time, he set himself a life goal and then identified several short-term goals he worked towards. Each week, he reviewed his activities with his accountability partner.

For a teacher, one of the lessons acquired from the program about attitudinal healing applied to her personal life. This lesson looks at the importance of letting go of painful or fearful thoughts.

“When we let go of fear, only love remains. We come to realize that it is not people, events or circumstances that cause us to be upset; rather it is our response to those things that cause our suffering. We can take responsibility for our own attitudes, choices, and outlook.”

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) defines quality education as going beyond academic competencies and attainment to promoting and facilitating wellbeing of the self and of others.

Research has shown that children with social and emotional skills do better in school, have improved relationships with peers and adults, are better adjusted emotionally, and have improved mental health.

This article was developed in partnership with Wellspring Foundation for Education

ONCE ISOLATED, NOW AN EDUCATION HUB: THE EVOLUTION OF NKOMBO ISLAND

On a foggy and breezy Monday morning, the tranquil shores of Lake Kivu beckon as our boat docks on Nkombo Island. The island's lush green hills, the serene breeze from the lake, and the peaceful ambiance make it outstanding.

However, beneath this calm exterior, lies a remarkable story of resilience and transformation. One that revolves around education.

Nkombo Island, located in the Western Province, has witnessed an incredible evolution in its educational landscape. For decades, education on the island was a distant dream, with minimal infrastructure and no opportunities beyond primary school.

Yet today, it stands as a beacon of progress, with a blossoming education system that rivals many urban areas.

As we move deeper into the island, the first stop is at Ecole Primaire Saint Pierre Nkombo, the island's flagship primary school. It is 8 a.m., and the school is buzzing with energy. Hundreds of students, together with their teachers. The assembly is a routine every morning before classes begin.

They stand in neat lines, chanting songs and reciting poems that reflect Rwanda's core values—patriotism, hard work, and unity. It is a scene of enthusiasm and hope. The story of education on Nkombo Island

is one that began much later than other regions in Rwanda. The Catholic Church first introduced primary education on the island in the 1930s.

It was an ill-equipped grass-thatched mud-and-wattle structure which did not do much to inspire islanders to attend school for decades.

More so, the school was not there for academic purposes. It served more as a means of spreading religious teachings than as a formal educational institution. "Back in the day, it was a school without proper infrastructure," recalls Beatrice Buhoro, a teacher at Ecole Primaire Nkombo who has spent 25 years teaching at the same school.

"Students and teachers alike used dilapidated wooden benches to sit. Classes were dusty," she says, reflecting on her own time as a student at the same school.

The situation worsened after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The genocide had decimated the country's education sector, and Nkombo Island was no exception.

There was a severe shortage of teachers, and many of those who remained were unqualified to teach. The only primary school on the island, Ecole Primaire Nkombo, could barely accommodate its students and would only have classes up to primary three.

"Education was a challenge for us," Buhoro continues. "There were very few teachers, and those who taught were not

trained. Many students dropped out, and there were limited opportunities for continuous education.

Much as education was tough for Buhoro who completed her primary education in early 1990s, those who studied before her faced even hurdles than those in her time.

For many years, Ecole Primaire Nkombo remained the only school on the island.

Students who managed to finish Primary 3 had to cross Lake Kivu to continue their education on the mainland.

This journey was not only costly but also dangerous, as many students found the boat rides frightening and exhausting.

"Some students even stopped after Primary 3 because they could not afford to travel to the mainland for further education," Buhoro recalls.

Emmanuel Byakasa, a father of six, vividly remembers the hardships of sending his children to school. "Back in the day, the education system on the island was weak. Students had to cross the lake, which was costly, and many dropped out along the way," he says.

The transformational journey

The transformation in education on



Nkombo Island began in earnest after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi with increased investment in infrastructure and teacher training.

Ecole Primaire Nkombo gradually improved, with classrooms now made of concrete, surrounded by a fence, and staffed by qualified teachers. More schools were built, and a secondary school, GS Saint Pierre Nkombo, was established adjacent to the primary school.

“This is a far cry from what it used to be,” says Buhoro. “Our children now have the opportunity to study in a safe, conducive environment. We are proud to be teachers on the island, and it’s heartwarming to see the transformation that has taken place,” he adds.

A hub for innovation

The secondary school, GS Saint Pierre Nkombo, has become a symbol of the island’s educational progress. It offers a variety of academic tracks, including science-related subjects, and has a growing focus on technology. One of the standout features of GS Saint Pierre Nkombo is its emphasis on innovation.

The school’s students have worked projects in fields such as robotics, smart irrigation systems, fire extinguishers, clap lamp controls, and even smart blind

sticks for the visually impaired.

Father Donat Sinayituse, the head teacher at GS Saint Pierre Nkombo, beams with pride as he speaks about the school’s accomplishments. “Our students are not just excelling in their academics; they are at the forefront of innovation. They have created robots, smart irrigation systems, and even a motorcycle powered by water and salt. This is the future of education on Nkombo Island,” he says.

High-speed internet

The school has also embraced modern technology, including high-speed internet access through StarLink, and has equipped classrooms with smart technology. These developments are giving students access to the same resources available in urban schools, allowing them to research, collaborate, and develop their skills in new ways.

Silas Hagenimana, an 18-year-old student pursuing Mathematics, Computer Science, and Economics, is one of the many students benefiting from these advancements. “Studying here is different from what I had imagined,” he says.

“With access to fast internet and smart classrooms, I can focus on my studies and carry out research in ways that were impossible for those who came before me. The resources here have made a real difference in my academic life,” Adds Hagenimana who aspires to become a software engineer.

Another student, Angelina Breann Nihabikuzo, transferred to GS Saint Pierre Nkombo three years ago after she completed her primary education from

one of prestigious schools in the City of Kigali. Today she is now thriving and proud of education she is acquiring from Nkombo Island.

“When I first came here, I was unsure about how education on an island would be. But over time, I’ve realized that the peaceful environment here helps me concentrate on my studies,” she says. “My wish is to continue with my advanced level here on the island and pursue sciences,” she adds.

The improvements in education on Nkombo Island are not just felt by the students; teachers, too, are benefiting from the changes. Emmanuel Musenge, a teacher at GS Saint Pierre Nkombo, reflects on his own educational journey.

“When I was a student in the early 1990s, we had to endure poor conditions. Now, as a teacher, I am proud to be part of this transformation. We have qualified teachers, better classrooms, and, most importantly, the support of the community.”

The numbers

Nkombo Island witnessed a remarkable transformation in its education system, from its humble beginnings to the establishment of eight schools catering to over 6,000 students.

According to Appolinaire Nangwahafi, the Sector Education Officer, Nkombo now hosts three primary schools, three day schools offering both primary and secondary education, one boarding



school, and a Vocational Training Center (VTC).

In total, 6,450 students are enrolled on the island. Of these, 4,994 students are in pre-primary and primary education, with 2,477 boys and 2,517 girls. The island's secondary schools accommodate 1,396 students, including 666 boys and 730 girls. Additionally, 60 students are currently pursuing vocational training at the VTC.

Despite the progress, the island faces significant challenges. "Poverty remains a major barrier for many families," Nangwahafi explains. "Life at Nkombo is different from the mainland, and this economic divide affects students' ability to access quality education," he adds.

Access to technology also remains

uneven. While three schools have embraced Starlink internet, revolutionizing teaching and learning, the remaining schools lack reliable internet access. "The internet has made a huge difference in the schools that have it, but we urgently need it in the others," Nangwahafi adds.

Other challenges include shortages of teaching materials and the high turnover of teachers. Many educators leave Nkombo for other regions in search of better opportunities, further hindering the island's educational progress.

Despite the progress, challenges remain. Teacher shortages, outdated materials, and infrastructure gaps continue to hinder the full potential of Nkombo's education system.

The government, through the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), is committed to addressing these challenges.

Dr. Nelson Mbaruhimana, the Director-General of REB, acknowledges the progress made on the island. "Nkombo Island schools have shown incredible resilience and competence. The students here are performing well, and their innovation is commendable. We are working closely with our partners to ensure that Nkombo's students receive the resources they need to excel," he says.

For parents like Byakasa: "Today, I am grateful that my grandchildren can attend school here, and even continue their education up to secondary school without leaving the island."





UNPACKING THE IMPACT OF RWANDA'S GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION SECTOR PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION GRANT

Rwanda's sustained efforts and investments in transforming its education sector have positioned the country favorably to work together with development partners to achieve impressive results. These investments are generating significant returns across the sector.

In 2020, Rwanda secured a \$30.8 million grant from the Global Partnership

for Education (GPE), the Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG) which was designed to support the implementation of the country's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) for 2018-2024 across pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education.

The ESPIG aimed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning for all students in Rwanda, with a focus on

improving teachers' capacity in English and inclusive education, providing essential teaching and learning materials to schools, enhancing learning in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and improving school infrastructure and the learning environment throughout the country.

Dr. Flora Mutezigaju, Education Specialist and Coordinator of Global Partnership for Education Grants at UNICEF, stated

Global Partnership for Education Grants

\$30.8M

The Education Sector Program Implementation Grant (ESPIG)

Effective from June 2020-June 2024. The grant supports the implementation of the current Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2018/2024

\$30M

The Multiplier Grant (MG)

Effective from November 2022 to July 2026. This is an additional financing for the Quality Basic Education Project.

\$2.4M

The System Capacity Grant (SCG)

Effective from January 2023 to December 2025

\$31.29M

The System Transformation Grant (STG)

Effective from July 2024- June 2028

that significant achievements were made during the grant implementation period, reflecting a strong commitment to improving educational outcomes.

“All the activities planned under the ESPIG were successfully implemented, and the project’s targets were achieved. As a result, we have observed improvements in students’ learning outcomes,” she noted in an interview.

Here, we review the achievements made in implementation, focusing on four priority areas of the Education Sector Strategic Plan supported by the Grant.

As part of the teacher capacity development program, teachers’ capacity in English language skills and inclusive education methodologies were enhanced. The capacity building training enabled teachers to create inclusive and supportive classroom environments that engage all students, including those with special needs.

Some of the ESPIG - Key Achievements



8,000

School Based Mentors Trained in English



1.6M

1.6 million textbooks provided to schools: science and mathematics



50

Schools equipped with smart classrooms



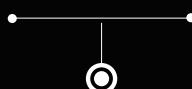
3,500

Packages of TLMs provide to preprimary schools



4,000

Teachers trained in Inclusive Teaching Methodologies



100

100 classrooms, 10 science laboratories, 10 Resource centres constructed



100

121-day secondary schools provided with Laboratory equipment

Under this component, 4,000 teachers were trained in inclusive teaching methodologies, gaining the skills and

competencies needed to effectively teach a diverse range of students, including those with special needs. This initiative has supported 39,227 learners with disabilities in primary and secondary education, ensuring they receive the assistance needed to fully participate and learn.

Additionally, 3,000 preprimary teachers were trained in play-based learning and creating locally made teaching and learning materials, contributing to quality education for over 540 primary school students. Furthermore, 8,000 school-based mentors in primary and secondary schools received English proficiency training to better support the ongoing professional development of other teachers at their schools. As a result, there has been an improvement in the number of learners meeting English benchmarks in national assessments.

When it comes to inclusivity, she noted that investing in inclusive schools proved to be more beneficial than the special schools because students with special needs can thrive in an inclusive education environment alongside other students.

The project also built 10 resource and assessment centres in inclusive model schools. These centers allow teachers to provide targeted support to students with special needs in subjects where they tend to fall behind, while enabling them to rejoin regular classrooms for other subjects. Consequently, enrollment of children with disabilities in inclusive schools has increased.

Furthermore, support also went to

infrastructure development where 84 classrooms, 10 science laboratories for Chemistry, Physics and Biology were constructed and 50 schools equipped with smart classrooms. Overall, these efforts contribute to a high-quality learning environment for primary and general secondary school students.

Provision of teaching and learning materials for improved learning outcomes

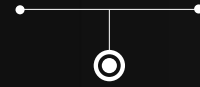
Access to high-quality teaching and learning materials (TLMs) is fundamental to effective education. ESPIG addressed this need by providing essential resources aligned with the competency-based curriculum. The initiative not only supplied textbooks but also incorporated innovative teaching materials that foster active learning and critical thinking among students.

More than 1.6 million textbooks with a special focus on elementary science and technology subject textbooks were provided to schools and 3,500 packages of TLMs given to pre-primary schools while 1,500 science kits were provided to primary schools, and 121 secondary schools were provided with science laboratory equipment. This reduced the textbook pupil ratio from 5:1 in 2017 to 4:1 in 2023 and improved learning



3,000

preprimary teachers/ caregivers trained on play based learning and making locally made TLMs



1,500

Science kits provided to primary schools





condition for more than 2,800,000 primary learners.

Mutezigaju highlighted that by encouraging participation in STEM subjects and improving facilities, equipment, materials and capacities of teachers in STEM, the program contributed to the cultivation of a generation of skilled professionals and learners capable of contributing to Rwanda's development goals while at the same time addressing gender disparities in STEM fields, ensuring that girls have equal opportunities to excel.

The impacts of ESPIG extend beyond immediate educational outcomes, she said "by improving teacher training, enhancing STEM education, and modernizing school infrastructure, the program played a vital role in preparing Rwanda's youth for future challenges. The focus on inclusivity ensured that no child is left behind, promoting social equity and cohesion."

From a development partner perspective, Mutezigaju noted that the success of ESPIG serves as a model for similar

initiatives in other regions, demonstrating the power of targeted investment in education to drive transformational change.

She noted that the foundations laid and strengthened by this programme are now being sustained by continued government investment and development partner support in the areas of strengthening pre-primary education, STEM education, English language learning and inclusive education, and this is the main legacy of the programme



TRANSFORMING EDUCATION: IMPACTFUL JOURNEY OF PRIMARY TEACHER RESIDENCY PROGRAMME



Evode Uwodusenga, a graduate of the Primary Teaching Residency Programme (PTRP), shared how his career has been transformed thanks to the knowledge and skills he gained through the initiative.

He is now ready to help his pupils realise their dreams and transform education in Rwanda. This initiative marks a significant step towards achieving quality education for all in the country, according to him.

“The programme helped me become a professional teacher, equipping me with evidence-based pedagogy strategies, English proficiency, and leadership skills. These skills will enable me to inspire and empower learners, contributing to quality education and national development,” he shared.

Pascaline Niwemugore Uwiringiyimana, another residency teacher, echoed Uwodusenga’s sentiments. She praised the programme for deepening her understanding of teaching methodologies and expressed hope that it would continue to benefit more teachers in the future.

According to Uwiringiyimana, the PTRP has the potential to provide Rwanda with

cohorts of highly competent beginning teachers, ready to deliver instruction using evidence-based strategies and learner-centered activities confidently.

The PTRP piloted by the Government of Rwanda in partnership with the Rainwater Charitable Organisation, aimed to enhance the capacity of newly qualified pre-service primary school teachers.

In a year, it offered extended training in evidence-based pedagogy, English, and ICT to boost their 21st-century skills, providing hands-on training, mentoring, and coaching to prepare teachers for implementing the competency-based curriculum (CBC) and effectively leading the teaching and learning process.

Gaspard Twagirayezu, the Minister of Education stated; “Last October, when we all met at the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) with students and different partners to launch this programme, we saw many were afraid. We all had questions and doubts, but we were united by the desire to do something different.”

Twagirayezu emphasized the demanding nature of the current education system. “We ask a lot of our teachers, especially primary school teachers who build the

foundations of our education system and society. We owe them a lot, and there’s still a package of support we need to provide to ensure they can meet these demands.”

The curriculum requires student-centered learning, which necessitates practice, patience, and mentorship—elements provided through this program. “This idea stemmed from our reflection on how we could help our teachers deliver effectively,” Twagirayezu explained.

Moreover, he disclosed that the programme was mooted during discussions amongst education stakeholders with view to increase the quality of education especially at the elementary level.

“We wanted to improve our primary teachers’ preparation post-TTC by focusing on four key areas: teaching in English, managing classrooms with evidence-based pedagogy, utilising technology, and allowing ample time for practice. We questioned if this could be achieved within the existing three-year TTC framework and decided to extend the training period to enhance these skills further.”

The programme began with 100 graduates participating in this



experiment, aiming to learn and improve the training of primary school teachers. “We started with uncertainty, but our commitment to continuous questioning, testing, and monitoring has yielded positive results,” Twagirayezu said.

“We are not at our best yet, but we’ve identified what works and what can be improved.”

Nelson Mbarushimana, the Director General of REB, celebrated the

achievements of the inaugural cohort of 100 Teacher Residents and highlighted the critical role of teachers in achieving Rwanda’s Vision 2050.

“The government recognises teaching as a distinct and valued profession within public service. Continuous reforms and initiatives in teacher education, management, and professionalization are crucial for strengthening teacher training, with a strong focus on pedagogical skills and school-based training,” he said.

Mbarushimana, further highlighted that the programme had shown significant improvements in the competencies of Teacher Residents, particularly in literacy, mathematics, and science.

They demonstrated growth in professional agency, teaching practice, reflective practices, and professional skills from tutoring learners. The enhanced English literacy skills also ensured their readiness to use English as the language of instruction.

He further said that the residency Program has provided all 100 Teacher Residents in the pilot phase ample opportunities for hands-on training, mentoring, and coaching to prepare them for implementing the CBC while developing appropriate knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes for effectively leading the teaching and learning process.



REMEDIAL EDUCATION: AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVE LEARNING AND REDUCE REPETITION

As schools reopened for the new academic year in September, the experience would have been very different for Axel Irakoze, a primary three learner at GS Mayange in Bugesera District, had he not participated in the holiday remedial classes.

The holiday remedial learning programme, conducted by the Ministry of Education between July and August 2024, was initiated to support learners in Primary 1, 2, and 3 who had not met grade-level competencies and were at risk of repeating the year. This programme provided these learners with an opportunity to catch up and advance to the next grade without needing to repeat.

The program delivered targeted pedagogical support in Kinyarwanda, English, and Mathematics, facilitated by specially trained teachers who helped students improve their skills in these core subjects. This support enabled learners to progress to the next grade in time for the new school year.

Preparation for the holiday remedial programme

On June 27, 2024, the National Examination and School Inspection

Authority (NESA) issued new guidelines for student promotion and repetition. According to these guidelines, students scoring below 40% (grades S and F) were recommended for remedial learning, while those scoring between 40% and 49% (grade E) could either be promoted based on school committee deliberations or participate in the remedial program.

Following these guidelines, the Ministry of Education, through the Rwanda Basic Education Board, organized the Holiday Remedial Learning Program across all public and government-aided primary schools. This program, conducted from July 29 to August 30, 2024, targeted lower primary learners recommended for remediation.

Before the program began, the Rwanda Basic Education Board developed essential resources, including a simplified remedial learning guide, instructional videos, and a training module for lower primary teachers and Directors of Studies on effective remedial education strategies. These materials were validated with support from foundational education experts, including the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID, and SOS.

A total of 28,502 lower primary teachers

(in Kinyarwanda, English, and Math) and 1,242 Directors of Studies received training on remedial strategies and the use of these materials. Teachers then conducted remedial sessions in their respective schools, while Directors of Studies provided oversight and mentorship to ensure the program was effectively implemented.

Eight-year-old Irakoze, who had been set to repeat Primary Two due to low scores in mathematics and English, was promoted to Primary Three after receiving individualized support in the remedial program and showing improved performance. He is among over 360,000 lower primary students who participated in the Holiday Remedial Learning Program.

Data on student attendance show that of the 417,995 students recommended for remedial learning, 361,055 (86%) attended the holiday remedial classes, while 56,940 (14%) did not participate. Furthermore, out of the 361,055 students who attended, 343,979 (95%) took part in the summative assessment, while 17,076 (5%) did not sit for the NESA examinations.

Regarding student performance, the data reveal that of the 343,979 learners



who completed the assessment, 220,975 (64%) achieved grade-level competence and were promoted to the next level. However, 123,004 learners (36%) did not meet the required proficiency and had to repeat the year.

With 220,975 learners, who would otherwise have repeated, progressing to the next grade, the programme was deemed an overall success in terms of learning gains across the three subject areas.

Hugh Delaney, Coordinator of the Foundational Learning Delivery Unit in the Ministry of Education, said the success of the program more than halved the repetition rate in lower primary this year due to the targeted intervention.

“In a classroom, while everyone strives to learn at the same pace, this is often not the case. Some children require different educational strategies to close gaps in their knowledge and achieve academic success. Where class sizes are large, it is difficult for teachers to follow individual learners and provide the additional support struggling learners need to catch up. Recognizing these challenges, the Government of Rwanda introduced the remedial learning program to support learners who may be falling behind academically and help them achieve grade-level proficiency”.

The program also addresses a significant challenge in primary education: high repetition rates. According to the 2022/2023 Education Statistical Yearbook, the primary school repetition rate reached 30%, with the highest rate (36.2%) in Primary One. High repetition rates hinder student progression and place additional demands on resources such as classrooms, teachers, and textbooks.

Beatrice Mukamurego, a Primary 3 teacher at GS Mayange, who was trained in remedial education, said that the programme helped students to catch up academically and stay enrolled in schools, which would have been a different case for many students who come from vulnerable families and who may have been forced to drop out.

She narrated that she assessed the learners' performance every day and grouped them based on their learning level, which helped her to closely monitor each one and provide tailored support depending on individual learning needs.



“Remedial education has been initiated as a strategy to identify those learners who are falling behind in their studies and to put in place a targeted programme of instruction to help accelerate their learning and allow them to keep pace with the rest of the class” Delaney said, while stressing that along with this holiday remedial programme, the plan is to introduce remedial education into schools throughout the school year, with specific remedial education sessions now included on the school timetable.

“As a result of the holiday remedial programme, we are going to see a lower rate of repetition in lower primary grades this year, which is good news for all those learners who have achieved learning gains and who can progress to the next grade. It is to be expected that the teachers who were involved in the program, and who received training on remediation, will take back new teaching skills and new approaches to supporting learners who are falling behind into their regular classes, which will have a positive impact on learning levels overall throughout the coming school year,” he added.

He emphasized that remedial education is one effective approach to improve learning outcomes in the lower grades, and that is why it has been included within the Foundational learning strategy of the Ministry of Education, to accelerate learning in pre-primary and lower primary grades. With growing numbers of children attending pre-primary and accessing primary school, it is essential to focus on equipping them with the foundations of learning, in particular numeracy and literacy skills. The programme has also been deemed a success, applying a cost-benefit analysis.

The costs of the remedial program incorporate efforts to mobilize and train teachers, school feeding for students,

and incentives for teachers, among other expenses. However, the savings in one year along from having over 220,000 fewer repeaters are significant and outweigh the costs of the programme, while resulting in fewer overcrowded classrooms at lower primary level.

Early Childhood Development Efforts

Delaney further highlighted that exposure to quality pre-primary education can help prepare children for primary school and reduce repetition rates. The Government has invested in expanding access to pre-primary education, which remains one of the top priorities of the education sector over the coming years.

“Children who have access to quality early childhood education or preprimary education find it easier to adapt to primary school, are school ready in effect and they are less likely to repeat grades,” he explained, while noting that the family environment and family support for children's learning also contributes to school performance.

This is why communication and awareness raising efforts with families is important for parents and communities to actively contribute to children's learning, which is also part of the Foundational Learning Strategy, he added.

The Remedial Learning Program is now being implemented in schools across the country to provide timely support for students at risk of falling behind. Its success will require continued mentorship and coaching for teachers, as well as a diverse range of teaching and learning materials.

For Irakoze, understanding key math calculations such as subtraction and multiplication is no longer as hard as it used to be, in addition to being able to comprehend basic English sentences and expressions.

EMPOWERING RWANDAN TEACHERS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND EQUIPPING SCIENCE LABORATORIES



For best learning outcomes and quality education to be realised, investment in teachers becomes an imperative. This is a key enabler for Rwanda’s efforts in human capital development as a nation whose future depends much so on the skills of its youthful population to bear fruits.

In a combined project, Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) made investments across three components aimed to empower teachers and boost their productivity as they navigate the evolving education landscape.

The initiatives include deployment of laptops and accessories to all smart classrooms in 16 Teacher Training Centres (TTC) across the country, disbursing practical materials for science laboratories in schools, and training of uncertified pre-primary and primary teachers on key subjects aimed at fostering holistic child development and effective teaching practices.

Emmanuel Shyaka, the Single Project Implementation Unit (SPIU) Coordination, REB, said that the three components complement each other to accelerate the quality of education by

addressing key challenges that teachers and students face.

“By integrating technology and practical resources while investing in comprehensive teacher training, we not only enhance student learning experiences but also empower educators to become adaptable and effective professionals. This investment in education ensures that future generations are well-equipped for success in an ever-changing world,” he said.

Enhancing English proficiency and digital literacy

REB distributed 1,600 laptops in all classrooms of TTCs to enable student-teachers to access a wide range of online resources, from grammar guides to interactive video tutorials accessed on platforms like YouTube, Coursera, and specialized language-learning websites as a path to significantly improve their English proficiency while familiarizing themselves with the digital gadgets.

PROVINCE	ACTIVE TEACHERS	ACTIVE STUDENTS
Eastern	1,946	5,799
Kigali	1,011	3,364
Northern	2,206	9,137
Southern	3,005	11,803
Western	2,891	10,247

“This access empowers student-teachers to engage in self-paced learning, allowing them to revisit difficult topics and tailor their educational experiences to their unique needs,” Shyaka noted.

Such flexibility is particularly crucial in language mastery, where students can practice and refine their skills at their own pace.

Through applications like Zoom and Skype, student-teachers can participate in virtual discussions, collaborate on projects, and immerse themselves in diverse linguistic environments, which are essential for mastering a language.

Shyaka stated: “Beyond language proficiency, student-teachers also improve their digital literacy by using laptops. This skill is essential for future educators who will be expected to teach in tech-enabled environments, including integrating digital tools into their own classrooms.”

He said that teachers are able to monitor the progress of student-teachers learning outcome through online learning management systems (LMS) using the gadgets, adding that the laptops will undergo maintenance checks every three months by a collaborative service provider of the same laptops.

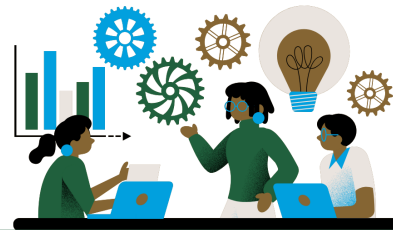
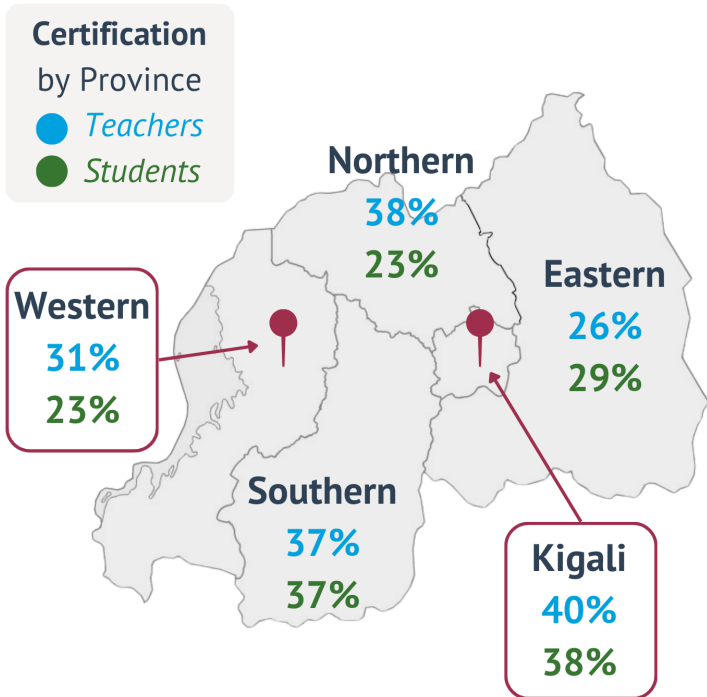
Strengthening STEM education

In parallel, as Rwanda’s education sector seeks to produce students equipped with hands-on skills by providing necessary materials to link the theoretical knowledge to practical skill sets, REB provided science lab materials to different schools.

The materials include chemicals and apparatus used in science subjects such as Chemistry, Physics, and Biology in secondary schools.

“Well-equipped labs allow students to conduct hands-on experiments that deepen their understanding of theoretical concepts. For instance, when students engage in experiments that illustrate chemical reactions or biological processes, they can bridge the gap between textbook knowledge and real-world applications.”

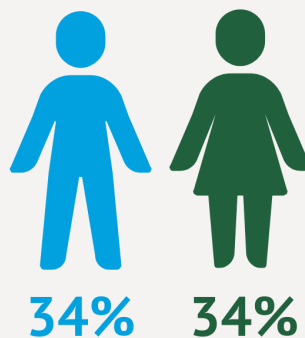
This hands-on learning experience is crucial for improving student engagement and interest in science as practical experiments stimulate curiosity and creativity, making science more enjoyable,



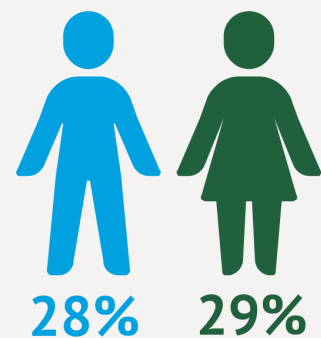
88 003
LEARNERS ENROLLED

CERTIFICATION RATES BY GENDER

Teachers



Students





Comfort/Confidence level indicators:

- *Not comfortable/confident*
- *Quite comfortable/confident*
- *Very comfortable/confident*

TEACHERS - BEFORE TRAINING

Level of confidence in their digital skills (in %)

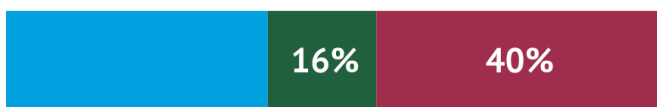


Level of comfort including digital tools in teaching (in %)



STUDENTS - BEFORE TRAINING

Level of comfort with a computer (in %)



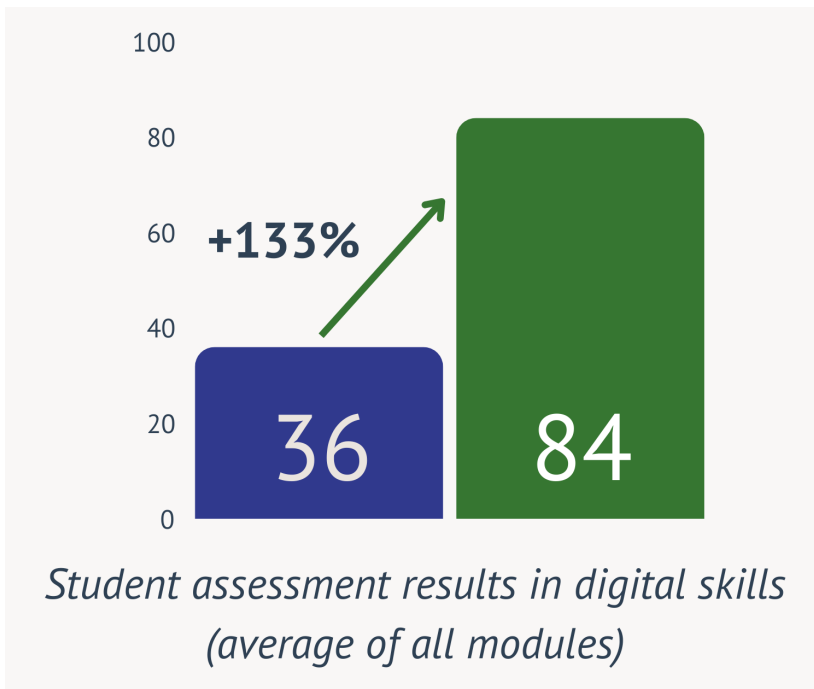
according to Shyaka.

Research shows that students retain information better when they actively participate in their learning process –a key element for the Competency-Based Curriculum.

By performing experiments, students grasp scientific principles more effectively than through passive learning methods like lectures or reading assignments. Furthermore, access to lab materials fosters the development of essential scientific skills and cultivates technical skills that are crucial for budding scientists and future professionals in STEM fields.

Students learn to think critically, formulate hypotheses, and analyze results, honing their problem-solving abilities as they experiment with different approaches to achieve desired outcomes. On an important note, Shyaka highlighted that providing materials ensures that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to engage with science in a hands-on way, especially empowering underrepresented groups in STEM, such as girls or students from marginalized communities.

Training uncertified teachers to boost education workforce



While the provision of laptops and science lab materials significantly enhances the learning environment, the role of teacher training is paramount. In that regard, REB through a partnership with the World Bank, identified 26,300 uncertified pre-primary and primary teachers to be trained in areas such as child psychology, inclusive education, and effective pedagogy to ensure that the educators are well-equipped to deliver quality education.

According to Shyaka, the project worth \$4 million is implemented within two years, whereby they are categorized in two cohorts and the first one will graduate in December 2024 while the second one will kick start the training in February 2025.

He explained that there are at least 617

trainers available to transfer knowledge to the cohort during weekends and academic holidays, as they are already in-service teachers.

Commenting on the training subjects, Shyaka said that it is important for teachers to understand child development, especially in early childhood, where cognitive, emotional, and social growth occurs at a rapid pace. “Teachers trained in psychology can tailor their instruction to meet the unique needs of young learners, creating nurturing environments that support positive social interactions and emotional well-being.”

When it comes to inclusive education training, teachers need to be prepared

and skilled to accommodate students of all abilities and backgrounds, including those with special educational needs or from marginalized communities.

“By learning how to differentiate instruction and create adaptable classroom settings, teachers can ensure that every student has access to quality education. This approach not only promotes respect and understanding among students but also helps reduce educational disparities.”

Effective pedagogy is another critical component of teacher training because mastering various instructional strategies—such as inquiry-based learning, cooperative learning, and differentiated instruction—teachers can engage students actively and create meaningful learning experiences.

“Specialized training in subjects like mathematics and language development equips teachers with the skills needed to address the unique challenges of each discipline,” said Shyaka.

For example, training in math pedagogy helps teachers use manipulatives and visual aids to make complex concepts accessible, while language pedagogy emphasizes the importance of rich language experiences to promote literacy, he explained.

Teachers trained in communication and collaboration skills understand the importance of building strong relationships with parents and caregivers to drive a home-school connection that supports overall development.

Furthermore, involving the wider community in the learning process enriches the educational experience, whereby utilizing local resources and inviting community members as guest speakers can create a more dynamic and relevant learning environment.

“As we continue to address the challenges and opportunities in education, these initiatives pave the way for a more equitable and effective learning environment for all students,” said Shyaka.

He emphasized that prioritizing access to technology, hands-on resources, and quality teacher training, lays the foundation for a competitive educational landscape and equally produces skilled workforce for socioeconomic development of the country.





BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR RWANDA'S FUTURE

The Government of Rwanda, through the Ministry of Education this year rolled out the Foundational Learning Strategy (2024/5-2028/9), a five-year plan aimed at enhancing the quality of education and learning outcomes at pre-primary and lower primary levels. The comprehensive strategy draws on evidence and experience of what works to improve foundational learning and equip all children with basic literacy and numeracy skills. It will also help harmonise interventions from all education stakeholders and partners at pre-primary and lower primary levels.

To start with, foundational learning refers to the early years in a child's education, ranging from pre-primary up to the end of lower primary school (primary three).

There is a growing body of research evidence showing the need to strengthen the foundations and ensure all children can read and write in their early years to guarantee success in their later education.

The most recent learning assessment, LARS 2023, found improvements in students' English and Kinyarwanda literacy skills at the end of P3, compared to the 2021 assessment. However, the performance in numeracy has slightly declined between 2021 and 2023. These results emphasize that efforts to strengthen foundational learning need to continue to sustain and build upon already-achieved progress.

In response, a five-year Foundational Learning Strategy has been developed by the Ministry of Education and partners to accelerate initiatives to enhance the quality of education at pre-primary and lower primary levels and to improve learning outcomes, with a focus on literacy and numeracy skills.

Background

The Ministry of Education has put significant efforts to enhance partner coordination and alignment for better learning outcomes at Foundational levels. This includes the establishment

of a National Foundational Learning Steering Committee, regular Foundational Learning Symposia as well as the development of a Foundational Learning Strategy (FLS).

The Strategy will serve as the guiding framework for all interventions by Government and Development Partners aimed at strengthening learning outcomes at the early years of learning. The Strategy was developed by the Ministry of Education, working closely with REB and NESAs, other relevant Government of Rwanda stakeholders and Education Development Partners engaged in supporting Foundational Learning.

The five priority areas

The Strategy draws on evidence



Graphic providing an overview of the strategies five priority areas





and experience on what works to improve foundational learning and highlights five priorities in its theory of change to address challenges specific to Rwanda. Three of the five priorities focus on the core processes of teaching and learning in the classroom: the quality of teaching, the curriculum, and teaching and learning resources.

Of the remaining two, one relates to families and local communities and their role in supporting children's learning inside and outside the classroom; and the other relates to arrangements for improved monitoring of learning and greater accountability from all parties.

The core programmes of the Ministry are prerequisites for the success of the Foundational Learning strategy, which has been designed to add value and focus on the priority of addressing learning poverty.

A focus on improving Learning Outcomes and reducing learning poverty

Enrolment in primary education is nearly universal, but only 37.52 percent of P3 learners assessed in 2023 met the benchmarks in English

foundational literacy, compared to 10 percent in 2021. In Mathematics, 55.60 percent of the P3 learners assessed in 2023 met the national proficiency benchmarks, which is a decrease of 5.36 per cent compared to 2021. There was an improvement in Kinyarwanda reading comprehension from the previous assessment with 82.70 percent of the P3 learners meeting the national proficiency benchmarks.

Despite the overall improvement in English and Kinyarwanda performance, more needs to be done to ensure young Rwandans have a solid foundation on which to acquire the competencies and attitudes for good jobs and careers in tomorrow's knowledge-based economy. A further improvement in learning outcomes is crucial for the success of Rwanda Vision 2050, the National Strategy for Transformation (NST 2).

Early childhood education
The strategy acknowledges the utmost importance and key enabling role played by Early Childhood Education in paving the way for foundational learning to take place. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) is coordinating closely with the National Child Development Agency (NCDA)

when it comes to early childhood education. This coordination is of critical importance especially for the area of early childhood education, which is delivered through several platforms, including school-based pre-primary or nursery education (for children aged 3-5 years old), overseen by the Ministry of Education.

The strategy contributes to existing efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education include a focus on creating a smooth transition from pre-primary to primary grades.

Implementation of the FLS – the Foundational Learning Delivery Unit

The Strategy has an implementation plan, which outlines the key initiatives and targets to be achieved, and highlights the lead Government agencies for each priority and identifies specific Development Partner contributions to the achievement of the strategy. The Strategy and its Implementation Plan are aligned with the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) and other priority strategies and programmes of the education sector.

It relies on a coordinated approach, which creates synergies between

existing budgets and programmes, for effective delivery of results. To support the achievement of results, a Foundational Learning Delivery Unit (DU) has been established within the Ministry of Education to help coordinate the rollout, monitoring and reporting on the Strategy implementation.

Conclusion

Rwanda's Foundational Learning Strategy is integral to the country's broader plan for human capital development, from early childhood to primary and secondary education, to tertiary education and skills development. Through the strategic investments and planning included in the Strategy, the Government of Rwanda lays the groundwork for rapid improvements in literacy and numeracy. The proposed interventions build on the successes of the past, account for lessons learned,

and align key stakeholders around priority areas that can bring about the greatest impact. It is with this

level of effort and intention that the FLS presents a roadmap for improved learning for all Rwandan children.



WHY TEACHERS MUST HAVE FULL GRASP OF RWANDA'S HISTORY



François Uzabakiriho is a history teacher at GS Kinyihira in Rulindo District. He has taught history in the A-level for several years now. However, just like his colleagues elsewhere, he struggled to teach Rwandan history effectively.

“Some of us found it difficult to provide concrete examples and facts for certain dates. A major challenge was the fear of teaching sensitive topics, particularly the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi,” Uzabakiriho explained.

However, A training programme designed for high school history teachers has mitigated this challenge. The programme, which focused on understanding Rwanda’s history, especially the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, has given educators the confidence to deliver more accurate and effective lessons.

“Understanding our country’s history is essential,” Uzabakiriho emphasized. “During the training, we were encouraged to teach history as it is, so students can get a clear and comprehensive picture. Previously, personal sensitivities often

held us back.”

Now, with the support of the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) and the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement (MINUBUMWE), teachers like Uzabakiriho are equipped with enriched materials, particularly concerning the Genocide against the Tutsi.

“Now, with the knowledge we acquired and the updated curriculum, the units are better organised. We are more confident in answering students’ questions, particularly on how divisionism is destructive,” he added.

The teachers were trained at the National Ubutore Development Centre in Nkumba and ran from September 16 to October 14, with 2,925 teachers participating in six cohorts, covering eight key topics over the month.

One of the key topics was the history of Rwanda’s unity and the introduction of genocide ideology leading to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and how this was inculcated in hundreds of thousands of Rwandans for decades.

Another focus was on the role of Itorero in Rwandan society and how its teachings can be integrated into classroom instruction. Additionally, they explored genocide denial and how to address it, emphasising the importance of teaching history with objectivity while maintaining emotional distance from the content.

Anuarite Twiringiyimana, a teacher at GS Notre Dame du Bon Conseiller Byumba, acknowledged that before the training, teachers had limited knowledge of Rwanda’s full history.

“The history books we used were incomplete, particularly when it came to pre-colonial Rwanda,” Twiringiyimana noted.

However, the training has provided her and other educators with a more comprehensive understanding of the country’s history, from pre-colonial times, through the colonial period, the Genocide against the Tutsi, and Rwanda’s post-genocide recovery.

“This training has equipped us with the tools to enhance our teaching. We can now ensure that students truly

understand their history, which will help them contribute to a future free from division,” she said, adding that the history syllabus has been significantly improved with updated teaching materials.

Francoise Uwimana, the teacher representative, praised the organisers for recognising the gaps in teaching Rwandan history, especially the relationships between Rwandans before colonialism and the divisionism that led to the genocide against the Tutsi.

She commended the REB and MINUBUMWE for updating the curriculum to give students a deeper understanding of their country’s past. Uwimana expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to enrich their knowledge, promising to be better teachers moving forward.

“We will teach true history that will help shape our students into good Rwandans, filled with values and the culture of our people,” she said. “We will teach the reality of the bad colonial leadership, the first and second republics that followed, and how these factors led to the genocide.”

She also said that teachers pledged they will work together to strengthen the teaching of history, using updated

materials, and will regularly visit genocide memorials to provide students with a tangible connection to the country’s past.

“We will share the knowledge gained from this training with other teachers to create partnerships and host Itorero dialogues in schools. Our goal is to counter genocide denial and build a future rooted in unity,” Uwimana added.

Teachers have committed to improving the practice of Itorero in schools, holding it at least twice a month. They also plan to establish a Union of History Teachers and Education Inspectors, which will meet at least once per semester to assess progress and identify areas needing additional attention. The teachers further pledged to counter genocide denial through social media and community programs like Umuganda.

Dr Nelson Mbarushimana, Director General of REB, emphasised that the training programme is part of efforts to build capacity for teaching Rwanda’s history, especially the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

“Starting history education at the pre-primary level presents an opportunity to foster unity, patriotism, and a commitment to Rwanda’s development,” Mbarushimana said.

He added, “Teachers requested this training, and it has been productive. Now they are better equipped to teach the subject.” Mbarushimana assured the teachers that REB would continue to collaborate with them to fulfill the pledges made during the training. “We ask you to implement what you’ve learned. Together, we can achieve more and help our country progress.”

Dr. Jean Damascène Bizimana, Minister for National Unity and Civic Engagement, urged teachers to teach history thoroughly so students can fully grasp the significance of the country’s past.

“Students need to understand what happened in 1994 and be committed to preventing such a tragedy from happening again,” Bizimana stressed. He also acknowledged the challenges teachers face, especially regarding topics on genocide ideology and divisionism, but emphasized that the training would continue to address these issues.

“This isn’t the last time we’ll train teachers; it’s an ongoing process,” Bizimana said, noting that teaching history started at pre-primary levels, ensuring that students acquire knowledge appropriate to their level.”



ENTREPRENEURSHIP: NURTURING FUTURE JOB CREATORS IN RWANDA'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS



Offering entrepreneurship courses in secondary schools has begun to yield impressive results mainly through Students Business Clubs (SBC) that were established within different schools in the country.

Such clubs have and continue to create an environment where students can nurture their ideas and implement them, setting them on a path to becoming future job creators, according to officials.

According to Nehemie Bacumuwenda, an Entrepreneurship Officer at the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), the importance of entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated.

He says that such clubs are an outstanding example of how students can use the acquired skills through the Competence Based Curriculum coupled with entrepreneurship skills to work on the projects that are

promising and can be scaled up.

Equipping students with practical skills

The initiative aims to equip students with the skills and competencies needed for productivity, especially for those who may not pursue higher education.

Bacumuwenda emphasizes, “We know that not every student who completes secondary school proceeds to university, and we wanted to ensure that we train them to be job creators even before thinking of enrolling to university.”

This proactive approach, he notes, encourages students to explore their talents early, inculcating a mindset that prioritises practical engagement over traditional academic pathways which were mainly theoretical.

By teaching students essential skills such as business planning, basics of taxation, and quality control, these

programmes are transforming the educational landscape.

“Today we see soft and solid soaps being produced by students yet the formula of saponification was taught for years and remained in theories. This tangible application of theoretical knowledge is crucial for students, allowing them to see the fruits of their labour,” he noted.

The rise of business clubs

Business clubs have become a cornerstone of this initiative, encouraging students to collaborate on projects that can be commercialized.

Jerome Rushingabigwi, a teacher at GS Saint Joseph in Muhanga district, explains that Students Business Clubs are engaged in production of different products, ranging from liquid soaps to sandals and ornaments among others.

“We are proud that it has been a successful project,” he said during an



The integration of entrepreneurship into secondary education is proving to be transformative. Students are now more eager than ever to embark on their entrepreneurial journeys, spurred by the skills and confidence gained from their school experiences.

“Entrepreneurship is making an impact, especially in changing mindsets,” Bacumuwenda affirms. “If you move around, you see young people running businesses, and it is my conviction that it is a result of entrepreneurship skills they acquire while still in secondary school,” he noted.

As these students graduate, they leave with not just academic knowledge but a portfolio of projects and the confidence to pursue their ventures.

With ongoing support and a strong emphasis on practical skills, officials believe the future of entrepreneurship in schools looks bright, promising a generation of innovative thinkers ready to contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities.

interview. “This hands-on experience not only cultivates entrepreneurial spirit but also nurtures the spirit of teamwork and communication skills,” he added.

Students are encouraged to brainstorm and implement their ideas, often resulting in innovative products like avocado oil and quality liquid soaps. Rushingabigwi adds, “Students have demonstrated their capacity to learn and innovate...I am confident that they will keep working on the project even after school and scale them up to the commercial level,” he said.

This confidence is bolstered by partnerships with organisations like Educate Rwanda, which provide financial support and training for students to acquire the necessary raw materials.

The students’ club at Saint Joseph

attracts learners from A Level [from S4- S6] and in all the four combinations including Mathematics Chemistry and Biology (MCB) Physics Chemistry and Mathematics (PCM), Mathematics Economics and Geography (MEG) and Physics Chemistry and Biology (PCB).

Competitions and recognition

To further incentivise participation and excellence, the REB together with its partners organises annual business club competitions, awarding the best teams with cash prizes.

“We encourage them to use the prize money to improve their projects. These competitions not only foster a spirit of healthy rivalry but also allow students to display their hard work and creativity, potentially leading to further investment in their ideas,” Bacumuwenda said.

A mindset reset



THE CASE FOR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING: EMPOWERING STUDENTS EARLY ON FOR A LIFETIME OF CONFIDENCE

Do you remember having a classmate who was shy and never spoke, or hyperactive and disruptive in class? Was it you?

Every classroom has students who exhibit low self-esteem or challenges with social skills in vastly different ways. Teachers struggle to deal with this effectively.

“It can be so overwhelming. You have diverse learners in one class and you have to control the classroom while engaging each one of them, so they can all advance,” says Appoline Mukakinyana, a pre-primary teacher

at Ecole L’Horizon.

This challenge is not new. Education has always been about preparing young minds for the challenges of tomorrow, all while working through the challenges of today. But, as the academic curricula evolve, a critical element takes a backseat: emotional well-being. Including

Social Emotional Learning early on in schools is not just an educational trend; it’s a transformative imperative.

Understanding Social Emotional Learning: Beyond Academics

Challenges with managing emotions and social interactions are an invisible epidemic among learners. They manifest as hesitancy to participate, as fear of failure or as difficulty in



forming genuine, deep connections. These students often withdraw from peers, not because they lack intelligence, but because they lack confidence. Social Emotional Learning can change this.

Social Emotional Learning equips learners of all ages with tools they can use to manage their emotions, build positive relationships and make increasingly informed, responsible decisions. This framework fosters empathy, self-awareness and life-long resilience as skills that are just as essential for human development as mathematics or reading. By prioritising emotional literacy in early education, children are equipped not only with the tools necessary for academic success, but also for

building meaningful relationships and fostering a positive sense of self. Such an approach shapes the learners' ability to successfully navigate the world.

Why Start Early?

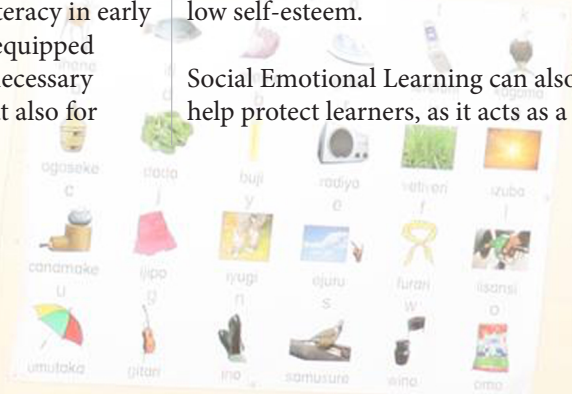
Early childhood is critical for human development because that is when emotional patterns take root. Introducing Social Emotional Learning at a young age ensures these learned patterns are constructive. It's much easier to build them into a young learner, than to act later to repair the damage caused by years of low self-esteem.

Social Emotional Learning can also help protect learners, as it acts as a

shield against bullying, anxiety and depression. Studies show that students in programs that embrace Social Emotional Learning perform better academically, manifest a stronger ability to focus on tasks, and exhibit lower degrees of stress.

Bringing Social Emotional Learning into Rwandan Classrooms

Developed and launched by USAID Tunoze Gusoma in collaboration with Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), Social Emotional Learning Framework was established to align with and integrate into the current Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) for the development of a





socially and academically competent individual in Rwandan society.

In the words of Dr. Nelson Mbarushimana, Director General of REB, the Social Emotional Learning Framework was important for the successful implementation of CBC in pre-primary and lower primary levels, as a guide to the integration and development of skills, values, and mindsets for improving learner wellbeing and academic results across subjects.

“It is in line with Rwandan education philosophy which aims to ensure that young people at all levels of education are facilitated to achieve their full potential in terms of relevant knowledge, skills and values to prepare them to succeed academically, for smooth integration into society, and to make full use of employment opportunities.”

The Social Emotional Learning Framework tackles seven domains: thinking, emotion, self-identity, self-direction, communication and understanding, socialisation, and

citizenship.

Each domain includes two categories of skills, values, or mindsets, namely cognitive processing, critical analysis, emotional awareness, self-management, self-esteem, self-awareness, self-reliance, purpose, understanding and responding in social situations, empathy, cooperation, relationship building, conflict management, and civic and service mindset.

Children learn these social-emotional skills from interacting with their parents and caregivers, teachers, peers, and communities in all types of situations, including school and home.

Jules Gatete, SEL Specialist at USAID Tunoze Gusoma, remarks that the Framework was developed and approved in 2023, paving the path for the development of Social Emotional Learning resources including the pre-primary activity guide, the lower primary revised Kinyarwanda Teacher guides, training manual, the posters and videos used to train teachers

on Social Emotional Learning skills and how to integrate them in literacy lessons and deliver them as part of their teaching models.

Early Successes

At least 8,792 teachers and head teachers in pre-primary and primary schools from across the country were trained in Social Emotional Learning approaches and techniques, and are ready to carry forward the teaching, sharing it with others.

“This was a deliberate choice. We selected subject leaders and head teachers and trained them so they can train others”. Jules Gatete said.

The cascading training program at school level has now reached around twenty thousand and two hundred thirty-five teachers (20,235) including three thousand six hundred eighty-three teachers of pre-primary (3,683) sixteen thousand five hundred fifty-two teachers (16,552) of lower primary.

Mukakinyana, as one of the

trained teachers, says that it has helped teachers to understand the importance of Social Emotional Learning, be more self-aware in terms of owning those skills themselves before transmitting them to the students, and generally become motivated to deliver the lessons with an uplifting spirit.

“We have seen a significant difference in our classroom sessions, it allows students to be engaged throughout a lesson without boredom and be able to retain what they learnt in a more relatable manner with the world around them.”

Gatete highlighted that Social Emotional Learning activity guide points to different classroom activities through which a teacher creates an enabling environment for a pupil to relax and if need, surpass hindrances from family issues and focus on class, learn literacy and numeracy through play, exhibit critical thinking and problem-solving, and develop empathy as they navigate the social world.

“This is expected to improve reading and comprehension performance, as well as reduce school absence or dropouts,” he noted.

Why focus on Kinyarwanda

This Social Emotional Learning approach was introduced as a continuation of USAID Tunoze Gusoma’s interventions in Rwanda’s education sector to enhance the students’ ability to read and write in Kinyarwanda. Studies show that good command of a child’s mother tongue is a key pillar of learning strength across other subjects, including for learning other languages like English.

For that reason, Social Emotional Learning is integrated in the teaching and learning of Kinyarwanda language in pre-primary and lower primary. This enables students to express themselves in their mother tongue as they build emotional intelligence and social connectedness.

Social Emotional Learning integrates



into other courses seamlessly, so it does not require additional time on the schedule.

As Venantie Mukantahondi, a Kinyarwanda Curriculum Development Officer at REB, says, the framework of Social Emotional Learning complements REB’s deliberate efforts towards building the social and emotional aspect of education.

The implementation is still in the early stages, but the preliminary evaluation indicates an enthusiastic uptake among teachers. With the integration of Social Emotional Learning, Mukantahondi expects to see improved performance of students and the rise of an empowered future generation in all aspects of life.

“If Social Emotional Learning is left out, their academic competence

would be of no good use in our world. These are the skills that should be built from an early stage in partnership with parents as key stakeholders in Rwanda’s education efforts.”

Mukantahondi adds that REB plans to move forward with integrating Social Emotional Learning into other courses.

Prioritizing Social Emotional Learning is critically important for the development of a well-rounded young person, equipped and ready to take on the challenges of their time. Together, parents, teachers, policymakers and whole communities, with support from USAID, are helping to raise a generation that excels academically and thrives emotionally. We nurture confidence early, firmly believing that every child deserves to shine.



EMPOWERING FUTURE WORKFORCE THROUGH DIGITAL LITERACY AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Digital literacy is a non-negotiable skill. Rwanda's commitment to preparing its youth for the digital age is yielding impressive results from projects with significant results.

It is in this context that the Big Win for Employment initiative, coordinated by Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) and RTB with Digital Skills Foundation's support, empowers Rwandan youth with critical skills to embrace emerging opportunities.

The first phase of Rwanda's digital literacy programme – which is part of the government's Vision 2050 strategy – was transformative. Engaging over 600 schools, the programme enrolled more than 70,000 students and 11,000 teachers, equipping them with essential digital skills for higher education and the modern workplace.

Teachers, at the heart of this transformation, saw significant improvements in their digital and

pedagogical skills. Their average scores rose from 43 to 87 points, marking a 102% increase, while their classroom skills grew by 58%. ' This leap enabled educators to integrate digital tools effectively, creating interactive and engaging learning environments. Students also experienced an average 133% growth in competencies, earning both the Digital Competency Passport and an attendance certificate from Microsoft.

Collective effort for community empowerment

A key highlight of this initiative is the collaboration between schools, government agencies, and international organizations, extending digital literacy beyond classrooms.

Supported by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of ICT and Innovation, a summer program mobilized Digital Ambassadors trained by RISA.

They played a crucial role in supporting students and raising awareness in their communities, along with teachers who actively contributed to the program.

By opening over 110 school computer labs during the holidays, the program ensured that students without personal digital access could continue their training. This approach not only bridges the digital divide but also maximizes the use of existing infrastructure.

Real voices, real impact

The success of the programme is best illustrated through the voices of those who have been directly impacted. Modeste Nzeyimana, a headteacher from Nyamagabe District, shared how the training has transformed teaching practices at his school: "Since the course completion, teachers are using [...] digital tools [that] have made teaching more interactive and engaging".



Students, too, have felt the profound impact of the training. Potassi Bajeneza, a student from ES Kabarondo, expressed how the skills gained have not only enhanced his academic performance but also prepared him for future opportunities: “I will use data, social media, and other digital tools [to] run a business, develop opportunities, and assess its performance”

Simeon NDAGIJIMANA, ICT teacher at GS GATIZO ,KAMONYI District feedback: “Learners were interested in enrolling in the DSF Platform and courageous in learning the modules. They used all their efforts to cover the content and get skills and certificates; they are thankful for the support and commitment. As a recommendation, they wish that the program covers not only boarding schools but also day schools.”

A model for the future

As the program continues, its potential to be scaled and integrated into the national curriculum becomes increasingly evident. By embedding digital literacy with recognised international certification and

21st-century skills into the fabric of education, Rwanda is not only preparing its youth for the workforce but also setting a precedent for how nations can harness the power of digital education to drive economic and social progress.

This overall program as well as the summer program have been a powerful reminder of the importance of continuous learning and the pivotal role of collaboration in achieving large-scale educational goals such as digital inclusion and preparing the Rwandan youth for the workforce. As Rwanda continues its journey

toward becoming a knowledge-based economy, this program will be extended over the next school year.

Thus, more students will enjoy the advantages of these skills and international certification. Initiatives like this will be crucial in ensuring that not only the youth but citizens are equipped to participate fully in the digital age.

The success of the initial digital literacy program laid a strong foundation for future endeavors and the continuous improvement and collaboration between all parties.



CHRIST-ROI STUDENTS SHINE AT FLL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Jeremie Habumugisha, a teacher at College Christ-Roi in Nyanza district, recounted the school's accomplishment as national champions and their subsequent participation in the 2024 FIRST LEGO League (FLL) World Championship in Houston, Texas.

Their standout innovation project explored the use of Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in architecture.

According to him, the students were able to demonstrate how VR can help users to explore and modify building designs before construction, while AI could predict structural issues and suggest sustainable materials.

"The judges were impressed, awarding the team medals after the presentation. It was a moment of immense pride for us all," said Habumugisha.

In addition to the innovation project, the team excelled in several categories, including robot design by

presenting the engineering behind their robot, highlighting its ability to perform various missions and robotics games where they showcased their adaptability, adjusting strategies in each round to complete mission challenges.

Furthermore, core values such as teamwork, resilience, and collaboration were at the heart of their participation. They were also able to network with peers from around the world, he added.

Habumugisha recalled an inspiring moment when the students met NASA engineers.

"They shared insights about robotics in space exploration and encouraged our students to continue their STEM journey. Their words motivated the team to think bigger and aim higher." The students returned home empowered, ready to inspire their peers and continue leading Rwanda's STEM efforts. Reflecting on the experience, Habumugisha emphasized that competing at the FLL World

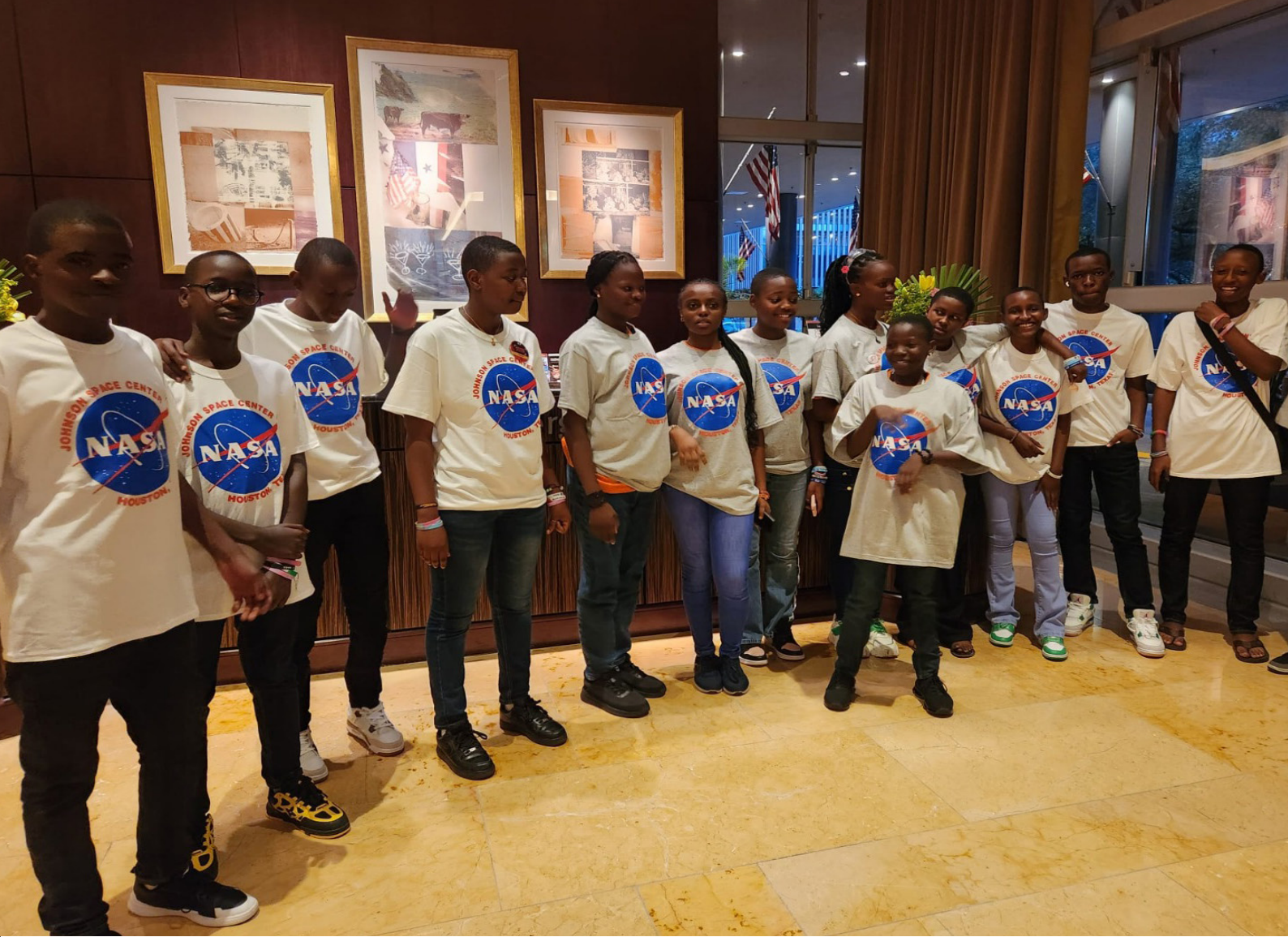
Championship for the first time was transformative.

"We gained exposure to advanced technologies and new problem-solving approaches. Teams from other countries inspired us to think beyond conventional solutions," he explained. Beyond technical skills, the competition underscored the importance of core values such as gracious professionalism and cooperation, which were equally important as the robot games.

"Winning wasn't just about completing missions; it was about teamwork, attitude, and respect for others throughout the process," he noted.

Habumugisha recommended several steps to strengthen robotics programs in Rwanda. These include establishing robotics clubs in schools early, increasing access to training opportunities and equipment like LEGO SPIKE Prime kits, and developing a national robotics network with peer learning platforms.





He also emphasized the importance of involving parents and the community in fostering a robotics culture.

“This experience taught me the value of student-centered learning,” Habumugisha added, emphasizing the need for continuous professional growth, strong support networks, and a focus on long-term development over immediate results.

The Christ-Roi team, comprised of ten students who had won the national FLL competition, made their global debut at the 2024 FLL World Championship held from April 17-20.

Competing against over 150 teams from around the world, they were recognized for their innovative use of VR technology in the construction industry, assisting architects and engineers in creating 3D building designs.

Ketia Nsabimana, one of the students, highlighted the project’s relevance to Rwanda, saying, “We aimed to design resilient houses capable of withstanding hazards and attracting tourists. Our project brings dream homes to life using technology.”

Moving forward to improve performance and bridge the gap, Nsabimana highlighted that future flag bearers should involve not only adults but also young children early on, spreading across more schools and allowing them to participate in various affairs.



AI HACKATHON CHAMPIONS SHARE EXPERIENCE, FUTURE ASPIRATIONS



In March 2024, a team of three young, bright and daring students at Ecole Secondaire Kayonza Modern won the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Hackathon challenge with their project titled ‘Ability Project’.

For Aline Munezero, the only female team member, participating and winning in this competition was testament to her lifelong aspirations of becoming a tech expert and creating solutions to some of the pertinent issues in society using technology.

The 19 year-old grew up with a special love for machine learning which led her to pursue Math, Physics, and Computer Science in secondary school. Just like her colleagues, she was excited at the possibility of creating a solution that would position them at a nation-wide competition stage.

“A colleague who was just informed about the AI hackathon from our teacher approached me and asked to be on the team and think of idea that we would present and work on as a

project. We had less time to come with a project but we submitted it and were selected to represent the school,” she narrated.

With limited programming and AI knowledge, Munezero and her colleagues were driven by the passion of technology to quickly learn and acquaint themselves with AI models that enabled them to execute their project.

“It was not an easy journey given that we were also doing our final year, preparing to sit for the national examination but our teachers supported us and we also got guidance and knowledge during the boot camp,” she said while adding that the presentation skills gained enabled them to win over other relatively advanced schools they were competing against.

The AI hackathon was designed for secondary schools, with the aim of introducing students to the world of artificial intelligence, providing them with hands-on skills to solve real-world challenges using technology and inspiring them to explore

the fields of science, technology, engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

It run concurrently with the Rwanda First Lego League (FLL) challenge –an internationally recognised initiative that challenges students to explore real-world problems, research solutions, and program educational robots to accomplish specific missions.

As emphasized by Dr. Nelson Mbarushimana, Director General of Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), the government’s investment in human capital development is cemented by exposing students to AI and robotics knowledge at an early stage, in order to be relevant and competitive in the current era of technology.

According to him, the results are evidently shown in the ability of students to participate in such international competitions. The competition was co-organized and sponsored with Greg Wyler, an American tech entrepreneur and

executive chairman of OneWeb and the founder of O3b Networks, in collaboration with the First Lego League, Global Learning Council, GIZ, among partners.

The winning team in AI Hackathon included Aline Munezero, Prince Manzi, and Bonheur Niyonkuru who attended the competition during their final year of Math, Physics, and Computer Science at Ecole Secondaire de Kayonza Modern.

The project entitled “Ability” sought to create an AI platform that enables people living with visual impairment to access information and expand their knowledge using technology. As they underwent the journey of project preparation, boot camp, presentation sessions, competing with other schools and attend the AI Symposium in Switzerland, the students affirmed that they gained vast knowledge both in the power of team work, modern challenges and how they can be turned into opportunities, and the application of AI as the future of work.

Manzi said that this further fueled his passion for technology and sharpened his soft skills including critical thinking, problem-solving,

presentation and networking, as well as the drive for competition.

“I really understood that this world is about competition and for one to succeed, they need to collaborate with others. My advice to young students is that knowledge is not the end in itself, it’s just a beginning of a learning process. They shouldn’t give up on creating and implementing their ideas as solutions to different problems in society.”

Manzi said that his next step is to pursue a Bachelor’s Degree in Software Engineering or Cybersecurity.

While awarding the winners of the FLL Challenge and AI Hackathon in Kigali, President Paul Kagame said: “Robotics and Artificial Intelligence are outstanding ways to learn science, engineering, technology, and also teamwork.”

This is true for Munezero who asserts that the AI Symposium in Switzerland exposed them to other current matters like climate change and its impact, environmental sustainability, cybersecurity and intellectual property, among others.

As further highlighted by Niyonkuru, this was eye-opening in terms of applying what they learnt but also stretching their learning capacity beyond the classroom as the capacity at the school was too limited to enable them access all they needed.

He noted that it is evident that there is still a long journey to go for Rwanda’s education sector in terms of increasing computer laboratories, access to digital gadgets, and more competition to test the acquired skills.

Niyonkuru attributed their success to the teacher and parents for encouraging them and supporting them within their means to not only participate in the competition but also go abroad to get more experience.

He said that they wait for further guidance and support on how to take their project to the next level and are willing to continue sharing their experience to other students, as they look forward to further their studies in Software Engineering.

In the competition, Rwanda Coding Academy came in second, and Hope Haven Christian Secondary School took third place.

To further drive such knowledge and innovations, REB launched a national program of coding and robotics as a pilot project to inform the integration of robotics and AI in the national curriculum with the start of the 2024/2025 academic calendar.

This, according to Mbarushimana, will enhance quality education is such a way that both the student and teacher get particular focus in these fields and technologically transform the delivery and learning of other subjects as well.

The world is entering a new era, one with key transformations needed in childhood education to meet future demands and improve educational outcomes. Rwanda has positioned itself to not only harness the potential of AI but also mitigate its downside through the National Artificial Intelligence Policy.



LITERACY MONTH: CALL FOR COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO PROMOTE READING CULTURE AT FOUNDATIONAL LEVEL



There is a need for concerted efforts to promote literacy in the foundational academic ecosystem to ensure every child in the community develops a reading culture by acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills at an early stage.

Dr. Nelson Mbarushimana the Director General of Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) made the call during the launch of the National Literacy Month on September 20, 2024.

The day, which marked the start of a month-long countrywide campaign to promote the culture of reading and writing, in Kinyarwanda and in English, was celebrated in Nkombo Island located in Rusizi district.

The campaign is running under the theme “Fundamental Learning a Key to Promote Multilingual Education”.

The highlight of the event was the launch of the Nkombo Community Library, the first of its kind established on the island.

The library comes as a response to help children and adults alike learn to read and write Kinyarwanda, English and even other languages.

The library has children’s books in Kinyarwanda and English, play and self-learning aids, customized reading tablets among others.

Speaking during the event, Dr. Mbarushimana underscored the importance of celebrating the event on Nkombo Island and the significance of the community library stressing that it was to promote reading on the island which for years was isolated from the country’s mainland.

Reflecting on this year’s theme, the Director General said science posits that children who learn how to read and write in their mother tongue at an early stage develop the ability to learn other languages and other subjects in general.

“We firmly believe that promoting early literacy and inculcating the culture of reading and writing especially in mother tongue among children is a strong

foundation of learning different languages and other subjects,” he told hundreds of participants who gathered at the grounds of Ecole Primaire St Pierre de Nkombo.

“If a child completes lower primary (P3) before knowing how to read and write, it becomes a hindrance in their education when they start the upper primary,” he added.

He challenged parents to always send their children to school as soon as they reach the school-going age, saying that the government was doing all possible to ensure that every child has access to early childhood education and education in general.

He added that through REB, the government has availed teaching and learning materials including those that cater for early childhood education. “Early childhood education is a foundation of learning, we encourage you to send your children to early Childhood Development Centre (ECDs) whenever they reach the time to start, the government prioritizes foundational learning which includes reading

and writing as a way of promoting multilingual education,” he noted. A study conducted in 2023 revealed that 82.7% of third year primary schools pupils demonstrated proficiency in Kinyarwanda reading skills.

Despite strides in promoting literacy especially in Kinyarwanda language, officials noted that there is a need for more concerted efforts especially in numeracy skills.

The government’s five-year plan emphasizes the importance of strengthening foundation learning skills, including reading and writing to better prepare children for academic success.

New community library

During the event to launch the National Literacy Month, a new community library was launched to promote reading and writing culture in the remote area of Nkombo Island whose residents use other dialects such as Amahavu and Mashi.

According to Dr. Mbarushimana, the library would serve hundreds of children and parents alike and help them embrace the culture of reading while also exposing them to the rest of the world given the IT tools it is equipped with.

“The Community library we have launched today should be more productive, we want it to be more exploited, children, and parents should visit and use it,” he said.

“Our wish is that every household should send children to come and read and local leaders should follow up and ensure that it is done systematically,” he added, also expressing plans to extend the library and make it bigger to accommodate more visitors.

Every child with a book to read
The celebration of National Literacy Month also featured awarding students who excelled in reading and writing competitions, which were organized across the western province including students from Nkombo Island schools.

The competitions sought to inculcate the culture of reading and writing Kinyarwanda among children.

Several children who emerged the best



Our wish is to ensure that each child has a book to read and together with partners we have committed ourselves to distribute more books to all Nkombo Island schools. We want books that promote national values, patriotism and unity.

in different categories including children with disabilities (with either visual or hearing impairments were awarded different scholastic materials including brand new customized reading tablets PCs (ATOUGH model with Android 12.0 operating system), school bags, books and other accessories among others.

Dr. Mbarushimana hailed Nkombo students for winning the awards and urged them to use the materials they received as part of the awards.

He noted that together with partners, all schools in Nkombo would benefit from more books to ensure that every child has at least a book to read. Such are academic books that also promote Rwandans values, patriotism and unity among others.

“Our wish is to ensure that each child has a book to read and together with partners we have committed ourselves to distribute more books to all Nkombo Island schools,” he said after handing samples of books to school managers.

“We want books that promote national values, patriotism and unity. We want our children to grow with patriotism, values, honesty, integrity and hard work to

ensure we groom future leaders,” he said. He also vowed that Rwanda Basic Education Board would keep promoting inclusive education by ensuring that every child can access education regardless of any disability.

“We have children who have proven to be able to read and write using their own ways such as braille for visually impaired students as well as sign languages for those with hearing impairment. We are ready to keep providing more materials and improve inclusive education,” he noted.

According to Dez Byamukama, the Chief of Party of USAID Uburezi Iwacu [Homes and Communities Project] implemented by World Vision and Partners, combined efforts would be intensified to continue unlocking literacy programs to ensure that children get appropriate reading materials, hence fostering the culture of reading in schools and at community level.

“These programs are designed not only to give children the ability to read but also a love for it which we believe will transform their lives and those of communities,” he noted.

“We have seen remarkable success stories from children who have improved their reading skills and now value literacy as a critical tool for development. These successes show the power of partnerships and shared vision,” he added.

Moving forward, Byamukama said, there are plans to strengthen more community libraries like the one that was launched at the Nkombo Island and organize the reading camps where children come together to learn, read and grow.

Parents, local leaders and students expressed satisfaction for the government and partners to celebrate the National Literacy Day on the Island and launch the community library, saying it would boost reading culture.

“We are happy that we have a community library and we were mobilized to exploit it,” Damascene Nzeyimana, a father of four said. “I am personally ready to encourage my children to use it and promote the culture of reading and writing and I think I share the sentiments with others,” he added.

ACCOUNTING CERTIFICATION IN RWANDAN HIGH SCHOOLS TO BEGIN NEXT YEAR

Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), in collaboration with the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Rwanda (ICPAR), is making strides toward offering Certified Accounting Technician (CAT) certificates to secondary school students.

This exciting development is set to begin in the 2025-2026 academic year, marking a significant milestone for students in the accounting field.

As part of its commitment to equipping students with market-ready skills early into their academic journey, REB has worked with different stakeholders to overhaul the accountancy curriculum to ensure that secondary school graduates possess the competencies needed to thrive in the labor market.

The revised curriculum, developed in partnership with ICPAR, enables

students to sit for CAT exams alongside their secondary school diploma.

A CAT qualification is a valuable credential in the accounting profession. It provides practical skills and knowledge that employers highly value, especially in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), according to Nehemie Bacumuwenda, an Entrepreneurship Officer at REB.

“CAT holders are qualified to perform essential accounting tasks such as bookkeeping, basic auditing, data entry, taxation, and reporting skills that are often in demand by businesses across the country,” says Bacumuwenda.

He explained that the curriculum revision was based on a survey conducted with employers, which identified a gap in accounting skills that SMEs require, stressing that the former were seeking employees

who not only completed secondary education but also held CAT certification.

This revelation led to the curriculum changes, ensuring that students are equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical accounting skills, he said.

“The survey showed us that employers, particularly in SMEs, need employees who are not only secondary school graduates but also certified in basic accounting. We hope that by 2025-2026, students will graduate with both their secondary diploma and a CAT certificate,” Bacumuwenda said.

Progress so far

The new curriculum has been rolled out in schools across the country. As of now, 28 public and government-aided schools, along with 27 private institutions, offer the accounting



program that includes CAT-related courses.

REB has already distributed online learning materials to schools, and teachers are delivering courses using the updated content effectively.

“We have worked closely with schools to ensure they are prepared for the full implementation of the revised curriculum. We have also distributed online books and other resources, which were made available in digital format over the past two years,” Bacumuwenda added.

Moving forward, REB plans to conduct awareness sessions for school head teachers and provide practical training for accounting teachers.

“This will ensure that the revised curriculum is taught accurately and with diligence,” Bacumuwenda said, adding that a series of pre-tests will be conducted starting in January next year to assess students’ readiness for the CAT exams.

What’s next for the programme

As part of the ongoing efforts, REB and ICPAR are working together to implement a series of mock exams for students who are expected to sit for the CAT exams. This will serve as a trial run to evaluate how well students are absorbing the revised curriculum and whether they are ready for certification.

The ultimate goal is to offer CAT exams alongside secondary school graduation, starting with the 2025-2026 cohort, he said.

“We are confident that by 2025-2026, students will be able to take the CAT exams and graduate with both their secondary diploma and the CAT certification. This dual qualification will significantly enhance their employability,” Bacumuwenda said.

ICPAR still upbeat

The CAT qualification will not only increase students’ competitiveness in the labor market but also offer them an advantage in furthering their



CAT holders are qualified to perform essential accounting tasks such as bookkeeping, basic auditing, data entry, taxation, and reporting skills that are often in demand by businesses across the country

studies.

Those who pursue the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) qualification will be exempted from nine courses, enabling them to complete their CPA certification with fewer exams and in a shorter time, according to Willy Innocent Twishime, Director of Education at ICPAR.

Twishime also highlighted the long-term benefits of the CAT certification, emphasizing that students who acquire their CAT qualification during secondary school will have a significant advantage in the labor market.

“It is crucial for students to obtain their CAT certification early. It gives them practical skills that are highly sought after by employers, especially in the accounting field. Additionally, students who later pursue CPA will be exempt from nine courses, making it easier and quicker for them to qualify as professional accountants,” Twishime explained.

ICPAR has committed to working closely with REB to ensure the smooth implementation of the new curriculum and to support teachers in acquiring the necessary skills to teach the revised content.

As part of the initiative, there are also plans to support accounting teachers in furthering their qualifications. Bacumuwenda mentioned the importance of ensuring that teachers are continuously updated with the latest accounting standards.

To that end, REB is advocating for accounting teachers to be provided with support to obtain CPA qualifications, just as other accounting professionals are encouraged to pursue further qualifications.

“We believe that if our teachers are also equipped with advanced certifications like the CPA, they will be able to teach our students more effectively and stay updated with industry trends,” Bacumuwenda stated.

Teachers, students speak out

For students like Marvine Ineza, an accounting student at Saint Joseph School in Kigali, the introduction of the CAT certification program has sparked excitement. She is hopeful that earning the CAT certificate will improve her chances of securing a job after graduation.

“I’m really excited about the opportunity to sit for the CAT exam. It will be an added advantage when looking for a job, as employers are more likely to trust a candidate with both a diploma and a CAT certification. This will definitely give me an edge in the competitive job market,” Ineza shared.

Teachers, too, are optimistic about the new initiative. Cleo Cyubahiho, an accounting teacher at APEGA Gahengeri, noted: “Students are already gaining valuable accounting skills through the revised curriculum, and with some additional preparation, they will be ready to excel in the CAT exams,”

“As teachers, we will also be grateful if we are assisted to acquire advanced accounting skills through CPA training and certification as our colleagues doing accounting in other fields do with the government support,” he added.



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Requirements for private schools that want to order for Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) textbooks from printing companies which were contracted to print and supply them

- **A letter addressed to the Director General of REB requesting to have access to CBC textbooks at affordable prices**
- **In addition to the letter, the following information should be provided:**
 - ✓ *Address of the school*
 - ✓ *Telephone number and email of the school head teacher*
 - ✓ *Title and quantity of needed textbooks per title and per level/class*
 - ✓ *Number of students per class*

Required information for private schools to order for CBC textbooks

The Schhol Address:

- ✓ *School name:*
- ✓ *District:*
- ✓ *Sector:*
- ✓ *Cell:*
- ✓ *Tel. Number for school Headteacher :*
- ✓ *Active school/ Headteacher's email:*

	Textbooks' titles	Textbooks quantity per level														
		N1	N2	N3	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
1																
2																
3																
4																
...																

Note: Information regarding the number of student per level should be also provided.

 P.O Box 3817
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REB has the following main responsibilities:



To prepare and distribute curricula, teaching materials, teacher's guides, methodologies and establish teaching methods for nursery, primary, secondary, specialised schools and adult literacy schools;



To establish and monitor the E- learning program in basic education;



To promote the use of information and communication technology in basic education;



To coordinate programs and activities to ensure teachers development, build their capacities and monitor their management;



To contribute to the development of education policy;



To coordinate and fast track basic education programmes and activities aimed at providing to all categories of Rwandans the quality education;



To advise Government on all activities which may fast track basic education development in Rwanda.

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