



POLICY BRIEF

STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN CAMEROON

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Notes

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Reviewers

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About the Unlocking Data Initiative

The Unlocking Data Initiative is a community of practice that connects African scholars, NGOs, national statistics offices and policymakers for the purpose of improving access to and use of education data. The **Unlocking Data: Scaling Uses and Users of Education Data** project is a collaborative work led by Zizi Afrique Foundation and supported by Education Sub-Saharan Africa, eBase Africa, University of Malawi's Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT). The latter project, which is being implemented in Cameroon, Kenya and Malawi, aims to scale up uses and users of data to address the knowledge gap of how to adaptively scale up the effective use of existing education data by policymakers and researchers in Africa.

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Overview

Foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) are essential for children's lifelong learning, economic and national development. Despite Cameroon's policies to promote FLN, significant implementation challenges persist that are hindering literacy outcomes. These challenges include teacher shortages, language barriers, regional disparities, limited data integration, and inadequate infrastructure. Nonetheless, opportunities such as digital learning tools, policy reforms and strengthened partnerships, if explored, can turn the game around. This policy brief highlights key challenges, opportunities and actionable recommendations to enhance data-driven decision-making, improve educational outcomes, and strengthen Cameroon's FLN ecosystem.

2. Context and challenges

Despite Cameroon's commitment to foundational learning as evidenced by national policies, the education sector faces significant challenges that impede effective implementation and improved learning outcomes in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). The main challenges in Cameroon include:

2.1. Data Gaps and integration issues

The Système d'Information pour la Gestion de l'Éducation (SIGE) collects data from public, private, and non-formal educational institutions ([UNICEF, 2019](#)). However, despite this effort, significant gaps persist in data availability, quality, and integration, limiting the potential for effective evidence-based policymaking ([Azevedo et al., 2022](#)). SIGE, together with other data systems also suffer from a lack of coherence and integration not only among themselves but also with international databases such as the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). Inconsistency in data reporting further undermines their reliability, reducing their effectiveness in informing policy decisions. Consequently, this lack of reliable and integrated data severely hinders the ability to assess Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) levels accurately, identify struggling students or regions, and develop the targeted, evidence-based interventions crucial for improving FLN outcomes across Cameroon

2.2. Limited collaboration, coordination and trust

Mistrust and fragmentation among government agencies, researchers, and civil society organisations lead to the creation of data silos, a reluctance to share critical data and the implementation of education interventions. This lack of cooperation not only undermines the development of comprehensive educational policies but also creates duplicative

efforts and hinders the coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts necessary to improve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy outcomes across Cameroon effectively.

2.3. Regional disparity

The Anglophone-Francophone divide, compounded by the ongoing Anglophone crisis, exacerbates inequalities in foundational learning.¹ Furthermore, the lack of mother tongue instruction hinders comprehension, making literacy acquisition more challenging. The Anglophone crisis and resultant conflict have displaced over 855,000 children, severely disrupting their access to education and foundational literacy acquisition.

2.3. Infrastructural deficiency

Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack essential teaching materials, trained teachers, limited professional development opportunities for educators, including essential training in digital literacy, as well as access to critical infrastructure such as electricity and internet connectivity, digital learning platforms, and the necessary tools for modern teaching practices and effective data collection severely hinder FLN development.

3. Policy recommendations

To improve FLN outcomes in Cameroon, the following recommendations should be prioritised:

3.1 Strengthening data systems and integration

3.1.1. Establish a unified education data framework to streamline and link SIGE with international databases like the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). Developing transparent data-sharing mechanisms, including standardised protocols and formal agreements, will foster trust and reduce delay. This is essential to create coherent, reliable data sets necessary for comprehensive analysis and data-driven decision-making that directly supports evidence-based strategies for improving FLN instruction and outcomes

3.1.2. Enhance data accessibility by reducing bureaucratic barriers and adopting open data policies while ensuring security and privacy measures. Establish formal agreements between stakeholders (government, researchers, NGOs, development partners, etc). Improved accessibility will not only facilitate research and policy formulation but also

¹The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon which began in late 2016 refers to an ongoing socio-political and armed conflict in Cameroon, particularly affecting the North West and South West regions, which are predominantly English-speaking (Anglophone), in contrast to the rest of the country, which is French-speaking (Francophone).

enable more targeted, regional, specific interventions crucial for addressing specific FLN challenges in different regions and populations.

3.2. Addressing regional disparities

3.2.1. Implement targeted interventions such as flexible learning programs in crisis-affected and marginalised areas, including flexible learning programs tailored to the needs of displaced children and learners in geographically isolated areas. Leverage existing community structures and non-formal education spaces to ensure continuity of foundational learning, as emphasised in stakeholder consultations. This is critical to ensure continuity of learning and provide essential FLN support, mitigating the significant disruption caused by conflict and geographical isolation on children's foundational skills.

3.2.2. Increase funding for teacher training and recruitment in underserved regions. Prioritise the deployment of trained teachers to underserved and rural regions to improve the availability of qualified personnel. Strengthen localised teacher capacity through targeted in-service training focused on foundational learning and data use, as underscored in the reports' discussion of systemic challenges related to technical constraints. To address regional disparities in access to professional development, training opportunities should be decentralised and tailored to regional needs. Ensuring that all children, regardless of location, have access to qualified educators equipped to teach foundational reading, writing, and arithmetic effectively is paramount for equitable FLN outcomes.

3.2.3. Develop and implement strategies to support early grade instruction in mother tongue and bilingual education where appropriate, in alignment with Cameroon's inclusive education policies. Provide learning materials in widely spoken local languages; Develop and implement strategies to support early-grade instruction in local languages. Provide learning materials and teacher training in mother tongue instruction, ensuring children learn foundational skills in a language they understand. This aligns with the report's emphasis on inclusive education policies and the need for contextually relevant learning approaches. The lack of mother tongue instruction hinders comprehension, making literacy acquisition more challenging, particularly in diverse linguistic environments. Supporting instruction in familiar languages is vital to improve comprehension and facilitate foundational literacy acquisition from the earliest stages

3.3. Strengthening stakeholder collaboration

3.3.1 Establish and institutionalise multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together key actors like MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINEPAT, MINAS, regional and local government, research institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), development partners, and private sector actors to coordinate and align foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) interventions. This not only fosters partnerships among government ministries,

researchers, civil society organisations (CSOs), and private sector actors to align efforts in FLN research and implementation but also facilitate joint planning, resource mobilisation, and evidence sharing across sector. This will also foster co-creation of a community of practice, a learning agenda, co-create framework for data collection sharing and archiving, build capacity, address gaps collaboratively. This helps to break down data silos and overcome the reluctance to share information stemming from mistrust, which currently undermines comprehensive educational policies. This coordinated approach ensures that data is used effectively and interventions are more impactful in addressing specific FLN challenges across different contexts.

3.3.2 Encourage community engagement by incorporating parents and local leaders in decision-making. This approach improves educational accountability and helps to tailor FLN initiatives to local needs and contexts, which is crucial for overcoming challenges like regional disparities and language barriers that impact foundational learning. Including these stakeholders also helps build trust and ensures greater ownership and sustainability of FLN improvement efforts at the grassroots level.

3.4. Investing in Infrastructure and Digital Tools

3.4.1 Expand access to electricity, internet, and digital learning platforms in rural schools. Providing this foundational infrastructure and access to digital tools is critical to support modern teaching methods and enable the use of digital learning materials. This can enhance student engagement and provide personalised learning opportunities essential for foundational skill acquisition, thereby improving FLN outcomes. It also facilitates better data collection from schools, which is necessary for monitoring student progress and school performance related to FLN.

3.4.2 Provide teacher training in digital literacy to optimise the use of technology in classrooms and improve learning assessments. This training is vital to equip educators with the skills needed to integrate technology into their teaching practices effectively. Addressing the limited professional development opportunities, particularly in digital tools, ensures that teachers can optimise the use of digital learning platforms to improve classroom instruction and leverage digital tools for more effective learning assessments. This directly supports improving teaching quality and providing targeted support for students struggling with FLN.

Conclusion

Cameroon can potentially increase foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes by adopting a multi-sectoral approach to enhance FLN. Strengthening data governance systems and integration, addressing regional disparities exacerbated by challenges like the Anglophone crisis and language barriers, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and improving infrastructure, including access to digital tools and teacher

training, will drive long-term educational success. Implementing these policies and strategies will not only directly improve FLN outcomes across the country but also support Cameroon's broader education strategy and contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education for All).

References

These references are available digitally in our evidence library at

<https://docs.edtechhub.org/lib/8C75SXEa>

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