

Blueprint for the Use of evidence In Language of Instruction (LOI) Decisions (BUILD) Evidence Review Rwanda Report

AIR with support from the Gates Foundation

February 2026

Authors (in alphabetical order by last name): Kelsey Erpinar, Chinmaya Holla, Pooja Nakamura, Cruzben Omani, Rebecca Ouma, Isabelle Salliard, and Michael Tusiime



Contents

Acronym List	iv
Acknowledgements.....	1
Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction	4
Objectives.....	5
Overarching BUILD Approach	5
The BUILD Framework	6
The BUILD Progression Scale	11
The Science of Bilingual Reading	1
Rwanda Country Report.....	4
Document Review	5
Stakeholder Consultations.....	6
Secondary Quantitative Data.....	6
FLN Goals and Language Policy.....	7
Country FLN Goals & Language Policy	7
Foundational Learning Skills	11
Teaching and Learning	17
Curriculum and Materials	18
Teacher Workforce and Professional Development	21
Community Engagement	24
Monitoring and Evaluation	27
M&E System.....	27
Continuous Improvement.....	29
Summary and Assessment of System Progression	30
FLN Goals and Language Policy.....	31
Evidence and Data Use	31
Curriculum and Materials	32
Teacher Workforce and Professional Development	33

Monitoring and Evaluation	34
Rwanda Blueprint.....	35
FLN Goals and Language Policy.....	35
Evidence and Data	35
Teaching and Learning.....	36
Appendix A. BUILD Consultation Guide	1
Language policy review.....	1
Language mapping/assessment of multilingual oral language competence (AMOLAC)	2
Orthographic mapping.....	2
Evidence base	3
Curriculum and assessment analysis (scope and sequencing)	3
TLM inventory Analysis	4
Teacher professional development	4
Teacher placement and language proficiency.....	5
Matching LOI policy to classroom implementation / Fidelity of implementation	6

Acronym List

AIR	American Institutes for Research
AMPL	Assessment for Minimum Proficiency Level
BLF	Building Learning Foundations
BUILD	Blueprint for the Use of Evidence in Language of Instruction Decisions
CBC	Competency-Based Curriculum
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ELP	English Language Proficiency
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EPTT	English Proficiency Teacher Training
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
FLIP	Foundational Learning Improvement Package
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
FLS	Foundational Learning Strategy
HCI	Human Capital Index
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LARS	Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools
LIFT	Learning and Inclusion for Transformation
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
LoI	Language of Instruction
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education (Rwanda)
NCDA	National Child Development Agency
NESA	National Examination and School Inspection Authority

PD	Professional Development
QBE	Quality Basic Education
REB	Rwanda Basic Education Board
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SGAC	School General Assembly Committee
SGAEC	School General Assembly Executive Committee
SoBR	Science of Bilingual Reading
SPIU	Single Project Implementation Unit
SSL	School Subject Leader
STELIR	Supporting Teachers to Teach English Language in Rwanda
TLMs	Teaching and Learning Materials
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible through the generous support of the Gates Foundation, whose commitment to advancing bilingual, evidence-driven education underpinned this work. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Rwandan Basic Education Board and to the many national and subnational stakeholders who contributed their insights, experience, and expertise throughout the project.

The authors further express their gratitude to Professor Michael Tusiime whose deep knowledge of Rwanda's foundational learning education landscape and sustained support for stakeholder engagement substantially enriched the analysis and findings presented in this report.

Finally, we thank the policymakers, educators, researchers, inspectors, and community members across Rwanda who generously shared their perspectives and experiences. Their continued commitment to strengthening foundational learning through effective language of instruction practices informs and inspires this body of evidence.

Executive Summary

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR), in collaboration with the Gates Foundation and national stakeholders, developed a language of instruction (LoI) framework for Rwanda as part of the **Blueprint for the Use of Evidence in Language of Instruction Decisions (BUILD)** project. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the available evidence and proposes a system-level roadmap for strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes under Rwanda’s English-medium education policy, drawing on the BUILD framework.

Rwanda’s education system is distinctive in that nearly all learners speak Kinyarwanda as a home language, while English has been designated as the official language of instruction from lower primary onward since 2019. This policy reflects Rwanda’s broader economic development and regional integration objectives and represents a decisive shift toward early English-medium instruction. While this approach has expanded exposure to English, evidence indicates that it places substantial linguistic demands on young learners and teachers during the foundational years of schooling.

Over the past two decades, Rwanda has demonstrated strong political commitment to improving foundational learning, supported by clear national strategies such as the Foundational Learning Strategy (FLS 2024–2029) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2024–2029). Major national and donor supported initiatives—including Building Learning Foundations (BLF), Tunoze Gusoma, Rwanda EQUIP, Elimu-Soko, and more recent English-focused foundational learning projects (i.e. the Learning and Inclusion for Transformation project) have created a growing body of evidence. However, key elements of this evidence base remain fragmented, and implementation systems have not yet fully caught up with the ambitions of the LoI policy.

A central challenge is teacher English language proficiency. Many teachers currently working in lower primary grades entered the profession under earlier language regimes and were not adequately prepared to teach literacy and content in English. Although Rwanda has invested heavily in continuous professional development (CPD) and large-scale English proficiency initiatives, limited teacher fluency remains a binding constraint on effective classroom instruction. As a result, informal code-switching and translanguaging between English and Kinyarwanda are widespread, functioning as pragmatic coping strategies rather than as systematically guided instructional practices grounded in the science of bilingual reading.

Curriculum and instructional materials present additional challenges. While national curricula and teaching and learning materials provide systemwide coverage, their alignment with the science of reading and the science of bilingual reading, particularly for early literacy in English as a second or additional language, is uneven. Donor supported programs have produced high

quality, evidence aligned materials. Guidance on how to strategically leverage Kinyarwanda to support English literacy development is inconsistent across materials and grade levels.

Rwanda's M&E systems are strong in design but limited in linguistic specificity. National assessment systems such as the LARS and administrative platforms such as EMIS provide regular data on learning outcomes and system inputs. However, these systems do not yet systematically capture key language-related indicators, including teacher English proficiency, classroom LoI practices, or learner language profiles. This limits the system's ability to assess LoI implementation fidelity and to use evidence for continuous instructional improvement.

To address these challenges, the report recommends a set of strategic actions to strengthen coherence between policy, evidence, and classroom practice:

- Clarify and operationalize early-grade language expectations by articulating realistic, language-specific FLN benchmarks for English literacy development.
- Make language visible in system diagnostics by integrating teacher English proficiency, learner language profiles, and classroom LoI practices into EMIS and supervision systems.
- Strengthen teacher professional development by embedding sustained English language development within CPD, aligned with the science of bilingual reading and classroom practice.
- Align teacher deployment with linguistic capacity by using proficiency data to inform placement in early primary grades.
- Revise curricula and teaching and learning materials to reflect explicit, systematic early literacy instruction in English, supported by strategic use of Kinyarwanda for meaning-making and comprehension.
- Institutionalize LoI monitoring by embedding language-focused indicators, classroom observations, and rapid feedback loops into routine M&E and sector review processes.

Introduction

Foundational learning—the ability to read and do basic arithmetic—has a profound influence on lifelong learning and earning potential.¹ However, millions of children across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are nowhere near acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills.² While this problem includes many facets, language plays a central role. At least half—and in some countries over 90%—of all children in LMICs are being taught in languages they do not use and understand.^{3,4} Most children will have to learn to read at least two languages in their schooling years, making **bilingual and multilingual foundational learning** the norm across LMICs.

The fact that students need to learn in their own language to acquire foundational skills is not only intuitive but backed by evidence from across the world and from across disciplines.^{5,6,7} The benefits include better cognitive and learning outcomes in *both* the first language (L1) and in the second (or later acquired) language (L2);^{8,9} prolonged school attendance, more engagement from parents and communities;¹⁰ and some evidence of cost efficiency.^{11,12}

At the same time, education stakeholders increasingly demand access to education in a child's L2—most often a post-colonial language—earlier in their educational trajectory, given the strong relationship between skills in these languages and socioeconomic mobility.^{13,14} Governments often opt to educate children *only* in the post-colonial language. In addition, varying political agendas cause the sociopolitical milieu affecting LoI choices to constantly shift.¹⁵ Therefore, decisions related to which language(s) to teach in, for how long, and to what end must be both politically palatable and empirically effective to improve FLN outcomes.

To support these decisions, there is an urgent need to treat FLN goals through the lens of bilingualism and multilingualism—not by framing the question of the acquisition of one language against another but by promoting learning outcomes in bilingual and multilingual education contexts. Decision makers need a systematic framework that politically and empirically reconcile this tension between the need to teach children in a familiar language for as long as possible and the need to teach children in an unfamiliar language as early as possible.

To meet this need, American Institutes for Research® (AIR), in collaboration with the Gates Foundation, has developed the **Blueprint for the Use of evidence In Language of instruction (LoI) Decisions (BUILD)** to provide an *empirically grounded and politically workable* framework to guide decision makers to improve bilingual and multilingual foundational literacy outcomes across LMICs. We are working closely with education decision makers and stakeholders across four countries in sub-Saharan Africa—Cote d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Senegal—to

apply the BUILD project framework and create actionable blueprints in each country to help leaders improve foundational learning outcomes.

Objectives

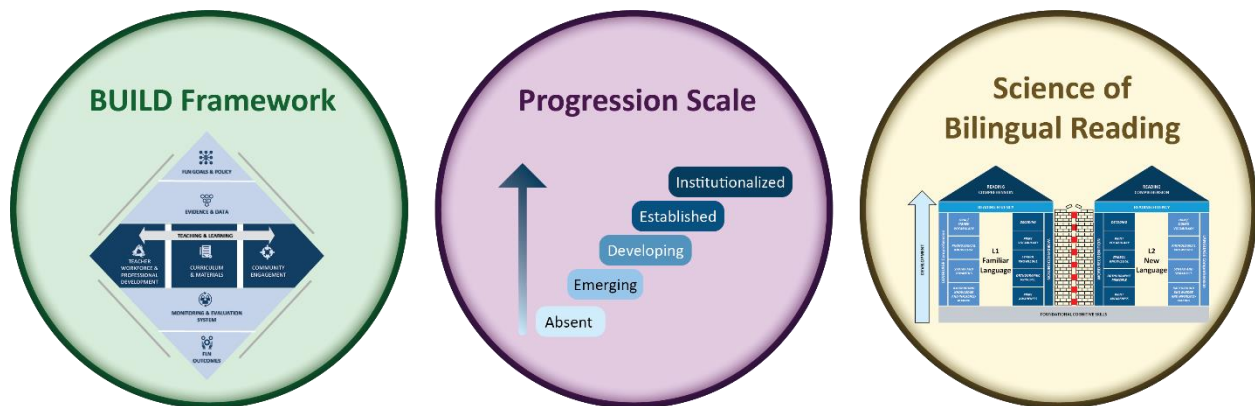
The main objective of the BUILD project is to support governments and education stakeholders to make effective LoI decisions to improve foundational literacy outcomes in their countries. BUILD aims to bring holistic understanding about how language is at the heart of improving foundational learning outcomes, including empirical, practical, and political considerations at key levels of the education system. The BUILD project specifically focuses on the question: *What language(s) are educators going to use to overcome the foundational learning crisis in a specific country, and—once that is decided—how?*

This perspective allows us to overcome the consistent and prevalent issue of either advocating for instruction solely in children’s familiar languages without much foresight into the transition process or focusing solely on the post-colonial language without much planning for the integration of the familiar languages to better support foundational learning outcomes. The BUILD project also aims to support decision makers to get a better sense of how different bilingual education models¹⁶ may be effective given all aspects of a country’s education system.

Overarching BUILD Approach

Our approach to this work includes the development of three components (see Figure 1) – the BUILD framework, the BUILD progression scale, and the theoretical model for the Science of Bilingual Reading (SoBR), also known as AIR’s Biliteracy House Model. The **BUILD framework** (Figure 2) encompasses the components of the educational system that will influence the relationship between language and learning. The **progression scale** (Table 1) helps track a country’s progress on the path toward effective integration of language considerations into solving learning poverty. The **theoretical model** (Biliteracy House; Figure 3) outlines the scientific underpinning of reading acquisition in bilingual contexts, which is central to all other decisions. Bringing these together, the BUILD project provides stakeholders with a blueprint for achieving the desired foundational literacy outcomes in bilingual and multilingual contexts.

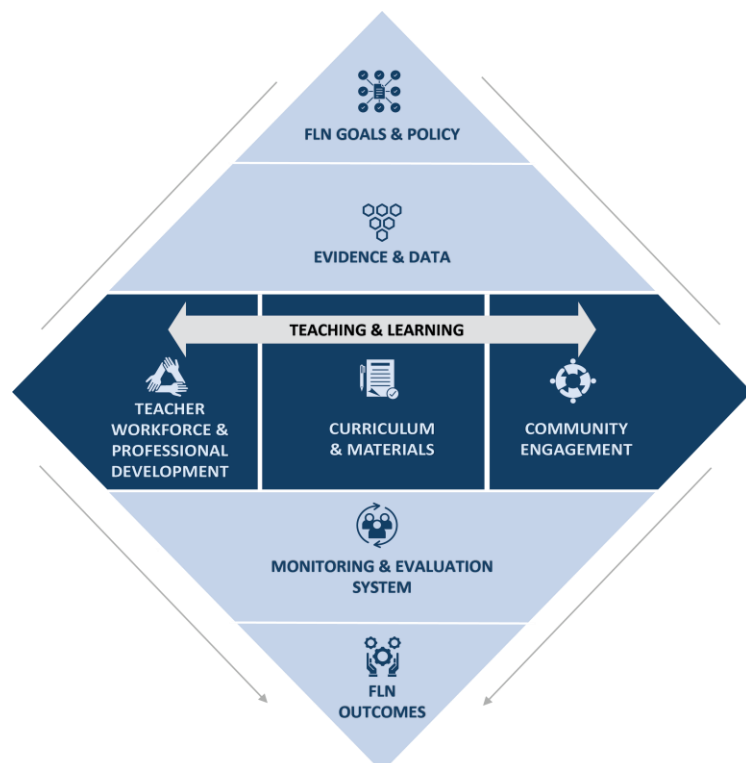
Figure 1. BUILD approach



The BUILD Framework

The BUILD framework (see Figure 2) is designed as a series of tiers, representing the core components of the education system that are likely to influence the relationship between language and learning. The tiers are arranged in a diamond shape from top to bottom, with arrows indicating improvement of FLN outcomes as the overall goal. The top tier and the bottom tier are narrower than the center as they represent more focused topics: the FLN goals (topmost tier) and FLN outcomes (bottommost tier). These are presumably the most important components but the least “expansive” in terms of the components and concepts they cover—and thus are represented as taking up less space. As we work down the model toward the middle, the conceptual coverage increases, with the center of the model being the widest, as it represents the largest sections of the system together. These pieces work in tandem conceptually and temporally and are therefore represented next to each other as

Figure 2. BUILD framework



opposed to above or below each other. In other words, curriculum and materials, teacher professional development (PD), and community components are all pieces of the education system that must be effective and functional at the same time. Each represents a large swathe of ideas, people, and materials involved, justifying its central and wide space in the model. In the following sections, we discuss each tier and present a set of questions that guide us in unpacking and understanding that tier in each country.

FLN Goals and Policy

The top tier, FLN goals and policy, represents the key objectives and policies that guide national education decision making at the primary-school level in terms of foundational learning. While foundational learning itself may or may not be part of the policy, there is an increasing presence of the term (or similar terms such as “early reading,” “early math,” or “basic education outcomes”) in policy documents and policy dialogue, propelled in large part by evidence for its centrality in lifelong outcomes.¹⁷



The reason the BUILD framework uses “FLN goals” rather than “LoI goals” or another term that focuses solely on language is that the separation of language policies and FLN policies is part of the problem with identifying how to improve FLN outcomes (the top of the diamond) across the remaining systemic components of an education system. Decision makers need effective tools and guidance to articulate and define a country’s FLN goals *through language*. In other words, national FLN goals (e.g., “the objective of all children reading”) should clearly state the language(s) in which students should achieve learning goals (e.g., “all children will be reading in X language[s]”). At a minimum, policymakers must understand and articulate the language(s) in which students should achieve their goals.

In addition, each BUILD country report will provide a brief historical analysis of the LoI policies, stakeholder analyses, and key roadblocks in its implementation. FLN goals and policies are not static concepts. They are rooted in deep historical, cultural, and sociopolitical realities that constantly shift and influence each other over time.¹⁸ The key questions that we aim to answer under this tier are:

What are the country’s language-specific FLN goals?

What is the LoI policy (if there is one)?

What are the pertinent political realities that might affect the LoI policy’s implementation and future sustainability?

Evidence and Data

The second tier of the BUILD framework represents evidence and data on the status of learning and language use in the country. It represents a compilation

of and secondary analysis of the extant data that our team could access at the time of publication of this report. It incorporates, for example, results on students' early grade reading or math scores, language abilities of students and teachers, empirical information on when children are best able to transfer from learning in one language to learning in another (if available), and the orthographic and linguistic properties of the languages students are expected to learn. This information helps us understand various aspects of the transfer of language and reading skills and timings of learning trajectories.



Too often, the generation, analysis, and application of evidence occurs in a vacuum, wherein the linkage to actual implementation and practice remains untapped. Filling this gap between the production of rigorous evidence and policymakers' use and demand of evidence is one of the bedrocks of the BUILD approach. By incorporating this step within the framework, stakeholders can see multidisciplinary results (or gaps in the evidence) for the most pertinent questions to developing and successfully implementing an Lol policy that is likely to improve FLN scores.

The following questions guide this section:

What are learners' current FLN levels across different languages, and how are these assessed?

What languages do teachers and learners understand best, and how do these align with the current languages of instruction (Lol)?

What factors influence first language (L1)–second language (L2) transfer and transition processes?

Data on the first question will allow stakeholders to assess whether and to what extent they are on track to achieving their FLN goals, get a better sense of indicators they need to measure for bilingual students, and help determine in what language(s) they should test students' FLN skills.

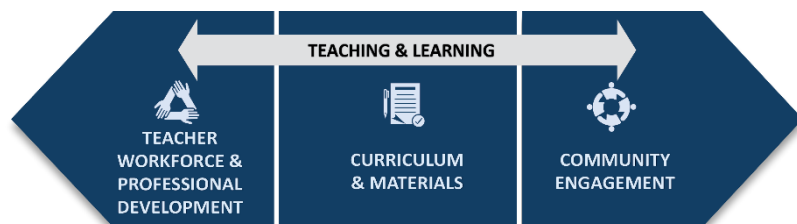
The second question helps us understand the *degree of proficiency* both students and teachers have in various languages. Most reports and available information tend to focus on children's FLN skills in a single language (most often the Lol). This makes it impossible to determine whether they have better skills in another language, whether they have skills in two or more languages, whether the level of their skill is strongest in the measured language, etc. Measuring

skills in only one language also makes it difficult to judge the extent of linguistic heterogeneity across students in a class. Furthermore, the lack of rigorous evidence on teacher skills—in terms of their own linguistic proficiency levels in the language they are teaching, as well as their pedagogical competence in teaching that language—is a serious impediment to effective teacher placement and training processes. Ultimately, classrooms should have as close a match as possible between the LoI, the proficiency levels of the teachers in both speaking/using that language and teaching that language, and the language proficiency of the majority of students (ideally *all*).

The third question focuses on the evidence that exists on L1–L2 transfer in the languages of the focus country and the impact of this evidence on the development of curricula, teacher training materials, and teaching and learning materials (TLMs). Most early learning programs treat L1 and L2 as separate entities, with many focused on improving national language education and others focused on supporting governments to implement a program in the post-colonial language. In the evidence and data tier, we aim to draw on the evidence of transfer between languages, orthographic and phonological processes that may affect such transfer, and other cognitive and linguistic processes (such as thresholds for transfer, thresholds for vocabulary, etc.) that may be necessary to plan and implement a program that accounts for bilingualism and multilingualism from the beginning.

Teaching and Learning

The central tier focuses on the heart of the education system in many ways—the teachers, curriculum and materials, and parents and communities—all of which support foundational learning outcomes in tandem.



In terms of teacher workforce, it is vital that teachers are placed in schools where they have high levels of proficiency in the language(s) they are expected to teach, as well as high levels of pedagogical skills to teach the language(s) they are expected to teach. In addition, teachers need training to teach bilingual children, in line with the science of bilingual reading (SoBR). This requires a deep analysis of existing pre-service and in-service professional development (PD) opportunities regarding multilingual teaching.

At the classroom level, learning outcomes are only as good as the teachers and the teaching and learning materials (TLMs) they use. Growing evidence specifies some of the key elements that support good teaching and learning in LMICs. For example, education systems need a

strong link between policy expectations and classroom realities.¹⁹ To be effective, systems also need a combination of teacher trainings, high-quality student learning materials, and clear teacher support for teaching and learning.²⁰ What is less clear, however, is how educators should design and implement these materials in bilingual or multilingual programming. In the BUILD framework, we closely examine the TLMs considering the SoBR and ensure that the curriculum, scope and sequence of skills, pacing guides, and all materials in the classroom align with this theoretical foundation.

The role of communities in supporting literacy is well established, especially the role of parents and caregivers and the home language and literacy environment.^{21,22,23} However, the conceptualization of the home literacy environment and parental involvement (especially in cases of nonliterate parents and mismatches between home and school language) needs careful consideration.^{24,25} As such, for any policy framework to connect with student-level outcomes, it is important to consider community-level engagements and perceptions toward bilingual education. The BUILD framework considers issues such as parental perceptions, especially in terms of demand for language education vis a vis post-colonial language education, the language mismatch between schools and homes, and the degree of parental literacy skills. Together, these dimensions can help leverage resources for nonliterate community members (e.g., by using transferable skills from oral language storytelling) and for places of language mismatch (e.g., by supporting the transfer of home language skills to school language skills).

The following questions guide this tier:

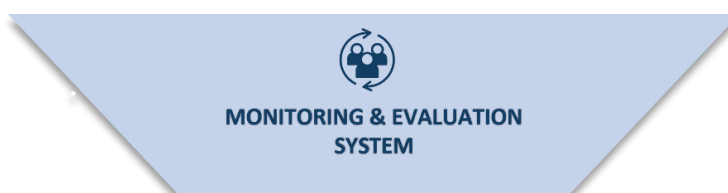
How are language considerations integrated into teacher recruitment, placement, and training (both pre-service and in-service)?

To what extent are the curriculum and TLMs designed to support bilingual and multilingual learners?

How are parents and community members involved in decisions about the LoI?

Monitoring and Evaluation System

In a previous tier of the BUILD framework, we covered evidence and data – which represented an analysis and understanding of the evidence at any given moment in time. In addition, an education system must be able to track, understand, improve, and sustain FLN outcomes over time. A functioning measurement and evaluation (M&E) system ensures that each tier of the education system functions as intended and progresses toward the overarching FLN outcomes.



We conceptualize the M&E tier as a continuous process of data collection, analysis, and data use by system actors to inform programs and interventions to improve learning outcomes. This tier explores whether the country's M&E mechanisms effectively assess the clarity, dissemination, and implementation of FLN goals and policies. It also examines if the M&E systems evaluate the effectiveness of teacher PD, the appropriateness and use of curriculum and materials, and the extent of community engagement. These assessments help identify areas for improvement and inform iterative adjustments to program implementation. Importantly, M&E also supports accountability by providing stakeholders with timely, actionable insights that can guide decision making and resource allocation.

This tier will be guided by the following questions:

Does the country have a regularly updated M&E plan, and are there national or subnational mechanisms to use these data for continuous improvement in FLN outcomes?

To what extent does M&E incorporate linguistic considerations, including data on teachers' and learners' Lol?

How are M&E findings used to inform and revise curriculum, teacher training, and Lol policies?

By embedding M&E within the BUILD framework, the model promotes a culture of evidence-based practice and continuous improvement, ensuring that all components respond to the dynamic needs of learners and the education system.

The BUILD Progression Scale

Within each tier, BUILD will support countries to determine their level of development and lead that into an action plan through the BUILD Progression Scale, as shown in Table 1. The purpose of this scale is to consider each BUILD tier within the country context and—based on the analysis of the available evidence—decide the level at which countries are prepared to institutionalize their FLN goals.

The **BUILD Progression Scale** serves as a diagnostic and planning tool that enables countries to assess their readiness to improve FLN goals through their Lol policies and systems. Organized into five developmental stages—Absent, Emerging, Developing, Established, and Institutionalized—the scale reflects a country's journey from fragmented or nonexistent efforts to full integration of Lol within national education systems. Each stage highlights progress across key system components: policy, teacher workforce, professional development, curriculum and materials, community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Countries may be at different stages for different criteria; for example, a country may be at the “Institutionalized” stage for its FLN goals and Lol policy but at the “Absent” stage for its teacher recruitment and placement practices.

At the **Absent** stage, countries lack an official Lol policy to support FLN goals. Teacher recruitment and placement practices do not consider language skills, and educators receive no training to accommodate Lol to understand and improve FLN goals. Instructional materials in relevant languages do not exist, and the curriculum fails to reflect linguistic realities. No systems exist for monitoring learning or evaluating language-related teaching practices. Communities do not engage in conversations about language in education, and parents do not know which languages schools use or why they matter for learning.

The **Emerging** stage marks the beginning of awareness and early action related to language. An Lol policy may exist, but it is often fragmented or poorly aligned with FLN goals. Teacher recruitment practices may acknowledge, but not yet operationalize, language dynamics. Training on multilingual instruction is minimal and insufficient for teacher preparedness. Some instructional materials begin to reflect language considerations, but they are inconsistent and limited in scope. Community engagement is largely one-way, consisting of awareness campaigns or information sharing, with minimal opportunities for parent or community input. Monitoring systems, where they exist, focus on outputs rather than learning outcomes.

At the **Developing** stage, countries demonstrate increased commitment to incorporating evidence related to language needs. Countries have more clearly defined Lol policies, which they back by government action. Teacher recruitment and placement practices begin to consider language backgrounds more systematically, though gaps remain. Pre-service and in-service training become more robust, incorporating both theoretical and practical strategies for teaching in multilingual classrooms. Instructional materials and curricula begin to reflect the SoBR and students’ language contexts. Education systems consult communities through activities such as language mapping or early reading initiatives but do not fully consider their input for decision making. Policymakers monitor student learning outcomes, although they do not consistently use data to refine strategies.

The **Established** stage is characterized by coherent and systematic implementation of evidence-based practices related to bilingual and multilingual learning. Clear operational guidelines and implementation structures accompany the Lol policy. The linguistic context informs teacher placement practices, and training systems integrate comprehensive professional development related to L1 teaching and transition. Instructional materials and curricula align with multilingual pedagogy and the SoBR. M&E systems produce data on learning outcomes, which decision makers use to adapt and improve policies and practices. Education systems engage

communities strategically by empowering families to support learning in home languages. Local leaders may contribute to school governance or teacher support, thus reinforcing LoI implementation.

At the **Institutionalized** stage, national systems deeply embed evidence-based LoI considerations. Education leaders routinely review and adapt all components of the education system, from policy to practice, in alignment with FLN goals. Teacher training is dynamic and responsive to shifting linguistic and demographic realities. Educators regularly update high-quality, evidence-based instructional materials. M&E systems track both immediate outcomes and long-term impacts of LoI policies, thus supporting data-driven decision making. Community engagement is no longer a peripherality, a formalized and valued part of the education ecosystem. Parents and community members actively shape curriculum, materials, and school governance, ensuring that language choices reflect and support learners' needs.

Ultimately, the BUILD Progression Scale underscores that effective implementation of LoI policies requires comprehensive system-level reform. It depends on sustained political commitment, investment in teachers, high-quality resources, strong accountability systems, and genuine partnerships with the communities that schools serve.

Table 1. BUILD progression scale

Component	Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
FLN goal(s) and Lol policy	No official Lol policy is in place to reach the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy exists, but it is vague, fragmented, or not aligned with the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy is defined, with growing government commitment and early implementation to achieve the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy is applied in practice and supported by implementation structures in support of the FLN goal(s).	An Lol policy is embedded in national education systems and reviewed regularly in alignment with the FLN goal(s).
Evidence and data	Education stakeholders do not use or have access to evidence related to student language skills to inform and adapt policies and practices.	Education stakeholders have access to some data related to student language skills, but the data are only available on a limited scale or have suboptimal quality.	Education stakeholders have access to student language mapping on a large scale, some evidence on language transfer between some L1s and the desired L2, and some other Lol indicators.	Education stakeholders have access to student and teacher language mapping data on a national scale, language transfer data between the most prominent L1s and the desired L2, and data on additional Lol indicators.	Education stakeholders not only have access to language mapping, language threshold data, and other Lol indicators aligned with all BUILD tiers but also regularly use and update those data to inform policies and practices.
Teacher recruitment and placement	No official teacher recruitment or placement plan is in place that accounts for teachers' language skills.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan that accounts for teacher language skills exists, but it is vague, fragmented, and not operationalized.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol, though it is in early implementation and not fully operationalized.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol and is supported by implementation structures.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan that focuses on Lol exists, is embedded in national education systems, and is reviewed regularly in alignment with FLN goal(s).
Teacher PD	Teachers receive no pre-service or in-service training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using national languages for instruction.	Teachers receive limited training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using local Lols, but that training is not sufficient for teachers to feel prepared to teach in local languages.	Teachers receive more notable trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using Lols, yet these trainings are not yet comprehensive and system-wide. Some gaps exist in teacher preparedness.	Trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using national Lols are integrated extensively into in-service and pre-service teacher training.	Ongoing, adaptive training responds to demographic and linguistic shifts among teachers and learners.
Curriculum and materials	The curriculum does not address multilingual teaching. Instructional materials in local languages are unavailable.	The curriculum addresses multilingual teaching to a minimal extent. Some instructional materials integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials incorporate the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts. Instructional materials increasingly integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials are fully aligned with the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts.	A high-quality, regularly updated curriculum and corresponding materials support evolving FLN and Lol goals.
Community engagement	Communities are largely unaware of the benefits of multilingual education. Little or no sensitization efforts are in place. Communities have no tools to support children to read in school languages. Communities are not engaged in supporting education in school languages.	Information-sharing efforts such as awareness campaigns may be in place, but they are not yet at scale with proven effectiveness. Families and communities have limited involvement in supporting multilingual education.	Families and communities are generally aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Communities are somewhat engaged in decisions and/or implementation of multilingual education through, for example, language mapping, focus groups, materials development, or supporting student language and literacy development at home.	Families and communities are largely aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Parents and communities actively support learning in the home language and/or the transition to the L2.	Community engagement and commitment to multilingual education is deep and sustained. Families and community members are continually involved in governance, curriculum feedback, material development, and home language and literacy support.
Monitoring and evaluation	No systems are in place to monitor student learning or assess Lol-related practices.	Some basic monitoring of outputs occurs (e.g., enrollment, textbook distribution) but not of student learning outcomes.	Student learning outcomes are tracked but not yet used to refine or inform Lol strategies.	Outcomes are continuously monitored; early evidence of what works is used to adjust approaches.	Robust systems track learning outcomes, assess the impact of Lol policies, and inform iterative policy adaptation.

The Science of Bilingual Reading

As mentioned above, the BUILD framework is grounded in the science of learning to read. Decades of research have led to several influential theoretical frameworks on learning to read (and reading to learn). Given that our current focus is foundational literacy, we rely on the theories of early reading development. We incorporate well-established theoretical models as well as emerging empirical trends from learning to read across languages and scripts and from across monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual models of learning.

First, in terms of the earliest stages of learning to read, the Universal Grammar of Reading²⁶ posits that all writing systems, regardless of language, fundamentally map orthographic (written) to phonological (auditory) information. However, the nature of this mapping varies across languages, influencing how children learn to read. Key dimensions that affect the reading process include:

- orthographic depth (how consistently letters map to sounds),
- symbol set size (the number of unique symbols or graphemes a learner needs to recognize and identify in order to decode words),
- phonological unit size (e.g., syllables vs. phonemes),
- visual complexity of the script, and
- tonality in tonal languages.

These factors are critical in shaping the scope, sequence, and timing of reading instruction.

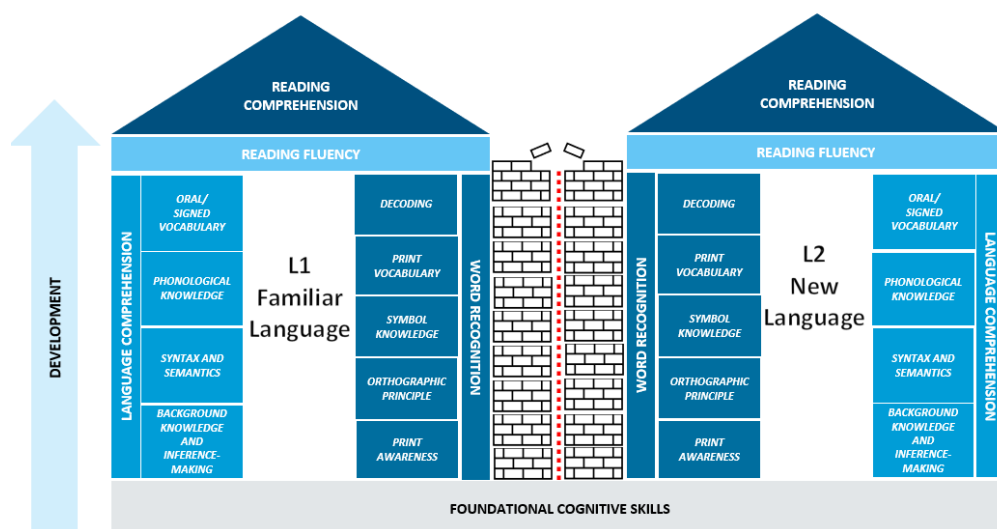
As students' ability develops beyond initial mapping of sounds and symbols toward basic reading comprehension abilities, the Cognitive Foundations of Reading Acquisition Model, articulated by Hoover and Tunmer, provides one of the most influential models of reading comprehension development.²⁷ This model, previously articulated by the authors as the Simple View of Reading, emphasizes that reading comprehension in any language depends on the integration of two core skill sets: language proficiency and decoding (or word recognition). Through a review of multiple studies across language types, it is clear that language proficiency includes a series of subskills such as background knowledge and inference making, knowledge of syntax and semantics (including morphological and other skills), phonological knowledge (i.e., understanding of sounds and sound patterns), and oral or signed vocabulary.²⁸ Word recognition also includes a series of subskills, including print awareness (i.e., understanding of the basic principles of text), knowledge of orthographic principles (i.e., understanding of *how*

sounds and symbols correspond with each other), symbol knowledge (i.e., understanding exactly *what* sounds correspond with specific symbols), and decoding (i.e., the ability to sound out words and symbols).^{29,30,31} Language proficiency and decoding then support the acquisition of reading fluency, which is the automatic (quick and accurate) sounding out of words and passages. Altogether, these abilities support reading comprehension—the overall goal of reading comprehension (or foundational literacy).

In bilingual settings, the Transfer Facilitation Model³² offers a framework for understanding how L1 and L2 abilities influence reading skills in L2. According to this model, predictable and significant patterns of transfer, cross-linguistic cognitive resource sharing, and transfer facilitation affect literacy acquisition. This means that skills acquired in one language can support and enhance reading development in another, highlighting the interconnected nature of bilingual literacy acquisition. Children who learn to **read two** or more languages develop a metaphorical “house” for each language, as illustrated in AIR’s Biliteracy House Model (see Figure 3). The model provides an intuitive and metaphorical representation of the skills and subskills (pillars and bricks) and transferable skills (shared walls) needed to support the development of biliteracy acquisition. In these cases, the child’s L1 impacts the development of reading in second or later-acquired languages in significant and predictable ways, namely the transfer of decoding skills from an L1 to an L2 when an empirically defined threshold level is reached.^{33,34,35}

The BUILD framework will apply the biliteracy house as its theoretical underpinning for the SoBR, and as such, the model will guide all aspects of our analyses and the development of the country Lol blueprints.

Figure 3. AIR biliteracy house



These theoretical models provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding how children learn to read in bilingual and multilingual contexts. By integrating insights from the Universal Grammar of Reading, the Cognitive Foundations of Reading Acquisition, and the Transfer Facilitation Model, the BUILD framework offers a robust, evidence-based approach to biliteracy development. The Biliteracy House model operationalizes these theories into a practical structure that highlights both language-specific and transferable skills. As the guiding framework for BUILD, it will inform all aspects of our analysis and the design of country-specific LoI blueprints, ensuring that our work is grounded in the science of how children learn to read and read to learn across languages.

Rwanda Country Report

Rwanda is a priority country for the BUILD project, given its sustained efforts to improve foundational learning outcomes amid significant Lol policy shifts over the past two decades. Rwanda's education system is linguistically distinctive in that Kinyarwanda is spoken by nearly all learners, while English has been designated as the official Lol across primary and secondary education since 2019. This policy transition has positioned language as a central driver of Rwanda's foundational learning outcomes and reform agenda.

Historically, Kinyarwanda served as the Lol through the end of primary education, with French used at post-primary levels. Beginning in 2008, Rwanda introduced English as the Lol from upper primary onward, and in 2019 the Government of Rwanda formally designated English as the Lol starting in lower primary. While Kinyarwanda continues to be taught as a subject and used informally in classrooms, English now functions as the primary medium for instruction, assessment, and official schooling processes from the early grades.

Evidence from national assessments and stakeholder consultations indicates that this rapid transition has created persistent challenges for both learners and teachers. Results from the Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) assessment show steady gains in English literacy over recent years, but overall proficiency remains low in comparison with other foundational subjects. Teacher English language proficiency (ELP) continues to be a binding constraint, particularly in lower primary grades, where many teachers rely on Kinyarwanda to explain concepts due to limited confidence and pedagogical preparation in English. At the same time, Rwanda has demonstrated strong political commitment to addressing these challenges through policy reform, investment in teacher professional development, and collaboration with development partners.

The Government of Rwanda, through the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), has articulated clear foundational learning priorities in the Foundational Learning Strategy (FLS) 2024–2029 and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029. These strategies explicitly identify Lol as a critical lever for improving foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) outcomes in both Kinyarwanda and English. Major national and donor supported initiatives—including Building Learning Foundations (BLF), Tunoze Gusoma, Rwanda EQUIP, ElimuSoko, the English Proficiency Teacher Training (EPTT) program, and the Learning and Inclusion for Transformation (LIFT) project—have generated a substantial body of evidence on teacher capacity, instructional practices, teaching and learning materials, and learner outcomes.

At this pivotal moment in Rwanda's education reform trajectory, the BUILD project seeks to support national leaders and technical stakeholders in using evidence more systematically to

guide Lol decisions. While Rwanda’s context differs from traditional bilingual education systems, the BUILD framework remains highly relevant for examining how language transitions, language support strategies, and the use of learners’ home language (Kinyarwanda) can be leveraged to strengthen early literacy acquisition in English and improve overall FLN outcomes.

The main objective of this country report is to conduct a comprehensive review of the available evidence on the role of Lol decisions in supporting bilingual and biliteracy-related foundational literacy outcomes in Rwanda, with particular attention to the transition from Kinyarwanda to English in lower primary grades. Guided by the BUILD framework, the report seeks to answer the core question of how Lol decisions can be used most effectively to address Rwanda’s foundational learning challenges, while identifying areas where evidence remains limited, fragmented, or underutilized.

The report synthesizes findings from document reviews, stakeholder consultations, and secondary quantitative data analyses, drawing heavily on evidence generated through national systems and donor supported programs summarized in the Rwanda LIFT Landscape Review (April 2025). These findings are used to develop a practical, contextually grounded blueprint to support national leaders in strengthening Lol implementation, teacher support, instructional coherence, and evidence use over the coming decade. The sections that follow describe the methods used, present key findings across each BUILD tier, and outline priority actions to guide Rwanda’s Lol and foundational learning roadmap.

Methods

To address the key questions guiding the BUILD framework, we conducted an in-depth desk review of relevant policy and program documentation, consulted with key national and regional stakeholders, and conducted secondary quantitative analyses of existing datasets related to language, instruction, and foundational learning outcomes.

Document Review

The evidence collection process began with the aggregation of more than 50 documents and datasets related to Lol policy, foundational learning, teacher professional development, and instructional materials in Rwanda. This included national policies, strategies, curricula, assessment reports, and program documentation from both government and development partners. Key sources were identified through prior AIR engagement in Rwanda and through the Learning and Inclusion for Transformation (LIFT) landscape review, which provides a comprehensive mapping of English language teacher training and foundational learning initiatives.

The document set spanned all tiers of the BUILD framework and included national education laws and strategies (e.g., FLS and ESSP), assessment reports from NESA (including LARS), teacher training frameworks and CPD materials from REB, and technical reports and evaluations from programs such as BLF, Tunoze Gusoma, Rwanda EQUIP, ElimuSoko, and LIFT. In total, more than 80 documents were compiled and analyzed for this report.

Each document was reviewed by at least two members of the research team to assess its relevance to the BUILD guiding questions. Documents were then categorized by BUILD tier and sub-tier, such as FLN goals and language policy, teacher workforce and professional development, teaching and learning materials, assessment and data systems, and system capacity and governance. Standardized analytical summaries were produced to extract key findings related to Lol, language transitions, instructional practices, and learning outcomes. All summaries were verified through human review to ensure accuracy and contextual validity.

Stakeholder Consultations

The research team engaged a diverse group of stakeholders through individual interviews and consultations to complement the desk review and deepen understanding of policy implementation and system realities. Stakeholders were selected to ensure representation across policy, technical, academic, and implementation perspectives and included officials from MINEDUC, REB, and NESA, as well as university researchers, development partners, district-level officials, school leaders, and teachers.

Using a structured BUILD consultation guide, consultations explored stakeholders' perspectives on Lol policy, classroom language practices, teacher preparedness, use of evidence in decision making, and perceived facilitators and barriers to improving FLN outcomes. These consultations drew on participants' direct experience with national reforms and programs documented in the LIFT landscape review.

Secondary Quantitative Data

In addition to qualitative evidence, the team conducted secondary analyses of existing datasets relevant to Lol and foundational learning in Rwanda. These included:

- Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) assessment data, examining trends in English literacy outcomes at P3 and P6;
- Administrative and assessment documentation from NESA, including emerging work on the Assessment for Minimum Proficiency Level (AMPL);
- Program level monitoring and evaluation data from donor supported initiatives, where available, to examine teacher proficiency, instructional practices, and learner language exposure.
- LIFT baseline data that AIR assisted with reviewing.

While data limitations constrained the ability to conduct fully disaggregated analyses by language use, these sources provided valuable insights into system-level patterns linking Lol, teacher capacity, and learning outcomes.

EVIDENCE REVIEW RESULTS BY TIER

Using the data sources and methods described above, we present the findings to our key guiding questions, by tier in the BUILD framework.

FLN Goals and Language Policy

In this section, we provide evidence from stakeholder insights and the available literature on the historical, political, and sociocultural factors that influence the current FLN goals and policies in Rwanda and facilitators and barriers to future implementation and scalability of the bilingual education goals and policies.

Country FLN Goals & Language Policy

We address each question in the FLN goals and policy tier of the BUILD framework in turn, beginning with the first two questions:



What are the country's language-specific FLN goals?

What is the Lol policy, if there is one?

What are Rwanda's language-specific FLN goals?

Rwanda's FLN goals are articulated through a combination of national education strategies, assessment frameworks, and sector reform initiatives, with a strong emphasis on improving early literacy outcomes in English. While English is the official Lol from lower primary onward, national policy documents recognize that foundational literacy development in the early grades is shaped by learners' strong oral proficiency in Kinyarwanda and their emerging proficiency in English.

The Foundational Learning Strategy (FLS) 2024–2029, led by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), identifies foundational literacy as a national priority and frames language as a critical enabler of learning outcomes in the early grades. The strategy explicitly acknowledges that limited learner and teacher proficiency in English constrains progress in literacy, particularly in lower primary grades, and calls for strengthened instructional approaches to

support early literacy acquisition in English while maintaining Kinyarwanda as a foundational linguistic resource. At the system level, Rwanda's FLN goals emphasize:

Ensuring that learners acquire basic reading fluency and comprehension by the end of lower primary;

- Strengthening oral language, reading, and writing skills in English, the official LoI, to support learning across subjects;
- Maintaining Kinyarwanda literacy as a foundational skill, given its role in early cognitive and linguistic development and its continued use as a subject and classroom support language.

Progress toward these goals is monitored primarily through national assessment systems administered by the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA). The Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) assessment provides nationally representative data on learner achievement in English literacy at Primary 3 (P3) and Primary 6 (P6). Recent LARS results show improvement in English literacy outcomes over time but also highlight that a substantial proportion of learners do not yet meet national proficiency benchmarks, particularly in the early grades, underscoring the challenge of achieving FLN goals under the current LoI conditions.

Taken together, Rwanda's language-specific FLN goals reflect a dual objective: improving early literacy outcomes in English to align with the official LoI, while leveraging learners' near-universal proficiency in Kinyarwanda to support foundational skill development during the early years of schooling.

What is Rwanda's LoI policy?

Rwanda's LoI policy has undergone several major shifts over the past three decades, reflecting changing political priorities, regional integration goals, and evolving understandings of language and learning. These shifts have had profound implications for foundational literacy outcomes and continue to shape classroom practice in the early grades.

Pre-2008: Kinyarwanda in Primary, French in Post-Primary. Prior to 2008, Rwanda's education system operated under a relatively stable language regime in which Kinyarwanda served as the LoI throughout primary education, while French was used as the primary LoI in secondary and tertiary education. Under this model, nearly all children entered school learning to read and write in a language they spoke fluently at home, which supported early literacy acquisition and classroom participation. Language transitions occurred later in the education cycle, once learners had already developed basic literacy skills in Kinyarwanda. This model aligned closely

with international evidence on the benefits of initial literacy instruction in a familiar language, even though it limited exposure to global languages in the early grades.

2008–2018: Introduction of English as a Medium of Instruction in Upper Primary. In 2008, Rwanda initiated a major policy shift by introducing English as the LoI beginning in upper primary (P4), while retaining Kinyarwanda as the LoI in lower primary. This reform was closely linked to Rwanda’s strategic realignment toward the East African Community and the global Anglophone economy. The policy aimed to strengthen English proficiency among learners while preserving early grade instruction in a familiar language.

In practice, however, the transition placed significant demands on teachers, many of whom had limited formal training in English or experience teaching content subjects in English. Evidence from subsequent assessments and inspections suggested uneven implementation, with wide variation in teachers’ ability to use English confidently and effectively as a medium of instruction. Nonetheless, this period marked Rwanda’s first large-scale attempt to balance early learning in Kinyarwanda with a gradual transition to English.

2019–Present: English as the Official LoI from Lower Primary. In 2019, the Government of Rwanda designated English as the official LoI across all levels of basic education, beginning in lower primary. Under this policy, English became the formal medium for teaching all subjects, developing curricula and teaching and learning materials, and administering national assessments. Kinyarwanda continues to be taught as a subject and remains the dominant language of everyday communication for learners, but it no longer holds official LoI status in the early grades.

This shift significantly altered the linguistic demands placed on young learners and teachers. Children now begin formal schooling in a language they do not understand at all or are still in the process of acquiring, while teachers are expected to deliver literacy instruction and content teaching in English from the earliest grades. National assessment data from LARS show gradual improvement in English literacy outcomes over time, but they also reveal that a large share of learners particularly in P3, do not yet meet national proficiency benchmarks in English literacy. These findings underscore the challenge of achieving foundational literacy goals under an English-medium model in the early grades.

Policy Refinement and Pragmatic Adaptation

Recognizing these challenges, Rwanda has increasingly adopted a pragmatic approach to LoI implementation, even as English remains the official policy language. The FLS 2024–2029 and related reforms acknowledge persistent gaps in teacher English proficiency and explicitly identify LoI as a critical constraint on foundational learning outcomes. As a result, the

government has invested heavily in large-scale teacher ELP initiatives, CPD frameworks, and revisions to curricula and teaching and learning materials.

At the classroom level, findings from stakeholder consultations indicate that code-switching and translanguaging between English and Kinyarwanda are widespread, particularly in lower primary grades. While these practices are not formally codified as Lol policy, they are increasingly recognized by policymakers and implementers as necessary instructional strategies to support comprehension and participation in English-medium classrooms. Recent teacher training materials and CPD programs have begun to incorporate guidance on when and how to use Kinyarwanda strategically to support learning, signaling an implicit shift toward a more flexible, evidence-informed interpretation of the English-medium policy.

Under the current policy framework:

- English is the formal Lol for all subjects from lower primary onward;
- Kinyarwanda is taught as a subject and is widely used informally in classrooms to support comprehension, particularly in the early grades;
- All national curricula, assessments, and official instructional materials are developed primarily in English, with Kinyarwanda materials concentrated in early literacy instruction and as supplementary supports.

National policy documents and stakeholder consultations indicate that the Lol policy is motivated by Rwanda's broader human capital and economic development goals, including regional and global integration. However, implementation evidence highlights persistent gaps between policy intent and classroom practice. Teachers in lower primary grades frequently rely on Kinyarwanda to explain concepts due to limited English proficiency and confidence, particularly when teaching literacy skills that require precise language modeling.³⁶

Recognizing these challenges, MINEDUC and the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) have introduced complementary policies and reforms to support Lol implementation. These include:

- Large-scale investments in teacher English language proficiency (ELP) and pedagogy through continuous professional development frameworks;
- Curriculum and teaching-and-learning-material (TLM) revisions aimed at strengthening foundational literacy instruction in English;
- Policy recognition of code-switching and translanguaging practices as pragmatic classroom strategies, even as English remains the official Lol.

In practice, Rwanda's Lol policy operates within a de facto bilingual classroom environment, where Kinyarwanda plays a critical support role in early grades despite the formal dominance of

English. This tension between policy and practice makes Rwanda a particularly salient context for applying the BUILD framework to examine how evidence can better inform LoI implementation in support of foundational literacy outcomes.

Tier 2: Evidence and Data



In the next tier of the BUILD Framework, we conduct an analysis of secondary data and existing evidence of students' FLN and language abilities, as well as review the linguistic properties of the language students are expected to learn to better inform the programmatic design of the curriculum mirroring the science of reading. In this section, we address the first question in the Evidence & Data tier:

What are learners' current FLN levels across different languages, and how are these assessed?

Foundational Learning Skills

Rwanda's learning profile points to a foundational learning challenge that begins early and compounds through primary schooling. In the World Bank Human Capital Index country brief, Rwanda's harmonized test score is 358 (2017 scale), and learning-adjusted years of schooling are substantially lower than expected years of schooling, which is consistent with weak mastery of basic skills despite near-universal participation in schooling³⁷. This gap matters for FLN planning because it implies that many learners are progressing through grades without secure reading comprehension and numeracy foundations.

Participation in schooling is high in primary grades, but the distribution is uneven across geography and age cohorts. The 2022 population census main-indicators report shows a net attendance rate of about 89 percent for ages 6–11, with higher attendance in urban areas than rural areas, and meaningful variation across districts.³⁸ These attendance gradients are programmatically important for language mapping because they affect who is represented in school-based assessments and which learners are most likely to experience interrupted exposure to print-rich instruction in the language(s) used at school.

As students move into adolescence, dropout becomes a binding constraint on who completes basic education and who benefits from sustained literacy instruction. A joint UNICEF–Ministry of Education (Rwanda) report prepared by Laterite documents a sharp rise in dropout at the transition into lower secondary ages, with enrollment falling rapidly after early adolescence.³⁹ This pattern is consistent with completion challenges reported in sector documents and

highlights why FLN strategies that focus only on in-school cohorts can overstate population-level gains unless paired with retention measures.

Lol dynamics interact directly with these learning and retention patterns. Rwanda’s system relies on English as the Lol starting in primary school, within a broader history of language policy shifts. The World Bank Rwanda Economic Update on “Schooling for Learning” summarizes this policy architecture and emphasizes that limited English proficiency among teachers and learners can constrain learning when the transition occurs before learners are reading fluently in Kinyarwanda.⁴⁰ Census-based language statistics reinforce the same structural point for language mapping: Kinyarwanda is near-universal, while functional literacy in English is far less common in the general population, which shapes the likely home-language exposure of most children and the intensity of support needed for English-as-subject and English-as-medium pathways.⁴¹

Assessment results from National Examination and School Inspection Authority further underscore why language mapping needs to be integrated into FLN interpretation. The LARS 2023 reports benchmark learner performance against national and global proficiency frameworks and provide subject-specific performance patterns for P3 and P6, including English, that can be used to triangulate whether the system is building enough early-grade literacy to sustain later learning in English.^{42,43}

The LITES results show a consistent and policy-relevant gap between students’ foundational literacy skills in Kinyarwanda (L1) and English (L2) across multiple subtasks (Figures 5 and 6). Students demonstrate near-universal success on receptive vocabulary in Kinyarwanda (99%) alongside much lower performance in English (45%), and they show a similarly stark difference on beginning letter-sound identification (94% in Kinyarwanda versus 19% in English).

Performance gaps also appear on higher-order outcomes that require meaning-making in text. Reading comprehension is 49% in Kinyarwanda and 17% in English and reading comprehension through a picture-based task is 61% in Kinyarwanda and 44% in English. Together, these graphs indicate that many learners are developing core early literacy skills more securely in the familiar language, while English outcomes remain constrained, especially for tasks that depend on vocabulary knowledge and comprehension.

Figure 4. Variation in literacy assessment performance by L1 and L2

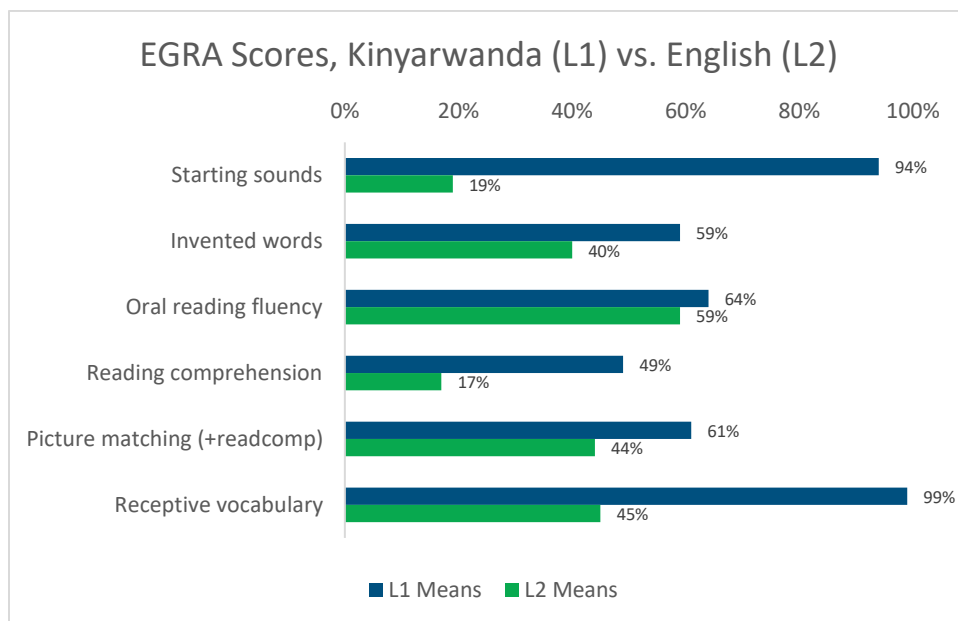
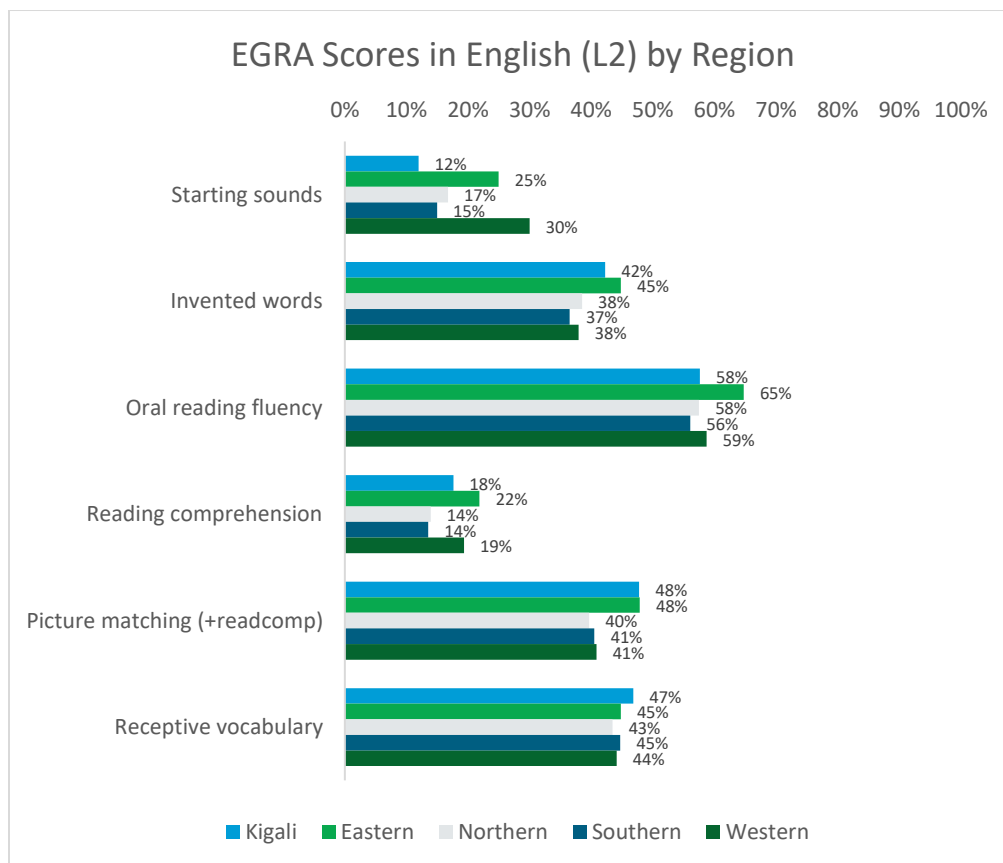


Figure 5. Regional variation in literacy assessment performance



For FLN strategy and language mapping, the implication is that English achievement in the primary grades is likely being limited by a combination of foundational decoding in English and, more importantly, by oral language and vocabulary that are required to access comprehension tasks. The relatively smaller gap on oral reading fluency (64% in Kinyarwanda versus 59% in English) alongside much larger gaps on comprehension-oriented measures suggests that some students can approximate fluent reading behaviours in English without consistently understanding what they read. This pattern strengthens the case for a structured bridge from Kinyarwanda literacy to English literacy that includes explicit oral language routines in English, systematic vocabulary development, and regular comprehension checks, with clear guidance for teachers on strategic use of Kinyarwanda to support meaning-making and reduce avoidable language barriers.

Language Mapping Data

Languages of Rwanda

Here, we provide information related to the demographics and regional distribution of major Rwandan languages, particularly in relation to English to understand how skills in one language may support another or require additional teaching. Next, we analyze existing data on which languages students know and understand across the country and, lastly, present evidence on the levels of reading and language skills required to support learning in English.

Demographics and Regional Distribution

Rwanda is characterized by a strong national lingua franca alongside multiple official languages that are stratified by schooling, cohort, and economic geography. Kinyarwanda functions as the national language and the default language of everyday interaction across the country, while the constitutional framework recognizes Kinyarwanda, English, and French as official languages and explicitly allows for changes to the official-language set through an organic law.⁴⁴ Kiswahili has been established as an additional official language, reflecting Rwanda's regional integration priorities, including within the East African Community.⁴⁵

Recent census evidence illustrates how multilingualism in Rwanda is distributed demographically through the lens of literacy. In the 2022 Population and Housing Census, the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda reports that 77% of residents aged 15+ are literate in at least one of the four official languages (Kinyarwanda, English, French, Kiswahili), and 54% are literate in Kinyarwanda only.⁴⁶ Bilingual and trilingual profiles are present but smaller at the national level, including Kinyarwanda and English (14%), Kinyarwanda and French (2%), and Kinyarwanda, English, and French (4.1%), with an additional 1.5% reporting literacy across all four official languages.⁴⁷ Kinyarwanda is universally spoken across all regions of Rwanda, making it the most dominant language. French is more commonly used among older

generations and in formal or diplomatic contexts, while English is increasingly prevalent in education, government, and urban areas.^{48,49}

Language profiles vary by province in a consistent pattern, with urban areas reflecting stronger links to labor markets and greater exposure to formal schooling languages. City of Kigali shows substantially higher multilingual literacy and markedly lower language illiteracy, with 6.5% reporting no literacy in any language compared with roughly 22%-25% in other provinces.⁵⁰ Kigali also has a higher share of profiles that include English and Kiswahili, including Kinyarwanda, English, and French (9.6%) and all four official languages (4.6%), consistent with English's institutional role in schooling following the 2008 policy shift to English as the main LoI.⁵¹ French literacy remains meaningful in absolute terms, especially among older and previously francophone-educated cohorts, while Kiswahili literacy tends to concentrate where regional trade and services are denser, with the strongest signals appearing in the capital's multilingual profiles.⁵²

Linguistic Properties

Kinyarwanda is a Bantu language that is mutually intelligible with Kirundi (spoken in Burundi). It is tonal, but tones are not marked in writing. It uses the Roman script without diacritics.⁵³ French includes a wide range of diacritic characters, such as é, è, ç, and œ. English and Swahili also use the Roman script.⁵⁴

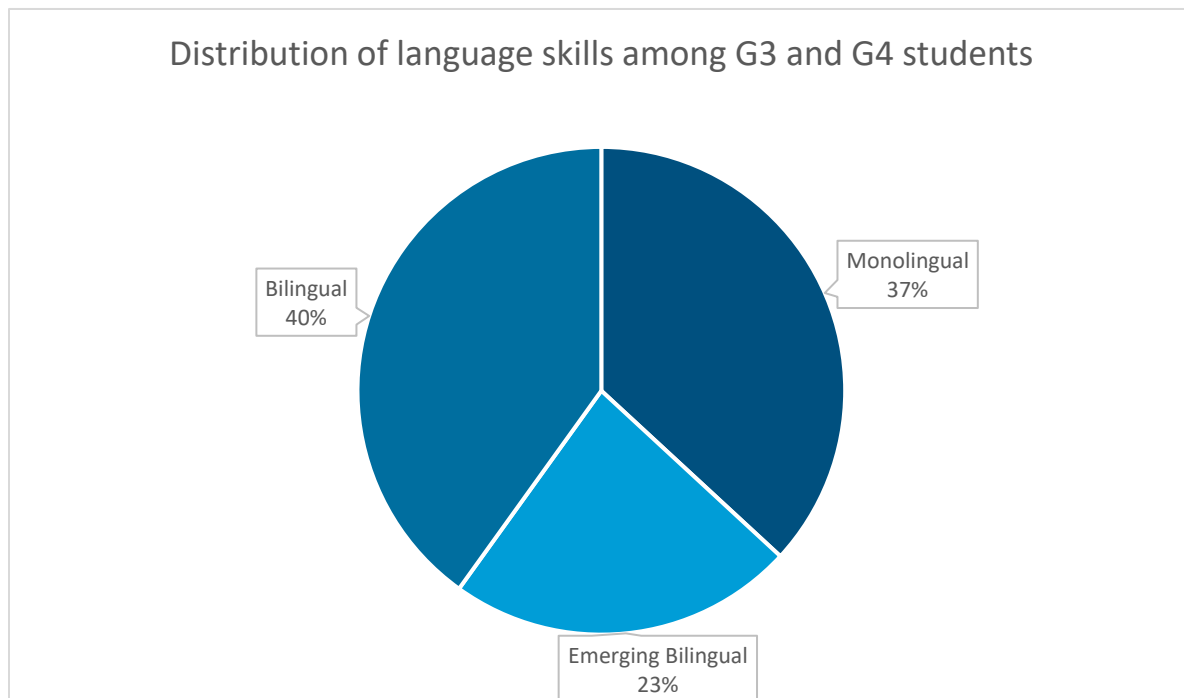
Student Language Mapping

Rwanda's 2008 LoI policy mandated Kinyarwanda as the medium of instruction from pre-primary to Grade 3, with a transition to English from Grade 4 onward.⁵⁵ However, studies show that many teachers and students were unprepared for this transition. Teachers often lacked proficiency in English and had limited training or resources to support bilingual instruction.⁵⁶ Teachers were frequently conceptualized as passive implementers of policy, with little input into decision-making. This top-down approach led to implementation challenges and inconsistent classroom practices.⁵⁷ Despite the policy, many teachers continued to use Kinyarwanda or French in classrooms due to limited English proficiency, especially in early grades.⁵⁸

Data collected by University of Notre Dame, as part of the LITES project, suggests that students in Rwanda exhibit substantial linguistic diversity in the primary grades, with 40% categorized as bilingual, 23% as emerging bilingual, and 37% as monolingual in Grades 3 (N = 606) and 4 (N = 609) across City of Kigali and the Eastern, Northern, Western, and Southern Provinces (Figure 7). Overall, 37% of sampled students are categorized as monolingual, 23% as emerging bilingual, and 40% as bilingual. This distribution indicates substantial linguistic heterogeneity within the primary-grade cohort and reinforces the need to treat language as a core constraint

on foundational literacy and numeracy, rather than a contextual variable. The presence of a large monolingual group implies that a meaningful share of learners may have limited access to classroom instruction when it is delivered primarily in a language that is not yet familiar, with predictable downstream effects on comprehension, participation, and performance on FLN assessments. At the same time, the combined 63% of students classified as emerging bilingual or bilingual signals a sizeable group for whom targeted language-supportive pedagogy can accelerate learning, particularly through structured oral language routines, explicit vocabulary instruction, and systematic comprehension checks. For program design, these findings support differentiated instructional supports and teacher guidance that are responsive to mixed-language classrooms, and they motivate disaggregation of language profiles by province to inform geographic targeting, teacher deployment priorities, and materials planning within Rwanda’s FLN strategy.

Figure 6. Language skills of Rwandan learners



Teaching and Learning



In the central tier of the BUILD framework, we focus on the teaching and learning practices

that influence classroom implementation of Rwanda’s Lol policy. In contrast to contexts with formal transitional bilingual models, Rwanda’s system is characterized by English as the official Lol from lower primary onward, with Kinyarwanda functioning as a subject. This tier examines three interrelated components: the teacher workforce and professional development, curriculum and TLMs, and community engagement. Together, these elements determine whether Rwanda’s English-medium policy is translated into effective instructional practice that improves FLN outcomes.

We begin by reviewing the national primary curriculum and associated TLMs used in Rwandan public schools, with particular attention to how English is positioned as the medium of instruction in the early grades, how early literacy skills are introduced and sequenced, and how learners’ existing oral and literacy skills in Kinyarwanda are—or are not—leveraged to support English literacy acquisition. This review includes an analysis of both government-produced curricula and materials developed by REB, as well as key donor-supported resources, to assess their alignment with the science of bilingual reading and evidence on language transfer in early literacy development.

We then examine teacher recruitment, placement, and professional development systems to assess the extent to which teachers are linguistically prepared and pedagogically supported to implement English-medium instruction in lower primary grades. This analysis considers teachers’ English language proficiency, pre-service and in-service training opportunities, and the availability of coaching, CPD, and supervision structures that support effective literacy instruction in a second or additional language. We also focus on how teacher training initiatives address the realities of multilingual classrooms, including the widespread use of Kinyarwanda for explanation and classroom management.

Finally, we review evidence on community engagement, focusing on how parents, caregivers, and local stakeholders understand and engage with Rwanda’s Lol policy, and the extent to which they are supported to reinforce early learning at home. Given the central role of Kinyarwanda in children’s home environments, this component examines how community-level language practices interact with school-based English-medium instruction and influence foundational learning outcomes.

Curriculum and Materials

We first examine how the REB curriculum is designed across key literacy subskills, assess the TLMs provided to schools, and briefly describe some of the regular assessments administered to students. Critically, we examine the alignment across these materials. In doing so, we respond to the following question:

To what extent are teaching and learning materials designed to support bilingual and multilingual learners?

Curriculum

Our review included a comprehensive desk review of national education policies, frameworks and strategies related to teaching English as a subject, English as an LoI and teacher English proficiency. The review also included an analysis of the approaches and achievements in the sector, as well as a detailed examination of lower primary TLMs, training materials and CPD resources provided over the past few years. The desk review aimed to identify key trends, gaps and progress in the implementation of English language education policies and materials. We reviewed 13 education policies, strategies and frameworks. Additionally, we reviewed 43 total TLMs, training materials and CPD materials from REB, Building Learning Foundations (BLF), Elimu-Soko, Tunoze Gusoma, and Learning and Inclusion for Transformation (LIFT).

TLM and CPD materials. AIR also completed an in-depth TLM and CPD materials review as part of the landscape analysis. We analyzed TLMs through a literacy rubric based on AIR's Foundational Learning Improvement Package (FLIP) methodology and AIR's Foundational Literacy Approach, which are both based on the Science of Reading (see Exhibit 1). In total, we reviewed 43 TLMs (mainly teacher guides, student books and related CPD materials) from the following programs: Building Learning Foundations (BLF), Elimu-Soko, Tunoze Gusoma, Quality Basic Education (QBE) project and the REB P1-P3 English materials.

Elimu-Soko. The TLMs we reviewed were all written in English and dated from 2018 to 2024, which generally aligned with the LoI policy change. Among these, the Elimu-Soko teachers' guides included both English and Kinyarwanda translations in certain sections. Through our analysis, the Elimu-Soko materials are fully based on the Science of Reading, which underscores the need for increased explicit and systematic literacy instruction in grades P1 to P3. Despite the strong emphasis on the Science of Reading, the Elimu-Soko materials appeared to lack alignment and contextualization to the Rwandan curriculum. The program was piloted in 40 schools, and the materials have yet to be validated by REB before it is further scaled.

BLF. The BLF materials we reviewed were developed beginning in 2017. We specifically reviewed the English teacher toolkits, learner activity books and the School Subject Leader (SSL)

portfolio, which encompassed resources and activities for SSLs to reference. We reviewed the classroom observation assessment rubrics as well. The materials were developed in collaboration with REB and based on the Rwanda primary education curriculum. The teacher toolkits included BLF self-study materials and audio materials with the objective of improving teachers' classroom English and general pedagogy. We found that these materials provided no content or support on teaching English in lower primary as a second (foreign) language as highlighted in the scientifically grounded rubrics. The teacher toolkits provided teachers with the opportunity to work individually (self-study) to expand their understanding on specific concepts, to apply what they learn in class (classroom application with sample activities provided in the toolkits) and to support each other through coaching and community of practice meetings (Communities of Practice (CoP) session plans provided in the toolkit for each topic developed). The SSL portfolio served as a reference document for lower primary SSLs on the best way to support teachers set CPD goals as well as to organize coaching sessions and CoP meetings.

REB Single Project Implementation Unit (SPIU)-QBE. The QBE materials included English teacher training and self-study manuals in the form of nine modules. Six of the modules focused on general and classroom English for teaching English as a subject, and each module 'level' builds upon the prior one, moving progressively from simple to complex. The other three modules were subject specific, focusing on the methodology for using English language as an LOI in Rwanda basic education. Our findings demonstrate a lack of integration of some of the key skills that research has pointed to as critical for acquisition of literacy skills. For example, there was no focus on teaching letter knowledge (especially acquisition of the mappings between graphological units and phonological units, and the dual model of acquisition of reading specific to more opaque scripts, such as English), which is essential for developing the decoding skills (the decoding pillar within the house model). Because these QBE modules are aligned with the English CBC and designed to support its implementation, the limitations to use of a scientific approach in QBE materials is likely due to its absence in the CBC. Another observation is that though these materials address topics from the CBC, they lack an important component of classroom application. However, a strength of these materials is the support on the use of code switching by demonstrating appropriate ways to use Kinyarwanda during English lessons. All the activities were done individually or in groups with other teachers but explicit support on how these should be applied in classroom settings is missing.

REB. The REB materials reviewed included lower primary English CBC and related teacher guides and textbooks, which were recently adapted with support from the World Bank. These materials were organized around CBC themes and did not provide explicit instructions on how to develop literacy skills. Exercises for oral languages, reading and writing were provided in the textbooks, but there were no strategies in the teacher guides for teachers to apply the subskills

under each of these literacy skills. For example, there were no strategies for developing phonological awareness, vocabulary, decoding, fluency or comprehension. These materials also did not have guidance on how teachers should help learners build English skills using the skills they had already acquired in Kinyarwanda.

Tunoze Gusoma. Our review of Tunoze Gusoma materials included CPD resources for both blended learning and school-based CoP programs, implemented among lower primary Kinyarwanda teachers. Additionally, the team examined the lower primary English leveling criteria and briefly reviewed the lower primary Kinyarwanda literacy TLMs.

Our findings indicate that the Tunoze Gusoma CPD materials are well-aligned with the Science of Reading. They provided teachers with content and tools to enhance their understanding of early grade literacy instruction. The materials offered easy-to-follow self-study content on each component of reading and writing, sample classroom application exercises and tools for coaching, peer learning and CoP. They also adhered to adult learning principles, which are crucial for effective CPD.

Beyond literacy instruction and assessment, the Tunoze Gusoma CPD materials covered general pedagogy, including strategies for gender-responsive teaching, classroom management and inclusive education with a focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines, teacher wellbeing and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Recognizing that many lower primary Kinyarwanda teachers also teach English, an additional chapter had been included to bridge strategies between Kinyarwanda and English. Lastly, an English leveling criterion had been developed and validated by REB to guide the creation of English texts and stories for lower primary children.

Learning and Inclusion for Transformation (LIFT). The LIFT project has played a central role in strengthening Rwanda’s foundational learning ecosystem, with a particular focus on instructional quality and English-medium implementation in the early grades. Under LIFT, a wide range of TLMs and CPD resources were developed to support both teachers’ English language proficiency and learners’ acquisition of early English literacy skills.

These materials include structured English proficiency modules for teachers, self-study and blended learning resources, coaching and community-of-practice guides, and tools for school-based instructional leadership. For learners, LIFT supported materials that strengthen oral English, vocabulary development, and early literacy foundations needed to access English-medium instruction. Many of these resources are grounded in the Science of Reading and adult learning principles, providing practical, classroom-relevant strategies for teaching literacy in English in linguistically diverse settings. At the same time, evidence from the LIFT baseline highlights ongoing challenges related to fragmentation and uneven integration of these materials within the national system, particularly in terms of providing clear, consistent

guidance on how English learning should be scaffolded in the early grades. Overall, LIFT has significantly expanded the availability and quality of English-focused instructional and professional development materials, while underscoring the need for greater system-level coherence to translate these investments into consistent classroom practice at scale.

Teacher Workforce and Professional Development

Teachers play a central role in translating LoI policy into effective classroom practice, and the success of bilingual education reforms depend heavily on their language competencies, pedagogical skills, and deployment. In this section, we examine teachers' language proficiency and MEC's recruitment, placement, and deployment practices. We then review the professional development opportunities available to teachers to strengthen their capacity for bilingual and multilingual instruction, including support for early literacy teaching and language transition. Through this analysis, we address the following guiding question:

How are language considerations integrated into teacher recruitment, placement, and training (both preservice and in-service)?

Teacher Recruitment, Placement, and Language Skills

REB is responsible for organizing recruitment processes, registering teachers, and managing deployment across districts and schools. These centralized teacher management structures are intended to ensure that schools, particularly those serving early primary grades, are staffed with qualified teachers capable of supporting foundational learning objectives.

Recruitment criteria for primary teachers include recognized qualifications from accredited teacher training institutions, alongside increasing expectations that candidates possess competencies aligned with Rwanda's language-in-education policy. English is the official LoI across all levels of primary education, reflecting a deliberate policy shift linked to Rwanda's broader education and development strategy. As a result, teacher language competence, particularly proficiency in English, has become an increasingly salient consideration in recruitment, placement, and performance management.

Despite these policy intentions, language proficiency remains a persistent system-level challenge. A substantial share of the current teaching workforce entered service under earlier language regimes and did not receive adequate preparation to teach confidently in English. As a result, limited English proficiency among teachers continues to constrain classroom instruction, particularly in the foundational grades where precise language modeling and explanation are critical for early literacy development. Policy discussions and public commentary have consistently highlighted the ways in which constrained teacher fluency can undermine

instructional clarity, reduce learner comprehension, and increase reliance on informal language switching in the classroom.

In response, the Government of Rwanda has introduced measures aimed at strengthening language capacity across the teaching profession. These include periodic assessments of teachers' English proficiency and policies that link language competence to continued service. While such measures signal strong political commitment to enforcing the Lol policy, they also underscore the scale of the capacity gap inherited from earlier transitions. To address these gaps more constructively, MINEDUC and REB, often in partnership with international organizations, have invested in largescale language training initiatives for in-service teachers. Programs such as REB's collaboration with Education First reflect a systemwide effort to improve professional English proficiency at scale, grounded in the assumption that teacher fluency is foundational to effective instruction, learner understanding, and Rwanda's longer term human capital goals.

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher PD is institutionalized through national policy frameworks that emphasize continuous, structured support across teachers' career trajectories. The Teacher Development and Management Policy provide an overarching framework for training, ongoing learning, supervision, and evaluation, reinforcing the principle that improvements in teaching quality depend on sustained investment in teachers rather than one-off training interventions.

Within this framework, professional learning is designed to occur at multiple levels of the system. School leaders participate in structured leadership and management training; teachers engage in subject-specific and pedagogical workshops; and schools host professional learning communities that provide opportunities for peer exchange, reflection on instructional practice, and discussion of student learning needs. These mechanisms are intended to embed professional development within routine school practice rather than treating it as an external or episodic activity.

CPD is explicitly identified in national sector planning as a strategic lever for improving learning outcomes. Rwanda's education strategy emphasizes strengthened CPD systems as a prerequisite for improving classroom instruction and raising student achievement, particularly in the foundational grades. Within this context, English language proficiency is treated as an integral component of professional development, given its direct influence on teachers' ability to implement the curriculum and engage learners effectively in the Lol.

Language-focused professional development initiatives, such as those supported through the LIFT project and other policy collaborations with international partners, seek to innovate both

the content and delivery of teacher learning. These efforts reinforce the view that effective teacher PD must address pedagogical skills and language capacity in tandem, rather than treating language proficiency as a peripheral or remedial concern.

At the same time, research and policy commentary point to persistent implementation challenges. Variability in uptake across districts, differences in school-level support, and resource constraints continue to affect the reach and effectiveness of professional development pathways. These challenges highlight the ongoing difficulty of ensuring that all teachers, particularly those in early primary grades, benefit consistently from language- and pedagogy-focused professional development aligned with Rwanda's foundational learning goals.

System-Level Gaps and Implications for Lol Implementation

Despite Rwanda's strong policy commitment to English as the Lol and sustained investments in teacher recruitment, placement, and professional development, low levels of English proficiency among teachers remain a binding constraint on effective Lol implementation, particularly in the foundational grades. This gap reflects the cumulative effects of historical language policy transitions, uneven pre-service preparation, and the scale at which language capacity must be developed across the existing workforce.

At the classroom level, limited teacher English proficiency directly affects the quality and consistency of instruction. Teachers with constrained fluency often struggle to model accurate language use, explain concepts with precision, or scaffold early literacy skills effectively in English. In the early grades, where learners are simultaneously acquiring foundational literacy skills and developing oral language proficiency in the Lol, these challenges are particularly acute. As a result, instructional time is frequently diverted toward managing language comprehension rather than advancing core literacy skills, and teachers rely heavily on code-switching to Kinyarwanda to ensure understanding.

While code-switching and translanguaging function as classroom strategies, their widespread and unsystematic use also points to a misalignment between policy expectations and classroom realities.⁵⁹ In the absence of clear instructional guidance on how to leverage Kinyarwanda strategically to support English literacy development, teachers are left to make individual, ad hoc decisions about language use. This undermines consistency across classrooms and schools and weakens the system's ability to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all learners.

At the system level, low teacher English proficiency complicates teacher deployment and support strategies. Centralized recruitment and placement mechanisms do not yet consistently account for variation in teachers' language skills when assigning educators to early primary

grades, where language demands are highest. Similarly, PD systems, while extensive, must operate at significant scale to remediate language gaps among in-service teachers, often while those teachers are already responsible for delivering English-medium instruction. This creates a tension between the immediate instructional demands of classrooms and the longer-term process of building language proficiency through CPD.

The implications for Lol implementation are substantial. Without a critical mass of teachers who are both linguistically proficient and pedagogically prepared to teach early literacy in English, the system risks perpetuating a cycle in which learners are expected to acquire foundational skills in a language that is not yet fully accessible, either to them or to their teachers. National assessment data showing persistent gaps in early English literacy outcomes underscore the urgency of addressing this constraint as a system priority.

From a BUILD perspective, these findings suggest that Rwanda’s Lol policy has progressed further at the level of formal adoption than at the level of classroom enactment. Strengthening fidelity of implementation will require continued investment in teacher language development, but also greater coherence across recruitment, placement, professional development, curriculum design, and instructional guidance. Clearer system-level articulation of how and when teachers should use learners’ familiar language to support English literacy acquisition, grounded in the Science of Bilingual Reading, could help transform current coping practices into intentional, evidence-informed instructional strategies.

Addressing teacher English proficiency as a system-level constraint is therefore not only a matter of teacher capacity building, but a prerequisite for aligning Rwanda’s Lol policy with its foundational learning goals and ensuring that early grade classrooms are equipped to support effective literacy development in practice.

Community Engagement

Rwanda’s efforts to strengthen foundational learning do not depend solely on pedagogical quality and system design, but also on the extent to which parents, caregivers, and communities support and engage with Lol decisions and early learning more broadly. In contrast to contexts where community engagement has been largely project- or donor-driven, Rwanda has articulated parental and community involvement as a system-level priority through national policy, most notably the FLS. This section examines how community engagement is positioned within Rwanda’s education reform agenda and addresses the following guiding question:

How are parents and community members involved in decisions about the Lol?

Community engagement is a pillar of Rwanda’s strategy to strengthen foundational learning outcomes, particularly in early literacy, numeracy, and core learning skills in the early primary grades. MINEDUC explicitly recognizes that children’s learning trajectories are shaped not only by classroom instruction but also by the quality of support and stimulation they receive at home and within their communities. This perspective is embedded in the national FLS, which positions parents, caregivers, and community actors as essential partners in addressing learning poverty and sustaining improvements in foundational skills.

The FLS identifies the mobilization of parental and community support for foundational learning as a core strategic objective. This reflects a system-level acknowledgement that children spend significantly more time outside of school than inside it, and that caregivers play a critical role in shaping learning behaviors, attitudes, and routines. Rather than viewing families primarily as contributors of financial or material resources, the strategy emphasizes their role in directly supporting learning processes.

Under this priority, MINEDUC encourages active parental engagement in children’s education, including ensuring regular attendance, supporting homework and practice activities, and fostering positive learning interactions at home. The strategy also underscores the importance of strengthening communication between schools and families through existing governance structures, particularly School General Assembly Executive Committees (SGAECs). These bodies provide formal channels through which parents and community representatives can participate in school planning, oversight, and dialogue around learning priorities.

Extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom is a key component of Rwanda’s approach to community engagement. The FLS prioritizes the development and expansion of community-based literacy resources that enable children to practice reading and engage with learning materials outside school hours. These efforts are intended to reinforce classroom instruction, increase exposure to print, and help establish regular reading habits from an early age. Central to this approach is the planned expansion of community reading clubs and libraries, including partnerships with the Kigali Public Library and affiliated networks. These community spaces are designed to provide children with access to age-appropriate books and supportive environments for independent and group reading. In parallel, the strategy emphasizes strengthening school libraries and their capacity to lend books and learning materials for home use, thereby creating stronger links between school-based instruction and home-based practice. Where infrastructure permits, community libraries are also envisioned as access points for digital educational content that can supplement foundational learning. These community-level structures aim to foster a broader culture of reading and learning and to ensure that children have regular opportunities to practice foundational skills beyond formal instructional time.

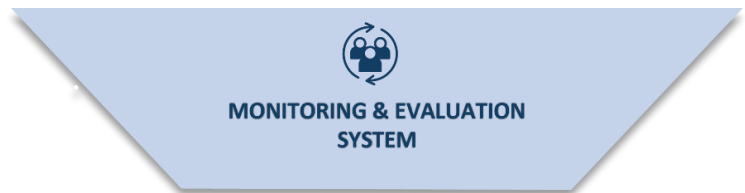
The FLS also outlines a set of actions to institutionalize parental engagement as a structured and sustained component of the education system. Rather than relying on ad hoc or informal interactions, the strategy calls for clearly defined mechanisms and roles within schools and education governance bodies to lead and coordinate caregiver engagement for learning. These actions include strengthening teacher–parent meetings focused on children’s learning progress and practical strategies for supporting learning at home, as well as promoting ongoing dialogue between educators and caregivers throughout the school year. In addition, the strategy proposes the use of behavior change communication campaigns to sensitize parents and community members to effective ways of supporting foundational learning and to shift norms around parental involvement. This approach reflects a deliberate move away from engagement models that focus primarily on financial contributions toward models that emphasize shared responsibility for learning outcomes. By framing parents as active partners in learning rather than peripheral supporters, Rwanda’s strategy seeks to embed learning-focused engagement within everyday school–community interactions.

Recognizing that foundational learning begins well before children enter primary school, Rwanda’s strategy also emphasizes early childhood development and caregiver support as critical components of its community engagement approach. FLS includes actions to strengthen early learning at home and in the community, particularly during the pre-primary years. These efforts include collaboration with the National Child Development Agency (NCDA) to expand training and support for caregivers involved in early childhood development. Through these initiatives, parents and community caregivers are supported to understand play-based learning approaches and the early foundations of language, literacy, and numeracy development. The strategy also promotes community-level parenting programs that aim to improve school readiness and support smoother transitions into formal schooling. By investing in early caregiver engagement, Rwanda’s approach seeks to strengthen children’s foundational skills before they enter primary education, thereby improving their readiness to benefit from formal instruction and reducing learning gaps that emerge in the early grades.

While the FLS provides the overarching policy framework for community engagement, practical implementation also occurs through a range of local and non-governmental initiatives. Evidence from literacy programs indicates that School General Assembly Committees (SGACs) have been engaged in activities that promote reading, teacher motivation, and equity, fostering school–community collaboration around learning support. In addition, community-based initiatives such as mobile libraries and reading campaigns have been deployed in some districts to expand access to books and encourage reading habits among children and adults alike. These efforts demonstrate how community engagement extends beyond formal policy structures into locally grounded practices that directly shape children’s learning experiences.

Rwanda’s approach to community engagement reflects an increasingly comprehensive understanding of the role that parents, caregivers, and communities play in foundational learning. By embedding engagement within national strategy, strengthening community learning structures, and supporting caregivers from early childhood onward, Rwanda is working to align home, community, and school environments in support of improved foundational learning outcomes.

Monitoring and Evaluation



In the final tier of the BUILD framework that we analyze (the final is the improved outcomes which are meant to be tracked over time), we assess Rwanda’s M&E system to see how well the country regularly incorporates data related to each of the other education system components, including language considerations, for ongoing refinement.

M&E System

First, we address the following question:

Does Rwanda have a regularly updated M&E plan, and are there national or subnational mechanisms to use this data for continuous improvement in FLN outcomes?

Rwanda has established a structured national M&E architecture that extends to the primary education sector and increasingly centers FLN outcomes. At the highest level, the Government of Rwanda operates under National Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Guidelines, which set expectations for systematic tracking of policy implementation and results across sectors. Within education, these national guidelines are operationalized through sector-specific frameworks, including the ESSP and the 2023–2027 Partnership Compact, both of which include measurable indicators related to foundational learning.

FLN is explicitly prioritized within Rwanda’s current education reform agenda. FLS identifies improvements in early grade reading and mathematics as central to overall system performance and long-term human capital development. As a result, FLN indicators are embedded within national planning, budgeting, and reporting processes. This reflects a shift from a focus primarily on access and completion toward stronger attention to learning outcomes.

A key mechanism for monitoring learning outcomes is the LARS which provides periodic, nationally representative data on student performance in literacy and numeracy aligned to the curriculum. LARS serves as a system-level diagnostic tool, enabling policymakers to identify trends in learning achievement and gaps across regions, grades, and student groups. In addition, Rwanda maintains an Education Management Information System (EMIS) that captures administrative and school-level data, including enrollment, teacher deployment, infrastructure, and other inputs relevant to learning conditions.

At the national level, these data sources feed into sector performance reviews and joint monitoring processes. Platforms such as the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) bring together government and development partners to review progress against agreed indicators, including FLN targets. These forums provide opportunities to align technical and financial support with identified gaps.

Subnational mechanisms also exist to promote data use for improvement. District and sector education officers are responsible for school supervision and are expected to use EMIS data and assessment findings to guide school-level support. School inspection processes, improvement planning, and district performance contracts (Imihigo) create additional accountability channels linking data to action. The intent of these mechanisms is to ensure that monitoring data inform instructional support, targeted interventions for low-performing schools, and allocation decisions.

Despite the presence of these formal systems, challenges remain in ensuring consistent and effective data use at decentralized levels. Capacity constraints, variability in data literacy, and resource limitations can affect how systematically assessment findings are translated into instructional change. As a result, strengthening the feedback loop between assessment, supervision, and classroom practice remains an ongoing priority.

Overall, Rwanda does have a regularly updated monitoring and evaluation framework for the education sector, with clearly articulated FLN indicators and national assessment mechanisms. The policy architecture supports continuous improvement through structured review processes at national and subnational levels. The remaining challenge lies less in the existence of data systems and more in deepening their routine use to drive instructional quality and foundational learning gains at scale.

Continuous Improvement

Finally, we assess the extent to which Rwanda uses its M&E system for continuous improvement, as aligned with the following question:

How are M&E findings used to inform and revise curriculum, teacher training, and LoI policies?

Rwanda's primary education system has developed structured monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that provide data on learning outcomes, which are intended to inform key policy domains including curriculum, teacher training, and LoI implementation. A central element of this system is the Learner Achievement and Retention Survey (LARS), a nationally representative assessment conducted periodically (approximately every two years) to measure literacy and numeracy outcomes against defined national benchmarks. LARS is explicitly designed to offer insights into student performance and to generate evidence that can support sector planning and policy recommendations.

Curriculum Alignment Based on Assessment Data. Learning assessment data from LARS and related studies have helped MINEDUC identify persistent gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy performance, particularly in English as a medium of instruction in early primary grades. These findings have contributed to the development of the FLS, which integrates evidence from learning outcomes into curriculum priorities—for example, by emphasizing oral English and adapting mathematics content in early grades to learners' comprehension levels as they transition into English instruction.

The strategy also responds to documented shortages of teaching and learning materials and supports remedial instruction for students with the greatest learning needs, showing how system monitoring is tied to decisions about curriculum resourcing and differentiated instruction.

Teacher Training and Professional Development. M&E findings have also shaped priorities within teacher training and professional development frameworks. National policy documents make clear that English language proficiency and pedagogical skills are areas of focus for both pre-service and in-service training, reflecting evidence that limited English competency among teachers can constrain effective delivery of the primary curriculum. Rwanda's Teacher Development and Management Policy explicitly mandates strengthening teacher capacity in English as the medium of instruction through continuous professional development (CPD) and structured training modules.

The policy calls for monitoring the implementation of targeted English proficiency training packages and integrating formative assessment practices into CPD. These requirements are

grounded in the understanding—supported by sector diagnostic data—that teacher proficiency directly influences student learning outcomes.

Moreover, LARS and similar assessment data are used to guide school-based mentoring and CPD planning by identifying gaps in instructional practice and informing the content of training packages. Such linkages help ensure that professional development is responsive to real classroom challenges revealed through system monitoring.

LoI Policy and Implementation. Rwanda’s LoI policy has evolved in response to both educational goals and evidence on implementation challenges. English has been the medium of instruction through lower and upper primary, however monitoring reports and educator feedback highlighted that many teachers and learners face language barriers that affect foundational learning outcomes. The FLS acknowledges these transitional challenges, emphasizing the need for tailored curriculum content and teacher support to navigate the switch to English instruction.

In response to identified gaps, government and sector partners have initiated large-scale English proficiency programs and built monitoring structures to track progress. For instance, Rwanda is rolling out nationwide teacher English training aimed at raising competency levels to match instructional requirements, accompanied by monitoring and assessment of training outcomes.

Continuous Improvement and Policy Feedback Loops. At the system level, M&E findings feed into sector planning processes such as the 2023–2027 Partnership Compact, which incorporates learning data into performance indicators and targets, underscoring the expectation that data should drive policy refinement and resource allocation.

Subnational actors, including district education officers and inspectors, are also tasked with using EMIS and assessment data to support school supervision, monitor teaching quality, and align support with identified learning needs. While implementation capacity varies across localities, these mechanisms reflect a policy direction that links monitoring evidence to decision-making and improvement planning.

Summary and Assessment of System Progression

This section synthesizes evidence across each tier of the BUILD framework to assess Rwanda’s current position along the BUILD Progression Scale. Overall, Rwanda demonstrates strong political commitment, clear national policy direction, and growing system coherence around foundational learning and LoI reform. However, persistent implementation gaps—most notably

related to teacher English proficiency, instructional coherence, and classroom-level enactment of Lol policy—continue to constrain progress toward more advanced stages of system institutionalization. As a result, Rwanda’s system falls across Developing to Established stages, depending on the BUILD component.

FLN Goals and Language Policy

FLN goals and Lol policy are best characterized as **Established** on the BUILD Progression Scale. The government has articulated clear, language-specific foundational learning goals through national strategies, including the FLS and ESSP. English is firmly established as the official Lol from lower primary onward, and Lol is explicitly recognized as a critical lever for improving foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Table 2. Progression criteria for Lol policies

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
No official Lol policy is in place to reach the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy exists, but it is vague, fragmented, or not aligned with the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy is defined, with growing government commitment and early implementation to achieve the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy is applied in practice and supported by implementation structures in support of the FLN goal(s).	A Lol policy is embedded in national education systems and reviewed regularly in alignment with the FLN goal(s).

Evidence and Data Use

Rwanda’s use of evidence related to language and foundational learning falls within the **Developing** stage. The system benefits from relatively strong national assessment mechanisms, including the LARS, and an established education management information system (EMIS). These systems provide regular data on learner outcomes and inform sector-level planning and review processes.

However, important evidence gaps remain. Data on teacher English proficiency, classroom-level language use, and learner language profiles are not yet systematically integrated into national monitoring systems. As a result, while learning data are available, they are not consistently disaggregated or analyzed through a language lens that would allow decision makers to assess Lol fidelity or teacher–learner language alignment. Evidence use is therefore stronger at the diagnostic level than at the level of continuous instructional refinement.

Table 3. Progression criteria for evidence and data use

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
Education stakeholders do not use or have access to evidence related to student language skills to inform and adapt policies and practices.	Education stakeholders have access to some data related to student language skills, but the data are only available on a limited scale or have suboptimal quality.	Education stakeholders have access to student language mapping on a large scale, some evidence on language transfer between some L1s and the desired L2, and some other LoI indicators.	Education stakeholders have access to student and teacher language mapping data on a national scale, language transfer data between the most prominent L1s and the desired L2, and data on additional LoI indicators.	Education stakeholders not only have access to language mapping, language threshold data, and other LoI indicators aligned with all BUILD tiers but also regularly use and update those data to inform policies and practices.

Curriculum and Materials

Rwanda's curriculum and instructional materials are assessed at the **Emerging** stage. National curricula and materials are not very well aligned with the English medium LoI policy and provide systemwide coverage. At the same time, reviews of teaching and learning materials reveal inconsistent alignment with the SoBR, particularly for early literacy instruction in English as a second or additional language. Donor supported programs have generated high quality, evidence aligned resources, but these materials are not yet fully consolidated into a single, coherent national instructional model. Guidance on how to leverage Kinyarwanda strategically to support English literacy acquisition remains uneven across materials. As a result, teachers receive mixed or incomplete signals about instructional priorities, limiting the effectiveness of curriculum implementation in early grades.

Table 4. Progression criteria for curriculum and materials

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
The curriculum does not address multilingual teaching. Instructional materials in local languages are unavailable.	The curriculum addresses multilingual teaching to a minimal extent. Some instructional materials integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials incorporate the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts. Instructional materials increasingly integrate language considerations.	The curriculum and materials are fully aligned with the science of reading for multilingual learners, reflecting students' linguistic contexts.	A high-quality, regularly updated curriculum and corresponding materials support evolving FLN and LoI goals.

Teacher Workforce and Professional Development

Teacher recruitment, placement, and professional development in Rwanda fall between the **Emerging and Developing** stages, with teacher English language proficiency representing a binding system-level constraint. While centralized recruitment and deployment systems are in place, they do not consistently account for variation in teachers' language skills when assigning teachers to early primary grades, where linguistic demands are highest.

Professional development systems are extensive and well institutionalized, and English language proficiency is explicitly prioritized within CPD frameworks. Large-scale language training initiatives demonstrate strong political commitment to addressing teacher capacity gaps. However, the scale of the challenge, combined with uneven uptake, variable instructional coaching, and the need to deliver English-medium instruction while simultaneously building proficiency, limits impact at the classroom level.

As a result, many teachers rely on code-switching to manage instruction, reflecting a gap between policy expectations and classroom realities.

Table 5. Progression criteria for teacher recruitment and placement

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
No official teacher recruitment or placement plan is in place that accounts for teachers' language skills.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan that accounts for teacher language skills exists, but it is vague, fragmented, and not operationalized.	A teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol, though it is in early implementation and not fully operationalized.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan exists with a focus on Lol and is supported by implementation structures.	A strong teacher recruitment and placement plan that focuses on Lol exists, is embedded in national education systems, and is reviewed regularly in alignment with FLN goal(s).

Table 6. Progression criteria for teacher professional development

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
Teachers receive no pre-service or in-service training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using national languages for instruction.	Teachers receive limited training on teaching in multilingual contexts or using local Lols, but that training is not sufficient for teachers to feel prepared to teach in local languages.	Teachers receive more notable trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using local Lols, yet these trainings are not yet comprehensive and system-wide. Some gaps exist in teacher preparedness.	Trainings on teaching in multilingual contexts and using national Lols are integrated extensively into in-service and pre-service teacher training.	Ongoing, adaptive training responds to demographic and linguistic shifts among teachers and learners.

Community Engagement

Community engagement around foundational learning in Rwanda is assessed as **Developing to**

Established. Unlike contexts where engagement is primarily donor-driven, Rwanda has embedded parental and community engagement within national policy through the FLS. The FLS articulates clear expectations for caregiver involvement in learning, expansion of community reading structures, and early childhood support.

Formal mechanisms for engagement—such as School General Assembly Committees and structured parent–school communication—are in place, and community-based reading initiatives are expanding. However, the extent to which these structures consistently translate into learning-focused engagement at scale varies across localities. Community engagement is increasingly institutionalized, but its impact on instructional practice and learner outcomes is not yet systematically monitored.

Table 7. Progression criteria for community engagement

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
Communities are largely unaware of the benefits of multilingual education. Little or no sensitization efforts are in place. Communities have no tools to support children to read in school languages. Communities are not engaged in supporting education in school languages.	Information-sharing efforts such as awareness campaigns may be in place, but they are not yet at scale with proven effectiveness. Families and communities have limited involvement in supporting multilingual education.	Families and communities are generally aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Communities are somewhat engaged in decisions and/or implementation of multilingual education through, for example, language mapping, focus groups, materials development, or supporting student language and literacy development at home.	Families and communities are largely aware of the benefits of multilingual education. Parents and communities actively support learning in the home language and/or the transition to the L2.	Community engagement and commitment to multilingual education is deep and sustained. Families and community members are continually involved in governance, curriculum feedback, material development, and home language and literacy support.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Rwanda’s M&E system is best characterized as **Developing**. The country has a well-defined national M&E architecture, regular learning assessments, and structured sector review processes. FLN indicators are embedded in national planning and accountability mechanisms, and data are routinely reviewed at national and subnational levels.

The primary constraint lies not in the absence of data systems, but in limited integration of linguistic indicators—such as teacher English proficiency, classroom language practices, and learner language exposure—into routine monitoring. Strengthening these elements would enable the system to better assess LoI implementation fidelity and link M&E more directly to instructional improvement.

Table 8. Progression criteria for M&E

Absent	Emerging	Developing	Established	Institutionalized
No systems are in place to monitor student learning or assess LoI-related practices.	Some basic monitoring of outputs occurs (e.g., enrollment, textbook distribution) but not of student learning outcomes.	Student learning outcomes are tracked but not yet used to refine or inform LoI strategies.	Outcomes are continuously monitored; early evidence of what works is used to adjust approaches.	Robust systems track learning outcomes, assess the impact of LoI policies, and inform iterative policy adaptation.

Rwanda Blueprint

In this section, we draw on the BUILD framework and the full set of data and analyses presented in this report to inform Rwanda’s blueprint. This blueprint outlines priority actions for strengthening Rwanda’s LoI implementation in support of foundational learning outcomes. Building on the evidence reviewed across the BUILD framework, the blueprint emphasizes system coherence—aligning policy intent, teacher capacity, curriculum design, instructional materials, and monitoring systems to ensure that English-medium instruction in the early grades is pedagogically effective and responsive to Rwanda’s linguistic realities.

FLN Goals and Language Policy

From policy clarity to implementation realities. Rwanda has established clear national foundational learning goals and a stable LoI policy designating English as the medium of instruction from lower primary onward. The next phase of reform should focus on translating this policy clarity into instructionally realistic system guidance. Priority actions include:

- Explicitly articulating *language-specific foundational learning expectations* for early primary grades, clarifying what learners should be able to do in English at different stages of literacy development.
- Developing operational guidance that recognizes the role of Kinyarwanda as a *support language* in early grades, consistent with the Science of Bilingual Reading, rather than leaving language use decisions to individual teachers.
- Ensuring that national FLN targets are framed not only in terms of outcomes, but also in terms of *conditions for learning*, including teacher language proficiency and learner language access.

Evidence and Data

Making language visible in system diagnostics. While Rwanda has strong national assessment and data systems, language remains under-measured as an instructional variable.

Strengthening Lol implementation requires making language use visible within routine monitoring. Priority actions include:

- Integrating *teacher language proficiency data* into EMIS and teacher management systems, enabling more informed deployment, support, and professional development planning.
- Introducing routine collection of *classroom Lol data*, including how English and Kinyarwanda are used during teaching and learning in early grades.
- Strengthening the use of assessment data to interpret learning outcomes through a language lens, particularly for early English literacy, oral language development, and comprehension.
- Deepening the empirical understanding of if and how use of Kinyarwanda can bolster biliteracy, and ultimately English language, outcomes.
- Building analytical capacity at national and subnational levels to use language-disaggregated data for instructional improvement rather than compliance reporting alone.

Teaching and Learning

This tier represents the most critical leverage point for improving Rwanda’s foundational learning outcomes under the current Lol policy.

Teacher Professional Development and English Proficiency

Building sustained language and pedagogical capacity. Low teacher English proficiency remains the most binding constraint on effective Lol implementation. Addressing this requires shifting from episodic training to a coherent, long-term language development pathway for teachers. Priority actions include:

- Establishing differentiated English proficiency benchmarks for teachers by grade level, recognizing that early primary teachers require strong oral English and literacy-teaching language.
- Embedding English language development within CPD as a *continuous process*, closely linked to classroom practice, coaching, and instructional supervision.
- Aligning language proficiency training with literacy pedagogy, ensuring teachers learn not only English, but *how to teach literacy in English* to learners who are still acquiring the language.
- Using proficiency data to tailor CPD offerings, rather than relying on one-size-fits-all training models.

Curriculum Revision

Aligning curriculum expectations with Lol realities. Current curricula are aligned to English-medium instruction in principle, but insufficiently calibrated to the linguistic starting points of learners and teachers in early grades. Priority actions include:

- Revising early primary curricula to reflect realistic learning progressions for English literacy, including explicit emphasis on oral language, vocabulary, decoding, and comprehension.
- Embedding guidance on strategic use of Kinyarwanda to support meaning-making, vocabulary development, and comprehension during the transition to English literacy.
- Ensuring curriculum scope and sequence are explicitly aligned with the Science of Reading and the Science of Bilingual Reading, particularly for second-language literacy acquisition.

Teaching and Learning Materials

Instructional materials must bridge the gap between policy expectations and classroom capacity. Priority actions include:

- Developing tiered teaching and learning materials that are aligned to *teacher English proficiency levels* and *learner language development stages*.
- Ensuring teacher guides provide explicit, scripted support for teaching literacy in English, including oral language routines and guidance on when and how to use Kinyarwanda strategically.
- Consolidating high-quality donor-supported materials into a coherent national instructional package, reducing fragmentation and mixed messaging.
- Aligning student materials with realistic language demands, ensuring early texts are accessible while progressively building English literacy skills.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Closing the loop between evidence and instruction. Rwanda's M&E architecture is well established, but it must be more tightly linked to classroom-level instructional realities to drive Lol improvement. Priority actions include:

- Expanding national monitoring frameworks to include indicators on teacher language proficiency, classroom Lol practices, and learner language access.
- Using assessment and supervision data to inform iterative revisions to curriculum, materials, and teacher training, rather than treating Lol as a fixed policy parameter.

- Strengthening feedback loops between schools, districts, and national actors so that evidence from classrooms informs system-level decision-making.
- Embedding LoI-related indicators into routine sector reviews and performance discussions to maintain sustained attention on instructional quality.

¹ Michelle Kaffenberger, Sarah Melville, and Madhuri Agarwal, *The Benefits of Foundational Learning to Individuals and Society: A Review of the Evidence*, Synthesis Brief 2025/003 (What Works Hub for Global Education, May 2025), <https://www.wwhge.org/resources/the-benefits-of-foundational-learning-to-individuals-and-society-a-review-of-the-evidence/>.

² "70% of 10-Year-Olds Now in Learning Poverty, Unable to Read and Understand a Simple Text," World Bank Group, last modified June 23, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/23/70-of-10-year-olds-now-in-learning-poverty-unable-to-read-and-understand-a-simple-text>.

³ World Bank Group, *Loud and Clear: Effective Language of Instruction Policies for Learning* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2021).

⁴ Pooja Nakamura et al., *Strengthening Bilingual and Multilingual Learning Systems in Francophone Africa: Final Report* (Arlington, VA: American Institutes for Research, 2024). <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/KIX-Strengthening-Bilingual-Multilingual-Education-Systems-Final%20Report-May-2024.pdf>.

⁵ Virginia P. Collier and Wayne P. Thomas, "Validating the Power of Bilingual Schooling: Thirty-Two Years of Large-Scale, Longitudinal Research," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 37 (2017): 203–17.

⁶ Wesley A. Hoover and William E. Tunmer, *The Cognitive Foundations of Reading and Its Acquisition* (Berlin: Springer International Publishing, 2020).

⁷ Sonali Nag et al., "Home Language, School Language and Children's Literacy Attainments: A Systematic Review of Evidence from Low- and Middle-Income Countries," *Review of Education* 7, no. 1 (2019): 91–150.

⁸ Pooja R. Nakamura, Thomas de Hoop, and Chinmaya Holla, "Language and the Learning Crisis: Evidence of Transfer Threshold Mechanisms in Multilingual Reading in South India," *The Journal of Development Studies* 55, no. 11 (2018): 2287–2305.

⁹ Diane August, Timothy Shanahan, and Kathy Escamilla, "English Language Learners: Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners—Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth," *Journal of Literacy Research* 41, no. 4 (2009): 432–52.

¹⁰ Sonali Nag et al., "Home Language," 91–151.

¹¹ Christopher Stroud and Kathleen Heugh, "Language Rights and Linguistic Citizenship," in *Language Rights and Language Survival*, ed. J. Freeland and D. Patrick (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2004), 191–218.

¹² Kathleen Heugh, "Theory and Practice—Language Education Models in Africa: Research, Design, Decision-Making and Outcomes," in *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor*, ed. A. Ouane and C. Glanz (Hamburg: UNESCO, 2012), 105–56.

¹³ Mehtabul Azam, Aimee Chin, and Nishith Prakash, "The Returns to English-Language Skills in India," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 61, no. 2 (2013): 335–67.

¹⁴ Casale, Daniela, and Dorrit Posel. "English Language Proficiency and Earnings in a Developing Country: The Case of South Africa." *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 40, no. 4 (2011): 385–393. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2011.04.009>.

¹⁵ "THE ECONOMICS OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN GLOBAL LABOR MARKETS: A SYSTEMATICS REVIEW ". 2025. *Proceedings Law, Accounting, Business, Economics and Language* 2 (1): 334-40. <https://www.ojs.udb.ac.id/label/article/view/5266>.

¹⁶ For example, "straight for" models that teach only the post-colonial language, early and late exit models, models that transition via subjects, models that transition via time on task for each language, and additive bilingual/multilingual models.

¹⁷ Kaffenberger et al., *The Benefits of Foundational Learning*.

¹⁸ Barbara Trudell, *What Would It Take? Sustained Implementation of Language of Instruction Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Background Paper for the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (February 2025).

¹⁹ Benjamin Piper et al., "Identifying the Essential Ingredients to Literacy and Numeracy Improvement: Teacher Professional Development and Coaching, Student Textbooks, and Structured Teachers' Guides," *World Development* 106 (2018): 324–336, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.01.018>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Yang Dong et al., “The Effects of Home Literacy Environment on Children's Reading Comprehension Development: A Meta-analysis,” *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice* 20, no. 2 (2020): 63–82.

²² Candace Debnam, *The Relationship Between Literacy Outcomes & Social-Contextual Variables for Students in Low and Middle Income Countries* (MSc diss., University of Oxford, 2022).

²³ Stephanie Simmons Zuilkowski et al., “Relationships Among Home Literacy Behaviors, Materials, Socioeconomic Status, and Early Literacy Outcomes Across 14 Low-and Middle-Income Countries,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 50, no. 4 (2019): 539–555.

²⁴ Nag et al., “Home Language,” 91–151.

²⁵ Sonali Nag et al., “Home Learning Environments and Children’s Language and Literacy Skills: A Meta-Analytic Review of Studies Conducted in Low- and Middle-Income Countries,” *Psychological Bulletin* 150, no. 2 (2024): 132–153.

²⁶ Charles A. Perfetti, “The Universal Grammar of Reading,” *Scientific Studies of Reading* 7 (2003): 3–24.

²⁷ Hoover and Tunmer, *The Cognitive Foundations of Reading*.

²⁸ Kate Cain, Jane Oakhill, and Peter Bryant, “Phonological Skills and Comprehension Failure: A Comparison of Phonological-Decoding-Skill-Matched Poor Comprehenders and Poor Decoders,” *Reading and Writing* 14, no. 5–6 (2001): 489–522, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011115112306>.

²⁹ Wesley A. Hoover and Philip B. Gough, “The Simple View of Reading,” *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 2 (1990): 127–160.

³⁰ Hoover and Tunmer, *The Cognitive Foundations of Reading*.

³¹ Perfetti, “The Universal Grammar of Reading.”

³² Keiko Koda and Annette M. Zehler, eds., *Learning to Read Across Languages: Cross-Linguistic Relationships in First- and Second-Language Literacy Development* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³³ Sheila Cira Chung, Xi Chen, and Esther Geva, "Deconstructing and Reconstructing Cross-Language Transfer in Bilingual Reading Development: An Interactive Framework," *Journal of Neurolinguistics* 50 (2019): 149–61.

³⁴³⁴ Nakamura, de Hoop, and Holla, "Language and the Learning Crisis."

³⁵ Pooja Nakamura et al., *Language Transition Study Report*, USAID Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Monitoring and Evaluation (READ M&E) (Washington, DC: USAID/Ethiopia, September 2019), https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdabr712.pdf.

³⁶ Stakeholder consultation, Rwanda, 2025.

³⁷ World Bank. 2018. "Rwanda: Human Capital Index (HCI) and Components." Washington, DC: World Bank.

³⁸ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. 2025. "The Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, 2022: Main Indicators Report." Kigali: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda.

³⁹ Laterite; UNICEF; Ministry of Education (Rwanda). 2018. "Understanding Dropout and Repetition in Rwanda." Kigali: UNICEF and Ministry of Education.

⁴⁰ World Bank. 2018. "Rwanda Economic Update, Edition No. 13: Schooling for Learning, Strengthening Resilience of Education in Rwanda." Washington, DC: World Bank.

⁴¹ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. 2025. "The Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, 2022: Main Indicators Report." Kigali: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda.

⁴² National Examination and School Inspection Authority. 2023. "Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) 2023 Analysed Using National Proficiency Benchmarks: Full Report." Kigali: National Examination and School Inspection Authority.

⁴³ National Examination and School Inspection Authority. 2021. "Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) 2021: Executive Summary." Kigali: National Examination and School Inspection Authority.

⁴⁴ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR). 2023. “Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, 2022: Main Indicators Report.” Kigali: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. ISBN 978-99977-43-09-1.

⁴⁵ Republic of Rwanda. 2017. “Organic Law No. 02/2017/OL of 20/04/2017 Establishing Kiswahili as an Official Language.” Official Gazette no. 18, 1 May 2017.

⁴⁶ National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR). 2023. “Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, 2022: Main Indicators Report.” Kigali: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. ISBN 978-99977-43-09-1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Johnstone, Lyn. 2019. “Rwanda and the Question of Commonwealth Relevance.” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 57 (3): 303–323. doi:10.1080/14662043.2019.1563753.

⁴⁹ Mazrui, Alamin M. 2004. *English in Africa After the Cold War*. Clevedon: Multilingualism Matters.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN), Rwanda: Toponymic Factfile (London: UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, January 2025), PDF.

⁵⁴ PCGN, Rwanda: Toponymic Factfile.

⁵⁵ Sibomana, E. (2018). Unpeeling the language policy and planning onion in Rwanda. *International Journal Of Social Sciences And Humanities (IJSSH)*, 2(2), 99-114. doi:10.29332/ijssh.v2n2.138

⁵⁶ Thomas Kral, “‘Eventually We’ll All Become Anglophones’: A Narrative Inquiry into Language-in-Education Policy in Rwanda,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 21, no. 3 (2023): 377–391, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2033613>.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Sibomana, “Unpeeling the Language Policy and Planning Onion in Rwanda: Layer Roles,” *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2018): 99–114, <https://doi.org/10.29332/ijssh.v2n2.138>.

⁵⁸ Kral, “‘Eventually We’ll All Become Anglophones,’” 380.

⁵⁹ Stakeholder consultation, Rwanda, 2025.

Appendix A. BUILD Consultation Guide

The following is a list of guiding questions that can be used with education policy makers, assessment experts, linguists, or other key stakeholders in national language of instruction decision-making. AIR will tailor these questions to each country targeted for consultations in the development of the country roadmaps and to each informant.

Language policy review

For use with: All

- What is the language policy in this country and approximately what % of children speak the official language of instruction in Grades 1-3?
- In order to prepare children in [country] to later live and work successfully, which language or languages do you think are important for them to learn foundational literacy and numeracy skills?
 - What language or languages are important for children to later succeed in higher education and the workforce?
 - In what language or languages would it be ideal to see your country's children be literate at the end of high school?
 - What skills should children ultimately learn in local languages like [e.g., Wolof, Kinyarwanda, Baoule, Tsonga, Africaans/Zulu] in [country]?
 - i. Probe: Do they only need to speak local languages, but not necessarily read them? Should they learn foundational skills like reading, writing, or math in those languages? Should they have professional proficiency in those languages? Anything else?
- What do you think of the current language skills of children/students? Are these children's skills in line with your expectations?
- What is your understanding of children's current learning outcomes in various languages? Are these results of the children in line with your expectations?
- I know that the current language(s) of instruction in [country] is/are [languages]. What do you think about that policy? What do you think are its weaknesses and strengths?
 - Would you like to see the language(s) of instruction policy change in any way?
 - If so, how would you like to see it change? If not, why not?

- How, if at all, do you think a change in the language of instruction policy would impact foundational learning outcomes? (For better for worse?)
- Why do you think that?
- What is the government's disposition towards bilingual teaching of national languages and French/English/Portuguese?
 - (In other words, are decision-makers in favor of introducing national languages into the school system as languages of instruction alongside English/French/Portuguese?)
 - Can you provide a short description and then also indicate if they are (a) Very Hostile to the use of students' home languages as mediums of instruction, (b) Not in favor of using students' home languages as mediums of instruction, (c) Neutral, (d) In favor of using students' home languages as mediums of instruction, (e) Very favorable to using students' home languages as mediums of instruction
 - Is the direction in which the education system is evolving towards more mother tongues/bilingualism or towards fewer mother tongues/bilingualism?
 - What are some ways that stakeholders disagree about the decisions related to language of instruction? Who has a different opinion?

Language mapping/assessment of multilingual oral language competence (AMOLAC)

For use with: All

- To your knowledge, what is the most comprehensive and up-to-date data available on primary school students' foundational learning (basic literacy and numeracy) outcomes?
 - Where or how might we access that information?
- Do you know if there have been large-scale reading assessments done in both students' home languages and in [French, English, Portuguese]?
 - If so, where or how might we access that information?
- To your knowledge, what kind of data is available on students' language abilities in various languages for example, through language mapping studies, census data or any other source)?
 - Where or how might we access that information?

Orthographic mapping

For use with: Linguists

- To your knowledge, what kind of information is available on the "depth" (degree of consistency between sounds and symbols) and "breadth" (possible graphemic combinations, phonemes in each syllable and so on) of languages used in [country]?

- Where or how might we access that information?
- Do you have information on the phonological and orthographic distance between the local languages in [country] and the official language(s) that children learn in school (i.e., English, French, Portuguese)?
 - Where or how might we access that information?

Evidence base

For use with: All

- How many languages(s) are there in the country?
- How many languages(s) are used in schools officially? How would you know?
- How many languages(s) are used in schools in practice? How would you know?
 - Are you aware of any studies that have been done on what works to help children to read in [English, French, Portuguese] in [country]? If so, what can you tell me about them?
 - i. What are the key takeaways from these studies?
 - To your knowledge, what evaluations have been done of specific reading programs in [country]? What can you tell me about those programs?
 - i. What are the key features of those programs?
 - ii. What scale were those programs implemented (i.e., pilot in select schools, community-level, provincial-level, national-level)?
 - iii. What was effective and what was not?
 - Where or how might we access the findings from these studies?

For use with: Policymakers

- How, if at all, has evidence been used for decision-making related to languages of instruction in [country]?
 - Can you provide some examples?
- What are the top 2-3 roadblocks to using evidence for policymaking related to languages of instruction?
 - What evidence do you wish you had?

Curriculum and assessment analysis (scope and sequencing)

For use with: Educators at any level, curriculum experts

- Are there different reading curricula for different languages?

- For example, are the milestones, scope and sequence, and skill objectives for reading and language skills different for different languages? If yes, how so?
- How is language of instruction integrated throughout the curriculum to teach reading?
- When and how is the introduction made to teach a new language/teaching *in* new language as the LOI (if applicable)?

TLM inventory Analysis

For use with: Policymakers, bureaucrats, educators at any level, curriculum experts

- What is the process for developing teaching and learning materials?
- What teaching and learning materials (i.e., teachers guides, student books, supplementary materials) are currently provided to schools?
 - Are any technology-based teaching and learning materials available to teachers or students? If so, please describe.
 - In what language or languages are the materials?
- When was the last time that the current teaching and learning materials updated?
- Generally, how often are they updated, or are they updated on an ad hoc basis?

Teacher professional development

For use with: Educators at any level, bureaucrats, policymakers

- I am aware that existing pre-service teacher training is provided in [language] In your opinion, how effective is it to provide training in that language?
- I am aware that existing in-service teacher training is provided in [language]. In your opinion, how effective is it to provide training in that language?

There are several different teaching issues that I am curious about and for each, I'd like to know a) what kind of support is available, b) what methods teachers are taught for dealing with those issues, c) the extent to which teachers implement those methods, and d) how helpful those methods are.

- What support, if any, do teachers receive for teaching in multilingual classrooms where children use and understand different languages? *(if needed, clarify that support might include training, mentoring, handbooks, etc.)*
 - What methods are teachers provided for teaching in multilingual classrooms?
 - To what extent do you think teachers implement those methods?

- How helpful do you find those methods and the support provided?
- *(for countries where multiple languages of instruction are used)* What support, if any, do teachers receive for transitioning from local languages of instruction in the early grades to later teaching in [English, French, Portuguese]?
 - What methods are teachers provided for language of instruction transitions?
 - To what extent do you think teachers implement those methods?
 - How helpful do you find those methods and the support provided?
- *(for countries where multiple languages of instruction are used)* What support, if any, do teachers receive for transferring children's reading skills in one language to a second language like [English, French, Portuguese]?
 - What methods are teachers provided for teaching reading skills in multiple languages?
 - To what extent do you think teachers implement those methods?
 - How helpful do you find those methods and the support provided?
- What support, if any, are teachers provided for supporting students with concepts they are struggling with?
 - What methods are teachers taught for remediation?
 - How do teachers implement those methods?
 - How helpful do you find those methods and the support provided?
- In your opinion, what are some gaps in existing teacher training and support?

Teacher placement and language proficiency

For use with: Polymakers, bureaucrats, educators at any level

- What data, if any, is available on the language skills of teachers?
 - Where or how might we access that information?
- What data, if any, is available on the teaching skills of teachers?
 - Where or how might we access that information?
- What data, if any, is available on the teaching skills of teachers specifically for bilingual/multilingual contexts?

- Where or how might we access that information?
- To what extent do current teacher placement practices take teachers' language skills (including skills in the local language of instruction in the school where they are placed) into consideration before assigning them to schools?
- To what extent do administrators take teachers' strengths and weaknesses into consideration before assigning them to specific schools/classrooms?

Matching Lol policy to classroom implementation / Fidelity of implementation

For use with: Policymakers, bureaucrats, educators at any level

- To what extent do you think language of instruction policies are implemented in the classroom? For example, is [French, English, Portuguese] used as the primary language of instruction in the same way and at the same time that the official policy specifies?
 - How does classroom practice differ from the official policy?
 - Why does classroom practice differ from the official policy? (What makes following the policy difficult?)
 - In your opinion, what should be done in order to ensure classroom practice matches official language policy?

About the American Institutes for Research®

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. AIR's work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).



AIR® Headquarters

1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org)

Notice of Trademark: "American Institutes for Research" and "AIR" are registered trademarks. All other brand, product, or company names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.

Copyright © 2023 American Institutes for Research®. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, website display, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the American Institutes for Research. For permission requests, please use the Contact Us form on [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).

XXXXX_MO/23