

Five years of Leaders in Teaching in Rwanda: summary of key actions from the closing event



Photo: Group photo of Laterite and REAL Centre teams with Mastercard Foundation and Rwanda government representatives during the Leaders in Teaching closing event

This report summarises key actions emerging from discussions at the Leaders in Teaching closing event, held in Kigali on 22 to 23 November 2023. The Mastercard Foundation's Leaders in Teaching initiative aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Rwandan secondary education through a range of programmes to support teachers and school leaders, with a focus on STEM subjects. In Rwanda, this initiative was implemented over five years by the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), VVOB Rwanda, the University of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE), Inspire, Educate, Empower Rwanda (IEE), UNICEF, and Carnegie Mellon University-Africa.

The closing event was led by the Mastercard Foundation and the Leaders in Teaching learning partners, Laterite and the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge, who are responsible for developing robust quantitative and qualitative evidence on how the initiative is improving teaching and learning in secondary schools. The event brought together government stakeholders (including from the Ministry of Education, the Rwanda Basic Education Board, the National Examination and School Inspection Authority, and University of Rwanda College of Education), implementing partners, teachers and head teachers, development partners, and researchers to share lessons learned from five years of Leaders in Teaching in Rwanda.

Themes of the closing event included: perceptions and practices of teaching quality, linking teaching quality with learning outcomes, and teacher motivation and implications for Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Across these themes, issues relating to gender and disability were highlighted.

Key actions from the Leaders in Teaching closing event



Photo: Minister of Education Hon. Gaspard Twagirayezu speaking with Pauline Rose, Director of the REAL Centre at the University of Cambridge

In his keynote address, Minister of Education Honorable Gaspard Twagirayezu emphasised the importance of evidence from Leaders in Teaching to inform government programming, particularly with respect to STEM subjects, and enhancing the role of female school leaders and teachers. The ten action points below summarise insights and recommendations for Rwandan government programming.

Actions to improve student learning outcomes and close the learning gap

1. Foster an inclusive secondary education system
2. Invest in inclusive learning for children with disabilities
3. Motivate girls to study STEM subjects

Actions to improve teaching quality

4. Support STEM teachers and school leaders to foster gender-responsive pedagogical approaches
5. Promote a supportive environment for female STEM teachers and school leaders
6. Enhance teacher motivation in secondary schools
7. Improve Continuous Professional Development, with a focus on less resourced schools

Actions on resources and decision-making

8. Improve school infrastructure and learning resources to encourage equitable resourcing
9. Engage teachers, students and parents in decision-making for education policy
10. Reduce the research-to-practice gap by facilitating equitable access to education research

Actions to improve student learning outcomes and close the learning gap

1. Foster an inclusive secondary education system

Evidence showed that average learning levels were the lowest for students from the poorest households, making a case for targeted interventions for disadvantaged students. Closing the learning gap involves prioritising inclusivity across dimensions such as gender, disability, rurality and socio-economic status. School leaders need to create a supportive, innovative, and engaging space for both teachers and learners to thrive. One suggestion included documenting how schools adopt inclusive practices in the country. Other suggestions involved supporting the most vulnerable students through individual support, providing additional learning materials, and stronger parental involvement. Participants raised that closing the learning gap required identifying how to assess student learning outcomes to better meet the objectives of the competency-based curriculum. In addition, participants identified that initiatives to target primary school teachers are also an important area for attention, given that inequities at the secondary level likely started earlier in a student's educational journey.



Photo: Panel discussion on policy and systems change with representatives from MINEDUC, REB, NESA and UR-CE

2. Invest in inclusive learning for children with disabilities

Students with disabilities must remain a priority. While progress has been made in the identification of and support for students with disabilities, more needs to be done. Teachers need more training to understand how to support students with disabilities and adapt teaching to their needs. This includes enabling teachers to exchange information about practical ways in which they are supporting students with disabilities in similar contexts, for example through communities of practice.

School leaders need to set the values, vision and policies for inclusion. This needs to be accompanied by access to inclusive facilities, such as ramps for students with mobility issues, and teaching and learning materials, such as braille books. The involvement of communities is also crucial: children with disabilities need an environment where they are accepted and supported. This requires the involvement of parents and communities in changing attitudes and behaviours.

3. Motivate girls to study STEM subjects

Another strong theme throughout the event was the need to build girls' confidence in STEM. Evidence from the learning partners revealed that boys out-performed girls in mathematics both pre- and post-COVID-19 school closures. In addition, many girls experience low levels of confidence in STEM subjects. Strategies to bridge the gender gap include promoting female role models and providing mentorship to girls, for example by motivating girls through talks from female professionals in STEM, or organising study trips with the aim of encouraging girls to pursue STEM in school and as a career. Other options include sensitisation programmes and campaigns that make science and technology more attractive and accessible to girls through media, as well as STEM-specific scholarships, incentives, and confidence-building activities for female students. Crucially, these initiatives must be accompanied by parental support, especially in rural areas where learning gaps between boys and girls are the greatest.

“Increasing efforts to train school leaders in gender-sensitive teaching practices could contribute to closing the student performance gender gap.”

- Learning partner

Actions to improve teaching quality

4. Support STEM teachers and school leaders to foster gender-responsive pedagogical approaches

CPD approaches would benefit from a greater focus on inclusive teaching, particularly gender-responsive teaching practices. While half of the school leaders surveyed by the learning partners received CPD on inclusive teaching, only a quarter of them were trained on gender-sensitive teaching practices. These practices aim to increase teachers’ and school leaders’ knowledge of teaching practices and learning activities that motivate and engage both girls and boys. Beyond training, program partners could consider providing supporting activities, for example by sharing resources on gender-responsive pedagogy.



Photo: Minister of Education Honorable Gaspard Twagirayezu and event participants listen to the Leaders in Teaching implementing partners’ presentations of their work and achievements

5. Promote a supportive environment for female STEM teachers and school leaders

Promoting a supportive environment for female STEM teachers and school leaders is crucial in bridging the gender gap, especially since they are primary role models for students. Family-friendly structures are important here. CPD programmes should consider the needs of teachers with childcare responsibilities by ensuring that sessions are close to participants’ homes, are at times that do not compete with caring responsibilities, and/or provide

“By supporting female school-based mentors, they can be role models for girls.”

- Panelist on policy and systems change discussion

options for childcare. Blended models of CPD can offer greater flexibility for those with caring responsibilities.

Communities of practice for female school-based mentors, quota systems for female recruitment, and career guidance and campaigns educating against gender stereotypes will also help create a conducive environment for female teachers and school leaders.

Female teachers should be encouraged to take up leadership positions and supported when they do so. This includes providing those aspiring to leadership roles with the necessary support through leadership training and other such resources for their professional growth.

6. Enhance teacher motivation in secondary schools

Teacher motivation is key to student achievement. Progressive career development is central to enhancing teacher motivation, and establishing a policy framework for it is fundamental. The recent salary increases for teachers played a major role in boosting teachers' motivation and willingness to pursue teaching as a career. A continuous review of teacher salaries based on market factors is recommended. This in turn would contribute to attracting the best candidates into teaching. One suggestion could be to introduce high-performing graduates to 'teach first'—to go into teaching as a national service after university.



A closing event participant during a reflection session where participants shared post-it notes on their recommendations based on the research findings

7. Improve Continuous Professional Development, with a focus on less resourced schools

CPD is important for enhancing teacher motivation, teaching quality and student learning outcomes. There is a need to focus CPD on less resourced schools. CPD training needs assessments will help to ensure opportunities are appropriately designed and targeted. Teachers should have more agency in choosing types of training to meet their needs. Ideally dedicated time could be carved out in the school timetable for regular CPD to help teachers balance this with their existing workloads.

Moreover, training on strategies to support the development of students' socio-emotional skills, understanding and supporting children with disabilities, and facilitating play-based instructional teaching are important for teachers to grow professionally. Teachers need evidence of the CPD they have completed, such as certificates or other forms of professional acknowledgement, to support their career development. Scheduling regular visits to schools by education officials to monitor CPD would also support its quality and regularity. Continuous job-embedded learning for teachers is another way to keep CPD relevant and applicable, as well as having continuous feedback mechanisms for improvement. CPD can also be supplemented with the promotion of communities of practice, school-based mentorship and peer coaching.

Actions on resources and decision-making

8. Improve school infrastructure and learning resources to encourage equitable resourcing

All schools need access to basic services, such as power and water, as well as classrooms that are suitable for manageable class sizes and provide a conducive learning environment. Moreover, given that STEM subjects require a hands-on approach, access to relevant equipment is critical both for student learning and teacher training. This is especially the case in less well-resourced schools and those in rural areas. Mobile labs are one option to explore which could improve access to science lab equipment for STEM educators and students in less resourced schools.

9. Engage teachers, students and parents in decision-making for education policy

Parents are key touchpoints in the education of their children, but are rarely the target of training or behaviour change policies which aim to make educational outcomes more equitable. Parents play a central role in supporting children with disabilities, and influencing attitudes to girls' education in STEM subjects and career motivation, for example. Forums which bring together teachers, students and parents will help to drive change at the community level, and create structures which can be consulted before bringing in new government policies. Their engagement will also enable accountability for effective implementation of education policy.

10. Reduce the research-to-practice gap by facilitating equitable access to education research



Photo: A closing event participant sharing insights during the discussion session

The dissemination of the learning partners' research on secondary education learning outcomes has sparked participants' interest in ensuring that data and evidence are accessible to teachers and the wider community. Reducing the research-to-practice gap can be achieved by disseminating findings directly to teachers, students, implementers, funders and policymakers. Continuous learning is critical to improving educational outcomes in Rwanda and this must be embedded in programming. In many cases, this includes taking the research back to those who have participated in the studies. Learning events such as the one conducted in November 2023 are a useful way to bring together key stakeholders who can provide a holistic approach to ensure learning remains inclusive and effective in schools across the country.