

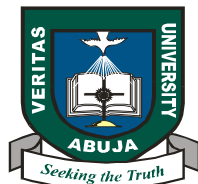
Teaching and Learning in Fragile Contexts (TLFC) Policy Brief



Assessing Quality Education for IDPs in Northern Nigeria: Phonological Awareness as Foundational Literacy Umbrella

Gabriel B. Egbe
Chika E. Eze
Tyolumun Kinga-Upaa
Abiodun C. Ayeni
Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria

March 2026



code | Promoting every
child's right to read

TLFC

In partnership with
Canada

Executive summary

Nigeria hosts approximately 3.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), representing the largest displaced population in Africa. Prolonged displacement caused by insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts has significantly disrupted access to quality education for children. This study examines educational conditions and learning outcomes at IDP Sharing Prosperity School located in New Kuchingoro IDP Camp. The school, established in 2017, serves about 250 pupils with ten volunteer teachers and operates with minimal resources, no formal government support, and limited instructional capacity.

The research adopted a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to assess both learning outcomes and contextual challenges. Three key instruments were utilized: Phonological Awareness and Early Grade Reading Instruction Survey (PAEGRIS); Phonological Awareness Test (PAT), and structured classroom observations. Baseline findings revealed that teachers had limited knowledge of foundational literacy instruction, including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Consequently, pupils demonstrated weak early reading skills, with instruction largely restricted to rote alphabet teaching.

Following the baseline assessment, a five-day intensive teacher training was conducted, focusing on phonological awareness instruction and basic psychosocial support. Teachers were equipped with practical strategies and instructional materials and received ongoing support through a digital (WhatsApp) communication platform. Classroom observations conducted after the training helped refine instructional practices and address observed gaps.

Post-intervention results showed significant and educationally meaningful improvements in pupils' phonological awareness across all grade levels (Primary 1–4). Gains were particularly strong in phoneme identification, blending, segmentation, and manipulation, as well as in word recognition and decoding skills. Importantly, improvements were consistent across gender, indicating that the intervention was both effective and equitable. These findings demonstrate that structured, explicit phonological awareness instruction can substantially improve foundational literacy even in highly resource-constrained and fragile learning environments.

In addition to academic outcomes, the study explored the psychosocial needs of pupils through focus group discussions with both teachers and learners. Three major themes emerged: physiological needs (especially food insecurity), competence needs (expectations for effective teaching and active learning), and welfare needs (lack of basic educational resources). These findings underscore the strong interdependence between learning and well-being, highlighting that hunger, inadequate materials, and limited teacher capacity directly hinder educational progress.

To promote sustainability and community engagement, a Mobile Literacy Tent was established within the camp. The tent provides access to essential reading and instructional materials, including decodable texts, charts, games, and writing supplies, as well as flexible learning spaces for pupils, teachers, and other community members.

Overall, the study provides compelling evidence that targeted literacy interventions—centered on phonological awareness, teacher capacity building, and continuous monitoring—can significantly improve reading outcomes among internally displaced children. However, it also emphasizes that educational interventions must be complemented by efforts to address psychosocial and welfare challenges.

Key recommendations include

- the development of a national framework for education in emergencies aligned with international standards,
- scaling of structured early literacy programmes,
- institutionalizing continuous assessment systems,
- strengthening teacher professional development through coaching and peer learning communities, and
- providing targeted support to address both academic and non-academic barriers to learning.

Context

Nigeria hosts about 3.6 million documented internally displaced persons (IDPs), representing 3% of the global total and the largest population in Africa. Displacement, driven by insurgency, banditry, jihadist activities, and communal conflicts, has severely disrupted education for school-age children. The New Kuchingoro IDP camp in Abuja Municipal Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, is home to 2,700 displaced persons mainly from Borno and Adamawa states. Among over 143,000 IDP camps and camp-like settings nationwide, New Kuchingoro established its own primary school in 2017, later renamed IDP Sharing Prosperity School. The school operates with ten volunteer teachers and about 250 pupils in primary 1 to 5. Despite being “affiliated” with a nearby government school, it receives no government support and relies entirely on charity. Challenges include unqualified teacher recruitment and poor remuneration, lack of professionalism, inadequate educational resources, absence of ICT tools, school fees difficulties, and uncertainty about continuity due to instability in their current location. These conditions mirror the broader struggles of IDP schools across Nigeria, where children face significant barriers to learning. This research project was conducted within this context of scarcity, aiming to highlight the urgent need for sustainable interventions to improve educational outcomes of children in IDP camps.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative designs. Three instruments were developed for data collection. The first, Phonological Awareness and Early Grade Reading Instruction Survey (PAEGRIS), assessed teachers' baseline knowledge and skills in phonological awareness and early grade reading instruction. The second instrument, Phonological Awareness Test (PAT), was used for both pre- and post-tests. It was pilot-tested in a nearby public primary school and subsequently revised in terms of item number, difficulty, and duration. The final version was administered to all available pupils by trained researchers and assistants. Results were analyzed to compare pupil performance across grade levels and gender using bar charts and histograms.

Following the pre-test, ten teachers participated in a five-day capacity-building training focused on phonological awareness instructional skills and basic psychosocial support. Teachers were provided with instructional materials and engaged in hands-on activities. A WhatsApp platform was created during the training and maintained afterward to support follow-up and monitor implementation.

A structured classroom observation template was used to monitor teaching and learning. Three observation sessions were conducted to identify gaps and inform ongoing instructional support. In addition, two focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers and pupils explored pupils' psychosocial needs and potential support strategies.

To enhance sustainability, a Mobile Literacy Tent was established, providing access to reading and instructional materials such as decodable texts, charts, games, and writing supplies, as well as movable chairs and tables for use by pupils, teachers, and the wider IDP community.



A Research Assistant administering pre-test

Table 1: Distribution of participants for pre-and post-test across levels and gender

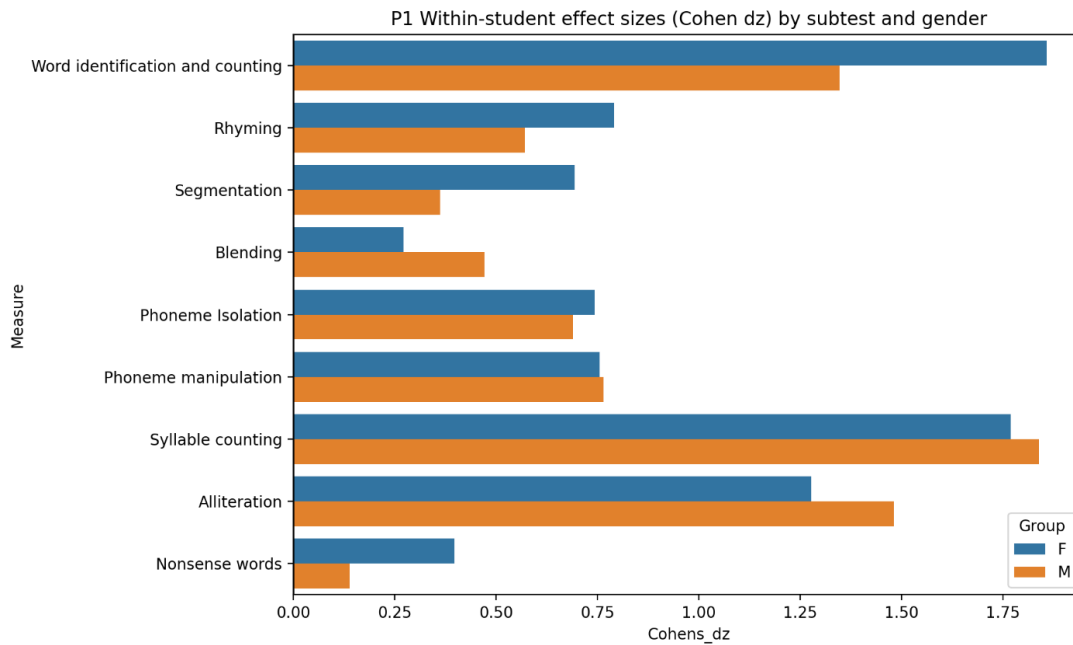
Pre-test				
Level	Gender		Participants	
	Male	Female	No. present	No. absent
P1	18	26	44	-
P2	18	26	44	
P3	13	27	40	-
P4	17	20	39	-
P5	16	13	29	-
Sub-total	82	112	194	-
Post-test				
P1	17 (3)	22 (9)	39	12
P2	17 (4)	19 (7)	36	11
P3	14(4)	21 (6)	35	10
P4	11 (5)	19 (4)	30	9
Subtotal	59 (16)	81 (26)	140	42
Grand total	141	193	334	42

Note: The number in brackets () shows participants who were absent during the post-test. It shows that out of the 42 pupils who were absent across the four levels, 26 were females and 16 were male pupils. Also, note that P5 did not participate in the post-test because they had left the school when the post-test was administered. The school does not have facility for P6.

Key findings

The Phonological Awareness and Early Grade Reading Instruction Survey (PAEGRIS) revealed that teachers at Sharing Prosperity IDP Primary School, New Kuchingoro, possessed little knowledge of instructional practices required to teach foundational literacy. Essential components such as phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and concept of print were largely absent. Literacy instruction was limited to teaching the alphabet and singing alphabet songs, with no grounding in alphabetic principles. Teachers lacked prior knowledge of phonemic awareness activities such as word recognition, rhyming, blending, segmentation, deletion, isolation, and substitution. Consequently, pupils' foundational literacy needs remained unmet prior to the intervention. Pre-test results confirmed this gap, while post-test results demonstrated significant gains in literacy after targeted instruction.

Figure. 1: Analysis of Phonological Awareness of Pretest and Post-test Scores of P1

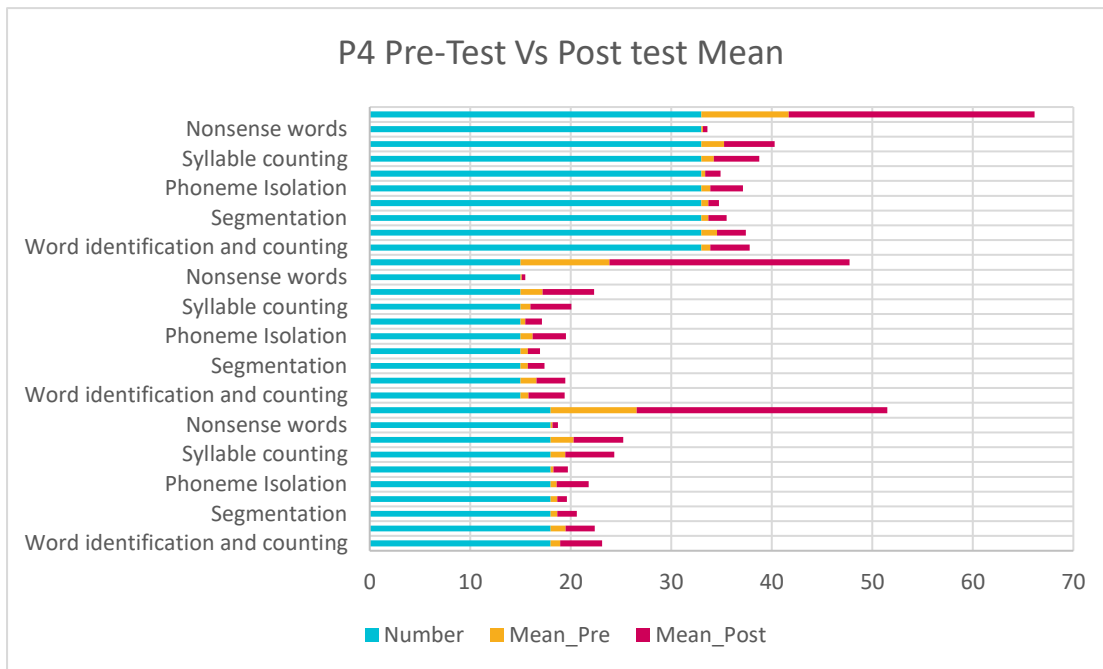


Results for Primary 1 revealed large overall gains from pre- to post-intervention, with effect sizes indicating substantial educationally meaningful improvement. Both boys and girls demonstrated similar magnitudes of progress, confirming gender equity in learning outcomes. The similarity in gain scores across genders suggests that the intervention’s instructional design was inclusive and effective (Ehri et al., 2001).

Primary 2 pupils showed broad improvements across all subtests, with medium-to-large within-student effect sizes. Stronger gains were recorded in word identification and counting, reflecting the benefits of explicit, repetitive practice in tasks tied closely to print awareness.

For Primary 3, results revealed substantial pre–post improvement across multiple subskills, with the largest gains in phoneme isolation and phoneme manipulation. This progression reflects advanced phonological awareness development, a critical precursor to fluent decoding and spelling (Ehri, 2005). Moderate gains in word identification, rhyming, and nonsense-word decoding indicate that learners were transitioning from sound awareness to applying those skills in reading unfamiliar words. This shift is consistent with the self-teaching hypothesis of reading acquisition (Share, 1995).

Figure. 2: Analysis of Phonological Awareness of Pretest and Post-test Scores of P4



Primary 4 pupils also demonstrated significant phonological awareness growth, with the strongest gains observed in phoneme isolation, manipulation, blending, and segmentation. The persistence of these effects into later grades demonstrates the sustainability of phonological instruction beyond early primary levels. Moderate improvements in word identification and nonsense-word decoding suggest that learners were increasingly able to generalize phoneme-grapheme correspondences to unfamiliar lexical items. This finding reinforces Ehri's (2014) conclusion that phonological awareness underlies orthographic mapping and word recognition.

"Gains were observed across all grade levels and subskills, with no significant gender disparities, indicating that the intervention was both effective and equitable".

Across all grade levels, pupils exhibited statistically significant and educationally meaningful improvements in phonological awareness after targeted instruction. The consistent pattern of growth from Primary 1 through Primary 4 supports the conclusion that explicit phonological awareness instruction is both effective and scalable in IDP educational contexts. The results confirm that foundational literacy interventions can thrive in resource-constrained schools if they

are data-driven, teacher-supported, and continuously monitored for equity and impact. Gains were observed across all grade levels and subskills, with no significant gender disparities, indicating that the intervention was both effective and equitable. The study provides empirical evidence that foundational literacy programmes emphasizing explicit phonological instruction, consistent progress monitoring, and teacher capacity building can significantly improve reading readiness in marginalized learning environments.

Beyond literacy, the study examined the psychosocial needs of pupils through two focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers and pupils. Thematic analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide, modified by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). Themes were identified based on patterns of feelings and moods expressed by participants, reflecting needs that were either important or interesting from their perspective (Alhojailan, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Three major themes emerged:

Physiological Needs: Pupils expressed a strong desire for food as a means of survival. This need extended to welfare concerns, particularly the provision of school resources such as books, writing materials, and classroom facilities. Hunger and lack of basic supplies were seen as barriers to effective learning.

“Together, these results provide strong empirical evidence that targeted literacy interventions, combined with psychosocial support, can significantly improve learning outcomes in marginalized IDP contexts”.

Competence Needs: These were expressed in dual form. Teachers expected pupils to be attentive and articulate, while pupils expected teachers to be competent in lesson delivery. This highlights the reciprocal nature of competence expectations in the classroom, where both groups rely on each other for effective teaching and learning.

Welfare Needs: Pupils emphasized the importance of resources that facilitate teaching and learning processes. Teachers similarly noted the lack of adequate materials and support, underscoring the broader structural challenges faced by IDP schools.

“The study provides empirical evidence that foundational literacy programmes emphasizing explicit phonological instruction, consistent progress monitoring, and teacher capacity building can significantly improve reading readiness in marginalized learning environments”.

Narratives from teachers and pupils revealed similarities in their perspectives, though with slight variations in detail. Both groups consistently highlighted the importance of food, competent teaching, and adequate resources as critical to the educational experience.

The findings from Sharing Prosperity IDP School. New Kuchingoro demonstrate that phonological awareness instruction substantially enhances early literacy development among internally displaced pupils. Gains were observed across all grade levels and subskills, with no significant gender disparities, indicating that the

intervention was both effective and equitable. Moreover, the identification of psychosocial needs underscores the importance of addressing non-academic factors such as hunger, welfare, and teacher competence in order to sustain educational progress. Together, these results provide strong empirical evidence that targeted

literacy interventions, combined with psychosocial support, can significantly improve learning outcomes in marginalized IDP contexts.

Key recommendations

1. National Framework for Education in Emergencies: Develop and institutionalize a national framework for education in emergencies, which aligns with the Kampala Convention, endorsed by Nigeria.

2. Curriculum and Instruction: Sustain and scale early literacy interventions, building on demonstrated learning gains and institutionalize structured daily routines through dedicated 5–10 minute literacy instruction/phoneme drills.

3. Assessment and Monitoring: Implement regular phonological awareness assessments to track key subskills as well as monitor growth, with a focus on ensuring lower-performing pupils catch up.

4. Equity and Targeted Support: Provide targeted interventions for struggling learners based on assessment data and ensure equitable access to resources and instruction across all learner groups in marginalized populations.

5. Professional Learning Support: Establish ongoing instructional coaching systems for teachers through sustainable teacher learning communities to encourage peer collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Teaching and Learning in Fragile Contexts Research Initiative for the 2024 Research Grant Award, funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and CODE, which made this project possible. We appreciate Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria, for granting permission to conduct this research, and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons for the ethical clearance to access the IDP school. We thank the IDP school for allowing their staff and pupils to participate in this study. We appreciate the support and cooperation of the community leaders of the New Kuchingoro IDP Camp throughout the research period.

The views expressed in this work are those of the creators and do not necessarily represent those of CODE, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) or the Government of Canada.



Children engaged in the Mobile Literacy Tent

References

- Adeyinka, T. O. (2018). The impact of Boko Haram insurgency on children's education in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice* 9(16), 1-10.
- Ehri, L. C. (2014). Orthographic mapping in the acquisition of sight word reading, spelling memory, and vocabulary learning. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 18(1), 5–21.
- Ekezie, W. (2022). Resilience and coping mechanisms among internally displaced persons (IDPs). *Nigeria. Journal of Refugee Studies*, 35(2), 123-140.
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (2006). Introduction to response to intervention: What, why, and how valid is it? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(1), 93–99.
- Gillon, G. T. (2017). *Phonological awareness: From research to practice*. Guilford Publications.
- Melby-Lervåg, M., Lyster, S.-A. H., & Hulme, C. (2012). Phonological skills and their role in learning to read: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(2), 322-352.
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- Neumann, M. M., Hood, M., & Ford, R. M. (2015). Phonological awareness and reading development in preschool children. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 38(1), 3-20.
- Odufowokan, O. (2018). Learning outcomes and educational quality in Nigeria: A review of literature. *Journal of Education and Practice* 9(16), 1-10.
- Rwang, P. (2023). Quality of education in IDP camps: A gap between policy and practice. *Journal of Education in Emergencies*. 9(1), 1-15.
- Save the Children (2021). *Education in Emergencies: Nigeria*.
- Share, D. L. (1995). Phonological recoding and self-teaching: Sine qua non of reading acquisition. *Cognition*, 55(2), 151–218.
- Suleiman, M., et al. (2020). Challenges of accessing education by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 9(2), 1-12.
- Torgesen, J. K., Wagner, R. K., & Rashotte, C. A. (2001). Preventing reading failure in young children with phonological processing disabilities: Group and individual responses to instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(4), 579–593.
- UNESCO (2023). *Education in Emergencies: Nigeria*.
- UNICEF. (2020). *Foundational learning in emergencies: Supporting displaced and refugee children*.
- UNICEF (2022). *Education in Emergencies: Nigeria Situation Report*.

United Nations (2021). *2019-2021 Humanitarian Response Strategy: Nigeria*.

World Bank. (2020). *Nigeria: Learning Poverty Country Snapshot*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

