



LITERACY BOOST IN RWANDA

Photo Credit: Colin Crowley/ Save the Children

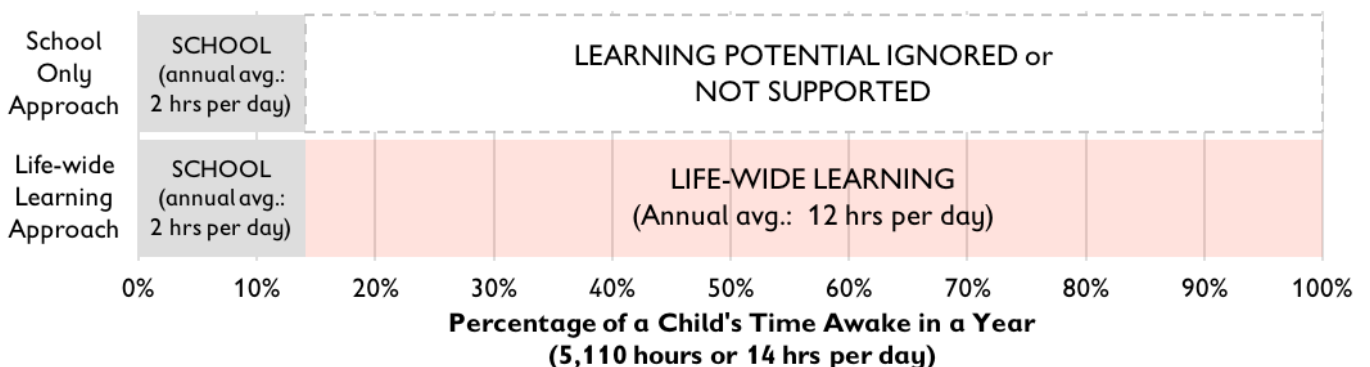
IMPACT EVALUATION OF A TWO-YEAR RANDOMIZED CONTROL TRIAL (CONDUCTED BY STANFORD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION)

A School-Only or a Life-wide Learning approach?

Reading, writing, and literacy in general are foundational to modern education. The global community in recent decades committed enormous resources to supporting children globally to access primary education. These efforts worked to increase school enrollment: by 2015, 91% of the world's children were enrolled in primary school. However, merely attending school does not guarantee an education. Approximately 250 million children cannot read regardless of school attendance, and 200 million young people finish their schooling without basic literacy skills.

To better address the real challenges that children face in learning both within and outside of school, Save the Children's Literacy Boost approach seeks to enhance instruction through training teachers while simultaneously educating families and communities to better support learning outside the school and engaging children in fun learning activities at home and in the community. The impact evaluation of this two-year randomized control trial answers the question: Does a school-only or life-wide learning approach work better?

Potential Learning in a Day: School-Only and Life-Wide Learning Approaches



HOW WAS THE TRIAL CONDUCTED?

Led by researchers at Stanford University, Literacy Boost in Rwanda's randomized control trial randomly assigned all sectors within one Rwanda district to one of two treatment groups or a control to answer two questions.

Three groups



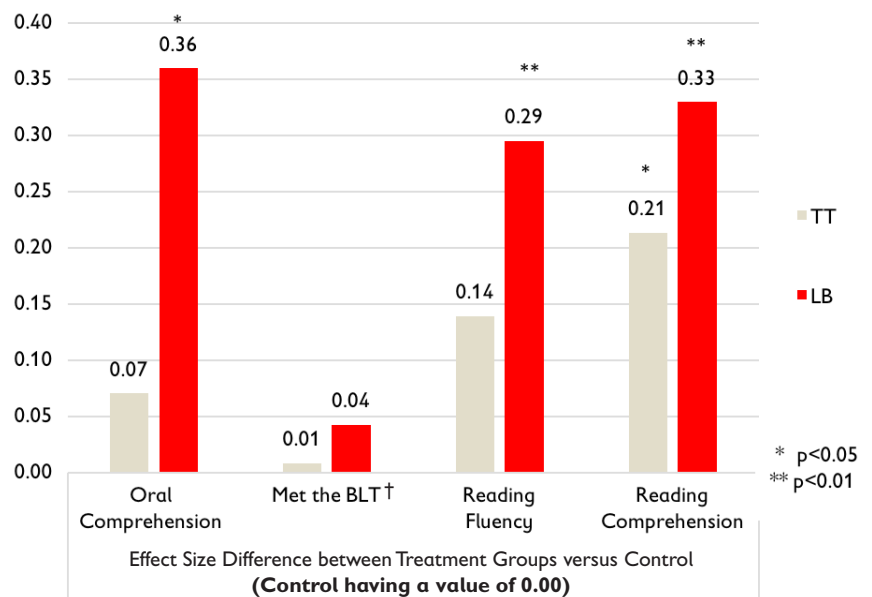
Two high-level questions



WHAT DID WE FIND?

- Treatments had an impact on reading skills, with LB producing stronger impact than TT.** Children in the LB and TT groups showed improvements compared to children in the Control group. The LB condition, which combined teacher training with community action, had a larger observable impact than teacher training alone. Moreover, two years of treatment had a higher impact than one year alone.
- Many students struggle to gain basic skills.** Despite these encouraging results, however, too many students struggled to gain basic skills. Overall, 31% of students tracked over two years did not meet a Basic Literacy Threshold (BLT) at endline.

Differences between Control and Treatment Groups on Literacy Measures



The * or ** symbol above specific bars indicate significant difference from the Control group.

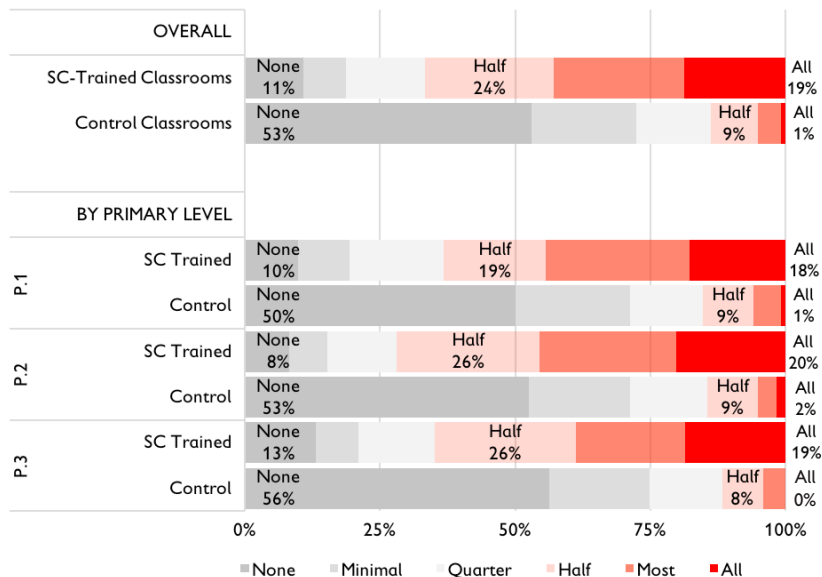
† Basic Literacy Threshold refers to students who are able to to complete the following 3 tasks:

1. Identify 18 or more of the 24 letters of the Kinyarwanda alphabet,
2. Read one or more words on the decoding subtest, and
3. Write one or more words on the dictation subtest.

- Treatment had an impact on primary level promotion rates.** The LB and TT treatments significantly increased the number of students promoted into P.3 by endline by 44%, compared to Control students. The difference in promotion rates between LB and TT was not statistically significant.
- Early primary level repetition rates are still very high.** Although the annual rate of student repetition in P.1 to P.3 was significantly lower in the LB or TT group (37% and 36 %, respectively) than in the Control group (44%), nearly 2 in 5 students repeated at least one early primary level.

5. Print Environment. Classrooms in schools who received LB Teacher Training (those in the LB and TT sectors) had significantly more print materials visible on their classroom walls.

Classroom Wall Covered in Print in Control & Treatment Classrooms, Overall & by Primary Level



6. Teacher Knowledge, Beliefs, and Practices. Teachers in the Save the Children-Trained group had significantly higher scores on their knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding reading instruction.

7. Differences between groups in the Literacy Ecology factors.

Students in the LB group experienced improved Literacy Ecologies at home, especially on three of the five Literacy Ecology factors: Reading Habits and Interactions, Reading Materials, and Child Interest/Engagement. Literacy Competency of the Caretaker and Religious related Reading Activities were comparable across groups.

8. The important relationship between student interest / engagement and literacy. The most consistent predictor of student’s literacy outcomes was student interest and engagement in literacy activities. The higher a student scored on the interest/engagement factor, the better that student performed on the reading assessments.

9. Ethnographic case studies illustrated how LB could have impact on children’s literacy growth, despite less than ideal home conditions. For example, a child in the LB group from an impoverished home with dim prospects for developing adequate literacy skills in 2013 became a confident reader by endline. A mother who could not read assumed an outspoken role in supporting her children to learn, following her attendance at Reading Awareness Workshops. At the same time, case studies also demonstrated that there are some home environments that can negate any potential effect of LB, again suggesting that promoting literacy growth in the developing world requires a comprehensive effort that touches children’s lives in and out of school.

School in Control Group



Photo Credit: Colin Crowley/ Save the Children

School in LB Treatment Group



Photo Credit: Colin Crowley/ Save the Children

CONCLUSION

Rwanda's educational leaders have made significant strides towards improving reading instruction in school. However, there are challenges that must be overcome if Rwanda is to become a nation of readers. This research demonstrated the power and efficacy of expanding the conceptualization of a learner from a narrow focus on a child's school experience (the School-Only approach) to a broader focus on all of the learning potential that a child has throughout his/her day and life (the Life-wide Learning approach). Integrated, systems-level interventions to help families, communities, and schools to support their children's learning are needed for Rwanda to foster a reading culture to transform itself into a knowledge-based economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 As LB had positive effects on children's literacy skills & promotion rates, it is recommended that LB approaches are incorporated in pre-service & in-service teacher training, parent support, and community activities.

2 Since learners face diverse obstacles both within and outside of schools in their learning, it is recommended that REB work with other government ministries, NGOs and others to provide learning opportunities outside of school.

3 Many children in the study did not acquire basic skills and experience normal promotion. Further research on possible causes for this is needed to develop better solutions.

ABOUT LITERACY BOOST

Literacy Boost is an evidence-based approach developed by Save the Children to strengthen the core skills of reading and support children's reading practice both inside and outside school walls. Literacy Boost both trains teachers to teach reading more effectively and helps families and communities provide support for children's nascent literacy skills. Inclusive within these interventions is ensuring access for children to local language books to help children practice their skills and develop a love of reading.

In Rwanda, Literacy Boost is part of Save the Children's Advancing the Right to Read Signature Programme, which provides a continuum of services for children aged 0 – 9 that focuses on beginning early, mastering foundational literacy skills, and improving overall learning outcomes.



Stanford GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This report was compiled and edited by Elliott Friedlander & Claude Goldenberg.

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For more details, refer to the full report: Friedlander, E. & Goldenberg, C. (eds.). (2016). Literacy Boost in Rwanda: Impact Evaluation of a 2-year Randomized Control Trial. Available at: <https://rwanda.savethechildren.net/resources>.

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