UNLOCKING DATA

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POLICY BRIEF

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF EDUCATION DATA: POLICY SOLUTIONS TO BRIDGE FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING GAPS IN KENYA

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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, and the 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 the use 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.

To find out more about us, go to https://unlockingdata.africa/. Our evidence library can be found at https://docs.unlockingdata.africa/lib/

Introduction: The importance of foundational learning

Foundational learning serves as the foundation from which further learning develops. Yet, many African children remain in school without gaining essential foundational skills, thereby jeopardising the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) (↑World Bank, 2022). The absence of these essential skills prevents children from having the chance to improve their lives, whether it means achieving a fair income, pursuing their dreams, or making positive contributions to their communities and enhancing their decision-making abilities. In sub-Saharan Africa, learning poverty is estimated at 89%, with the situation in Kenya being labelled as a crisis since only 45% and 60% of students aged 6 to 17 met expectations in reading a Grade 3-level text and solving a Grade 3 maths problem, respectively (↑UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, 2024).

This policy brief evaluates shortcomings in data use and policy execution in Kenya while offering practical suggestions to turn evidence into solutions. Based on findings from the Unlocking Data Initiative (↑Gachoki & Arisa, 2025), it emphasises five key insights, ranging from disjointed data systems to inequalities in research accessibility, and calls for cohesive, data-informed approaches to guarantee that no child is left behind.

Finding 1. Ineffective implementation of education laws and policies

While Kenya has strong legal frameworks, such as the Basic Education Act, and initiatives like the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), their implementation remains inconsistent due to bureaucratic hurdles, insufficient funding, and weak mechanisms for accountability. Other policies, such as the 100% transition from primary to secondary school, do not directly address learning poverty related to literacy and numeracy outcomes because these policies often focus on access rather than ensuring the acquisition of foundational learning skills. Despite the existence of the Kenya School Readiness Assessment framework, the assessment has not been implemented as learners move into Grade 1 (the formal entry point into primary education) to evaluate their literacy and numeracy competency (↑Gachoki & Arisa, 2025).

Finding 2. Dispersed data management systems

Kenya's educational data is fragmented across various uncoordinated platforms (e.g., Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), National Education Management Information System (NEMIS), Non-Governmental Organisation studies), leading to redundancy, inefficiency, and at times, conflicting results. This fragmentation hinders an in-depth analysis and understanding of whether the education system is improving learning outcomes and the identification of necessary interventions to mitigate learning loss. Moreover, there are differing approaches, metrics, and indicators in measuring foundational literacy and numeracy by Uwezo and the Usawa Agenda and government assessments, which hinder reliable progression comparisons. Creating a centralised, interoperable data hub with uniform metrics would address redundancy, cut costs, and offer a cohesive view of learning outcomes, essential for informed decision-making. Without better integration, resources will continue to be utilised on overlapping systems that fail to support coherent strategies.

Finding 3. Insufficient utilisation of data for policy development

Despite the wealth of data and evidence generated through national assessments and surveys, the evidence is seldom leveraged in decision-making for effective impact. For instance, failure to enforce the Kenya School Readiness Assessment Tool (KSRAT) results in learners' competency in literacy and numeracy being unknown at primary school entry. It is only captured at a later date when interventions may be ineffective. In addition, standardised assessment results from the Kenya Early Years Assessment (KEYA), administered to Grade 3 learners, and the Kenya Primary School Education Assessment (KPSEA), administered at Grade 6, have yet to meaningfully inspire and influence focused teacher training initiatives years after their roll-out. This disconnect can be attributed to several factors. On one hand, the Kenya Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) generate robust analyses of education data. This data is, however, not synthesised enough to tell the full foundational learning story. This is exacerbated by the lack of data literacy among Ministry officials at both the National and Sub-National levels, which hinders their ability to break down the data for effective decision-making. On the other hand, critical data such as assessment data is inaccessible to both the ministry and non-state actors for them to synthesise it into actionable outputs (↑Gachoki & Arisa, 2025).

To address this gap, there is a need to empower schools and middle-level education actors to be able to interpret data. Inspiring national and sub-national analysis of assessment data and aligning teacher training and retooling to be informed by evidence.

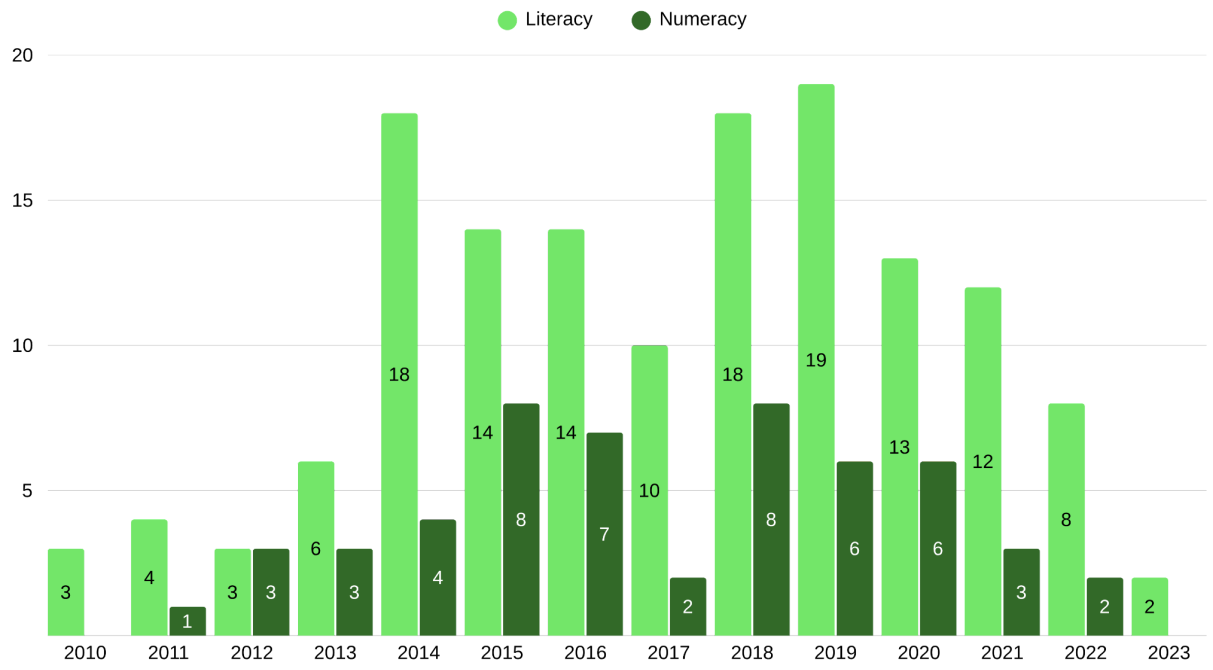
Politics will also be beneficial; the government should require data-informed policy evaluations, invest in data experts, provide training on data interpretation for officers, and establish feedback mechanisms between researchers and practitioners (teachers), ensuring that findings lead to changes in the classroom.

Finding 4. Disparities in research coverage

Research on foundational learning tends to focus more on literacy than on numeracy (see Figure 1), values and life skills, and is often concentrated in urban areas, frequently overlooking marginalised communities such as out-of-school children, rural children, children with special needs, or refugee children. For example, regions classified as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands are frequently excluded from research and knowledge generation, which masks significant literacy disparities. This bias reinforces inequality, as interventions are crafted without a clear understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

To ensure that no child is overlooked in policy planning, it is essential to prioritise inclusive sampling, support local researchers, and analyse data through the lens of gender, location, and disability and their intersection.

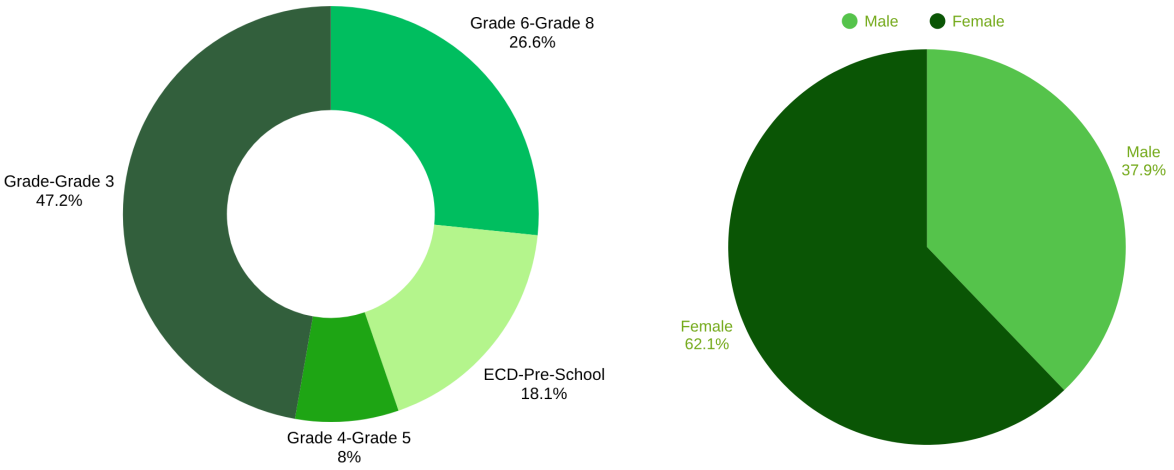
Figure 1. *Knowledge by foundational learning area. Source:* ↑Gachoki & Arisa, 2025



Finding 5. Lack of research in foundational learning

In terms of research within the foundational learning (4–10 years), the category of ages 6–8 years (grades 1–3) has received significantly more research than the other years. Additionally, female authors have also been disproportionately represented in foundational learning Research (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Evidence generation by FL years and gender of first author. Source:* Gachoki & Arisa, 2025



Policy recommendations

Based on the compelling evidence presented, we recommend:

1. In the absence of a stand-alone foundational learning policy and the existing policies not being robust enough to address foundational learning challenges, **anchor foundational learning guidelines within the existing policies,** with clear targets.

2. **Integrate fragmented data systems** by creating a centralised foundational learning data hub, combining information into a single platform managed by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, implement interoperability standards to facilitate smooth data exchange between different systems. The creation of the Kenya Education Management Information System (KEMIS), which will replace the current NEMIS, is an attempt to consolidate and streamline data management for informed decision-making in the sector, offering a useful entry point.

3. **Enhance data utilisation for informed decision-making**, especially in addressing learning poverty. Develop a national education data reporting framework that guides the type and format of data generated, analysed, and reported, as well as the decisions made based on the data. Additionally, strengthen the skills of policymakers and educators in analysing and utilising data for informed decision-making. Publicly track the foundational learning indicators.

4. **Promote equitable and inclusive research** by addressing knowledge gaps through a systematic emphasis on disaggregated data and analysis across key demographics, including gender, disability, region, and socioeconomic status, while also acknowledging the distinct and varied needs of children. By undertaking intersectional and context-specific research, we can guarantee that

policies, programmes, and interventions are customised to confront systemic inequalities and support marginalised groups, ensuring that no child is overlooked.

References

These references are available digitally in our evidence library at https://docs.edtechhub.org/lib/F82BU24Q

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